

Hijab Row Karnataka, India 2022: A Multimodal Analysis of Political Cartoons Related to Hijab Controversy with a Social Semiotic Approach

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ABSTRACT

Political cartoons have been widely analyzed in social and media studies to explore socio-political ideologies and agendas implicit in them. This paper attempts to focus on the Hijab row which took place in Karnataka, India in February 2022 and analyses it through the cartoons published on this issue. The paper adopts multimodal approach for analysis as presented by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) and later explained by David Machin (2006). Qualitative method based on semiotic approach with focus on the specific type of composition, was adopted to study each cartoon. The results showed that placement of different elements within a composition is a smart tool in the hands of cartoonists to express their opinion on the issue and shape the opinion of audience. The study proves cartoons are a clever way to address sensitive social and religious issues which may not be indulged in easily otherwise. This study enhances the understanding of Hijab issue from different perspectives and analyzes specifically how cartoons are used to present the case strongly in favor of one opinion or the other. The paper makes significant contribution of analyzing cartoons through Composition Analysis Model which was used earlier, mostly for advertisements and photos analysis and never for political cartoons.

KEYWORDS

Hijab Row, Multimodality, Political Cartoons, Social Semiotics, Composition

JOURNAL INFO

HISTORY: Received: May 28, 2023

Accepted: June 27, 2023

Published: June 30, 2023

INTRODUCTION

News Discourse or the genre of Journalese has been a center of interest in recent era. Social and linguistics researchers are interested in its features and dynamics. One of its sub-genre is political cartoons which have both linguistic and non-linguistic features and meaning is created more effectively through this multimodal medium. Aftab (2021) is of the view that language is a sign and it can take the form of words, gestures, images and objects. These forms are means of communication. Humans utilize these signs to communicate to others. Cartoons serve as powerful communicative tools, utilized by print media, for manipulation, persuasion or argumentation. According to McLuhan (1964), its mainly cartoons which have attraction for the majority of viewership. It is a fun and light way of presenting a serious message (Nelson, 1975). The history of newspaper cartoons dates back to 16th century in Italy and has over the time gain a lot of popularity and attention of general public. These cartoons are not only disseminating information on current issues but also playing role in shaping and molding public opinion and are serving to set political, social or even religious agenda.

Political cartoons have roots in satire or irony. In fact, what is termed as satire in literature can be termed as cartoon in non-linguistic art (Streicher, 2008). The surface meaning may amuse the viewers like any cartoon is supposed to do but it's hardly innocent amusement, rather it has deeper meanings with a covert agenda which is either ridiculing a social norm, mocking a controversial personality or simply exposing the absurdity of an event, however the sugar coat of humor makes the satire more easily acceptable to the viewer with less doubts and resistance (Walker, 2003).

Political Cartoons cannot be declared as unbiased rather they are either supporting or going against an ideology, depending upon the cartoonist's own ideology or that of his media group. They attempt to construct a Social Reality and need not always words for this, instead they make use of symbols, hyperboles, metaphors and irony to achieve this end (Gilmartin and Brunn, 1998). It is significant here that the viewer should have the background knowledge and must have reasonable analyzing skills to decode the message of political cartoons which may not always happen as in the case of complex cartoons (Lent, 2000)

It is important to note that cartoons mostly present what is already known to people (Greenberg, 2002) and they are only mirroring the cultural narrative and its value system (Mazid, 2008). As such cartoons are a good way of displaying shared meanings and popular culture by presenting a peep into latest trends and events (Rosa, 2012).



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The Hijab controversy, Karnataka India

The educational institutes of Karnataka India raised a huge controversy when they issued a ban on wearing Hijab by Muslim students in college campus, in February 2022. As per Indian constitution, all states have the Right to form their own individual educational policy but as the ban was targeting one particular religious' community, it raised a huge series of protests by the Muslims against this ban. This provoked counter protest by Hindus who came out in protest to support Hijab ban, wearing saffron shawls which is sacred color in Hindu religion. The incident which took immediate fame and highlight happened on 22 February 2022, when Muslim student girl covered in black Hijab was harassed by Hindu male students with the slogan of Jai Shri Ram. instead of being afraid of this charged mob, the girl retaliated back with the slogan of Allah o Akbar and faced them single handedly with courage and bravery.

The whole incidence was filmed and got viral on all media channels as well as social media platforms within no time. The Muslim girl later turned out to be Muskaan khan became media sensation in coming days and was interviewed on many media channels. The response to this incidence was a mixed one. The Muslim community was all praise for the courage of this young girl. Some intellectuals were concerned with the impact it will have on educational system of India. The humanists were worried for the islamophobia trend and hate aspect of this whole episode. The clash of state laws and an individual choice of clothing became the hot debate and the subsequent issues of India' secularism and growing islamophobia were discussed in multiple perspectives.

It may be added here that Hijab has created controversy lately in France and other European countries where prohibiting one community (Muslim) from exercising their freedom of choice in clothing had led to hate crimes against them, alienating them and creating a feeling of *Othering* for them.

Key Terms

Political Cartoons: political cartoon commonly known as editorial cartoon is commentary or opinion on political issue or event. It not only amuses the reader but also has persuasive power to change his/her opinion. Cartoonists usually make use of irony, exaggeration, labeling and analogy to bring their message home

Multimodal Analysis: Multimodal Discourse Analysis is an approach to discourse which focuses on how meaning is made through the use of multiple modes of communication as opposed to just language. (Jones, 2021)

Composition: The act or process of composing. It is arrangement into specific proportion or relation. It is product of mixing and combining various elements and ingredients in an intellectual manner.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cartoons published in newspapers and magazines hold powerful impact which can change opinions, develop beliefs, modify ideas and lead masses' minds in a very subtle unconscious way. Streicher et al. (2008) commented that though making political cartoons is an art form but it involves science to be drawn correctly and making the desired impact on its audience.

Political cartoons are an area of interest for researchers all over the world who have tried to find the motives and impact of these cartoons on political and social behaviors of people. Sani et al. (2012) focused on the attempt of framing socio-cultural agenda in Nigeria through political cartoons. Willems (2011) analyzed what role was played by political cartoons in developing a satiric narrative against Zimbabwean president. Mascha (2010) explored the part played by women in Italian fascist trends by focusing on the political cartoons. The potential impact of political cartoons on young minds is studied by El Rafaie and Horschelmann (2010). Mazid (2008) investigated the relationship of ideology and politics through the analysis of cartoon portrayal of Bush and Osama Bin laden. The presidential campaign of US elections-2004 as reflected in cartoons is studies by Connors (2007). Najjar (2007) studied the role played by newspaper cartoons in constructing the refugee's identity in Palestine. Han (2006) explored the satirical representation of Korea in Japanese print media. Wigston (2002) analyzed the possible effects of cartoons on the AIDS awareness campaign of south Africa. US president Clinton impeachment trial with reference to Clinton-Lewinsky affair was reflected in political cartoons and their impact on people's opinion was studied by Benoit, klyukovski, McHale and Arnie (2001).

In Pakistan, analysis of political cartoons has attracted a lot of research attention in recent times. Ghazali (2020a) investigated a huge data from 1947 to 2020, and studies the political power struggle of Pakistan through these cartoons which now serve as a record of political history manifesting its ups and downs. The cartoons provide a powerful critical lens to public for the analysis of different events and incidents in the political history of Pakistan (Ghazali 2020b). Jabeen and Ahmad (2018) examined controversial US-Pakistan relationship especially after 9/11 incident and its portrayal in cartoons which effect public perception and shape it in favor of certain ideologies. Tehseem and Bokhari (2015) studied how political cartoons serve to spoil or save the image of Pakistani political leaders.

There is also growing research interest on the topic of Hijab ban and its consequences. Rumaney& Sriram (2021) record the experiences of hijab woman and their opinion on the escalating tension on this issue. Parikh (2019) investigates the hijab phobia in France and connects it with ongoing hijab ban in India. Kishwar (2022) discusses the question of neutrality and secularism in the context of Hijab row.

All these researches are trying to investigate the socio-political aspects and consequences of Hijab row. This Hijab controversy is interrelated to society and its norms on one hand and political motives of the stake holders on the other. The religious sentiment attached to religion makes it even more sensitive. The society is divided in its opinion about individual right to dress and administrative policies to monitor terror and extremism. The debate is strongly embedded in the clash of three powerful phenomena's namely, society, religion and politics. The present research throws light on this issue from entirely a different perspective of cartoons published on it. It studies how cartoons are a smart way of dealing sensitive issues. Words are often concrete and have a direct message which could incite reaction in sensitive matters, whereas cartoons are subtle and open to multiple interpretations. This study analyses how the cartoonists presented their version of this Karnataka incident and presented it through the window of their cartoons.

Significance of the Study

The present research analyses a new incident in already existing Hijab controversy. The incident taking place in February 2022 in Karnataka India shook not just India but the entire world and poured opinions from various strata of life. Various cartoons printed on this issue present the diversity of opinions on this controversy. The topics like Indian democracy and its intricate loop holes, the unrest among different communities and human rights vs state control attracted the attention of think tanks and social activists all over the world. This research tries to find out the opinion making process through analysis of cartoons made on this issue.

The goal of this research is to understand the multimodal tools employed by cartoonist to propagate their message. It is an attempt to grasp the use of element positioning as an effective technique in nonverbal discourse. This study will provide fresh insight into multimodal analysis and future researches in this genre will be benefitted from the practical implication of element positioning framework. It will also invite review analysis of previous multimodal researches who ignored this dimension.

The application of multimodal analysis framework suggested by Kress and Leeuwen (2006) is relatively new in this field and presents a fresh scope to the analysis.

Overall the topic chosen is mostly unexplored and will add to the analysis of social perspective of this issue and the research methodology employed here will add to the new dimensions of multimodal analysis.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Theoretical Background and Research Framework

The meaning is constructed in any Discourse not just through language or visual elements but it can be done on various layers of an image including iconography, modality markers, meaning of color, and typography etc.

One important aspect of analysis is through positioning of visual elements and their relationship with each other, though it is often ignored. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) termed it as *Visual Syntax*. By syntax generally we mean word order in linguistic perspective. But "in visual compositions it is based on spatial relationships, in other words how the elements are related to each other in meaningful ways on the page".

The page organization of any composition can have four types as discussed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) and explained further by David Machin in his *Introduction to Multimodal Analysis*. These patterns themselves carry meanings and add meanings to the elements that are embedded within. Following is a brief overview of these four kinds of composition.

Left and Right

This includes the positioning of elements on the axis of Right and Left. Such positioning holds deep symbolic meanings and have multiple interpretations. One significant work in this regard is that of Needham (1973) an anthropologist who explored the symbolic interpretations of Left and Right through various cultures. He concluded that mostly Left is associated with bad, sinful and immoral while Right stands for good and virtuous. Similarly Left is for sacred and Right is for normal everyday elements. The supremacy of Right was asserted by another anthropologist (Hertz,1960). The analysis of dreams formulated by psychologist Sigmund Freud where Freud also interpreted Left as forbidden associated with guilt and Right as Righteous and acceptable.

It is interesting to note that Left is associated with past and Right with present as in the case of evolution timelines and before/after photos. The concept has been elaborated by Halliday (1978) where he uses the terms Given and New. The communication begins with something already known and moves to something new. This is true of visual composition as well. In advertisements, Left presents the necessities while Right shows possibilities. Kress and Leeuwen (2006) provides further details on this concept and expounds that even the gaze of persons in any composition towards Left or Right is also meaningful. Characters looking in Right direction are portrayed in positive light, looking towards optimism and future. On the other hand, a gaze towards Left represents stagnation, past or signifies tradition.

Top and Bottom

The up and down or top and bottom positioning also carries a huge symbolic significance in any composition. Set on the vertical axes, high denotes power, upper class, high culture or pretentious. Low stands for poverty, powerless, grounded or down to earth. Emotions if presented high connotes positivity while on low scale they represent negativity. Kress and Leeuwen

(2006) employed the substitute terms of *Ideal and Real* to demonstrate this concept. The top stands for idealizations, generalizations and simplifications whereas down portrays realistic and factual content. The sense of contrast is very sharp in this vertical approach as opposed to the left, right horizontal approach which demonstrates change.

Centre compositions

Any element in the center of composition brings whole focus on this. It can also play the role of mediating the elements presented in right, left, up or down. It provides link to the information around it, providing them meaning and developing coherence for them.

Embedded composition

Structures of composition can and do appear in combinations. In one composition there can be given new arrangements elements as well as ideal and real. Hence the arrangements are not simple but diverse offering multiple interpretations.

Research Question

How do the cartoons on Hijab controversy India, depict conflicting opinions on the issue and try to effect public opinion through element positioning in a composition?

Data Collection

The data for this research comes from internet source. The cartoons are handpicked, being ideologically rich and related to the Karnataka Hijab issue. The source websites are

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| <i>iamc.com,</i> | <i>irshivideos.com,</i> |
| <i>dailyo.in,</i> | <i>reddit.com,</i> |
| <i>theprint.in,</i> | <i>us.bolnews.com,</i> |
| <i>thequint.com,</i> | <i>opindia.com,</i> |
| <i>downtoearth.org.in,</i> | <i>pgurus.com</i> |

All these websites are Indian as the paper is concerned with how Indian media specifically, is perceiving and presenting this issue. The date of retrieving data is between 16 May 2022 to 20 May 2022.

Data Analysis and Discussion



Fig. 1. See this is the Face of Empowerment and Freedom

Figure.1, shows a person named *TEACHER* in the middle of settings, carrying three books in his Left hand. On his Right hand, there is a woman in graduating gown and cap, holding a degree in her hand. On his Left, there is another woman, clad in black Hijab completely with a rather confuse expressions in her eyes and she is grabbed by an old man behind her. The speech bubble above the teacher says “*SEE THIS IS THE FACE OF EMPOWERMENT AND FREEDOM*”.

The cartoon clearly presents the dichotomy between the concepts of empowerment and freedom on one hand and Hijab as religious observation on the other. The clash is made explicit by the figure ‘teacher’ who is responsible for the educational and professional grooming of any person. Placing the woman without Hijab on right side presents her in positive light and vice versa. Moreover, the Hijab woman being on left is presented as Past whereas the modern woman on right is the future. An old person clad in typical Muslim traditional clothes at the back of Hijab woman shows the behind scene pressure of conservative parents, who may be presented here as the authority, forcing Hijab on their girls. The presence of teacher in the Centre of

composition is also very suggestive. The Centre here stands for final judgement and deciding factor. With closed eyes and indicating with right hand towards the modern woman, the teacher has a decisive body language in the favor of modern woman. His choice of words especially 'face' is satirical as the Hijab woman is covering her face and she cannot be the face of any progressive trend.



Fig. 2. UP is now the Best State

The figure 2 displays two bald middle aged male figures, wearing traditional Indian attire. The one on Right side is in walking position, carrying a paper with words HIJAB ROW prominently written and on his shirt his name BOMMAI (CM of Karnataka) is mentioned for the audience to identify him. The person on the Left is wearing a waistcoat and is busy in addressing on a podium. His speech bubble shows the word *UP is now the best state*. The answer to it is displayed in Bommai's speech bubble where he says "*And Karnataka is also fast becoming like UP*".

On symbolic grounds, this cartoon is very satirical in tone. UP is notorious for poor law and order situation where Hindu Muslim clashes are a routine matter. The CM of UP is proudly asserting it the best state. Karnataka is becoming the stage for religious unrest including Hijab row incident and its CM Bommai follows the steps of UP CM in calling his state as good as UP as both have same extremist religious issues. The positioning of elements is again symbolic here. Bommai is in walking position, showing the changing conditions of peace in Karnataka and UP already on a notorious platform of terror is represented by its CM. The positioning of right and left may not be read here as good and evil but it fits the criterion of Given and New. The anarchy in UP is a Given fact believed to be known by the audience. Bommai holding Hijab row information is presented as New.



Fig. 3. Clad in Traditional Hindu Dress and his cap

The cartoon in fig. 3 presents a sketch of woman clad in black Hijab with hands in upright position and there is a man pulling the Hijab off the girl. The person is clad in traditional Hindu dress and his cap shows the words *INDIA*

The elements in this composition are positioned as Right and Left. The right side presents the Hijab girl. We know that right is for righteous and goodness. The left presents sinful and evil where we can see the symbolic image of India as Hindu extremist society. The school bag behind the girl is a clever hint at Hijab incident Karnataka. The act of pulling off the Hijab by Hindu is a symbolic representation of India's forceful policies to snatch Hijab from Muslim girls. The upright position of girls' hands portrays her in a very helpless position. The pile of Hijab cloth on floor shows the long and continuous efforts of India to get rid of Hijab but still not fully successful. The audience may perceive the girl's hairs being pulled as the black hairs and black Hijab merge into each other and one cannot identify them separately. In that case, pulling hairs not only signify physical torture done to Muslim girls but also conveys a significant message that Hijab is the part of Muslim identity, a part of their very being, pulling it is stripping the very identity of Muslim girls.

The cartoon is clearly in support of Hijab movement.



Fig. 4. Wearing religious attire is not suitable for public institution

The cartoon in fig. 4 presents the posters of election campaign asking *Vote for Yogi*, showing a bald person in saffron cloak. Two persons are walking in front of it, where the speech bubble displays the words; *wearing religious attire is not suitable for public institution*.

This cartoon is in context of Karnataka High court decision which gave the verdict that wearing religious attire is not suitable for public institution hence Muslim girls should not be allowed to wear Hijab while attending college or university. This verdict came when Hijab row Karnataka reached high court and asked its opinion on the issue.

While the two persons are discussing the issue, the hypocrisy implicit in the verdict is exposed by the posters placed on the wall where yogi who is a Hindu pandit, wearing saffron dress is asking for vote to be elected for a public institution. The rule of no religious dress for public institution is thrown to winds when it's going against Hindu community hence targeting only Muslim community. The placement of elements is also symbolic here. The saffron color is used to present the Hindu ideology. Both the persons taking walk are clad in Hindu ethnicity dress code and appear unaware of the flouting of this rule by their own religious leaders. The cartoon serves well the purpose of satire and irony.



Fig. 5. If you want to wear one of these, you have to get rid of those

The cartoon in fig. 5 shows seven female students clad in Hijab, addressed by a person wearing black suit and holding a graduation cap and exclaiming if you want to wear one of these, you have to get rid of those.

The supposedly teacher figure in this composition is on left side, hence presenting him in negative light. He is shutting his eyes, which means he is unable to SEE the hollowness of his message and cannot notice the confused response of girls who are given a ruthless choice of selecting career or personal freedom in selecting their attire.

The cartoonist has used two head coverings, where Hindu society claims one (graduation cap) as necessary and desirable and the other (Hijab) as negative and prohibited. The teacher is pointing to their Hijab with his right hand and holding graduation cap in his left, hence giving the same symbolic message as he himself is standing on the left side of composition. Its teacher and graduation cap which becomes controversial and questionable by appearing on left side whereas innocent girls are at right, unable to accept the difficult choice given to them.

The cartoon clearly goes in Hijab favor.



Fig. 6. I want this trophy. Make them ply Hindu-mulsim Game Teacher

The cartoon in fig. 6 shows a gate named as *COLLEGE* in the background. A teacher is standing in front of a group of students and is ordered by a hand from above. The message of hand appears in speech bubble which reads as *I WANT THIS TROPHY. MAKE THEM PLY HINDU-MULSIM GAME TEACHER*. There is a golden trophy marked as Karnataka elections 2023 placed on left.

This cartoon is the first one to present elements on top and bottom as well as right and left. The philosophy behind the cartoons is the notion that all Hijab controversy prevailing in Karnataka is just an election stunt to win majority. The cartoonist cleverly made use of element positioning and colors to present this idea. The hand with invisible face is at the top left of composition. We know that top elements present power and authority. The left as earlier discussed is not perceived in positive light hence the hand becomes powerful but evil. Its identity is hinted by the saffron piece of cloth tied in its wrist signifying Hindu forces. The teacher is a mere puppet in the hands of this authority. He is giving a thumbs up to the directions of this

hand, promising to act upon the order. The group of students at the bottom which is for powerless and weak. They are also at the extreme right signifying their innocence in the whole issue. Some students are wearing Hijab and some are not. This presents the mix community of students who are unknowingly falling a victim to a religious conspiracy played against them. The bottom left presents the trophy or the ultimate reason behind the whole Hijab controversy, which according to the cartoonist is upcoming Karnataka elections.



Fig. 7. Hand holding six saffron Ribbons

The cartoon in Fig. 7 presents a woman clad in Hijab from head to toe pointing upwards. Upon her head there is a hand holding six saffron ribbons which have fingers like ends. The shadow of the girl on wall displays a lioness.

The cartoon is a master stroke of element positioning within a composition. The hand at the top shows power and authority. This hand with invisible face is trying to trap the girl with multiple saffron hands which stands for Hindu forces. But the girl is pointing her hand upward in a challenging position just as Muskaan khan has done in Karnataka incident. She was seen alone countering a group of Hindu boys clad in saffron mufflers and harassing her. The Hijab girl is positioned at the bottom signifying her powerlessness but her bravery and resilience is reflected through the caricature of lioness shadowed on the wall. Though weak but the girl has the courage of a lioness challenging all forces against her. As the girl is positioned in the center, she is the focus of attention.



Fig. 8. A girl covered in Hijab

The cartoon in Fig.8 presents four persons standing in front of a girl who is much shorter in stature and covered in Hijab. This cartoon is a good example of ‘A picture speaks thousand words’. The four persons are one the right side of composition but facing left. Their gaze is on the girl. Their identities are made explicit by the uniform they are wearing. The first one with a gavel in hand is clearly the judge. The second one is a policeman holding the stick in his hand. The third one is media person holding movie camera in his hand. The last one is a politician or a common Hindu again holding a stick. The all

are fully equipped to block the educational right of a powerless girl. The girl being on the left is facing the gaze of these men and holding a book in her right hand, her only weapon to deal them.

While all forces are against the girl, she is determined to face them to get her rightful education. The Karnataka incident where Muskaan Khan faced everyone all alone and subsequent incidents going against Hijab girls is presented powerfully through this cartoon.

Findings and Conclusion

So far, the positioning of elements in a composition was studied with reference to media advertisements and photographs only. This detailed framework was never used to study how cartoonists employ the technique of certain positioning of elements to get the desired results. After a detailed analysis of cartoons made on hijab controversy, it can be asserted that cartoonists make conscious and clever use of positioning to bring certain meanings home. They are well aware of these semiotic techniques and use them to propagate their version of truth.

To sum up, political cartoons have far reaching effects. Audience often take them light heartedly but they generally don't realize how potent they can be in influencing their opinion on unconscious level. Amidst all the discussions and debate on hijab controversy, these cartoons played a silent but powerful role of shaping public opinion. They have the freedom of presenting the issue without using any direct words or facts. Cartoons are not just a commentary on any given incident rather they have ideological agendas behind their message. The positioning of elements in any cartoon creates a deep psychological impact which often goes unnoticed. There is need for more research as to how people perceive and feel about the element positioning in these cartoons.

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