

Creating Violence Together: A Study of Pakistan and India's National Days Celebrations through the Lens of the CMM

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Abstract

Pakistan and India are at war since their inception and independence: literally and verbally. It is the latter that most often leads to the former according to Pearce and Cronen's communication theory Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM). This paper studies the repetitive and destructive patterns of communication between Pakistan and India, especially on important occasions such as their independence days' celebrations. The warring tones and armed conversation across the borders have aggravated the political tension between the two nuclear neighbours. The paper concludes that by applying CMM's principles of dialogic and cosmopolitan communication, the two hostile states can avert the imminent danger of a nuclear war, and can achieve a peaceful and friendly coexistence.

Keywords

Pakistan, India, CMM, Communication, Dialogic, Cosmopolitan

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Introduction

This paper studies the symbolic violence in the shape of the mass display of highly destructive weapons and of the equally destructive warring tones on national days, particularly on independence days, in both Pakistan and India; furthermore, it will be argued how the symbolic violence is a 'real' violence. The study critically analyses this situation through the lenses of the interpersonal communication theory Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) of Pearce and Cronen (2005). The destructive and harmful patterns of communications will be spotted by applying CMM as a critical and interpretive theory. The data analyzed has been collected from well-reputed Pakistani, Indian and international newspapers.

Literature Review

Since the inception of Pakistan and India, as a result of the partition and independence of the then British colony, the two archrivals have displayed a hostile and threatening attitude towards each other. This warring mood has resulted in several large scale wars between the two neighbours, not to mention the routine skirmishes on the long borders. Indians and Pakistanis love to hate each other at the level of the state, and, not surprisingly, as nations, which is the result of the perverse interactive patterns at work in official and ordinary interaction between the two states. From sports to the corridors of power and politics, India and Pakistan exhibit a negative and damaging attitude towards each other.

Though the print and electronic media highlight the jingoistic attitude of the two states, yet it is the same media that has been a carrier and sustainer of this symbolic violence. In an effort to win a greater number of viewers/readers, the sensational and melodramatic content of the newspapers, news channels and other television programs escalates the tensed environment further and further (Hamelink, 2015). The cyber chat and the real life interaction of Indians and Pakistanis are extremely hostile and abusive. They see each other as enemies even though most of them have never met an individual from across the border. What Hamelink calls the "spiral of escalation" (p. x) through media discourse has put not only these two neighbours but the world at large at risk. That is why media discourse needs to be disarmed to save the world from a total disaster that might well be caused by humans themselves rather than by global warming or a collision with another celestial body.

The international media itself has raised the issues of 'jingoism' and 'jihadism' in both Pakistani and Indian media over the years. These media experts and researchers believe that the media of the two countries is to blame for a lot of armed conversations and the deep-rooted hatred the Indians and Pakistanis are involved in since their independence. For example, studies have shown how the Indian media played a negative role in reporting burning issues like the Kashmir dispute (Viswam, 2010; Narula, 2006) and how the media hype helped in creating the monstrous evil of war and destabilization in the Middle East. However, there is scarce academic research dedicated to an understanding of how the symbolic violence on national days and, particularly, on their respective independence days is marked by mutually destructive and disturbing patterns of communication in both Pakistan and India. This article aims at critically analyzing and making sense out such bad and repetitive patterns of conversation in the light of Pearce and Cronen's theory of communication CMM.

Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM)

According to CMM, humans are interactive beings whose experiences and life is made and remade in the act of conversation. They coordinate meaning; which means that when people are engaged in conversation, they not only create meanings but, essentially, negotiate meanings. It is imperative, therefore, that humans realize their role in the co-construction of their own social realities. The very title of the theory sums up how meaning is created and managed in coordination between the conversing parties (Pearce & Cronen, 2005). It is important to understand that the CMM theory, like several other communication theories—for instance, those of Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) —considers communication as a ‘performative’ act not just simply a passive or isolated utterance of words. So our utterances in this sense are ‘speech acts’, that is, we ‘do’ things with words. Moreover, CMM believes in the ‘constitutive’ nature of the conversation, which means that in an interpersonal interaction people not only send and receive messages, but, more importantly, create and constitute new values, traditions, meanings, and identities in the process of communication.

Pearce and Cronen argue that by raising consciousness about the process of human interaction a more peaceful and happier coexistence can be achieved. These theorists maintain that many individuals are at loggerheads with each other because of a lack of awareness about the right patterns of communication and thus end up either in monologue or else in an armed conversation. These bad and repetitive communication patterns can be redeemed by subscribing to a saner mode of interaction, i.e., dialogic and cosmopolitan communication. Dialogic communication means a healthy pattern of interaction where you listen to the interlocutor in a way that encourages and motivates him to speak, and speak in a manner that the other person would listen to you with interest. This does not imply that persons-in-conversation should compromise their opinions; it simply means that they should be wary of the nature of communication and the way it works. This mode of communication has been practically and successfully applied according to the proponents of the theory, such as in the Cupertino Community Project (Griffin, 2012: 69), to bring two estranged communities to resume their social interaction and to solve potentially dangerous issues which people could not even name, fearing an ethnic war. Similarly, cosmopolitan communication means coordinating and cooperating with our conversational partners without trying to impose our choices on others and without trying to change them in a world where values, beliefs, ethics and identities are not uniform. This is so because the form is more important than the content of communication (Griffin).

Analysis of the Patterns of Violence in Celebrating National Days

Communicating violence is actually committing violence. The violent messages that Pakistan and India send each other and respond to are an extremely dangerous form of communication. The national and international media cover the events and ceremonies as they happen in the two countries; only rarely is there a critical edge to the coverage of such events. This analysis will have a look at how the two countries reciprocate a negative strain of communication that aggravates the already strained relationship of the two nuclear states.

Pakistan celebrates the 23rd of March every year as Pakistan Day in commemoration of the famous resolution of Muslim League on March 23, 1940 in Lahore. This event, as covered by the country’s well-known newspaper Daily Dawn in 2016, is marked by an attractive yet disturbing display of weapons and military parade. In fact, the very title of the news report says

that: “Military might displayed at Pakistan Day Parade”. The pictorial journey along with the brief news story shows very few signs of peace. “During the rally, attended by several thousand people, Pakistani armed forces displayed nuclear-capable weapons, tanks, jets, drones and other weapons systems” (Dawn, March 23, 2016) such as missiles, rockets, and guns. The charged soldiers are either on the march or else mounted on horseback or on camels. The Pakistani President Mamnoon Hussain and the military chief inspect the parade from atop a military jeep. The message is loud and clear, but this message is violent and, as expected, leads to an equally daunting response from India on their national days. The CMM theory predicts that these destructive messages, when reciprocated, are bound to create an even bitter reality. These threatening symbols lead to a race and rivalry in preparing and purchasing even more lethal weapons.

Similarly, a CNBC report title about India’s Republic Day celebrations reads “India to display military might at Republic Day parade” (January 25, 2017). An occasion that is supposed to commemorate the day the Indian Constitution came into effect in 1950, there is very little on display about the republic; in fact, there are only weapons of mass destruction on display:

[A] flypast of 27 aircrafts, a marching contingent led by the official band of the Indian Air Force (IAF) The first phase will begin by four Mi-17 V5 helicopters in an 'ensign' or inverted-Y-shaped formation, followed by three Mi-35 helicopters in a 'chakra' or wheel-shaped formation, and supplanted by three C-130J Super Hercules aircrafts. A C-17 aircraft and two Su-30 MKI aircrafts will then come after in a 'globe' formation. (CNBC)

The domestic Light Combat Aircraft is inaugurated and “The Indian Navy meanwhile is set to showcase the Kolkata class destroyer INS Chennai and the Kalvari class attack submarines” according to the report. What is evident from these celebrations is the language of war—preparations for war rather than for peace. India, like its nuclear neighbour Pakistan, conveys a message that the intended listener (Pakistan) would not like to listen to. These repetitive and destructive patterns of communication on the part of the two countries shape a new reality where the dialogue turns into a monologue, cancelling all possibilities of a ‘dialogic communication’. In the absence of dialogic communication, the two countries, like two conversational partners, become unwilling to cooperate, and thus pave the way for an even more dangerous exhibition of deadly weapons and jingoistic language on both sides. That is why the two states are among countries with the largest defense expenditures: “India's pace of expenditure could hit \$65 billion by 2020, from \$50.7 billion in 2016, which would firmly establish India as the third largest defense market in the world” (CNBC). On the other hand, “Pakistan is set to increase defense spending by \$578 million to \$8.78 billion in fiscal year 2017-2018” (The Diplomat, June 5, 2017).

Another national newspaper The Nation reported on its front page on 15th August, 2017 the celebrations of Independence Day in these words “Fighter jets criss-crossed over the leafy capital in aerobatic manoeuvres as thousands packed shoulder-to-shoulder applauded from a park below. Planes from close allies Saudi Arabia and Turkey also took part.” The words clearly carry their performative weight when analyzed from the perspective of CMM. The violence ingrained in the report quoted above demonstrates how language is not just a passive means of communication but something that constructs a reality---in this case the simulacra of contesting war discourses. The violence promoted by the report is not just verbal violence, it

anticipates and meets in equally dangerous discourse that gets bounced back when received in India.

The analysis of the news stories reported by Dawn and CNBC suggest not only weapons of mass destruction, but also convey 'messages' of mass destruction. The deadliest of weapons, on each side, have, resultantly, created a hostile environment because the two countries have shown little regard for each other. This lack of regard for the 'other' bars the two states from listening and understanding each other. So what is claimed by the CMM theorists about persons-in-conversation is true of 'states-in-conversation' as well. Apart from the lethal weapons displayed on national days, there are fiery speeches where the civil and military leaders of the two countries directly challenge and threaten each other.

The Pakistani premiere blamed India for hostility and non-cooperation in his Independence Day speech on the 70th anniversary of the occasion according to news reports (The Economic Times, TOI, August 14, 2017). The military chief of Pakistan visited the restive LoC at Wagah Border on the same day and addressed the security troops, with a message of war rather than peace in his speech (Dawn, August 14, 2017). Other international newspapers have reported the two events in a similar vein. Like his Pakistani counterpart, the Indian PM directly addressed Pakistan in his speech on August 15, 2016, on the occasion of India's Independence Day. The speech that was widely reported in the media was marked by destructive patterns (The Express Tribune, Pakistan), examined in the light of CMM, because the words were uttered in a manner that the partner in conversation, that is, Pakistan, would not at all listen to; as a CMM theorist would expect, this situation has resulted in hostile monologues. Zakaria (August 14, 2017) has expressed her worries about the disturbing and hostile narratives Pakistan and India have constructed through a disastrous policy of mutual hatred and antagonism: "70 years after 1947, India and Pakistan have successfully dehumanised each other in the popular imagination of its people" (Dawn).

Conclusion

CMM theorists believe that communication is not only a means of symbolic interaction, that is, sending and receiving messages. It is a process in which we co-create our social and political realities in the very act of our conversation and communication. Persons-in-conversation co-construct the world they inhabit. Moreover, conversation is seen as 'performative' by CMM, which means that people 'do' things when they 'say' things. At times people are involved in destructive patterns of communication and create a bitter world for themselves. In this context, the above discussion focuses on how Pakistan and India are often involved in an armed conversation while celebrating and commemorating significant national days. The two countries speak a language of weapons and war, shaping a bleak present and future with little chances afforded to peace to play its role and bring normalcy to the relationship of the hostile neighbours. In the words of Pearce (2005) Pakistan and India talk "past each other" (P. 39), and by repeating the flawed patterns of conversation and interaction, they create "more of the same" (44). The news stories analyzed above suggest that bad conversations are one of the biggest reasons that Pakistan and India still consider themselves enemies seventy years after their Independence from the same yoke. As Cronen and Pearce would suggest, the two states, like two persons, need to speak in a manner that the other state would like to listen to what is said and listen in a manner that the other state would like to speak. Only a cooperative pattern

of interaction can result in the peaceful coexistence of the otherwise armed and charged nations.

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