DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION AS A CATALYST: CHALLENGING STEREOTYPES IN MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS OF MIGRANT COMMUNITIES

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Abstract: This article analyses the media representation of two distinct refugee groups in India: Rohingya Muslims fleeing Myanmar, and non-Muslim religious minorities from Pakistan, Afghanistan, and neighbouring nations affected by the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA). Despite their experiences and narratives of persecution and injustice, the media's lens has painted divergent pictures, influenced by right-wing sentiments, solely based on the religious identities of the migrant groups. Analysing representations in the print media, we explore the perplexing phenomenon of the negative framing of one community and the positive depiction of another based on religious identity.

In addressing this disparity, the article scrutinises the role of development education as a transformative force. We investigate innovative approaches that actively engage with media representations of migration, aiming to dismantle anti-immigrant sentiments. Drawing inspiration from Paulo Freire's praxis, development education emerges as a powerful tool not only to challenge prevailing myths and stereotypes but also to empower learners towards meaningful interventions in societal realities. The opportunities and possibilities for development education to enhance our understanding of migration are illuminated through current and recent practices. By adopting an active learning, participative approach, development education seeks to unravel the root causes of injustice, fostering a space for learners to comprehend the complexities surrounding migration. This article contributes to the ongoing discourse on migration, emphasising the potential of education to shape narratives, challenge biases, and drive positive social change.

Keywords: Migration; Development Education; Media Narrative; Stereotypes; Rohingyas; Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA).

Migration and media narratives

In the ever-evolving landscape of media narratives, this article aims to address essential questions surrounding the nature of media narratives, particularly those related to perceived threats or dangers associated with the influx of specific migrant groups. It emphasises the cultural erosion of the 'imagined community', cautioning against the generalisation and homogenisation of diverse practices and understandings that constitute the nation (Anderson, 2016). The deployment of such narratives, marked by various ways of describing, representing, and writing about migration, is explored to comprehend the politics of this rhetoric. Migration is presented not only as a technical problem requiring governance solutions but equally as a political issue marked by contestations among different socio-political groups, government agencies, and popular media. The production of discourse is acknowledged as an integral part of politics, emphasising the selective and strategic deployment of language by governments, policymakers, civil society organisations, and media to influence each other and build consensus on public issues.

Different sections of the media employ specific images, metaphors, idioms, stories, and categories to portray migration as an alarming situation beyond the control of the majority community (Leudar et al., 2008; Ferreira, 2019). Media reporting often adopts an urgent tone and cinematic codes, using metaphors to indicate an imagined physical and societal threat in the form of an attack on the civilisational ethos of the dominant community, leaving little room for nuance. In this context, the role of development education becomes pivotal in revealing the political processes and power relations among different social and political groups, addressing anxieties that become overpowering due to media narratives that stereotype migrant communities. Understanding the politics behind these narratives can enhance awareness of socio-political realities, and opposition to dominant narratives can foster a sense of human solidarity based on principles of justice and equality, contributing to the ability to empathise with others' suffering.

This article is broadly divided into two parts. The first part attempts to unravel the contradictory discourse peddled by right leaning media portals of two distinct refugee groups in India: Rohingya Muslims fleeing Myanmar, and non-

Muslim religious minorities from Pakistan, Afghanistan, and neighbouring nations affected by the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) (The Gazette of India, 2019). Despite shared experiences and narratives of persecution and injustice, the media's lens has painted divergent pictures, influenced by right-wing sentiments, solely based on the religious identities of the migrant groups. Analysing representations in the print media, we explore the perplexing phenomenon of the negative framing of one community and the positive depiction of another based on religious identity. These media platforms were selected for discourse analysis due to their status as prominent right-wing news platforms in India. Characterised by accusatory rhetoric, their aim is to discredit mainstream journalism and provide alternative perspectives for right-wing audiences (Chadha and Bhat, 2022).

These outlets openly align themselves with right-leaning ideologies and pride themselves on being devoid of any liberal bias, offering contrasting viewpoints to the perceived 'left-liberal' mainstream media. They often criticise mainstream press for allegedly silencing the voices of the Hindu majority, while favouring minority groups and undermining India's global reputation (Bhat, 2020). According to Chadha and Bhat (2022), in April 2022, *OpIndia*, which describes itself as India's first digital fact-checking news platform, attracted 11.9 million unique monthly visitors, surpassing other right-wing news sites like swarajyamag.com, which drew 3.6 million monthly visitors. This amplifies the influence of other right-wing media outlets such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)-affiliated *Organiser*. The RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh) is an Indian far-right, Hindu nationalist volunteer organisation. The incumbent Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, along with several cabinet ministers and Chief Ministers of the states, are associated with the RSS (Pandey, 2020). The content from these right-leaning platforms is widely shared by their readership, thereby perpetuating their ideological predispositions within the public sphere.

The second section observes the role of development education as a transformative force. Drawing inspiration from Paulo Freire's praxis, development education emerges as a powerful tool not only to challenge prevailing myths and stereotypes but also to empower learners towards meaningful interventions in social realities. Critical education, as envisioned by Freire, aims

to question and challenge unjust socio-economic systems by emphasising the influence of ideology on individual awareness and societal frameworks. This transformative educational approach has been expanded upon by development education, which delves into the dynamic relationship between education and development, seeking to tackle the root causes of inequity and injustice. Emphasising interactive and participatory learning, it addresses disparities rooted in class, race, and the unique challenges faced by regions in the global South, utilising tools such as social media and information technology. Its goal is to cultivate critical consciousness regarding one's local and global context, rooted in an understanding of social, economic, and political dynamics, ultimately striving for social change that champions equality, inclusion, and social justice. This extension of Freire's ideas underscores the importance of recognising power dynamics and social relationships in fostering a more equitable society. Drawing from this understanding, the article contributes to the ongoing discourse on migration, emphasising the potential of education to shape narratives, challenge biases, and drive positive social change.

India and its contradicting discourse: a juxtaposition

In India, sensitivity toward nationalism and the desire to uphold the sanctity of borders contribute to the normalisation of metaphors depicting danger, terror, or cultural devastation associated with images of migrants impacting the region's vulnerability and stability. This exacerbates concerns about poverty, transnational organised crime, population growth, and competition for limited resources. The politics of fear and narratives surrounding migration from neighbouring countries, such as from Bangladesh into Indian territory, intertwine to form a dominant discourse. This discourse is evident in the rhetoric of key political figures; for instance, the former Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) president and current Home Minister of India, Amit Shah, referred to Bangladeshi migrants as 'termites' during discussions on the draft National Register of Citizens (NRC), further fueling insecurity for the 'Others' (The Hindu, 2018). Illegal migration from Bangladesh or the Rohingya flight from Myanmar are projected as potential threats to India's national security, viewed through the lenses of terrorism, ethnic, or communal violence. Shamshad (2008) notes that Bangladeshi migrants became a central issue in the political rhetoric of the BJP during the 1980s and 1990s, as Hindu nationalists perceived the growing Muslim minority as a

potential threat to the Hindu majority status in India. This article examines the role and effects of media coverage on different groups of refugees, focusing on the Rohingyas and religious minorities included in India's controversial CAA of 2019. The act seeks to expedite the path to Indian citizenship for non-Muslim immigrants from neighbouring countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan. The article also delves into the role of ideological constructs in normalising rhetoric surrounding these groups, as media trends impact the affected communities and influence citizens' attitudes toward them and humanitarian intervention.

The article specifically focuses on media reports from 2017 onwards, as August 2017 marked a deadly crackdown by Myanmar's army that sent Rohingyas fleeing across the border, particularly to India and Bangladesh (Sebastian, 2022). Due to the absence of a specific law or policy in India to deal with refugees, the treatment meted out to different communities of refugees differs based on ideological and political considerations. Juxtaposing these contradictory discourses allows for a comparison of narratives presented by news reports regarding the forced displacement of Rohingya Muslims and non-Muslim groups from other neighbouring countries. Both groups have experienced decades of systematic discrimination, persecution, and forcible displacement. As explained in the introductory section, the rationale for choosing the print media sample is rooted in their immense popularity for their right-wing leanings. This observation enables an understanding of how different crises are described and framed to influence the public by focusing on the narration of the crisis or its consequences.

The discriminatory treatment of the Rohingyas in Myanmar has triggered a large-scale humanitarian and refugee crisis as they sought refuge in neighbouring nations. While the Rohingyas became a stateless population in 1982, with the revised Myanmar citizenship law excluding them from the list of ethnic groups (Chaudhury and Samaddar, 2018), the outbreak of large-scale violence in 2012 accelerated their large-scale migration. Over the years, thousands of Rohingyas have entered India, fleeing violence and persecution (Faye, 2021). Anti-Rohingya sentiments are widespread across India, with right-wing groups often demanding their expulsion, labelling them as 'infiltrators' and 'illegal immigrants'. Reports in 2022 indicated that the Indian government had to retract

a plan to provide free residential housing to Rohingya Muslim refugees in New Delhi following protests by right-wing Hindu organisations (Rahman, 2022). Television channels and media have amplified allegations linking the Rohingya to terrorism, portraying them as security threats altering the demographic profile of Northeast Indian states bordering Myanmar. This has led to the systematic criminalisation of the Rohingyas, with instances of deprivation reported across detention centres housing them. There is a lack of education provision for children, and those whose parents are detained rely on the goodwill of other refugees, who themselves struggle for basic amenities and employment (Article-14, 2023).

Right-wing news platforms, such as *OpIndia*, have alleged that the 'illegal migration of Rohingyas to India and the decision to settle in any part of the country are being masterminded by a core group created by Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI)' (OpIndia, 2019b). They claim this group aims to spread fundamentalism and works towards the pan-Islamisation of the region, exacerbating political and religious conflicts and further driving away the Hindus to alter the regional demography (Bijapurkar, 2017; OpIndia, 2019a). Rohingyas are portrayed as a serious challenge to the national security of India and are deemed not fit to enter the country. The same *OpIndia* piece added:

> "The Rohingyas - who are revered in India by the liberal, communist, Islamist brigade as innocent and hapless - are just another group of veiled jihadis who, given the right opportunity, would massacre every non-Muslim in their path" (OpIndia, 2019a).

The above-mentioned reports claim that some Rohingyas are involved in criminal activities, drug trafficking, and executing terror activities, teaming up with Pakistan's Intelligence agency Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI) sleeper cells. Further reporting argues that, given their links with Islamist terror outfits, their deportation is justified (Organiser, 2021). It is the 'pseudo-secular', 'left-liberal' media that often downplays the extent of such threats (Mohta, 2018). Another pro-government media house named *Organiser,* the mouthpiece of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), wrote that 'India is in the midst of Islamist surge – a communal cauldron' and thus Islamic fundamentalists can easily 'recruit' these

Rohingya refugees, further proving to be threats to the national security (Reddy, 2022). Continuing these contentious viewpoints, an article by *TFIPost* blames Rohingyas for exponential population growth, putting strain on resources and forging government documents and enjoying welfare benefits meant for poor Indian families (Gupta, 2022).

The exclusion of Rohingyas from India's civil documentation process deprives them of access to basic services such as health and education. These exclusions contrast with recent inclusions and protections extended to non-Muslim migrant groups from Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Bangladesh through the CAA, 2019 (Khan, 2020). The absence of a standardised policy to treat refugees in India allows for differential treatment across different communities, particularly on the basis of ethnicity and religion. This impacts whether communities are referred to as refugees or illegal migrants. *OpIndia* favours the state's benevolence in providing citizenship to minority communities persecuted by the majority Muslim community in Islamic nations up until 31 December 2014 (OpIndia, 2022). *Organiser*, a widely circulated nationalist English weekly, commended the CAA for being a 'revolutionary humane step towards providing citizenship to minority communities in India's troubled neighbourhood', facing 'inhumane religious persecution' and a 'slow genocide' (Bora, 2022).

Such stereotyping of migrants by the media is witnessed in other parts of the world as well. In her study of the German media, Wigger (2019) has observed how the print media has drawn on stereotypes to represent migrant Muslim men as criminals and sexual predators in the wake of the 'European refugee crisis' due to rising migration from predominantly Muslim countries. Similarly, in the context of Britain, Bleich et al. (2015) noted the depiction of Muslim men in print media in a systematically negative way, and that Muslims are depicted more negatively than other religious communities, especially Jews and Christians. In the case of American cable news coverage, Lajevardi (2021) has observed that compared to people of other ethnicities, the coverage of Muslim Americans is more negative. Such negative portrayals lead to increased hostility against Muslims and gather wider support for stricter policies targeting them. Such large-scale stereotypical misrepresentation of Muslims in media is rooted in Islamophobia and further reification of the Islamic identity as violent.

Development education: humanising the discourse

The media's portrayal of migration and refugee crises serves to heighten public awareness. However, when aligned with right-wing political discourses, it also fosters sentiments of racism, xenophobia, and prejudice among the population. The negative depiction of the refugee crisis, and its frequent association with anti-social activities and threats to national security and terrorism, amplifies the appeal of far-right ideologies, deepening the divide between refugees and host communities. Mainstream media coverage tends to perpetuate stereotypes and categorisations of refugees as a collective 'other', distinct from 'us'. This portrayal often frames refugees as either a humanitarian or security problem, perpetuating a narrative that silences, dehumanises, and marginalises those being discussed.

The term 'refugee', frequently used interchangeably with 'migrant' or 'asylum seeker', is oversimplified, rigidly defining individuals as either 'worthy' or 'unworthy' of protection. This binary overlooks the diverse experiences, journeys, and historical contexts that led people to leave their homes. A brief examination of mainstream media coverage reveals two predominant narratives: one depicting the migration story as a tale of human loss, highlighted through iconic images of suffering, and the other presenting it as a story of large-scale population movements capable of disrupting the living conditions, security, and welfare of host communities.

The media's role in perpetuating narratives characterised by geographies of power and control becomes apparent through the repetition of divisive terms and the construction of differences along racial, ethnic, or religious lines. Unfortunately, this repetitive framing has a detrimental impact on public attitudes toward refugees, further fostering negative perceptions. Education emerges as a crucial tool to counteract discriminatory, violent, and anti-Muslim narratives, as well as hate speech. Implementing significant changes in both formal and informal educational settings in India becomes imperative, particularly in light of the disturbing rising trend of communalising young students in schools. For instance, an incident recently came to light involving a school-teacher instructing a fifth-standard Hindu school student to slap a Muslim classmate at her behest (The Hindu Bureau, 2023b). Instances like this underscore how educational

institutions can become instruments for normalising political indoctrination, prejudices, and propaganda.

Simultaneously, education serves as a powerful means for resistance, possessing the capacity to influence a broad spectrum of individuals at various stages of learning, spanning from childhood to higher education and lifelong learning. Critical educational practices strive to establish conditions wherein learners perceive themselves as multifaceted entities – 'social, historical, thinking, communicating, creative persons' (Freire, 2000: 25). The process of education reform necessitates comprehensive adjustments. Reforming education involves revising teaching practices, curriculum, and involving parents and communities at large to have larger impact of development education. Curriculum revision is essential, incorporating global, national, and local-level issues to comprehend the roots and consequences of inequalities, promoting inclusivity and holistic understanding. Both formal and informal interventions play crucial roles. For instance, a collaborative effort emerged among educationists, lawyers, and civil society activists in New Delhi, giving rise to the Democratic Outreach for Secular Transformation of India (DOSTI). This initiative, marked by the term 'DOSTI', meaning friendship in Hindi, aims to counter the escalating trends of hatred, communalism, and violence within the country (The Hindu Bureau, 2023a). DOSTI seeks to combat misinformation on social media platforms and extend support to those affected by communal and sectarian violence.

In conjunction with the DOSTI initiative, numerous other campaigns and platforms actively contribute to the realm of development education by fervently countering hatred directed towards minorities. One such exemplary campaign is led by Citizens for Justice and Peace (CJP), which vehemently opposes hate, communal bigotry, and prejudices through its 'Hate Hatao, Desh Bachao' initiative, which translates to 'Eliminate Hate, Save the Nation' in English. It suggests a call to eliminate hatred and promote unity for the well-being and preservation of the country. The campaign employs the innovative Hate Hatao app to identify and bring to justice individuals perpetuating hate, especially those abusing their positions of power to propagate anti-minority sentiments (CJP, n.d.). Beyond mere identification, CJP actively engages with relevant authorities, citing instances of hate crimes, to seek justice and facilitate solutions that maintain peace

and harmony. Notably, CJP also undertakes the critical task of documenting hate-driven incidents and speech targeting specific communities across the diverse landscape of the nation.

Similarly committed to challenging hate politics is the Gurgaon Nagrik Ekta Manch (GNEM), recognised for its significant efforts in promoting communal harmony, particularly during the challenging times of the COVID-19 pandemic. GNEM launches a compelling online campaign via social media, urging citizens to vocalise their opposition to hate politics through the use of the hashtag #HatePoliticsNotInMyName (The Hindu, 2022). As an integral part of this campaign, artists contribute poignant artworks designed to serve as profile images and banners, creating a visual narrative against hate politics. GNEM further extends its commitment to creating a platform that challenges hate politics, vowing to prevent its insidious infiltration into people's social lives.

In the realm of fact-checking and advocacy, the Citizen's Religious Hate Crime Watch by India Spend emerges as a dedicated entity (Scroll.in, 2018). This fact-checker meticulously tracks crimes targeting individuals or groups based on their religious identity, aiming to counter the deliberate obscuring of the nature and scale of hate crimes in India. Through this initiative, transparency is promoted, and awareness is heightened regarding the prevalence and impact of hate crimes on minority communities. Moreover, media monitoring emerges as a pivotal strategy in the collective efforts to reduce communal tensions. By actively monitoring and regulating media channels, the spread of misinformation and hate speech is curtailed, contributing to an environment that fosters understanding and tolerance among diverse communities.

Karwan-e-Mohabbat, also known as the 'Caravan of Love' or 'Peace Yatra', stands as a poignant manifestation of collective civic action. Launched in September 2017 in response to a series of extrajudicial killings and incidents of mob lynching, including the 2015 Dadri mob lynching and subsequent cow vigilante violence, this nationwide civilian campaign aims to express solidarity with victims of religiously motivated violence (Mander, 2017). The cow vigilante violence, often perpetrated by groups claiming to protect cows, primarily targets individuals from minority religious communities, particularly Muslims, under the

guise of protecting Hindu religious sentiments associated with the cow, considered as a sacred animal. Operating on the principle of peace and love, the campaign actively engages in promoting harmony, dialogue, and understanding in the face of communal violence. These initiatives collectively embody a concerted effort to promote dialogue, understanding, and harmony across all segments of society. Serving as formidable pillars against hate and bigotry, these endeavours remain steadfast in upholding constitutional values of equality and harmony.

Educators must teach learners about the root causes of hate speech. Educational interventions should focus on pedagogical methods that sensitise learners to cultural and social differences, enhance emotional intelligence, and train both students and teachers to create an inclusive and harmonious learning environment. This approach aligns with Paulo Freire's premise of establishing an 'active, dialogical, critical, and criticism-stimulating method' based on a horizontal relationship between parties (Freire, 2005: 40). Encouraging participatory engagement among students and communities is essential, fostering collaboration among different societal groups to develop relevant initiatives, programmes, and tools. Empowering young people to be advocates in their communities is crucial for effectively addressing hate speech. This empowerment equips them with the ability to decode narratives, cultural messaging, stereotypes, and misinformation used to propagate hate in the media, curriculum, political speeches, and propaganda.

Development education holds significant potential in challenging the perception of refugees as threats to the welfare system, cultural beliefs, and values of the host country. Instead, it can promote empathy, solidarity, and goodwill toward migrants fleeing war zones or facing tragic events. Moreover, it can contribute to a deeper understanding of how refugees are described, categorised, and represented, encouraging active engagement in constructing our understanding of these events, rather than passively consuming pre-existing views. This active involvement can shape the range of possibilities for comprehending migration stories and how we perceive migrants and refugees. Furthermore, development education can play a positive role in critically analysing the roots of social inequality and exploitation, addressing issues related to power and privilege,

and devising strategies to enhance social inclusiveness and diversity across all levels of society.

It can aid in comprehending the complexities of trauma and violence by contextualising and historicising grievances, sensitising the citizenry to engage in public discourses. This approach aligns with Freire's notion that teaching and learning should transcend technicalities and instead be rooted in the ethical formation of both individuals and history (Freire, 2000: 4). The aim of this knowledge production is to involve a dialectical movement between 'doing' and 'reflecting on doing', thereby fostering reflective beings (Ibid.). Such education recognises the right to express appropriate anger against injustice, exploitation, and violence, fostering a capacity not only to adapt to the world but to intervene and transform it. The development of social and emotional sensitivities through experiential learning and inclusive pedagogy helps dissociate from ideological or political propaganda. This approach is considered a defence of democracy, emphasising the 'inseparability of learning from political consciousness and of political consciousness from political action' (Freire, 1998: 7). In such a scenario, education has the potential to be liberating, focusing on the development of self and collective identity and fostering democratic participation.

Conclusion

The foundation of the transformative educational approach lies in the acquisition of well-grounded knowledge and a heightened awareness of how discourse shapes our perceptions, coupled with a discerning recognition of its inherent strengths and flaws. Central to this approach is the prioritisation of victims' narratives, allowing their experiences in humanitarian crises to counterbalance hegemonic voices that often go unquestioned. By providing a platform for these narratives, the initiative empowers individuals to represent themselves, their communities, and the multifaceted issues they confront. An integral aspect of this educational paradigm involves challenging the uniformity of exclusionary views, recognising the imperative need to sensitise the citizenry to the historical and cultural roots of crises and their enduring aftermath. This analytical understanding serves as a linchpin for challenging misleading narratives, cultivating empathy, and nurturing a more humane perspective towards the 'other'. As mentioned earlier, various campaigns in India have contributed to countering hatred. Such initiatives of

collective civic action have considerable impact in strengthening solidarity and goodwill towards minority communities as well as migrants.

In the realm of media advocacy, the education-driven approach emphasises the necessity for media professionals to enhance their coverage of migration issues. This enhancement requires effective collaboration among media professionals, activists, and citizens, collectively working towards the realisation of a more open, diverse, democratic, and human rights-based society. Such collaborative efforts aim to dismantle barriers to inclusive citizenship by fostering a more profound and inclusive understanding of the concept. This expansive educational initiative becomes a catalyst for transformative change, contributing to the fabric of a society that is not only informed but also empathetic, embracing diversity as an asset rather than a threat.

Moreover, in the academic discourse surrounding media advocacy, a comprehensive exploration of ethical considerations and power dynamics inherent in representation becomes paramount. This entails a rigorous inquiry into the ethical responsibilities of media professionals and the ethical implications of their narrative constructions, particularly within the context of migration issues. Additionally, an academic examination of collaborative efforts in media advocacy mandates an in-depth analysis of participatory approaches and their efficacy in amplifying marginalised voices and catalysing social change. By employing a multidisciplinary lens encompassing education, media studies, sociology, and ethics, this academic discourse seeks to engender a holistic understanding of transformative education and media advocacy as interconnected processes aimed at promoting social justice and inclusivity.

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