# A CRITICAL DISCOURSE STUDY OF EDITORIAL CARTOON ON '26/11 MUMBAI ATTACK'

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## ABSTRACT

Editorial cartoon, a single panel graphic, is one of the most demanding yet satirical forms of communication that comments and records political events and policies. It creates a picture of the political climate in a given time period, thus serving as an effective source of data to study socio-political and economical phenomena. Using Indian newspaper editorial cartoon, this piece of work explores the 'grammar' of images and visual metaphor. This study draws on the theory of social semiotics and the concepts of cognitive metaphor theory to analyze an editorial cartoon on THE theme '26/11 Mumbai Attack'. The analysis critically inquires into the idea that is expressed about the issue through the visual mode. Particularly, it explores whether the editorial cartoon is able to present the theme of '26/11 Mumbai attack' effectively and does it reflect the editorial that appeared on the same day. It critically analyses the specific role visual metaphor plays and the functions that visual modes of the text perform in the construction of this theme. Thus, this paper contributes to the cartoon research by contributing theoretical insight to the cartoon genre as a means of portraying social realism, educating, informing and entertaining his viewers.

**KEYWORDS:** Cognitive Metaphor Theory, Editorial Cartoon, Indian Newspaper, Social Semiotics, Visual Mode, Visual Metaphor

## INTRODUCTION

Visual image is considered to be a quick and obvious medium of communication. One can effectively communicate one's thoughts, emotions, any information or reality of the society through some sketches or lines. Little in language can be understood without taking into consideration the wider picture of communicative purpose, content, and audience. In modern times, the editorial cartoon is perhaps one of the most usual forms of visual representation. Editorial cartoon refers to be a visual metaphor and a satirical or humorous genre. Nelson (1975, p.11) states that cartoon is a screaming medium that cannot be denied attention. Since "editorial cartoons are oriented towards extreme interpretations of campaign events, "they are free to "discuss, investigate, and lampoon topics that are . . . generally left untouched by the media at large" (Koetzle & Brunell, 1992, p. 96). It is the most intense form of expression found in newspapers, as it is not bounded by norms of journalistic objectivity but a source of satirical critique of the existing socio-political and socio-economical state of affair.

Editorial cartoon is "a graphic presentation typically designed in a one-panel, non-continuing format to make an independent statement or observation on political events or social policy" (Edwards & Winkler, 1997, p. 306). It would generally appear on the Editorial or opposite editorial page of a printed newspaper. Editorial cartoon has proven a valuable tool and possibility to inform, to educate and to entertain the readers in any publication, i.e., newspaper, internet, magazine, where it appears.

By the use of metaphor, the cartoonist visually defines and interprets a political and social event in an amusing

and thought provoking way. Metaphor is not simply the replacement of one concept or image for another. Instead, it is a process of complete transformation where two originally different meanings are "merged so that a new meaning is effected" (Edwards, 1997, p. 29).

It represents the thought process through which we interpreting reality. It is believed that "the mechanisms underlying metaphor exist in the mind independently of language" (El Refaie, 2003, p. 76), and undoubtedly is observable that a visual metaphor such as one found in an editorial cartoon is "sometimes able to convey a complex message in a much more immediate and condensed fashion than language" (El Refaie, 2003, p. 87).

The paper draws on the theory of social semiotics and the concepts of cognitive metaphor theory to analyze two editorial cartoons on the theme '26/11 Mumbai Attack'. This analysis of editorial cartoons on '26/11 Mumbai Attack' inquires into the idea that is expressed about the issue through the visual mode. It analyses the functions that visual modes of the texts perform and the specific role visual metaphor plays in the construction of this theme.

## ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The analysis is primarily based on Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996) visual semiotic framework. They adopted the theory of metafunction from the work of Halliday and applied it to all semiotic modes that are specific to visuals. According to Halliday, meaning is conceptualized in terms of three functions: firstly ideational metafunction, second interpersonal metafunction and finally textual metafunction.

On the basis of these metafunctions, Kress and van Leeuwen gave the concept of Visual Representation (the relationship between represented participants), i.e., 'narrative' representation or 'conceptual' representation; Position of the Viewer (patterns of interaction), i.e., the interaction of the viewer with the images is realized through the 'gaze' of represented participants, 'angles', choice of 'distance' (as in close-up, medium or long-shots); Modality (models of reality), i.e., reliability of message; Meaning of composition, i.e., 'composition' of the whole image and layout on the page. This framework is applied to research on visual images as it makes a detailed analysis of the 'grammar' and 'forms' of visual representations within social context.

Some of the concepts of Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) cognitive metaphor theory were also drawn on to analyze the constructions and meanings of visual metaphor. According to this theory, metaphor is a fundamental part of our conceptual system, which governs our actions, reactions and relationships. Metaphor helps us in understanding and experiencing one thing in terms of another. It provides a level of understanding of the construction of metaphorical concepts in the visual texts and how they influence our ideologies and cultural attitudes.

## FOCUS OF THE PAPER

The main aim of this study is to analyze the function of visual mode of the text in the construction of theme. Whether the editorial cartoon is able to present the theme of '26/11 Mumbai attack' effectively or not? Is it the true reflection of the editorial 'An Affront of the Indian State' that appeared on the same day.

## ANALYSIS OF EDITORIAL CARTOON

The editorial cartoon on '26/11 Mumbai Attack' that appeared in the 'CARTOONSCAPE' of *The Hindu* on November 28, 2008 is referred to as Text. This black and white cartoon by Keshav appeared on the editorial page of the newspaper two days after the 26/11 attack.

**Visual Representation**

The cartoon involves both narrative and conceptual representation. Apart from a historical building, a bomb and a missile, this cartoon draws upon the representation of human participants. The historical building in the cartoon reminds us about the Gateway of India that tells us about the exact location discussed in the cartoon, i.e., Mumbai, the country's financial and business center. The use of setting and background is present in the cartoon. Black and white contrasts are sharp with maximum representation of pictorial details.

The cartoon contains two human participants. A man holding a huge bomb and riding a missile is the actor of the cartoon. With a splash of water, he enters though the Gateway of India. The represented participant, the man with a bomb, is highlighted in the cartoon. A man holding a gun is the reactor of the cartoon. He is just gazing towards the phenomenon and is in a state of shock. His uniform and gun represents his identity as a police officer. The editorial cartoon depicts motion. Through this picture, the cartoonist tries to narrate the story of the terrorist attack that took place in Mumbai.

In terms of conceptual representation, the process here can be described as a symbolic attributive. The police officer is the generalized and symbolic representation of the Maharashtra police's anti-terrorism squad, military commandos and National Security Guard commandos. He also represents the symbol of positivity and safety and security of India. The represented participant, i.e., the man holding a bomb, is a carrier involved in action, and the 'attributes' he wears and carries identify him.

These attributes are a bomb, a missile, his uniform and the gun slung over his shoulder. The symbolic relationships of these elements with him construct his identity as an armed 'terrorist'. This identity is reinforced by the symbol of danger on the bomb and the huge size of the bomb.

The sophisticated arms that are used and the manner of the attack, at the same time, adds slightly more specificity to his identity as a 'Lashkar-e-Taiba and its several variants'. The armed terrorist is a generalized and symbolic representation of international terrorism and a symbol of negativity and destruction.

In the cartoon, the action carried out by the armed terrorist represents the manner of attack, i.e., a fidayeen attack like the one on Parliament in 2002. The Gateway of India represents the targeting of well-known landmarks and high profile places in Mumbai, including the Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus, the Taj Mahal and Trident hotels, and Nariman House.

**Position of the Viewer**

The participants of the cartoon offer an indirect gaze, or there is absence of gaze, at the reader. There is representation of the cartoon participants from an oblique view without any visual contact. The police officer is gazing towards the phenomenon.

The terrorist has a concentrated or focused gaze looking out at something far-reaching, but not directly at the reader. It symbolizes someone with a mission. His field of vision does not encompass the reader. It shows that the reader is not present at the time of incidence and looks at the image from an outside perspective.

The reader is not engaged in the same world as that which is seen in the image. The meaning, then, is detached or redirected. The figure of the armed terrorist appears to be moving in a particular direction, although stationary. It is a longer shot that reflects the relationship between the reader and the participant to be impersonal. The reader is not directly involved in the incidence, but observing the whole phenomenon through the eyes of the cartoonist.

**Figure 1: Cartoonscape, the Hindu, November 28, 2008**

**Modality Markers**

According to Robert Hodge and Gunther Kress, 'modality refers to the status, authority and reliability of a message, to its ontological status, or to its value as truth or fact' (Hodge & Kress 1988, p. 124). It is also termed as "a social theory of the real" (Kress &van Leeuwen, 2006, p.154). Evidencing a minimum saturation of color, black and white prevails in the given editorial cartoon (figure 1). Monochrome is maintained in the cartoon, which leads to minimum differentiation of color. There is use of unmodulated colour. Absence of play of colours and shadows in the editorial cartoon represents the lowest modality. Contextualization or the presence of setting and background increases the modality of the editorial cartoon. Detailed background connects the viewer with a particular location and a specific moment in time, i.e., terrorist attack on famous places in Mumbai on 26/11/2008. In this cartoon, there is maximum representation of pictorial details. The editorial cartoon reflects a maximally deep perspective or viewpoint about the whole incident, but has only two degrees of brightness, i.e., black and white. Modality markers account for the degree of factuality or truthfulness of visual images with regard to the real world. The higher the degree of modality is, the more credible the represented message will be. The realism of representation and image depth is well developed in the cartoon, i.e., the degree of modality is high. This lack of realism is emphasized in case of color, brightness and illumination, i.e., the degree of modality is low. The editorial cartoon reduces naturalism in the way it treats colour, intensify it in the way it treats texture, and yet represent its theme in a naturalistic way.

**Visual Metaphor Analysis**

The editorial cartoon (figure 1) is a personification of 'terrorism' and thus a 'de-politicization' of the issues involved. From the picture, it is obvious that it was an act to insult or offend India. This personification of terrorism can be associated with the metaphor of evil. Insulting or offending someone is equivalent to an evil act. This cartoon could even be seen as an embedded metaphor of aggression, hatred and destruction. It is personification of 'terror' that created feeling of insecurity in the mind and heart of Indian citizens. It reflects the bitterness of religious politics of the neighboring country 'Pakistan' against 'India'. It reminds us about the grievous tragedy and an attack on the spirit of India. The man holding the bomb on his shoulder resembles famous mythological figure 'Atlas'. Atlas and his brother sided with the Titans in their war against the Olympians. When the Titans were defeated, the Zeus condemned Atlas to stand at the western edge of the Earth and hold up the Sky on his shoulders. In the same way, the terrorist is carrying the responsibility

of destroying the world on his shoulder. The missile represents steamer. It represents high speed and the force with which the attack took place. The policeman (Hemant Karkare) in the state of shock represents the condition of safety and security during the time of attack. The Gateway of India represents the exact location of the attack and the route taken by the terrorist for the attack. The burning lid of the bomb represents the pre-planned attack. The size of the bomb with a danger mark represents the kind of attack.

## ANALYSIS OF EDITORIAL

The title of the editorial '*An Affront to the Indian State*' depicts the real condition and cause of this attack, i.e., "…a grievous tragedy and an attack on the spirit of India." ('*An Affront to the Indian State*', 2008, p.19). The attack was carried out to intentionally or openly insult India. The editorial discusses the manner and action of the terrorist attack. 'The use of the sea route by the terrorists who could have landed on a small boat from out of a larger vessel in the high seas off the coast of Mumbai opens up the possibility of their coming in from Karachi.' ('*An Affront to the Indian State*', p. 19). The editorial also presents the after effects of the attack. It recommends the actual steps that should be taken by the government and the people of our country to avoid such situations.

## RESULTS

Through the editorial cartoon, the cartoonist has tried to narrate the whole incidence of 26/11 Mumbai terrorist attack. Whereas, the editorial, '*An Affront to the Indian State*', discusses not only the manner and action of terrorist attack, but also other aspects related to this incident, i.e., its after effects, role of both the nations and appropriate steps taken by the government. The cartoon portrays only the first half of the incidence, i.e., how the attack took place. The viewer should have complete knowledge of the background to understand the editorial cartoon. The interpretation of this cartoon may vary from person to person. The editorial cartoon on theme '26/11 Mumbai Attack' leaves a number of questions in the mind of its viewer. It is not clear from the cartoon that whether the terrorist is entering India or taking exit from India. If the terrorist enters India through Gateway of India, then what is its destination? Was the terrorist attack a failure or a success? Were the security forces of India able to control the attack? Although, the editorial cartoon on the theme '26/11 Mumbai Attack' is not a complete picture of its editorial, yet the cartoonist has tried to portray the real picture of the incidence to some extent. Therefore, the editorial cartoon is the sub-set of its editorial. The editorial cartoon is not complete in itself but acts as a complementary to the editorial '*An Affront to Indian State*'.

## CONCLUSIONS

This analysis of editorial cartoon on '26/11 Mumbai Attack' explores the ways in which readers make sense of the visual text. Interpreting editorial cartoons is a complex process that requires people to draw on a whole range of different literacy. These include a broad knowledge of past and current events, an acquaintance with the cartoon genre, a gigantic range of cultural symbols, and skill of thinking analytically about real-world events and state of affairs.

The editorial cartoon is the partial reworking of its editorial. As the title of the editorial states, '*An affront to the Indian state*', the editorial cartoon is its real image. The cartoon visualizes the insult and offensive act by the Lashkar-e-Taiba. But it was not able to express the after effects of the attack. The cartoon leaves a number of questions unanswered in the mind of the viewer. The cartoonist was to some extent successful in presenting the theme of '26/11 Mumbai attack' effectively to the readers.

To understand the message conveyed through the editorial cartoon, one should have good background of the news. Each person employs the world knowledge and social knowledge to covey meaning in communication. The

knowledge of the news and editorial used as the background for the cartoon, leads the reader to expect or predict in their interpretation of the editorial cartoon. To successfully interpret hidden comments of the cartoonist in the editorial cartoon, the correct assessment of the news used, as the background for the cartoon by the reader is essential. A cartoonist can assume that his/her reader has it whenever a particular situation is described. The interpretation of the language that is used to communicate through the cartoon is based, to a larger extent, on what the readers have experienced in the past understanding of the text, i.e., news.

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