

How Ethnicity and Elite Politics affect Media Discourse in Pakistan? A comparative study of Zainab and Farishta's rape cases

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Abstract:

This paper compares the electronic media coverage of two similar rape cases in Pakistan and examines how ethnicity and elite politics come into play to the detriment of the marginalized ethnolinguistic groups. The study employs Discourse Analysis and analyzes the Prime-Time (9 p.m.) headlines and bulletins of Pakistan's eight mainstream TV channels over a period of six consecutive days. The study hypothesized that in Pakistan, ethnicity and political exigencies contrive to give an otherwise peripheral issue a big media whip but it is the former which plays the leading role. The findings revealed that seven times more airtime was allotted to Zainab (ethnic Punjabi) than Farishta (Pashtun). Zainab's case was reported on all the six days while Farishta's case was totally ignored on the first day but was also not continuously reported on other days. To banalize Farishta's rape, some channels focused only on her ethnic otherness, stripping the case off its humane and legal context. Other channels played the victim blame.

Key Words: Ethnicity, elite politics, electronic media, representation, rape case, coverage

INTRODUCTION

This paper compares the Electronic Media coverage of two separate rape cases of minor girls: Zainab Ansari (age 7) and Farishta Mohmand (age 10) by employing Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1995-a; Wodak & Michael, 2001). Zainab was raped and then murdered in January 2019 in Kasur city of Punjab and this ignominious act received heavy media coverage while Farishta was also raped, acid thrown on her, and then killed in May 2019 just at a stone throw from the Presidential and Prime ministerial Houses in Islamabad but received only a modicum of media attention. The ethnicity of both rape victims and the political importance/timing of these similar cases can explain this disparity in their media treatment. The main purpose of this paper is to compare the media coverage of these two rape cases and examine how politics and ethnicity affect the editorial priorities of media houses and journalists. Pakistan's eight major electronic media news channels; GeoNews, ARYNews, Dunya, Express, Samaa, 92HD, 24HD, and NewsOne were selected and their primetime News Bulletin and Headlines over a period of six consecutive days were analyzed.

Pakistan has a vibrant though not free electronic media landscape (Liaquat, Qaisrani, & Khokhar, 2016; Siraj, 2009; Baig & Cheema, 2015). Although, the intertwined political-economy (commercial and political interests/pressure) of Pakistan's media exclusively dictates their news-priorities,

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besides this, turban VS rural (center-periphery), gender, and ethnic consideration too influence the media coverage. Most of the TV channels are located in urban centers of Lahore, Karachi, and Islamabad and the majority of the owners and journalists/anchors are ethnic Punjabis (Media Ownership Monitor Pakistan, 2019). Events involving political, military, commercial, and judicial elites and happening in the metropolitan centers (Karachi, Lahore, and Islamabad) get more media attention while issues across class, ethnic, rural, and gender divides are neglected. Similarly, in times of political agitations created either by religious groups or opposition political parties against the incumbent government (most often in collusion with the Establishment), some events/cases coincidentally get enormous media spotlight which in the normal situation may not most likely make any headlines.

Zainab belonged to the Kasur city of Punjab Province. Punjabis are the largest (44.7%) (Government of Punjab, 2017) ethnic and politically dominant group in Pakistan. Zainab's rape and murder received massive media coverage and a country-wide outrage. Farishta, on the other hand, belonged to Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KP), which is a media-periphery, and its people, Pashtuns, have historically been suspected of separatism and even betrayal when they demand ethnic equality, fair resource distribution, and provincial autonomy, all guaranteed in Pakistan's constitution (18th amendment). So, Farishta's rape was unable to elicit the media attention at the scale Zainab's had achieved.

Zainab rape case was reported in 2018 when a seven-year-old girl was abducted, raped, and then murdered in Kasur. Zainab was not the first rape victim in Kasur city. In fact she was the 12th who had fallen to the same serial pedophile killer; Imran Ali (Sayal, 2018). Though most of the victims were killed as Zainab, no one was charged in the previous cases, and also other cases either received minimal or no coverage for reasons which are discussed below.

If one is ethnically dominant, one is also politically important. Zainab's rape case got spectacular media attention due to two reasons: ethnic and political. First, the incident happened in the Punjab province where most of the TV channels' headquarters are located and to which the majority of media owners and journalists belong to. Consequently, issues related to this province get more coverage. Second, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) was in power in this province which also had the government in the center. The powerful establishment was angered by Nawaz Sharif who had alleged the former of incubating militant groups (Almeida, 2018; Masood, 2017). So the establishment was looking for a pretext to weaken both his federal and provincial governments. Imran Khan, the then opposition leader, and other religious pressure proxies of the establishment like Pakistan Awami Tehreek (PAT) of Tahir-ul-Qadri and Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) of Khadim Hussain Rizvi were already protesting against Nawaz's government. Zainab's rape case provided a virtuous opportunity to Imran Khan and the establishment to further mount pressure on him. Since TV channels in Pakistan are routinely controlled by secrete agencies ("Pakistan's journalists complain," 2018; "Pakistan journalists say," 2018), they whipped the frenzy up and every channel started pouring airtime into Zainab's case. Earlier, the same rapist, Imran Ali, had raped and then killed 10 minor girls in the same city but their cases remained unsuccessful at gaining the media's attention because their importance relative to political developments at the

national scene was inconsequential. At that time, the establishment or Imran Khan were not looking for any pretext to be exploited against their political rivals.

But in Pakistan, even if political exigency goes in one's favor, ethnicity still determines its course and limits; hypothesis that this paper sets to prove. This statement can be supported by the example of Asma, a four-year-old child (female) who was raped and then strangled to death in Mardan city of KP on January 17, 2018, just 13 days after Zainab's murder ("Asma, four, 'raped, strangled to death," 2018; Malik, 2018). But her case was reported as a casual event in the daily news cycle. Being a Pashtun, Asma's case neither appealed to the media's humanist nerve nor the conscience of elite politics, even though the opposition parties' agitations were still on their peak.

(Note: Why did not we compare Asma's case with Zainab? Because at that time, the media and civic debate were already saturated with Zainab's coverage, and though Asma got only minimal media attention, had it been covered on the same scale as Zainab's, we would have assumed that in the sweep of the trend (bandwagon), media was obliged/forced to do that. Farishta's, however, was an ideal litmus case because it happened when no other such cases were being reported. One might further question that since the establishment (Elite Politics) wanted to exploit Zainab's case so it contingently got huge coverage, but in the case of Farishta, the establishment was protecting the government and it was analyzed how in such conditions, media downplays or delegitimizes the rape case of a Pashtun victim. Thus, the Farishta case was more suitable for comparative analysis.)

Finally, Nawaz Sharif was de-seated by the court in a case. Imran Khan won the 2018 elections and became prime minister. In May 2019, even a more despicable rape case of Farishta - a 10 years minor girl who was first raped and then acid was thrown on her body - happened beneath the prime minister house in Islamabad but media fury was conspicuously absent. Imran Khan's federal ministers who would thunder at Nawaz Sharif for his failure in protecting Zainab were mute and avoided media. No journalists from mainstream media or political leaders, except for Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM), visited her home. Farishta was an ethnic Pashtun, and worse, from the Tribal Area of Mohmand Agency. His father was a vegetable vendor in Islamabad. It can be inferred that humanist feelings, violations of law, or other considerations may not play a role in setting the media's agenda unless the event is ethnically and politically important.

Farishta went missing on 15th of May 2019 and her mutilated and acid burnt body was found on 20th of May 2019. Her family had tried to file a complaint at the Shahzad Town police station but according to her brother, the police instead forced them to broom the police station and refused to file a First Information Report (FIR). Her brother further told the social media journalists (as no mainstream journalist was reporting the issue) that police alleged that the girl might have eloped with her lover ("Farishta rape case," 2019). Because pictures of a smiling minor girl alongside her burned dead body were circulating on social media, and PTM's two parliamentarians joined the small group of people who were protesting the criminal negligence of police in Islamabad, it forced the police to file the FIR and start an investigation.

This paper looks into the treatment of both these cases in the media and the interplay of politics and ethnicity in Pakistan's media.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Fairclough (1995-a) argues, “media industry is under the control of those institutions that hold political, cultural, and economic power.” Similarly, Tolson maintains, as cited by Hassan, (2018) “the informational content on the media is mostly ideologically shaped,” study. Media outlets have their own agendas in covering events, which become the purpose of “ideologically driven information to reproduce and strengthen the social relations of oppression and exploitation” (Fairclough, 1995-a). Furthermore, such construction is naturalized over time and the audiences perceive the “information” on media as a part of their “common sense” knowledge. Therefore, Fairclough claims, “media is capable of being easily manipulated by other institutions in society and thus can never be believed or said to represent a reality but merely the representation of reality”(1995-a).

Researchers have pointed out that the news media has an undeniable effect on society. According to Dijk (1988), “the news accustom the viewers into forming certain interpretation frameworks that explicitly shape the way they view or perceive different events.” This highlights the importance of studies on the news media keeping in view the media’s potential force of shaping society or altering reality. Therefore, it is crucial to investigate media coverage for its ideologically invested meanings.

The use of language, Bommaert (2005) points out, “cannot be seen as neutral, rather it should be examined for embedded and precise values, presuppositions and ideologies.”

Redfern suggests, “television news bulletins are a highly structured form of discourse that unfold predictably due to the strong constraints that govern the presence of a limited set of structural elements and the order in which they occur. By examining the relationships between these elements, we aim to define the functions they serve and the logic that governs their organization” (2014). Reportedly, “Mass media influence the way facts are viewed and debated in society. Independence and pluralism in media, public opinion, and views -including criticism of people in power -are the safeguards of a healthy democracy. Monitoring and ensuring ownership pluralism is the first step toward independence and freedom of choice” (Media Ownership Monitor Pakistan [MOMP] 2018).

Media plays a significant role in influencing public opinion about ethnic minorities (Hall, 1995; Dijk, 2000). “Many research findings show that the news audience has a high level of trust in news content; particularly in television in which ‘real images’ are shown”(Mullan, 1997). Sociologists generally opine that minorities are relatively lacking in power and hence, are subject to certain exclusion, discrimination, and other differential treatments (International Encyclopedia of Social Science 1968, p.368). “This immediately emphasizes the significance of a fair portrayal of ethnic minorities in news. Assuming that the news audience puts a high level of trust in news content means news content must have an impact on members of ethnic communities. Ethnic communities are a part of that news audience and see the same news content as everyone else” (Mullan, 1997).

In the context of increasing globalization, “mobility, and intercultural communication, the public representation of a social group is crucial for its integration and participation in society” (Fehr, Greye, Trebbe, & Sünje, 2019). Thus, Fehr et al. (2019) argues that groups and actors can only be

integrated into society if they are publicly visible and actively participate in public discourse. "Media representation can therefore be classified according to these hierarchical stages: Thematization, Representation as part of society and finally Participation" (Fehr, et al., 2019). Due to this hierarchy minority groups are always concerned about their low/bad visibility or marginalization in the mainstream media.

Another aspect of minority representation is the negative generalization which Cherry Banks has pointed out in his study of the black TV characters. "Black character tends more frequently to have personal or family problems and lower social status than white TV characters"(1977). Other studies have found negative generalizations about other ethnic groups. "Black and Latino's characters are depicted more often than white characters as immoral" (Monk-Turner, Heiserman, Johnson, Cotton, and Jackson,2010). This is also true for Pakistan. "Pashtuns are frequently profiled in TV drams, movies, and political sitcoms, and their attire and accent are associated with terrorism and cloddish" (Khan, 2016).

Wal, d'Haenens, and Koeman (2005) found that media content related to ethnicity is characterized more negatively than other content and that migrant and ethnic minorities are often thematized in negative contexts such as crime. Similarly, Dixon and Azocar suggested that the crimes caricatured in the media are directly linked to a particular social group. Their study "discovered direct relation in the recipients' perception of crime and that group regardless of their previous attitudes toward that minority"(2007).

Likewise, Trebbe found that the representation of minorities and ethnic groups is most often negative, inappropriate, or distorted which sometimes leads to ethnic and racial stereotyping (2009). Fehr et al. define stereotype "as a generalizing image of individuals or a group which are not evaluated according to their individual characteristics but by the group they are affiliated with" (2019).

Ethnic minorities have little opportunities to express their opinion in the press. "The news media frequently construct ethnic minorities as 'Others', using a discourse of Us versus Them" (Devroe & Saeys, 2002). Their Research on the Flemish newspapers "shows that news about ethnic minorities is mostly related to crime, problems and conflicts and a strong generalizing bias." In other study. Devroe conducted interviews with minority groups."The participants felt that there was a lack of positive role models for ethnic minorities in the media and thought that more ethnic minority journalists could positively influence news content"(2004). They concluded that the respondents were very disappointed with the media and especially the news media. "Some participants believed in the supply of alternatives by diasporic media in order to see themselves represented more fairly and to express their opinions"(Devroe, 2004).

There are also some research studies on minorities' representation in Pakistani print media. Ali & Jalaluddin analyzed the news coverage of Pakistani minority groups in two leading Urdu language newspapers Daily Jang, and Daily Nawa-i-Waqt for one year. "The study found that the media representation of minority groups in these newspapers was positive" (2010). Ali & Jalaluddin (2010) also analyzed the media representation and portrayal of minority groups. They evaluated news stories of the Daily Dawn and the Nation and found that 21 percent and 24percent of news in

both dailies, respectively, about minorities were negative. Jawad (2010) focused on the columns published in Urdu-language newspapers. He concludes that sub-cultures in Pakistani society remain generally ignored or downplayed. “There is an overwhelming emphasis on Pakistan’s Islamic identity which serves as an overall melting pot within which other forms of identity such as race, ethnicity, and religious denomination remain invisible. Consequently, there is a significant discrepancy in the concept of Pakistani identity and how it fits the realities of a multicultural society” (Jawad, 2010).

Finally, Ahmed analyzes the relationship between ethnicity, class, and the state. It identifies military, bureaucracy, capitalists, and landlords “as the principal elements of the ruling class and shows that the different ethnic groups have different class structures and differential participation in military and bureaucracy” (1996). His study points out “the near absence of cross-cutting cleavages which tend to turn the class and power conflicts into ethnic conflicts” (Ahmed, 1996). While “underlining the shifting definitional boundaries and relative demographic and cultural homogenization of the population,” he makes a case “for the recognition of ethnic diversity in Pakistan, equal treatment of all ethnic groups, and protection and promotion of the languages and cultures of the different ethnic groups.” He suggests that national unity, security, and integrity “will be achieved if the primary emphasis is placed on promoting equity and harmony rather than on suppression of ethnic differences in the name of unity” (Ahmed, 1996).

From the above literature, we see that so far no study has been conducted on how elite politics and ethnicity combine to determine the contours of media coverage. This paper attempts to fill this gap.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Because of its viewership reach and political impact, the prime time (08-10 p.m.) News bulletins were selected for analysis of both cases. Some TV channels run headlines while other broadcasts News Bulletin during this time. Most of the headlines are 10 minutes long while the News Bulletins may span over approximately 30 minutes. In this study, News Bulletin of Express, Bol, and Dunya News whereas the headlines of GeoNews, ARYNews, 92HD, 24HD, and News One were thoroughly examined. Table 1 shows the selected categories of News:

Table 1.

Selected Time	News Selection	
	News Bulletin	Headlines
9 PM	Express, Bol, and Dunya	GeoNews, ARYNews, 92HD, 24HD and NewsOne

A coverage of six days from the breaking of the story was taken for the analysis. Since Pakistan is an eventful country, no story lasts longer on the media’s horizon than two or three days unless there is some extraordinary political or strategic importance to it. So, it is safe to take a span of six days for collecting complete details of an issue. Table 2, shows how much time was allotted to each case by the selected TV Channels.

Table 2.

		Zainab Ansari Rape Case	Farishta Mohmand Rape Case
News Type	News Channel	The time given in 6 days Headlines	The time given in 6 days Headlines
Headlines	Geo News	28 Minutes 07 Seconds	02 Minutes 55 Seconds
	ARY News	25 Minutes 27 Seconds	6 Minutes 01 Seconds
	92HD	23 Minutes 32 Seconds	04 Minutes 02 Seconds
	24HD	39 Minutes 59 Seconds	08 Minutes 03 Seconds
	NewsOne	19 Minutes 58 Seconds	03 Minutes 06 Seconds
Bulletin	Dunya	28 Minutes 03 Seconds	10 Minutes 50 Seconds
	Express	63 Minutes 14 Seconds	04 Minutes 56 Seconds
	BOL	52 Minutes 34 Seconds	03 Minutes 47 Seconds
Total		280 minutes 46 seconds	40 Minutes 45 seconds

The above table reveals that 24HD provided maximum coverage to Zainab Ansari and Farishta Mohmand rape cases although in drastic disproportion. The former was allotted 39 minutes and 59 seconds while the latter was given only 08 minutes and 03 seconds. This is followed by the country's biggest and most popular news channel GeoNews, which gave 28 minutes 07 seconds to Zainab Ansari's case while only 02 minutes and 55 seconds to Farishta's case which is less than all other channels.

In the selected News Bulletins, Express news gave maximum airtime i.e. 63 minutes 14 seconds to Zainab's case whereas only 04 minutes, 56 seconds to Farishta's case. From the table, it is obvious that Zainab's case received staggeringly seven times (280 minutes) more total primetime coverage than Farishta's case (40 minutes).

Rundown of the Bulletin/Headlines and placement of the story in it

The table 3 demonstrate where each TV channel placed these news in their bulletin/headlines.

Table 3.

Zainab Ansari Story in Lead						
News Channels	1st day	2nd day	3rd day	4th day	5th day	6th day
GeoNews	lead story	lead story	2 nd in lead	6 th in lead	7 th in lead	4 th in lead
ARYNews	lead story	lead story	3 rd in lead	3 rd in lead	3 rd in lead	7 th in lead
Dunya	lead story	lead story	2 nd in lead	lead story	4 th in lead	6 th in lead
Express	lead story	lead story	3 rd in lead	3 rd in lead	3 rd in lead	6 th in lead
BOL	lead story	lead story	4 th in lead	Missing	missing	4 th in lead
92HD	lead story	lead story	lead story	2 nd in lead	2 nd in lead	8 th in lead
24HD	lead story	lead story	2 nd in lead	5 th in lead	10 th in lead	10 th in lead

NewsOne	lead story	lead story	3 rd in lead	lead story	3 rd in lead	4 th in lead
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From the above table, it is clear that Zainab's case was the top story of all channels for two consecutive days. All the channels focused on the case, gave it more space, and prioritized it. Unfortunately, the two days coverage of the BOL channel is missing which could not be found in their archives or on any other video providing sites.

Table 4.

FarishtaMohmand Story in Lead						
News Channels	1st day	2nd day	3rd day	4th day	5th day	6th day
Geo News	Not Reported	5 th in Lead	Last Story	6 th in Lead	Not Reported	Not Reported
ARY News	Not Reported	7 th in Lead	5 th in Lead	5 th in Lead	Not Reported	9 th in Lead
Dunya	Not Reported	7 th in Lead	5 th in lead	5 th in Lead	5 th in Lead	Not Reported
Express	Not Reported	Not Reported	8 th in Lead	6 th in Lead	Not Reported	Not Reported
BOL	Not Reported	3 rd in Lead	6 th in Lead	12 th in Lead	Not Reported	Last Story
92HD	Not Reported	2 nd Last Story	4 th Last Story	7 th in Lead	9 th in Lead	Last Story
24HD	Not Reported	Lead Story	Lead Story	9 th in Lead	Not Reported	12 th in Lead
NewsOne	Not Reported	8 th in Lead	2 nd in Lead	4 th in Lead	8 th in Lead	3 rd in Lead

In the case of Farishta Mohmand, the coverage is quite opposite to Zainab. On the first day, as shown in the above table, not a single channel covered the news. From the 2nd to the 6th day, the majority of the channels placed the story in the last slot of the news rundown. Only 24HD reported it as a lead story on the second and third day but it also ignored it on the first day. The fact that the story of a Pashtun rape victim made it to the TV control rooms on the second day rather than going missing like other incidents which happen in the ethnic periphery is that the memories of Zainab's rape and brutal murder, its huge coverage and banging of the country-level conscience were fresh. Second, Imran Khan was in power who, during Zainab's case had vowed that were he in power, such incidents would never have happened. Third, due to the political mobilization of Pashtun youth by the PTM, constant criticism was coming from social media activists. Fourth, PTM's two parliamentarians had joined the protest due to which international media reported the story. So it seems these factors had finally forced the mainstream Pakistani media in giving it some airtime from the second day onward.

Still, while Zainab's story was reported on all the selected six days, Farishta's case did not catch that attention.. The table 5, shows how many days, the TV channels did not cover Farishta's case altogether.

Table 5.

News Channels	Farishta case Story not Reported
Geo News	3 Days
ARY News	2 Days
Dunya	2 Days
Express	4 Days
BOL	2 Days
92HD	1Day
24HD	2 Days
NewsOne	1 Day

Sources that were quoted/interviewed by media are shown in table 6.

Table 6.

News Sources	
Zainab Ansari	Farishta Mohmand
Victim's parents, civil society organizations, citizens' views, almost all well-known politicians, army chief and ISPR spokesman, police officials, Punjab government, judiciary, showbiz celebrities and cricketers and other sportspersons.	Father and brother, a few politicians, federal Information Minister, Speaker national assembly, police officials, and showbiz celebrities.

In both cases, all channels focused on elites as source in their coverage. In the case of Zainab, almost every channel allotted the whole news bulletin to cover the issue. The news mostly quoted political leaders (Government officials and opposition members) along with the police investigating the case, judges and lawyers, army generals (both serving and retired) and ordinary citizens but in the Farishta case, it was different. Only a few opposition politicians were quoted such as Mariam Nawaz and Siraj ul Haq while from the government side, information minister and Speaker national assembly were contacted. In both cases, media gave space to the victims' family. In the case of Zainab, mostly her father and mother's views were taken while in Farishta case, only her brother's voice was on-aired. Another fact was that the Chief Minister Punjab and other high level officials of provincial government visited Zainab's home and held many press conferences in which her father would sit side by side with them and would speak to the media. But no such thing happened to Farishta's family.

Frames used in both cases

The table 7, explains which frames were mostly used/invoked by media while reporting the story.

Table 7.

Channels	Zainab Ansari Rape Case	Farishta Mohmand Rape Case
GeoNews	Context, depth and opinion, educative play, awareness, protests, followed investigation of the case, child protection laws, changes in education curriculum, parents emotional scenes, trends on social media about the case, women protection.	Elites, father views, celebrities' views.
ARY News	Protests, sympathy, elite, awareness and informative report, child protection laws, in-depth insights, investigation, other rape cases.	Elites, degradation of social morality, PTM leaders portrayed negatively for their protest. ARY alleged the PTM activists of damaging national interests. Claims that the victims were Afghan nationals.
Dunya	Protests, civil society response, elites, trend on social media, judiciary actions, sympathy and emotions, other child sexual scandals, awareness, celebrities' campaign, investigation, criticism of the Punjab government.	Police misbehavior with victim family, protests, elites, report on the situation, dialogue between government representatives and protesters, child awareness, child protection laws.
Express	Protesters clashes with police, trend on social media, showbiz celebrities and cricketers, elites, victim family appeal, judiciary in action, other rape cases, investigation, and emotional report.	Protests, wrongly accused that culprit was victims's relative, elites, in-depth report about the case.
BOL	Elites, protests, social media trend, emotional report on family, judiciary stance, celebrities' demands, criticism of the Punjab government.	Report on the case, investigation, inquiry commission, ethnic movement (PTM) criticized.
NewsOne	Protests, parents emotional appeal, elites, judiciary in action, social media trend, celebrities, and cricketers demand child protection laws, other rape cases, report on the case progress, government to include child awareness in the curriculum, details of the culprit.	Protests, brother's comments, elite views, investigation, other rape cases, suspects in custody.
92HD	Protests, elites, rape statistics, awareness, other rape cases, criticism of the Punjab government, celebrities' response, investigation, father views.	Suspects are Afghans, protests, dialogue between government officials and protesters, elites, suspects under investigation but news excluded who suspects were?
	Elites, parents appeal, trend on	Family's protest, elites' views, dialogue

24HD	social media, judiciary in action, protests, other rape cases, celebrities' responses, report on family, report on other rape cases, laws for child protection, statistics on rape cases, women protection.	between officials and protesters- including PTM members, suspects taken into custody, the suspect is a neighbour, celebrities and cricketers' views, criticism on police, investigation.
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According to the above table, in Zainab's case, all news channels used maximum frames in their reporting, mostly showcasing the protesters clashing with police, what the elites say, parents of Zainab, trend/#tag on social media, celebrities responses, statistics on rape cases, awareness of children and parents, women protection laws, demand for new laws for child protection, incorporating sex education in the curriculum, and most importantly, all the channels reported other rape cases to further highlight the issue.

On the other hand, in the case of Farishta Mohmand, the coverage was limited. They used minimum frames and some channels even speculated fake and unauthentic news about the arrest of the suspect. Such as 92HD declared that the suspects are Afghans and are in the custody of the police, whereas 24HD alleged that the suspects were neighbours of the victim. Similarly, express News also claimed that the suspects were her relatives. When police arrested the real culprit, Nisar Ali on June 22, 2019, he was her neighbour but neither Afghan nor her relative. ARYNews and BOL criticized PTM members who were peacefully protesting with Farishta's family for investigating the case and also initiating an inquiry into the criminal negligence of police. But these channels never mentioned any such thing in the case of Zainab. Since Zainab's father was an active member of PAT, so the already protesting PAT picked this opportunity up. Thousands of its members alongside their leaders were violently protesting and clashing with police across the country and were chanting slogans against the then government, but TV channels did not criticize them. The serious implications of such partial coverage for ethnic groups are discussed in the Conclusion section.

CONCLUSION

Shoemaker and Reese (1996) stated that news reflects society's distribution of power. Therefore, as Avraham (2003) argues, social groups/places close to the elite/foci of power receive more and favorable coverage while weak groups have to enter through the back door reserved for strange or disorderly. The political and social unequal status of ethnic groups in Pakistan is reflected in the media but before that, as Avraham (2003) has pointed out, the government creates the political atmosphere and certain attitude towards groups and the media follows. In Pakistan, nationalists, specifically Pashtun and Baloch are suspected by the central government which is always controlled by the powerful military and bureaucratic establishment. Pashtuns are associated with irredentism and their demands for human rights and provincial autonomy are equated with separatism and disloyalty to the state.

Since the behaviour of the state towards a sociocultural group is best reflected in the media, given that the former controls the latter, therefore, Avraham (2003) maintains that when they translate the objective reality into symbolic reality, the social-political distance between the group/place and

the foci of power intervenes. Consequently, “if a city is constructed as geographically distant, then its people’s behavior and thinking are also considered as weird/backward. The media always emphasizes the supposed threat, the different nature of their members, and the otherness of the periphery and thus reinforce prejudices, social tags, and stereotypes”(Avraham, 2003). This is why ARY News emphasized/overplayed the ethnic background of the rape victim Farishta since she was a Pashtun. But ironically, the TV channel never mentioned any such thing in the case of Zainab. Thus, as Avraham puts it, “The press instead of criticizing the marginalizing policies of the state, plays the victim blame and legitimizes the prevalent politics and the existing distribution of power and fortify the ruling hegemony”(Avraham, 2003).

Moreover, ARY not only dehumanized the rape victim by distinguishing it as an ethnic rather than a human case but also banalized it by diverting the public’s attention from the police negligence to the otherness of the victim. Moreover, since PTM was protesting against the police’s wayward behaviour with the family, and since the state had already started a powerful campaign to malign and discredit this rights movement, ARY diverted Farishta’s rape case from its context and linked it to PTM, a rights movement being portrayed as anti-state by the government sponsored media due to its criticism on state policies in Pakhtun areas.

Moreover, Avraham (2003) claims that the media imposes labels on people in a constructed symbolic environment. Thus, journalists translate their cultural assumptions/prejudices into “objective” news. But Lipmann (cited in Avraham, 2003) opines that stereotypes used by the reporters merge with the stereotypes held by the readers so that stereotypes are not passed on to a neutral audience but rather to an audience sharing the same stereotype. This interplay of constant reciprocation between media and political establishment concerning the use of terms and issues being raised/selected determines the [mis/non]representation of certain marginalized groups (Avraham, 2003). So, when the family went to the Police Station to file FIR, the Station House Officer (SHO) told them that the girl might have eloped with her lover. The girl was just 10 years old (child). How can a child elope? But this behavior reflects the orientalist perception of Pashtuns, specifically the Tribal Pashtuns, as rough, uncivilized, and forsaken people. The SHO neither trusted the Pashtun father nor was serious about taking his case since he clearly knew the ostracized and secondary status of Farishta’s father. Perhaps, the SHO might have been right so far as his treatment of such forlorn and suspected Pashtuns was concerned except that he was unaware of the new forces: social media and PTM.

Moreover, to obscure the debate and cover-up the police negligence and discrimination of Pashtuns in Islamabad and other big cities of Pakistan, ARY alleged that the parents of Farishta were Afghan citizens without any evidence. Since it is common to blame Afghan refugees, who are legitimately residing in Pakistan under Islamabad’s agreements with the United Nations Human Rights Commissioner for Refugees UNHCR (Latif, 2019; Rummery, 2009) for every crime that happens on the streets of Pakistani cities (Siddiqui, 2019; Hafizullah, 1988). Pashtun’s only news coverage eligibility is when they commit murder or other felonious acts. So, the media commands Pashtuns to “Enter as deviants or remain outside in the cold, both unappealing alternatives”(Avraham, 2003). So such social groups are left out of the public eye or at best, discredited. This is why some TV channels used the Relative Frame (the rapist was Farishta’s relative). The TV journalist/news

producer's subconscious assumption was that Pashtuns are unruly people who most often fight among themselves, so the family members themselves should be responsible for the rape. No external person could commit such a crime.

Finally, the huge difference in the amount of time allotted to both stories also tells the discrepancies in the coverage of both cases. While the nature and viciousness of Farishta's rape were the same or maybe even more than Zainab's (luckily acid was not thrown on her and police had also not mistreated the family for filing a report), but her ethnicity, and the fact that the establishment was not looking for a political excuse to pressurize the current government of Imran Khan, foreclosed any chance of her case becoming big news and talk of the town.

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