

Reporting In Conflict Zones; a Case Study Of Balochistan

Media and Journalism

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Abstract

Pakistan finds its way towards democracy in the year 2008 after ten years long dictatorial reign of Pervaiz Musharraf. The transition distinguished by liberalize and vibrant mass media. The role of media remains positive, if the media assume its role as a watchdog of democracy. Although Pakistani media is pulsating but still its job is difficult in performing responsible information to the masses. The media and journalists in Balochistan are facing a number of challenges, reporting on sensitive issues and in conflicting zones are the biggest challenges facing by Journalists. Balochistan has turned out to be very dangerous zone for the journalists. There is a war like situation which is a big challenge the journalists are facing. The underground militant movements create an environment of intimidation and coercion restricting media's freedom of speech and expression. This study searches for how Media is affected by and how journalists perform their duties under conflicting and challenging environment.

Keywords: Balochistan, conflicting zones, journalism, media, terrorism

Introduction

The attacks of 9/11 bring changes globally; it affected individuals' lives changed the dynamics of politics, brought challenges for everyone to fulfil responsibilities of daily life and introduced a new term to the inhabitants of the world: War against Terrorism.

A national press is the mirror of national politics. The politics of the country, therefore, do have a bearing on the country's Press. It can be said that a country gets the kind of press it deserves. If the politics of a country are dirty, the country's Press cannot remain immune from it. The country will continue to have a bad Press as long as its politics are unhealthy. **Press Commission (1954)**

9/11 conveyed Pakistan into the axis of intercontinental political affairs. It was a vital player in the US-led inclusive war against terrorism. Accord in the global community sturdily agrees that elected, secure Pakistan is dominant for global peace.

The war against terrorism which was originally started against Al- Qaeda in Afghanistan has deep impact on Pakistani society. War against terrorism has set new challenges in the world, one of the most important amongst which is for the journalists to note and report information from the conflicting zones. **(CPJ Report 2011)** Pakistan has lined top as the most lethal country in the world for journalists. Seven Pakistani Journalists were killed in the year 2011.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, FATA and Balochistan are most severely affected zones where security and safety situation is eye opening for the international journalists' organizations and unions. Journalists in these zones face threats and in some cases they are killed after targeting. Journalists working in conflict zones adapt self censorship to report a news story, some of the areas are no-go areas for journalists.

That's where free flow of information suffers and curbs have been put on to media and journalists. The need of time is to provide security and trainings for journalists about reporting on sensitive issues.

The role of the media should be emphasized, if Pakistan is going to make a triumphant transition to democracy. **(Media in Pakistan, 2009)**

The media must be able to perform its role as a watchdog -holding politicians, the state apparatus and army accountable and keeping the general public well informed.

Methodology

Secondary data collection will be collected through literature review or from the research which already be made in this regard. The published research article may be written by International, National or regional author will be made the part of the study of secondary data collection.

Since the main aim of the study is to focus the challenges face by journalists in conflicting zones, the primary data will be collected from the said zone. To access to these journalists primary data collection is confined to Quetta only.

Other conflicting zones are not made part of primary data collection due to law and order situation.

Focus group discussion FGD will be organized in which professional journalists from different parts of the city will be invited especially from those bits where performing journalistic duties is a challenging task.

The focus group discussion (FGD) is a rapid assessment, semi-structured data gathering method in which a purposefully selected set of participants gathers to discuss issues and concerns based on a list of key themes drawn up by the researcher/facilitator. **(Kumar, 1987).**

A focus group, or focus group interview, is a qualitative research tool often used in social research, business and marketing. Focus groups are "small group discussions, addressing a specific topic, which usually involve 6-12 participants, either matched or varied on specific characteristics of interest to the researcher. **(Morgan, Spanish, 1984). p-253-270.)**

Military rules and democracy:

Pakistan has had three reigns of military rule or dictatorship, these reigns were led by Ayub Khan and Yahya Khan from 1958–71, Zia-ul-Haq reign from 1977–88 and the last reign of Military dictatorship was led by Pervaiz Musharraf, which was almost ten years long i-e 1999–2008. **(Siddiq, 2007)** Defence and foreign policy is – to a large extent – run by, or with the approval of, the military. Pakistan's nuclear weapon program is totally under its control. The military is an important player on the economic front as well. The democratic system has not had time to completely obtain root in the populace. State foundations like judiciary system stay behind weak and democratic conversation has not materialized.

The civil opinionated leadership of the country ties to the conventional feudal power organization. While the less powerful and the privileged are not able to rise to political power or they were not given opportunity to be the part of the system. The lawyer's movement gathered hundreds of thousands of masses together in support of deposed Chief Justice of Pakistan. The Pakistani media played a important role in mobilizing public support for the expression. **(Haqqani, 2005)**

The military's dominant role in society is closely linked to its role as the caretaker of Pakistan's security and defence of the state's Islamic identity. The military has had a close alliance with Islamist political parties and longstanding. One of the most notable things in the military reign was the threaten factors which it brings along. Zia Islamization policies have brought sectarian thrives in the country and Musharraf foreign and war against terrorism policies went against the stability and security of Pakistan

internally. Suicide attacks, sectarian violence's and target killings were more than ever in the Musharraf reign of ten years.

Regional dynamics, Pakistan, Afghanistan and the War on Terror

Following 9/11 Pakistan's bear for the Taliban became difficult to its own stability internally. Pakistan managed to play a double game for a long time, Pakistan was supporting the Taliban on one hand and on the other hand chasing and demolishing Al-Qaeda operatives. US put its pressure on Pakistan to cut its relation with Taliban. Pakistani military supports no longer Taliban openly. It is supposed that Pakistan remains inactive to the activities of the Afghan Taliban leadership based in Quetta, Balochistan.

The Military operation in borders is a force terrorist to influx into the major cities of Pakistan. The major influx of these extremists into major cities caused unrest internally in Pakistan. The major drawback of all it was the conflicting issues which were buried for many decades erupted with intensity.

(Rana, 2006)

Quetta is the largest center of Jehadi organizations in Balochistan. Extremist Militant outfits are located in Quetta. Violence's of sectarian issues were highly increased during past ten years. The reports of these violent activities were not an easy for journalists. Many journalists and Newspapers faced threats.

Media's Lack of Maturity and Professionalism

The biggest barriers to objective and truly independent journalism are lack of maturity and professionalism among journalists. They pointed to the fact that ordinary citizens were barely making any news in today's Pakistan. On the contrary, most of the media outlets would either operate as an accessory representative of the establishment, or they would go for a highly contentious scoop, no matter if it were based on slight evidence, or if it could become a probable trigger of political and social unrest. The media liberalization, the mushrooming TV channels started to recruit heavily from newspaper journalism. That course not only influenced on the proficient composition of the print media, but it also presented the electronic media with journalists who were not trained in electronic journalism. It has changed the construction and operation of the print media, where more of the journalists presently have less than three years' experience.

Media under pressure in Balochistan

There are no go areas where reporter has no access or less access to report a news story. These no go areas are controlled by ethnic or sectarian outfits. Balochistan, KPK and Karachi are the major areas where reporters faced

challenges. Conflict reporting became a very knotty and hazardous job. Shazad Baloch, reporter Express Tribune details his experience of reporting in conflict zones, the experience of reporting in this conflict zone is horrifying; witnessing bloodshed, violence, threatening messages, warnings and most importantly, avoiding several crucial stories owing to security reasons. **(The Express Tribune, 2012)** One of the eye opening to analyze the worse situation of reporting would be comprehensive reports on media on issues related to Balochistan are written or reported by the local author. The reason is threatening situation they are facing in performing their duties. Journalists are not even keen to share problems because of fear and try to resolve the issues by holding talks with the people issuing threats. No one relies on law enforcement agencies.

Pathetic Plight of media in Balochistan

The commercial quota for the local newspapers remains a useful tool for the state to pressure coverage of events. Media in Balochistan, most journalists agree, is not free because of fears of attack from the state, slashing of the advertisement quota and control of newsprint. Since the transformed insurgency, the advertisement quota is mostly handled by an intelligence agency that dishes it out to newspapers favouring the government - or to influence them into a favourable stance. **(Intermedia Report, 2010)**

District journalists have the nastiest of it all because there is minute security that comes with support organizations in cities.

The provincial government's Public Information Department (PID) has doubled as many employees as any other city that observes media and use advertisements as stress tool to control content. In 2008 two operatives from an intelligence outfit came to the Quetta Press Club demanding membership because the journalists wouldn't allow outsiders, especially agency people, into the press club. **(Intermedia Report, 2010)**

Very few people go into journalism in Balochistan because there is little money. Only a handful of capable ones find jobs with TV channels that pay good but those who do not make it, have to work without salaries.

Journalism in Balochistan is still in general concerning press releases and press conferences. There are very little people centric stories. The media in Balochistan, when it comes to Balochistan issues, is mostly about reporting bombings and target killings. There is little culture of follow-ups. Media flattering borderless with blogs, vlogs and podcasts, enterprising, media giving confidence youth in Balochistan have create freedom of expression in online journalism. The year 2009 saw the coming of Balochistan's first independent online English newspaper Baloch Hal (although shortage of funds and alleged harassment forced it to shut shop in early 2010) and news

channel Vash/Rozn TV. While the state has moved to block several Baloch websites, many others are regularly updated with new print and video content for everyone to see. **(Report, 2010)**

Unions for protection of Journalists

International Federation of Journalists (IFJ)

International Federation of Journalists, IFJ, is a universal union association of journalists' unions, the largest in the world. The association endeavours to protect and support the rights and freedoms of journalists. The IFJ is also dedicated to working for solidarity, social justice and for protection of Journalists. The IFJ supports journalists and their unions whenever they are fighting for their industrial and professional rights and has established an International Safety Fund to provide humanitarian aid for journalists in need. **(Website)** International Union of Journalists has not taken stern steps for protection of journalists in Pakistan. However, IFJ claims to be the most vital organ for journalist's rights and protection. The role of IFJ seems vague in those areas where reporting and journalism is challenging task.

Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ)

The Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists often referred to as PFUJ is the first journalistic union of South Asia, representing journalists of an entire nation. PFUJ was established in 1950 and is allied with the International Federation of Journalists IFJ. PFUJ is self-governing body having its own constitution, accountability process and code to check into capability of a journalist. Balochistan has witnessed a surge in killing of journalists in Balochistan. As many as 13 journalists have died since 2008. In the history of PFUJ, four missions were constituted comprising four senior journalists each who visited every nook and corner of the country to gather information on the working conditions of journalists, the kinds of threats they are facing and the nature of obstacles they confront in the line of duty, their financial situation and training in the profession. **(Website)**

Balochistan Union of Journalists (BUJ)

Balochistan Union of Journalists is platform for professional journalists in Balochistan not only facilitate journalist's issues but ensure their security as well.

Focus Group Discussion

FGD was three hours session with Journalists and reporters from Quetta City. It had three parts (i) Introduction of research objectives (ii) Discussion, Facilitated by research team members, and (iii) Brain storming possible

causes to dig out what are the reasons reporters are facing while performing their duties.

Few of the participants showed reluctance and even few of them refused to speak under scrutiny, the researcher withdrew from the said provision. Another arrangement was made, that is one of research team member was facilitated discussion while other member of research team was assign duty of took notes during discussion. Moreover, on few occasion participants even refused to put their names on the attendance sheet for which researcher did not force them to avoid discontentment among the participants.

<u>S#</u>	Reasons		Description
	Main Category	Sub Category	
<u>1</u>	Access to Information	Everyone has Legitimate right to access to Information.	Information Technology has brought revolutionary changes and no information can be kept under secrecy in this modern era .Pakistan is an independent state and every citizen has equal right to access to information.
<u>2</u>	Information and Opinion	A clear difference between information and opinion	Reporting is covering a news story; it means reporter cannot add something from his/her side. It is based on facts and figures. News story let audience know about something new. News story format is impartial it cannot lead audience to certain level of building opinion. So there is need to understand between information and opinion.
<u>3</u>	Objectivity and Biasness	Facts based on truth are objectivity, while reports based on favors is	Duty of Reporter is to report news story without any pressure and influence from any pressure group.

		biasness.	
<u>4</u>	Qualified and Unqualified Journalist	Qualify Journalist can handle things tactfully.	One of the most unfortunate facts in Balochistan is that, most of the Journalists are not Qualified. They cannot handle things tactfully, they don't know the sensitiveness of selection of words and pictures even. On the other hand qualified journalist can handle things very tactfully and with expertise he conveys information without indulging himself in risk.
<u>5</u>	Topics of Conflicts in Reporting	Reporters face threats and pressure while reporting on sensitive issues.	International political changes warfare. After 9/11 global changes has brought changes in south Asia also. War against terrorism has deep effect on Pakistani society. Extremist element continued destructive activities in Pakistan. It bring religious disharmony with great pressure. Sectarian violence's is witnessed in large number after 9/11. Reporting on such incidents is high risk for journalists in Balochistan.

<u>6</u>	Journalists Bodies	Role of Journalists bodies for protection of journalists.	Journalistic bodies are not aware of the risk of working in conflict zones; however few journalists, who were under threat, were supported not only by journalistic bodies but also newspapers owners. But those Journalists who are facing threats, their duties should be transfer to other provinces. So that a risk of life threat should be avoided. Main offices of Journalists bodies should be established in Quetta city for better observation of the plight of Journalists in Quetta City.
<u>7</u>	Weak Implementations of rules and egulations.	Law and order situation has worse the whole environment.	Poor implementation of rules and regulations is one of the main reasons, where pressure groups easily pressurize reporters, newspapers and TV channels.
<u>8</u>	Role of law enforcement gencies	Politicized role of Agencies.	Agencies are not playing their due role. Police are under pressure of politicians or they are influenced or they have weak intelligence system to dug out the element who causing problems for Journalists.

9	Institutional dimensions	Poor democratic mechanism	The engineered elections and non-representative governments cannot maintain peace and harmony in the province. Province need people centered political system that may ensure civic ownership and essence of mutual confidence building measures, so that every institution play its due role with courage and satisfaction.
<u>10</u>	Social dimensions	Poor social setup	The poor access to basic social services such as health, education also play key role in pushing the marginalized groups of society to adopt extremist activities as mean of livelihood.

Findings

- Reporting on Sectarian issues and Nationalists movement is major factor faced by reporters to report on.
- Un-Qualified Journalists has less sense of selection of words and sensitiveness of the issues on which they are reporting.
- Besides reporting on sensitive issues, media is strongly monitored by law enforcement agencies and sometimes reporters face hurdles in reporting stories due to interference.
- Journalistic bodies' role is not appreciate able, Owners of the newspapers and TV channels demands for the breaking news and stories but when it comes to protection of reporters life when they are under threat, they show less concern.

- International Unions establish offices who works for Journalists protection in Quetta city, so that they can observe closely how critical is for journalists to perform duties in conflict zones.
- Weak investigative system provoked the element of threat to journalists and reporters.
- Lack of training opportunities for journalists has rusted their capability for being good reporters.

Recommendations

- Journalists must experience training in conflict reporting and their employers must be made accountable for this training.
- Allocation of funds in annual federal and provincial budgets for protection of journalists when they are under threat.
- Journalists shun their differences and unite at one platform when one among them is under threat or in danger.
- Media houses should give life insurance to working journalists.
- Media code of ethics must be observed by all journalists reporting conflict.
- The media in all reverence and spheres should elevate its professional standards.
- Journalists should be provided risk and life indemnity reporting both by media and employers.
- Press clubs and media organizations all over Pakistan should be supported by provincial governments under the analysis of Ministry of Information to guarantee collective security of journalists.

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