

Media and Messiah: Reconciling Relations in Bajranghi Bhaijan

**Vikash Kumar Choudhary*

"It is not the strongest of species that survives, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsible to change" - Charles Darwin

In 21st century, media is emerging as a revolutionary medium of communication to express emphatically what you want. Media contributes a significant role in creating bridges and ducts to make a convenient smooth life. Though in some matters its major thrust is to manipulate and present the subject in a mesmerizing and hideous way.

The boundaries that nations so assiduously built around them are steadily and rapidly being dismantled. Each of us has multiple identities: our physical self, the ones we keep for our office and our virtual identity on the Net. When Winston Churchill talked of the "empires of the future" being "the empire of the minds", the Internet didn't exist. But Churchill's words are becoming reality. It is a revolution that is happening in fast-forward and will access the discourse and narratives on key issues that determine our lives and relations between countries as a new age of enlightenment unfurls.

More importantly in the sub-continent, grandmother tales of Partition, doctored history in textbooks and traditional media reports on strife will recede as the main source of information for the new generation. The big change that the Internet highway has already brought to our lives is instant connectivity anytime, anywhere and anyplace. Info-tech icon Nandan Nilekani terms it "the death of distance". It is the lifeline of the human being who wants to connect the world.

While British India became independent and was divided into India and Pakistan for a more peaceful and saner future, we know that this is yet to be realized. Since separation, there has largely been a culture of war and extreme hatred. In these 67 years, there have been four major wars, countless cease fire violations and indirect clashes suffered by divided families, prisoners and innocent people of both sides. During this period of time, India and Pakistan seem to be unable to resolve their differences and develop a sound neighborly relationship, which could have benefitted people on both sides of the border. There have been several attempts to initiate a sustainable peace process, but most were either stillborn or abandoned in their infancy. Does it mean that the two countries are condemned to live in perpetual hostility? Or can they overcome their historic rivalry? Are the problems besetting their bilateral relations so intractable that no resolution is possible? Or can they set aside their differences for a while and build on commonalities of interests?

Still, any positive attempt to improve relations proves futile as still there exists a pessimistic attitude towards peace and this critical issue is taken to be an issue of mockery. Also, these views emanate not from the stakeholders but from the common masses in both countries. There is not

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just a pessimistic attitude but also a severe questioning of it, especially on times of a clash. During any disturbance, the peace groups and activists are targeted. They are rendered accountable. Their loyalty towards their country is questioned. They are asked to prove their love for their country by condemning the other. Their efforts are regarded to be futile and showy.

In general, there exists a view that war and peace are in the hands of those who have political power. What can you and me do about it? The conflict is regarded to be a conflict between the state heads, between New Delhi and Islamabad. Is this true? Do people have no vital role? Another view that anyone who advocates for peace witnesses is that there can be no peace unless we solve the core issue, the Kashmir or the K-issue. Is this the only way to establish peace? What is then the purpose of interactive sessions, seminars, public demonstrations and student exchanges?

While the two views regarding the state's role and the need to resolve core issue are not wrong, they are narrow and insufficient. We use the term "peace process". The word "process" signifies that peace, like any process, will come under certain conditions and through a systematic way. It will come under a certain culture. While peace and conflict definitely depends on the political head, the decision or the official policy is never in isolation with the views of the people. The states manufacture consent. There is a certain ideological culture that it manufactured to create as well as sustain the official policy. In our context, hatred for India/Pakistan has been manufactured and sustained. There exists a culture of hatred and suspicion on both sides of the border. Both sides have constructed their own stereotypes and misconceptions. These have been aggravated, if not carefully constructed, by the lack of communication and by miscommunication. Both sides believe that they are right and the other is wrong. Both sides think the other does not want peace; the other is unjust and cruel.

At present, humanity requires such messiah or you could say its role play by media and a human being, one who have heart-felt generosity of its people, their ability to take a higher ground when requires and be a source of help for anyone who knocks on their doors. *Bajranghi Bhaijaan*, today stands as a shining example of how common people from across the borders can mend hearts broken over border divides.

Bajranghi Bhaijaan, the title is a carefully assemblage of two cultures and religions, reflects fostering ties between the two nations. The hand that heals is the hand of god, be it from any country. The person who needs help does not care where the hand comes from. All he wants is to feel better or his loved ones to feel better. If one wants to serve humanity, and keen to restore the innocent smile than nationality and religion doesn't matter. We know our borders are taut with tension, but does a border really rule hearts? What are borders? They are drawing lines between two lands and said: 'this is our, and that is yours'. But can one expect a 'being human' to stay within those borders knowing very well that the path of pleasure, and peace of an innocent child lies on the other side?

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Bajrangi Bhaijaan is a film directed by Kabir Khan, starts with a Muslim family watching TV in Sultanpur village situated in, Azad Kashmir, Pakistan and an expectant mother's baby kicks when Shahid Afridi leads Pakistan to victory in an India–Pakistan cricket match. A few years later, the baby grows up to be a young speech-impaired girl, Shahida. Her mother takes her to Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya's Dargah in Delhi, India, to pray for her speech to return.

On their way back, in the middle of the night, right next to the Pakistan border Shahida lost in India. When in Pakistan, Shahida's parents know that there is no hope to go back instantly then her grandfather prays that-*"Koi to Khudakaneikbandahoga Hindustan mein jo hamari Shahida ka khyaal rakhega"* and then fortunately Shahida meet a messiah, Pawan Kumar Chaturvedi, also known as Bajrangi, the role play by the famous face of Bollywood, Salman Khan, who, calls that little girl Munni and asks her which city she's from, but she doesn't respond to any Indian town's name. Taking that innocent child to his place he asks her to call him "Mama" (maternal uncle) when she starts speaking.

Aftermath the whole plot is revolve around how does Bajrangi takes the risk of his life and takes an oath to send Munni safe and secure to her home, and in due course of time there are many people who support him to gain his goal. Rasika, beloved of Bajrangi, withdraw her bank money to send Munni her home. When Bajrangi refuses to take her money, which she has saved for her dream home after marriage, she says-*"Lekin Apna Ghar Banane se Behtar hai Munni ko Uske Ghar Bhejna."* If both nation's people first start to mend the neighbor's wall then to make their own, that day now here those hands will be found who destroy the peaceful abode of a neighbor.

Bajrangi decides to take her back home by crossing the border. With great difficulty, they manage to get the Pakistani army's permission to cross the border. On border when Pakistani General says-*"Tum Wa kaisa hi Kahte ho ye koi Mental hi ho Sakta hai."* But he is not a mental, but a messiah for a homeless and parentless child. In present time, when our borders are taut, and both political and army power is also seem helpless to reconcile the bizarre relations, at these critical situations we ardently need such messiah, who bridges harmonious and healthy relations.

Shortly after arriving in Pakistan, Bajrangi is arrested on the grounds that he is an Indian spy. At the police station, Munni sees a scenic photograph on a calendar, indicating that she comes from that area. Bajrangi escapes from police custody and boards on a bus. When bus conductor asks him for fare, Bajrangi clarify that he doesn't have money, because he is an Indian and he comes here with Munni for search her parents. Then the bus conductor says-*"Kamal hai Bhaijaan, Aap Jaise or log hote inn do Mulko mein to Dushmani jaisi koi Baat hi na ho."* He says a very deep and meaningful view in simple language, and now its need of time for a nice present and better future of both nations.

In Pakistan, Bajrangi meets Chand Nawab, a journalist working for a Pakistani TV channel, who initially thinks that Bajrangi is an Indian spy. He soon realizes his mistake and joins Bajrangi in the

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noble task of finding Munni's parents. The police are after them, but they manage to hide themselves in a madrassa - cum - masjid. The head of the madrassa, Moulvi Sahib turns out to be a nice person and helps them in their quest. When Pakistani police come to search an Indian spy and inquires to Moulvi Sahib about such a stranger. The Moulvi Sahib says-*"Khuda ke Ghar me in Ajnabi nhi hote. Ye Jaghae Sab ke liye Khuli hai, Issiliye hum Masjid mein Kabhi Tala nhi Lagaate."* But the hearts of the people on both side sare still locked with the key of hatred and enmity for each other. It's time to unlock these hearts, and once the hearts of the people are clear from rivalry and enmity than borders are nothing.

When Chand Nawab contacts a number of TV channels to tell them the story of Bajrangi, but they refuse to air it and says-*"Ek Hindustani ki story Dikhane mein Hamara kya Fayeda hai"* Chand Nawab retorts-*"Ek bachhi ko uske Maa-Baap*

Mil Jaayege." Then the editor says -*"Hum News Bechtee hai Sahab. Yeah Ammani Sah ki Masjid Nahi Jha Bichdoo ko Milatee ho."*

All of the TV channels ask to air the story of Indian spy not an Indian 'being human' who rescue the life of another country's child. At last, helpless from all means Chand Nawab decides to film a video by himself telling the story of an Indian messiah, and uploads the video on the Internet because -*"Nafrat Badi Assani se Bik Jaati hai Janab Lekin Mohabbat..."* demands a sacrifice from both side.

Bajrangi Bhaijaan is a moving story of an innocent child who unfortunately, makes separate on the other side of border, and a messiah who does his best and bridges gap of rivalry and enmity to reconcile her to her parents and sacrifice himself sake of humanity and a harmonious healthy future. *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* is a touching homecoming of human sympathy and pathos seems to take a trustworthy step towards Indo-Pak relations entirely free from political biases. It's an ominous rainbow of relations, who spreads a message of peace and fraternity across and away from bizarre border of hearts.

As in the case of any two nation-states, but perhaps more so in the Pakistan-India context, several far-ranging and complex factors shape bilateral relations. These include: geography, history, religion, culture, territory, identity, ideology, armaments, competition, education, economics, aspirations...and the role of media. While media have the unique function of reporting on all the other factors, of promoting perceptions and setting an agenda, media per se, but media is not the sole decisive determinant factor for an improvement in relations. Steps need to be taken in each of those factors where there is an impediment to improvement. To the extent that media is also a part of the impediment. There media leadership has a vital responsibility to fulfill.

A new kind of partnership should be created between, on the one hand, the political and parliamentary leader ships of both countries and, on the other, the media leader ships of both countries. Such collaboration will help establish candid, regular communication, foster trust-building and mutual respect in order to transcend respective traditional, self-imposed fears and

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doubts. The suggested linkages can initiate a new era of improved knowledge about each other and greater respect for each other. However, difficult and elusive as the goal may seem, the ultimate vision of a non-violent, productive, dynamic South Asia obliges us to persevere.

While media can begin to initiate positive changes on a simultaneous basis to the progress achieved in the other preceding respects, it needs to be remembered that being mirrors, media is obliged to reflect the harsh or the pleasant reality, as the case may be. Therefore, media cannot move far ahead of reality. At the most, they can be only one or two steps ahead of actual conditions on the ground. Being rooted in the origins and the perceptions of national interests of their own respective host-nation-States, the media is obliged to be patriotic and even chauvinistic while sacrificing balance and the whole truth.

But the imperatives that come with the sheer fact of being two immediate neighbors, of being two of the world's ten largest populations, of sharing many fundamental challenges to reduce poverty, illiteracy, sickness and suffering amongst tens of millions of people demand that the level of awareness about each other on a daily basis should be elevated to a plane which enables understanding, mutual respect, constructive co-operation and collective progress. The news media can play a decisive role in achieving that high level provided news media modulate and refine their conceptual approach to news and analyses about the other country.

Devising, adopting and practicing a Code of Content Conduct by which media will avoid using certain words and terms and styles of presentation which promote distrust, hate and tension and which demonize the other country. Without curbing the reporting of facts and freedom of editorial expression, the Code could aim to encourage portrayal of the other country in humanistic and balanced terms. Such a Code could also encourage media to accurately report views of both sides regarding unresolved core issues such as Kashmir, Siachin, Sir Creek, water, etc. Encouragement to existing bilateral friendship websites operated by youth in both countries and the opening of new similar and other forms using new mobile media and seeking support from corporate sectors.

Thus, while strategies and methods for improving relations between Pakistan and India must use the new media in imaginative and adventurous ways, serious attention needs to be continuously applied to the mainstream media. Media have a pivotal role in shaping a better future both within and between Pakistan and India.

I would like to end my views with a Hindi couplet which I remember-

***"Insaan ho tum to insaaniyat dikhana jaruri hai;
Zinda ho tum agar to zinda nazar aana jaruri hai..."***

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References:

·Bajrangi Bhaijaan, is a 2015 film by Kabir Khan

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