

**Research Article**

# Reportage of Corona Pandemic in Hindi News Television and Stereotyping of Muslims with Special Reference to Tablighi Jamaat

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## ABSTRACT

This research paper is an attempt to map the depth of stereotyping of Muslims in mainstream Hindi news television. Stereotyping of religious, ethnic and other minority groups, is not unusual in mainstream press and television. However, 'crudeness' of media content may endanger the lives of the entire community and has the potential to threaten the social fabric of the society/country (Lippmann, 1922). It strengthens negative schema among the members of the society. In this research paper, I have analysed the language, tone, tenor and form of reportage of Covid-19 pandemic vis-à-vis Tablighi Jamaat sect in two leading Hindi news channels. I find the two news channels violate the basic principles of journalism practised in a 'free press'. It clearly stereotypes and 'demonises' Muslims, and in the process diverts attention of the public from 'real' to the 'imaginary' ('Say Sorry', 2020). Both quantitative and qualitative methods have been used for content analysis. Critical discourse analysis is the main tool to map the depth of stereotyping.

**Keyword:** Covid-19, Corona, Muslims, Tablighi Jamaat, Stereotyping

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## INTRODUCTION

The infection of Covid-19 is an unprecedented crisis all over the world. Different countries and their respective governments responded to the crisis differently. While some were better prepared to handle the situation, others were caught off guard. In India, the crisis was looming large ever since the deadly virus was reported first in neighbouring China and acknowledged by World Health Organization (WHO) in December 2019 (WHO,

2020). The crisis in India was imminent as India not only shares geographical boundary with China but also has major trade relations with it. Experts and the political opposition in the country were calling for alertness as early as 12 February 2020 (Deka, 2020). However, the government came into action a month later, thereby losing out some crucial days. The initial response was confined only to papers. The real risk and government action became visible in public domain on 22 March 2020 when the Prime Minister of India announced the ‘Janata Curfew’ in which he asked people to voluntarily stay at home; public and private transports were restricted. Complete lockdown was announced on 24 March 2020 (De, 2020). Covid-19 became a major story for the mainstream news television only after the announcement of the Janata Curfew. However, the reportage on Covid-19 in mainstream news television soon became reportage on a Muslim sect known as Tablighi Jamaat. The main focus of New Delhi-based national media was Tablighi Jamaat’s headquarters called Nizamuddin Markaz in Delhi’s Muslim-dominated area close to the shrine of famous Sufi saint Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya. Markaz literally means centre. Television news agency ANI was the first to report the gathering of people at Nizamuddin Markaz on the evening of 30 March 2020 (Bhardwaj, 2020). The Nizamuddin Markaz is a multi-storied building that doubles up as a mosque, a guest house and a learning centre for religious teachings. It holds large congregations throughout the year. The ANI news report claimed people in Nizamuddin Markaz falling sick and many of them being taken to hospital for Covid-19 test. The very next day, most mainstream news channels started following the Markaz story extensively. The Nizamuddin Markaz became a ‘media hotspot’ and subsequently the ‘Corona hotspot’ and a ‘master spreader of Coronavirus’ as we shall see in the later part of this research paper. The focus of the mainstream news television revolved mainly on these issues—assembly of large number of people belonging to the Tablighi Jamaat at the Nizamuddin Markaz contrary to a government notification, their unwillingness to get themselves tested for Covid-19, non-cooperation with the police and health officials, incidents of misbehaviour (spitting on police and health workers, and sexual harassment of female nursing staff), hiding from the police and spreading Coronavirus all over the country. In this research paper, I have done content analysis of two top news channels—Aaj Tak and ABP News—in terms of viewership as identified by rating agency Broadcast Audience Research Council (BARC). Both quantitative and qualitative analyses have been done to identify the depth of stereotyping of Muslims in the reportage on Covid-19 spread in India. The study shows the news channels heavily stereotyped Muslims leading to several incidents of hate crime against the community.

## **STEREOTYPING OF MUSLIMS IN INDIA**

Historian Mushirul Hasan writes the loyalty of Indian Muslims has always been a suspect since the Partition in 1947. Muslim officers in the government were seen with suspicion

in years after Partition. The influx of Hindu refugees from Pakistan and rising communalism insisted that Muslims need to prove they were not ‘fifth columnist’ in India (Hasan, 1990). Hasan further argues that communalism grew in India under the ‘secular’ leadership of Nehru. Hindu communalism was coated with nationalist feelings after the wars with China (1962) and Pakistan (1965). Simultaneously, certain Muslim groups drew legitimacy under the prevailing communal divide (Hasan, 1988). The socio-cultural–political gap between the majority Hindu and minority Muslim community and their respective competing communalism manufactured and reinforced certain stereotypes about each other. Media not just maintained the status quo but also furthered the existing stereotype. The role of media did not remain confined to mere transmission of information to a static audience. Rather it created meaning to the information with which the audience identified themselves. It involved active engagement with the audience and gave vocabulary in public discourse (Muralidharan, 2012). With the attack on the twin towers of the World Trade Centre in the United States in 2001, Muslims world overcame under the scrutiny of media. At the same time, there has been a series of terror attacks in India as well. This initially brought focus on Jihad, Madarasa (Islamic seminary) and role of upwardly mobile educated Muslims. In India, the media discourse gradually widened its scope to issues like Shariat and Personal Laws, status of Muslim women and ghettoisation of Muslim neighbourhoods, etc. Arvind Rajagopal in his book *Politics after Television: Hindu Nationalism and the Reshaping of the Public in India* (2001) sketches the rise of Hindu nationalism and the growth of visual media. He acknowledges the correlation between television-mediated politics and the growth of Hindu nationalism (Katju, 2001). In this backdrop, we discuss the reportage of Covid-19 in two television news channels especially focusing on a Muslim sect called Tablighi Jamaat.

### **TABLIGHI JAMAAT AND ROLE OF MEDIA IN CORONA PANDEMIC**

Headquartered in New Delhi, the Tablighi Jamaat came under scanner after the 9/11 terror attack in the United States as a revivalist Islamic movement. In a section of US media, the Jamaat was then compared to several revivalist movements having close links to terror networks. It was acknowledged that Tablighi Jamaat has presence in most parts of the world. Some scholars, however, opined that Tablighi Jamaat does not propagate radicalism. There was no evidence of their association with any violent activity. Tablighi Jamaat was understood as a non-political group engaged in religious teachings, daily rituals and self-discipline (Mamun, 2019). The Jamaat came under attack for the first time in national media in India on 30 March 2020, during the Corona pandemic. In several days that followed, there was marathon media coverage of Tablighi Jamaat identified as ‘super spreader’ of coronavirus in India. The intensity of media coverage was such that even international press reported it with the same slant (Slater *et al.*,

2020). In a series of stories, live reporting and panel discussion/TV debates spread over several days, it was alleged that the Jamaat held a congregation of hundreds of people at the Nizamuddin headquarters disregarding the government order. The gathering was deliberate and in clear violation of government orders for religious places. Foreign delegates attending the gathering were alleged to have ‘brought the virus from abroad’. Some media outlets went on to allege that members of the Tablighi Jamaat spread all over India from the Nizamuddin Markaz with the intention of ‘killing’ people. It was called a criminal act. The media carried forward only the police version without raising some questions like failure of the government, its unpreparedness and late reaction in dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic situation. The media portrayed the Jamaat as ‘uncivilized, medieval and anti-science’ group of people. Insulting and judgmental language was used to describe the Tablighi Jamaat, its members and leaders. I shall discuss this in detail by picking up specific stories in the qualitative analysis section of this paper. The serious allegations levelled by the media against Tablighi Jamaat fell flat as later several courts exonerated them of all charges. The Bombay High Court even observed that the Tablighi Jamaat members were made scapegoat (‘Govt made Tablighi Jamaat scapegoat’, 2020).

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RQ1–Did media show Tablighi Jamaat responsible for the spread of Corona in India?

RQ2–Did media show Tablighi Jamaat as wilful violators of law?

RQ3–Did media portray Tablighi Jamaat as anti-social, anti-science and backward community?

RQ4–Did media show Tablighi Jamaat working against national interest?

RQ5–Did media reporting on Tablighi Jamaat strengthen negative stereotype of the entire Muslim community?

## METHODOLOGY

I identified two Hindi news channels as the representative of news television for the purpose of content analysis. Two top channels–Aaj Tak and ABP News–were selected on the basis of their ratings or Television Rating Points data released by BARC.

The sample was collected using keyword searches. The depth of stereotyping was measured through quantitative method by analysing the graphics text in terms of negative, positive or neutral reference to Tablighi Jamaat in particular and Muslims in general. The entire sample was then studied in detail through critical discourse analysis (CDA) which is a qualitative method of content analysis.

## Sampling and Data Collection

Sampling was done by keyword search method also known as ‘Push-Button’ content analysis (Deacon *et al.*, 1999, pp. 133–136). In this method, keywords are selected which would closely associate with the research objective. Keywords are then typed on a search engine and the resulting links are taken as sample. Here, I used YouTube channels of the identified news channels to search for the stories. Most television stories are posted on the respective YouTube channels of the news channels under the study. I have selected only the TV stories for my study, not the digital ones. Following keywords were used to search for the story links in Table 1.

**Table 1: Keywords Used to Search and Select Content from YouTube Channels**

S.No.	Keyword	Time of search	Date of search	Result
1.	Jamaat+ ABP News	5:30 pm	14 September 2020	10
2.	Jamaat + Aaj Tak	5:36 pm	14 September 2020	10
3.	Corona + Gurudwara + ABP News	5:42 pm	14 September 2020	10
4.	Corona + Mandir + ABP News	5:48 pm	14 September 2020	10
5.	Corona + Mandir + Aaj Tak	5:54 pm	14 September 2020	7
6.	Corona + Gurudwara + Aaj Tak	6:00 pm	14 September 2020	3

*Notes:* Only the searches–Jamaat + ABP News and Jamaat + Aaj Tak–were taken as sample for content analysis. I got links to a total of 20 stories spread over 10 days beginning 31 March 2020. Total duration of ABP News stories under the study is 1:35 hours. Total duration of Aaj Tak stories under the study is 3:11 hours. The remaining stories obtained from the other keyword searches were used only to compare how the two news channels reported the same issue for other religious places like gurudwaras and temples.

The content selected for the analysis were news stories, live reporting/chats, anchor-bytes, interviews and studio discussions. The entire sample was downloaded and saved in a pen drive. This was done to avoid losing the content once it was removed from the main server or for any technical problem in future. Each story was given an Identity (ID) number along with the date and time of telecast and name of the news channel.

Coding–two separate coding sheets were prepared–one for the quantitative analysis and the other for the qualitative analysis.

## QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

Graphics text used in the content was quantified and studied. Graphics text is the written text which comes on screen to support the audio–visual content of the news story. The graphics text gives the crux of the voice-over and visual content.

All the graphics were written on the coding sheet. Each sentence was taken as one unit. It was then categorised as negative, positive or neutral depending on the meaning it

conveyed with respect to the Tablighi Jamaat. The judgment was purely the discretion of the researcher.

The number of negative, positive or neutral sentences were then counted and categorised separately for the two news channels Aaj Tak and ABP News. I obtained the following graph for the two news channels in Figure 1.

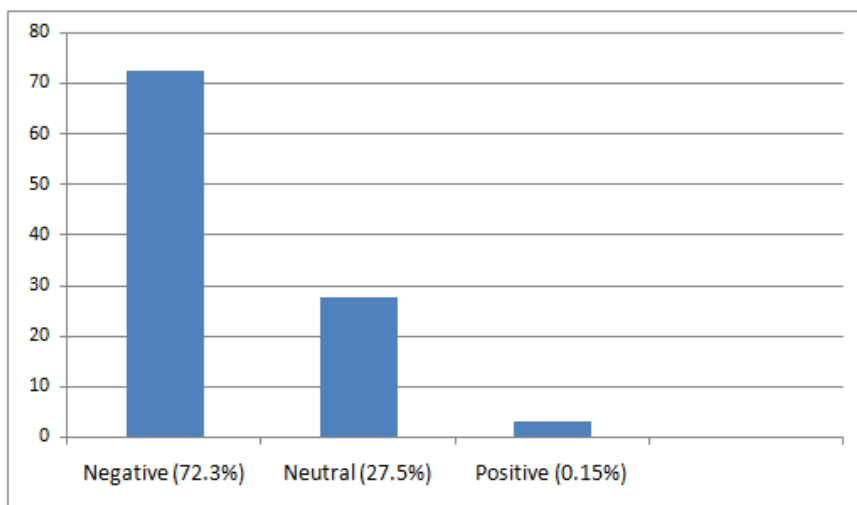


Figure 1: Quantitative Analysis of Graphics Texts in Aaj Tak News Channel

### Quantitative Analysis of Graphics Texts in Aaj Tak News Channel

*Note:* This figure represents the percentage of negative, positive and neutral sentences used by Aaj Tak News Channel in its graphics text.

Total number of stories analysed–8

(Total number of stories collected through pushbutton search method was 10. I later found that two stories were repetitions so they were left out of the analysis)

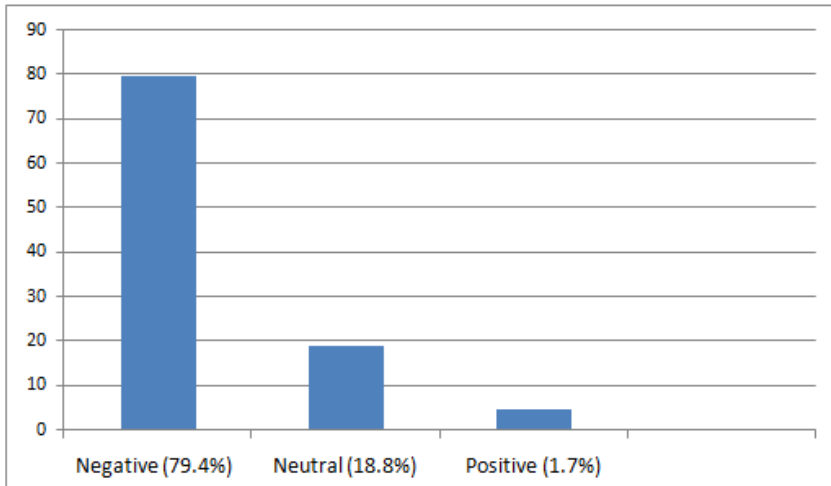
Total number of sentences (graphics text) present and studied–636

Total number of negative sentences–460 (72.3%)

Total number of neutral sentences–175 (27.5%)

Total number of positive sentences–1 (0.15%)

(This one positive sentence was the quote of a doctor of LNJP hospital.)



**Figure 2: Quantitative Analysis of Graphics Texts in ABP News Channel**

*Notes:* This figure represents the percentage of negative, positive and neutral sentences used by Aaj Tak News Channel in its graphics text.

Total number of stories (Figure 2) analysed–9

(Total number of stories collected through pushbutton search method was 10. I later found that one story was repetition so it was left out of the analysis.)

Total number of sentences (graphics text) present and studied–170

Total number of negative sentences–135 (79.4%)

Total number of neutral sentences–32 (18.8%)

Total number of positive sentences–3 (1.7%)

(This one positive sentence was the quote of a doctor of LNJP hospital.)

## **QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS**

I have used CDA as the main tool for content analysis. This particular mode of analysis was chosen based on similar studies done by scholars in the past. The current subject under the study requires deciphering the deeper schema present in the society which often gets manifested in the media content. Norman Fairclough, one of the prominent scholars of CDA, believes CDA is used mainly to understand the relation between power and inequality in the society as reflected in the use of language. Linguist Ruth Wodak writes CDA analyses the hidden as well as apparent relationship of ‘dominance, discrimination, power and control’ present in the language. It basically looks at the

relationship between language and society (Blommaert and Bulcaen, 2000). The subject chosen for analysis here is located in a similar situation. A ‘fragile’ minority community was ‘bombarded’ with allegations of threatening the national security by a powerful media supported by a strong ‘majoritarian’ government (Iyer, 2020). The ‘attack’ on Muslims, the country’s largest minority who constitute about 14.23% of the population, came at the time when the entire country was grappling with an unprecedented pandemic of Covid-19 infection. The coverage of Covid-19 by news television not just stereotyped Muslims but also endangered their lives. Stereotyping in news television was further exaggerated in social media by series of fake news leading to the spread of hate messages, economic boycott and hate crimes against Muslims. The relation between violent attacks on Muslims and media coverage needs deeper sociological and linguistic analysis of the reportage in new television. This paper briefly tries to answer those questions. Therefore, CDA appears to be an appropriate method to understand media stereotyping. Deacon, Pickering, Golding and Murdock have explained procedure and guide to discourse analysis which has been used in this study (Deacon *et al.*, 1999, pp. 170–192).

## **CDA**

A coding sheet was prepared under following heads—Lexicalisation, Predication, Intertextuality and Social Practice. Two separate coding sheets were used for Aaj Tak and ABP News. Every story was played repeatedly and observations under the given heads were noted down on the coding sheet. It was found that both news channels’ approach and treatment to the subject were almost same. Both channels stereotyped Muslims in their broadcast. So a combined analysis of both channels has been given in this research paper.

## **Lexicalisation**

Both Aaj Tak and ABP News used words, visuals and expressions which not only ‘branded’ Tablighi Jamaat, but with the entire Muslim community. As a result, entire community was stereotyped negatively. Words like Muslim, Islam, Maulana and Markaz have been used repeatedly in almost every story. In none of the stories, there has been any attempt to explain that Tablighi Jamaat is a small sect among Muslims and is not representative of the entire community. Value-added words and expressions were juxtaposed with the visuals of mosque and people offering Namaz in groups. The graphics used in all the stories have pictures of beard sporting people in Muslim attire like Kurta–Payjama and skull cap. Language and content used in the background voice-over added to the negative schema present in the viewers. This gave impression that Muslims as a whole were involved in activities that spread Corona virus in India.

There is a liberal use of insulting words and sentences in clear terms without any inhibition.

Some sentences picked up from Aaj Tak stories:

1. कोरोना की जमात (Group of Corona).
2. कोरोना का गढ़ (Centre of Corona).
3. जमात से निकला कोरोना का जिन्न (Corona genie comes out of Jamaat).
4. तबलीगी जमात के सेंटर के मौलाना के खिलाफ केस दर्ज होगा (Case will be lodged against Maulana of Tablighi Jamaat centre).
5. जमा हुए लोग अपने साथ वायरस ले गए (The gathering carried virus with them).
6. जमात का इलाज जरूरी है (Treatment of Jamaat is necessary).
7. पुलिस ने भी ठाना है कि जमात अपनी हरकतों से बाज नहीं आया तो उससे सख्ती से निपटा जाएगा (Police are determined to take strict action if Jamaat does not mend its ways).

Some sentences picked up from ABP News stories:

1. दुश्मन न करे एक मौलाना ने वो गलत काम किया है। (Even enemy don't do things which a Maulana has done).
2. पूरे देश को कोरोना के आग में झोंक दिया है। (The entire country has been forced into Corona).
3. धर्म की दुकान चलाते चलाते मुस्लिम संगठन तब लीगी जमात देश का गुनहगार बन गया। (By running the shop of religion, a Muslim group has become sinner of the entire country).
4. कोरोना वायरस के बीच मुसलमानों को निजामउद्दीन मरकज में जुटाना, फिर पूरे देश में छोड़ देने का ही तो नतीजा है कि देश में 30 पर्सेन्ट केस का कनेक्शन तब लीगी जमात से जुड़ रहा है। (Thirty percent of cases are linked to the Markaz because Muslims were made to assemble in Nizamuddin Markaz and then they were sent to different places all over the country).
5. कोरोना वायरस के बीच तब लीगी वायरस बहुत बड़ी समस्या बन गया है। (Amidst coronavirus, Tablighi virus has become a big problem).

Both channels used insulting words and sentences freely to directly hold the Jamaat responsible for deliberately spreading Covid-19. Terms like जाहिल (illiterate), virus, enemy of the nation, etc. have been used to describe the Tablighi Jamaat.

## **Predication**

The language, tone and tenor, and visuals used in the entire coverage of Covid-19-Tablighi Jamaat issue are similar in both Aaj Tak and ABP News. The common approach in both news channels is the same—use of insulting words, labelling, one-sided allegations without taking any reaction from the Jamaat, factual inaccuracy and sensationalism.

## **Visuals**

The visuals used in all the stories/discussions are similar to a crime/terrorism story. There is a drone shot of the Nizamuddin Markaz building coupled with a background music which makes it appear like a scene of crime. This shot has been used repeatedly in almost all the stories and discussions in both news channels. The other common visual is that of a group of Jamaat members sitting in ambulances and buses. The camera angle, content and style of voice-over make it appear as if they are being taken away by the police like criminals. These visuals were taken while carrying them to hospitals and quarantine centres by the health officials. Another commonly used visual is a long shot of a group of Jamaat members standing or walking in a queue along with their luggage. The long-shot captures a police barricade that separates the Jamaat members from others. These visuals can be likened to a terror story or a major scene of crime.

The treatment in all the stories is that of a crime story rather than an unprecedented health emergency. There are one-sided allegations on Jamaat, without any reaction or response from them. However, in some of the panel discussions, representatives of Jamaat are present. But they are subjected to ridiculing and grilling. No effort is made to hear ‘their side of the story’.

The stories make us understand that there was a deliberate attempt by Jamaat to assemble at Nizamuddin Markaz and spread Coronavirus all over the country in order to kill people. It was a criminal act. It was an anti-national act as it puts the country to risk. There was an attempt to kill people by spreading the deadly virus. There could be a wider international network and conspiracy which needs to be investigated.

The commonly used expressions are खुलासा (disclosure), तलाश जारी है (the search is on), लोग इकट्ठा हुए (people assembled), लोग मस्जिद में छुपे हुए थे (People were hiding in mosque).

In several stories, a map was shown repeatedly to emphasise the spread of Corona from Nizamuddin Markaz in New Delhi to states all over India, as people from Markaz ‘spread across India secretly disregarding the Janata curfew or lockdown’. Jamaat has been described as Jahil Jamaati or uneducated and uncivilised group.

It is observed that both channels used words and expressions to create scare and panic among the viewers. Expressions like डराने वाला मामला (scary issue), पुलिस जमातियों को ढूँढ रही है (police searching Jamaat people) have been commonly used.

Consider this Aaj Tak story dated 7 April 2020:

पुलिस की दबिश के बाद भगोड़ा जमाती पकड़ा गया नहीं तो वो कोरोना बम ही बन जाता।

(Police caught the absconding Jamaat member after a raid. Else, he would have become Corona bomb.)

Similarly, ABP News stories are also full of similar expressions. Sample this from a story dated 1 April 2020:

‘कारोना फैक्टरी’ वाले मौलाना की संपूर्ण कहानी

A complete story of a Maulana of the Corona factory.

कोरोना के आतंक का केंद्र बना हुआ है दिल्ली का निजामउद्दीन मरकज

Delhi’s Nizamuddin Markaz is the centre of Corona terrorism. Note the use of word ‘terrorism’ in the context of Corona and Muslims.

जो धार्मिक काम का मरकज था उसे एक मौलाना के करतूत ने कोरोना का केंद्र बना दिया।

The bad deeds of a Maulana converted the place meant for religious activity to a centre of Corona.

Consider this ABP story dated 3 April 2020.

वीओ – जिन्हें अश्लील हरकतें करने में शर्म नहीं आई वो कैसरे पर चेहरा दिखाने से बच रहे हैं। ये तबलीगी जमात से जुड़े वही जाहिल लोग हैं जिन पर बदतमीजी और अश्लील हरकतें करने का आरोप है।

(Voice over—Those who had no shame in doing sexually vulgar act are now hiding their face. These are the same illiterate people of Tablighi Jamaat who are accused of misbehaving and doing sexually vulgar activities.)

This is a story on the allegations of sexual misconduct by Tablighi Jamaat members in a hospital in Ghaziabad in Uttar Pradesh. The Jamaat members allegedly tried to expose themselves in front of female nurses in the government hospital. They were allegedly moving around nude and teasing the female staff. The story is supported by a sound bite of a male doctor. There is a written complaint by some nurses who have not been named. The story talks about a government order for invoking the stringent National Security Act against the accused.

After the broadcast of the sexual harassment stories on 3 and 4 April 2020, there has been no follow-up story in any print or electronic media till the writing of this research paper in March 2021 to establish the veracity of the allegations. There is no media coverage on the legal proceedings in his particular case.

The Jamaat has been portrayed as a group that performs acts that are not only unacceptable in any civilised society, but is also anti-Islamic. The stories have used expressions like ‘illiterate’ and ‘sexually frustrated’ to describe the Jamaat. The words, expressions and style of writing are similar in all the samples under the study.

### **Intertextuality**

It basically deals with ‘how quoted utterances are selected, changed, contextualised’ (Blommaert and Bulcaen, 2000). Norman Fairclough links intertextuality with ‘assumptions and presumptions’. He says what is ‘said’ in a text is said in a backdrop of lot of things that are ‘unsaid’. Assumptions are hidden in a text. The intended message is delivered without actually saying it (Fairclough, 2003, p. 40).

I have observed three major instances of intertextuality in the samples under this study. This intertextuality has been referred repeatedly in several of the sample stories.

First, speech of Maulana Saad, who heads the Tablighi Jamaat. First, let us consider the speech of Maulana Saad, who heads the Tablighi Jamaat sect in India. One audio clip of Maulana Saad has been used repeatedly to show that he made people stay in the Markaz despite Covid-19 threat. He is heard telling people that mosque is the best place to die. He goes on to say that the government was asking people to maintain social distancing because they want to separate Muslim brothers. It was a conspiracy to create rift among Muslims.

The source and date of the audio clip have not been mentioned in any of the stories. While the authenticity of the clip is not under challenge, the way it has been used and contextualised strengthen the negative stereotype about Muslims in general.

The content of the audio clip *prima facie* appears to be troublesome. However, it is difficult to arrive at any conclusion. The audio clip is selective. The entire audio clip is not known. It is not known in what context the speech was made and with what intention.

Both Aaj Tak and ABP News used Kerala Governor Arif Mohammad Khan to understand and explain the content of the speech of Maulana Saad. It was not disclosed to the viewer that Khan was closely associated with a right-wing organisation whose views

may not be considered neutral. Khan in his discussion interprets the speech of Maulana Saad as a general malaise ailing the Muslim community. He generalises the speech to portray Muslims as uneducated, backward, anti-science, irrational and fanatic group of people. Coming from a governor of a state, his words did carry a lot of weight. It is unusual for governors in India to speak to media on a divisionary subject like this. As per the Constitution of India, a governor is a Constitutional head of a state, who is expected to maintain neutrality, strike a balance, remain politically inert and function as a watchdog of the state government.

However, consider this live chat between news anchor Anjana Om Kashyap and Arif Mohammad Khan on Aaj Tak on 31 March 2020.

Anchor: जमात के मुखिया ये जहर फैला रहे थे। इसका काट क्या है। कौन है जो कौम के आखरी व्यक्ति तक पहुंचकर बतायेगा कि जमात गुमराह कर रही है।

(Jamaat's head is spreading this poison. What is the solution? Who will tell every Muslim that Jamaat is misguiding people?)

The question in itself casts stereotype that all Muslims are ignorant. Someone needs to educate the community.

Khan replies common Muslims will fight it out when they get educated. The answer is contextualised to make sense that common Muslims are uneducated and all or majority of them follow Maulana Saad or a similar ideology or understanding of the situation. Khan goes on to say: 'Look at their (Muslim clergy) history. They say don't learn English. Don't seek knowledge. They (religious leaders) want Muslims should remain uneducated, unaware and can be used like animals.' This is blatant negative stereotyping. The fact is that Jamaat itself has a large number of educated English speaking elite Muslims as its followers.

Anchor: 'There is a section which every moment says that this step is being taken to move you away from religion. What is the solution?'

The anchor talks in a larger context and refers to some unknown Muslim religious leaders, who in her opinion, keep telling Muslims that there is an attempt by the government to keep Muslims away from religion.

Khan: 'ये लोग सुपर्शटीशन अंधविश्वास बढ़ा रहे हैं। Indoctrination कर रहे हैं किये हीं चले आओ भलेही मर जाओ। ये लोग (धार्मिक नेता) फायदा उठा रहे हैं किये लोग (आम मुसलमान) शिक्षित नहीं हैं।' (These people are spreading superstition. They are indoctrinating Muslims to come to the mosque even if you die. Clergy is taking benefit because Muslims are not educated and aware.)

Anchor: 'ये सोच फैलाई गई जमात के मुखिया के भाषण के जरिए। लेकिन लोगों को ऐसे वक्त में वैज्ञानिक सोच रखनी चाहिए।' (This mindset is being propagated by the Jamaat chief. But people should have scientific thoughts.)

The news anchor advises Muslims to have scientific temperament. The above discussion conveys a message that Muslims in general lack scientific temperament. They are going to the mosque to offer prayers even if they die there. This clearly means that Muslims were not following the lockdown and closure of religious places order of the government.

I see a similar style of reporting in ABP News in this context.

Secondly, the major emphasis in most stories was the 'deliberate and wilful' decision of the Jamaat to ignore the government notification on restriction of movement of people due to Covid-19. This again appears to be factually incorrect. A Delhi court judgement later counters this claim.

Both news channels aired a video clip (CCTV footage apparently supplied by the police) without giving any credit to the source of the footage. The footage is that of Hazrat Nizamuddin police station where the Station House Superintendent is seen speaking to a group of Jamaat members in a threatening tone. The video and the voiceover give an impression that the Jamaat wilfully refused to leave the Markaz despite several requests and help offered by the police. However, a Delhi court later acquitted 36 foreign Tablighi Jamaat members of all the charges. The judge noted that it was 'reasonably probable' that the police had picked up the accused to 'maliciously prosecute' them (Mandhani, 2020). This video clip was apparently leaked to the media by the police. The video has only police version of the story. The claim by the Jamaat that they had approached the police and authorities on several occasions to evacuate people from faraway places struck in the Markaz found no or little mention in media reporting ('Nizamuddin Markaz had sought help', 2020). The Jamaat also claimed that they were cooperating with the health officials in the medical treatment of the sick people was completely absent in all the stories.

Thirdly, the panel discussion in both news channels gave opportunity to the Jamaat representatives to explain their position. But most of the time they were interrupted before completing their argument or their statements were twisted to give a different meaning.

Consider this debate on Aaj Tak by anchor Rohit Sardana in a program called Dangal dated 1 April 2020.

Sardana starts with the question on the failure of police but hastens to add: 'What about the speech of Maulana Saad'. When a panellist Bilal Khan (a Jamaat supporter) tries to

explain, Sardana interrupts him to say: ‘Don’t look at this issue from religious point of view.’ Even though panellist Bilal Khan did not refer to any religion. He had just pointed out why the issue of Markaz was raised so much in the media but not the gathering of thousands of migrant labourers at Anand Vihar bus stop just a few days ago. He had pointed out excessive media scrutiny of Muslims. As Bilal Khan tries to explain his position, Sardana starts making gestures at him and apologises to him with folded hands. He twists Bilal Khan’s utterances to give an impression that a powerful news anchor has to bow down before an aggressive Muslim community. He then drags the discussion towards how difficult it was to maintain law and order in Muslim dominated neighbourhoods. And for this, he had a special guest on his panel—a retired police officer LN Rao in Figure 3.



Figure 3: Screenshot of a Studio Discussion from Aaj Tak News Channel

Note: The news anchor speaks with folded hands and makes gestures to create his own image of a helpless citizen while portraying the Tablighi Jamaat representative as an aggressor

Similarly, the story ‘करोना फैक्टरी वाले मौलाना की सम्पूर्ण कहानी’ (a complete story of the Maulana of Corona factory) on ABP News on 1 April 2020 focuses on the role of Maulana Saad and his Jamaat. Story is full of shots that show huge gatherings. These mostly file footage from different locations. But it is juxtaposed in the present situation of Corona where big gatherings and crowds are the main cause of the spread of the disease. The story then talks about a Jamaat congregation in Dhaka, Bangladesh, the previous year where violence broke out between two rival Jamaat groups. This portrays the violent character of Jamaat. There are beep sounds in the video footage of violence

which gives an impression about some abusive words being spoken by Jamaat members. The footage is apparently picked up from social media and has no credit given or any source cited. Contra, the Jamaat in India has been the most peaceful and non-political outfit among Muslims. There is no history of violence by Jamaat in India. This has been acknowledged in another story by ABP which is part of our study sample.

Lastly, Aaj Tak story claims of Chinese nationals present in the Jamaat. This sensationalised the story as Coronavirus is alleged to have originated in China. This gave an impression of a deliberate attempt to bring in the deadly virus from China. Factually, no Chinese national has so far been found in any of the court cases and police complaints registered against foreigners at several places in India.

### **Social Practice**

In his book *Language and Power*, Fairclough (1989) explains how language is used in exercise of power. Language is a form of social practice (Fairclough, 1989). Language becomes an important tool in not just establishing but maintaining the hegemony of the powerful. Hegemony is mediated and reality is constructed through mass media in an implicit form. The ideology is hidden within the text. Fairclough used social practice to understand the notions of ideology and hegemony. Analysing the media content on Tablighi Jamaat in this framework, I see two important frames. First, Muslims in general (through Tablighi Jamaat) were made responsible for the spread of Corona all over India. The entire Muslim community came under scrutiny. This led to several hate crimes against Muslims and also a bulk of hate messages on social media. Secondly, the language and form of media coverage demeaned Muslims as uncultured, illiterate and anti-science community.

### **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

Using the CDA method of content analysis, I find two top Hindi news channels—Aaj Tak and ABP News—stereotyped Muslims negatively during the coverage of Corona pandemic. It used the gathering of Tablighi Jamaat sect in New Delhi to paint the entire community as responsible for the spread of the disease. The answer to all the research questions is affirmative. Contra, both news channels' stories on gathering of people in temples and gurudwaras were in a sympathetic tone as 'people are stuck due to lockdown'. However, people stuck in Nizamuddin Markaz were addressed as 'criminals'. Further study is required to find the linkage between continuous media coverage on Tablighi Jamaat, negative stereotyping and hate crimes against Muslims across north India. This research paper raises questions on the credibility of mainstream television in India.

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