

Farmers' protest in India- analysing the coverage of farmer's protest in light of republic day celebrations

Abstract

History has witnessed the biggest protest led by farmers of India against the three farm laws introduced by the BJP (Bhartiya Janta Party) government in September 2020. Farmers began a peaceful protest on the borders of the national capital Delhi, to demand withdrawal of three farm laws since they feared it would worsen their livelihood. On the 72nd Indian Republic Day (26th January 2021), farmers decided to execute a tractor march in Delhi which escalated into violence as a result of clashes between the Delhi Police and the protestors. The tractor rally became the news headline with media houses either supporting or publishing negative stories about the events of Republic Day. The violent outbreak also brought hatred towards the Sikh community for perpetrating violence. The farmers from the Sikh community were falsely labeled as supporters of Khalistan movement, who wanted to spread terror and anti-national elements through protest. Media outlets published their versions of the truth about the violence, misleading the audience against the protest and the Sikh community. The media coverage backed by the power holders of the nation stirred controversy and raised questions about the democracy and freedom of speech in India. This research compares the articles printed about the Republic Day violence by mainstream media versus the alternative media sources by conducting critical discourse analysis on text of the published news.

Keywords: farmers' protest, republic day, mainstream media, alternative media

Volume 9 Issue 2 - 2024

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Received: May 15, 2024 | **Published:** June 19, 2024

Introduction

Farmers form the backbone of any nation in this world. India is categorized as an agrarian economy with over half of the total workforce engaged in the agricultural sector. Farmers perform a significant duty towards the society by working tirelessly on the fields yielding crops. They ensure production of cereals, pulses, fruits, and vegetables to feed the nation of more than a billion people. While they ensure that no one goes to bed hungry, it is the duty of the government to provide necessary support with laws, crop insurance and subsidies. On the contrary, the new laws enacted by the BJP government spread fear and tension amongst farmers in India. The uncertainty about the MSP (Minimum Support Price), role of the corporate sector and the new structure of Indian agriculture landed farmers in a difficult position.¹ A farm leader from Punjab voiced 'the farmers not only know how to farm but also know how to protect their fields.' With the majority workforce in the agricultural sector, farmers from various states of India began protesting in September 2020.²

Protesting stands as a cornerstone of democracy, crucial in shaping and evolving society by providing citizens with a platform to express their demands or discontent with governmental decisions and policies. When Parliament passed the three farm laws in September 2020, without the opinion of farmers or their representatives; farmers began protesting in the northern parts of India.³ India had not witnessed such a massive protest by farmers since independence or liberalisation era.¹ Millions of farmers particularly from Punjab, covering a geographic area of 5 million ha, supporting 30 million people and Haryana covering 4.4 million ha, supporting a population of 28.4 million have camped in the bitter cold months on the outskirts of Delhi to peacefully protest against the three laws. Additional 250 million farmers, farm workers and the general public have come out in support of the protest from all corners of the country.⁴ The farmers from Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, and several other states

came in solidarity to protest till the three laws have been repealed.⁵ The farmers' demonstration to repeal the three laws have grown to become the largest protest movements in world history.⁶

Navasky quoted that reader's make up their national mind based on the journalism they consume.⁷ Media houses use the framing technique to highlight certain aspects of events and silent the rest. They consciously or subconsciously focus on a point to encourage particular understanding of the event.⁸ when the farmers protest began in 2020; it became the core debate on all media outlets for various issues. While the majority media houses functioned as spokesperson of the BJP government, the alternative forms of media supported the true reasons of the protest. There were considerable differences present in ways the protest was presented in the news.

The researcher aims to answer the research question which asks, "How were the events of Republic Day violence covered by the mainstream media and alternative sources of media?" Firstly, the reason that prompted the researcher to analyze the media coverage of farmers' movement was that this movement harnessed worldwide attention. Secondly, it raised serious allegations on the BJP government and its workings. Moreover, this movement also pointed at the ways in which the media outlets cover stories to generate particular opinions. On 26th January 2021, the unexpected turn of events raised many questions on the government, Delhi Police, and the protest. People of India and across the world were spilt between supporting the farmers and going against them after a plethora of violence. The opinions reflected the ways in which the media had portrayed the outbreak. Reporters, columnists, journalists, and other people working in the political related environment of the media system have the power to choose and process politically relevant content and play a key role in formation of public opinion and distribution of influential interests.⁹

This research will be a useful addition to the growing literature about media representation of less powerful groups in India, the

media's way of dealing with issues against the ruling government and the differential framing of news by mainstream and alternative sources of media.

Why are the farmers of India protesting?

During the second half of September 2020, three agricultural acts were enacted by the Indian Parliament for the agricultural sector in India. The Farm Acts were hastily passed on 17 and 20 September 2020, by the two Houses of Parliament through a voice vote and minimal discussion.⁵ The three acts passed under the Indian Farm Reforms 2020, were the Farmers Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services Act (the Contract Farming Act) and The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act. The first act restricts the state oversight to the Produce Marketing Committees while giving space to new corporate players to create new markets. This would limit the farmers from selling the product in the government regulated markets at a fixed minimum price. This act supports free trade of farm produce while more than ninety percent of the farmers lack the skills to deal with modern trading rules or negotiate in an open or e-commerce market. Due to which traders will further exploit the farmers by dictating the prices or keep extremely low prices for the farm produce.⁴ The second act sets contract agreement between farmers and contractors also known as sponsors. The contract would be set for a specific quantity of the produce for a specific duration. This act does not contain regulations or clauses in cases of disputes between the farmers and contractors. In an instance of dispute between the two parties, the new law would prohibit the farmer from taking a legal route for justice. The third act allows large corporations to stockpile food and engage in warehouse and supply management. It uplifts all restrictions which discouraged stockpiling of food grains to prevent artificially raising prices.² Under the third act, the government can only intervene during certain circumstances of war or famine. This act would further benefit the big corporations like the Adani group who would sell the produce at much higher prices, leaving the poor to die of hunger and starvation. Moreover, since the agricultural sector falls under state issue, the three laws trespass the State legislation.⁴ A policy paper by Niti Ayog states 'in a nutshell, the three policy reforms undertaken by the central government through the three new acts are in keeping with the changing times and requirements of farmers and farming. If they are implemented in the right spirit, they will take Indian agriculture to new heights and usher in the transformation of the rural economy'.¹⁰

The bills which stirred controversy received the President's sign off on 27th September 2020 while the opposition parties and farmer unions opposed it.¹¹ According to the BJP government, these laws would change the Indian agricultural system and attract private investment. These laws would ease the entry of corporate agribusiness.⁶ On the other hand, farmers believe that powerful investors would bind the farmers in unfair contracts and critics state the passing of the bills as unfair. The BJP government defied the parliamentary procedures, passed the bills with minimal discussions while the country battled with deadly COVID-19 pandemic.⁷ These acts compromise with food security and equity rights of farmers living in Punjab, Haryana and other states who have played a significant role in growing crops since the 1960's.⁴ The laws were centred around the purchase, production, and storage of agricultural produce. The three laws triggered millions of farmers who then marched towards Delhi to protest against the laws. Farmers from Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttarakhand surrounded the capital city, and the major highways connecting Delhi to other states became the protest site.¹² Opposition

parties, Bhartiya Kisan Union (BKU) and All India Kisan Sangharsh Coordination Committee (AIKSSCC) opposed the bills, stating them as 'anti-farmers.' They have been labelled as 'draconian laws' and 'black laws' by the protestors and supporters of farmers' protest.¹³ One of the protesting farmers stated that the contract farming system does not bring prosperity to farmers in the presence of power asymmetry and restricted bargaining power at farmers end.¹⁰

Punjab, the primary agricultural state of India with thirty-two large and small farmers' unions were the first to raise voice against the three acts. When the farm laws were passed, unions from Punjab came to the forefront forming and leading the all-India united front called the Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM; United Front of Farmers). Formed in November 2020, it called out all the farmers to march towards Delhi. Thousands of farmers, a long convoy of tractors and trucks entered the capital city on 26th November 2020. A slogan on the protest site stated, 'we will fight over and over again and generation upon generation but will not let our land go'.² While the pro-reform economists support the laws and label them as 'watershed movement in Indian history', opposition parties, farm unions consider them as their 'death warrant'.¹⁴ Farmers along with women and children camped along the national highway of Delhi during the freezing cold to protest against the laws.

In a deeply class and caste stratified city like Delhi, the protest welcomed residents from poor neighbourhoods and offered communal meals. The central practice of Sikhism called Langar (offering free food to everyone) was prepared on Tikri and Singhu borders and everyone had been invited to eat irrespective of colour, gender, or religion.⁶

BJP's view on farmers' protest

The BJP rule over the years of its governance has established Hindutva regime, which aims to establish hegemony of Hindus in India, which is deemed as a constitutionally secular state. The Hindutva regime, BJP controlled state apparatus and the puppet media is often characterized for state and mob violence, targeted lynching, absence of empathy and psycho-social viciousness. Protesters view the three laws as steps towards greater centralisation of power and disregard of democratic and federal principles of the nation.⁵ The response of police and the BJP government has been criticised for inflicting violence on protesters, using water cannons and tear gas shells, blocking their entry. In the initial months of 2021, the police restricted mobile and internet services at the protest sites and the BJP government asked Twitter to remove posts related to the protest. These moves received criticism from the Human Rights Organization for intolerant steps towards protesters.¹⁵ An agitation that has drawn attention internationally from farmers, journalists, politicians, and has been making the headlines. This has raised several questions on the existing democracy in India.⁴ Moreover, during a debate in the Rajya Sabha, Sh. Narendra Modi during his talk even stated that the country needs to stay protected from foreign destructive ideologies, referring to the Khalistan movement supporting the protest from the UK, USA, and other countries.¹⁶

Role of media in farmers' protest

Media, the fourth pillar of democracy, one source for all the information that reaches and influences people about the events happening around the globe. Mainstream media has always played a crucial role in shaping opinions and conversations as an agenda setting nodal in history.¹⁷ Newspapers, news channels, social media platforms and other sources played a key role in influencing the public about

the farmers protest that began in India in 2020. Though mainstream media covered farmers' protest from the day it began, the mainstream resources faced resentment from viewers, for not covering the events genuinely and manipulating the facts. Farmers labelled the mainstream media as 'godia media', which refers to mainstream media sitting on the lap of the power holders.¹⁸ In a democratic country like India, where the media is an independent body functioning as a spokesperson of the big corporations and the ruling government. The Indian mainstream media aligned themselves with power bearers and acted as spokesperson for corporates. None of the media outlets highlighted that the BJP government had disregarded the parliamentary procedures while passing the laws. Opposition parties raised demands for select committees to scrutinise the bills which got rejected. Moreover, the live telecast of the bills was also muted.¹⁴ The mainstream media began an anti-farmer campaign labelling them as anti-nationals and calling their protest an attempt to disrupt the unity and peace in India. Media houses which became the voice of big corporations and the BJP party defamed the protesting farmers to create negative sentiment in the minds of the public.¹⁴ Farmers' protests were labelled as 'political dissent of citizens', 'jihadi', 'terrorist', 'Khalistani', 'anti-national' by the ruling regime and the media owned by them.⁶

On the Republic Day, 26th January 2021 farmers reached the Red Fort as a sign of protest against the three laws. Media outlets falsely depicted the events of that day. Information was being spread out that farmers had placed the flag of Khalistan by removing the national flag of India. The Indian flag was used strategically against the protestors. False narratives of disrespecting the national flag were circulated amongst the public.¹⁹

What happened on 26th January 2021?

The events of 26th January 2021 completely changed the landscape of protest. On a day of national importance, when the majority of people watching the news were bombarded with images of clashes in Delhi, the image of a peaceful protest got distorted.² On 26th January 2021, India celebrated its 72nd Republic Day, this day holds deep value for Indians. On this day in 1950 the Indian constitution came into force and India was declared a Republic. Every year on 26th January, the President of India unfurls the national flag, the country's armed forces organise a march while citizens cheer and celebrate the occasion. During the 72nd Republic Day, the celebrations did not go as planned. The farmers' protest grabbed the news attention, and a series of events led to a huge clash between the Delhi Police and protesting farmers.²⁰ A peaceful march turned into violence leading to the death of one of the protestors and hundreds injured.²¹

People from various states of India had been gathering around the protest sites to march on the Republic Day. An estimated number of two hundred thousand tractors had gathered around the starting points to march across the outskirts of the city as a sign of protest against the three laws. The Delhi Police had planned three routes for tractor rallies on the outskirts of the city. During the talks with the Delhi Police, the protestors had agreed to conduct their rally on the designated routes. As the rally began from the three starting points, represented through the three black points, some protestors deviated from originally planned routes and entered the central part of the city. During their route to the Red Fort the protestors clashed with Delhi Police, crossed barricades and soon a peaceful march turned into a massacre. On entering the Red Fort, the protestors hoisted the farm union flags, flag of the Sikh religion and the national flag of India.²¹ When the Sikh flag fluttered in the air, rumours started to spread about the flag being the Khalistani flag. The media and government found a way to further put down the protest by establishing links between

the two movements. The Khalistani flag represents the movement to demand a sovereign state for Sikhs while the Sikh flag is sacred to the religion and is seen in all the Sikh temples. A Sikh flag can be differentiated from the Khalistani flag by its colour and shape. The Sikh flag is a saffron coloured triangular flag with a symbol of sword or 'khanda' while the Khalistan flag is yellow coloured and rectangular in shape. It has the word 'Khalistan' written on it.²² Post the violence, people were agitated against the protestors and filed Public Interest Litigation (PIL) against the protestors to vacate the protest sites. The central government got a boost in favour of the three farm laws.²

Mainstream media vs alternative media

Over the last thirty years there has been a rise of alternative media sources. These alternative news sites refer to themselves as 'correctives to the mainstream media.' The alternative news media represents anti-elite and anti-system attitudes, proposing content that opposes mainstream news media.²³ Defining alternative media has been a problematic exercise. One way of defining alternative media is challenging the concentrations of media's power. Downing²⁴ labelled the term as 'oxymoronic.' He stated that everything is an alternative to something else in the world. Some academics labelled it as mainstream media, radical media or as citizen media. Alternative media has grown as 'explicit opposition' to mainstream media sources. It breaks the status quo strengthened by the mainstream media.²⁵ It creates a diverse media environment to challenge the dominant ideologies. Trust in media has significantly declined in many countries, as alternative news media offers new opportunities to know about current affairs and reality especially to people with low trust.²³ Mainstream media is often criticised by alternative media for biased reporting, excluding important voices, key information and supporting those in power.²⁶

Aims and objectives of the study

Media plays a significant role in forming opinions in favour or against an event. The research aims to investigate the differential publishing by mainstream and alternative sources of media. Furthermore, this research attempts to analyse the coverage of the events that broke out between protestors and the Delhi Police on the Republic Day (26th January 2021). The research will also investigate the differentials of covering an event between mainstream and alternative sources of media.

Research questions

Research questions were formulated keeping in mind the objectives of the study. Following questions were formulated for the present study.

1. How was the clash presented by the Mainstream media sources?
2. Were there links between farmers protest and Khalistani movement?
3. Was the news published by alternative media sources free from any biases?

Research methodology

The research aims at answering how the clash between protesting farmers and the police was covered by the mainstream media and alternative sources of media in light of Republic Day (26th January 2021) in India?

Based on the research question and the above stated evidence, my research states the following three hypotheses-

The first hypothesis states - Mainstream media highlighted the narrative that the clash was caused by the farmers and protesters.

The second hypothesis states - Mainstream media sources linked farmers' protest with Khalistani movement.

The third hypothesis states - Alternative media sources published unbiased narrative.

Addressing the research question, four news sources were selected for analysis. Two news sources were identified from mainstream media and two sources from alternative sources of media. From the four selected sources, two articles each were selected. The selected articles were published around the period of Republic Day clash. On the selected sources, critical discourse analysis (CDA), a subcategory of discourse analysis will be conducted to compare and analyse the rhetoric used to describe the events, references made between the Khalistanis and people following the Sikh religion and the presence of dominant power in media. The research would analyse the textual content present excluding the presence of visuals. Fowler argues that news media reproduce the dominant order because of the ideological influence of power holders. News media focuses and publishes the attitude of the powerful through written dialogue.²⁷

For the analysis of mainstream media sources, Dainik Jagran and Times of India the two most read newspapers in India²⁸ were selected. Conducting the analysis of alternative media sources, Scroll.in which has a monthly unique readership of four million and The Wire with seven to eight million readership every month was selected.²⁹

Critical discourse analysis

This research follows Habermas's perspective to analyse the selected sources. This perspective views discourse as utterances between actors in a communicative exchange. The ideal speech situation is defined as the discourses in which individuals can make assertions and assess others' assertions without coercive, hegemonic dominance. Due to power imbalances, the transcendental condition of communicative exchange rarely exists in ideal speech communities. Transcendental means that an ideal speech situation is subject to the possibility of communication. Habermasian's perspective analyses discursive exchanges to highlight conscious and unconscious hegemonic participation during communication which leads to distance between actors from the ideal speech situation.³⁰ Conscious hegemonic participation is also referred to as conscious deception which is the active manipulation of communication to obscure the purposes of the communicative act. On the other hand, unconscious hegemonic participation also known as unconscious deception is the use of dominant ideologies which are taken for granted and draw the author and community away from the ideal speech situation. Identifying the hegemonic participation, the Habermasian CDA looks into the violation of four validity claims – comprehensibility, truthfulness, legitimacy, and sincerity. Comprehensibility is the technical and linguistic clarity of communication, truthfulness is the propositional content of communication as represented by complete arguments and unbiased statements. Legitimacy is understood as the presence of all the different perspectives and sincerity refers to the connection between what is said by the speaker and what the speaker actually intends by the communication. While analyzing the four validity claims, it is difficult to analyze the sincerity claim, when the speaker engages in unconscious hegemonic participation by using beliefs and assumptions which are often taken for granted. Thus, while analyzing unconscious hegemonic participation, researchers are required to examine the sincerity of the larger community.³¹ Analysing the news articles following the Habermasian CDA would give deeper

insight about the prevalence of dominant ideology which could create a positive or negative image of the protest. The news articles about the violence that broke out were covered differently by mainstream and alternative media by focusing on certain aspects and ignoring the others.

Ethical considerations

The research adheres to the University of Leeds research ethics policy.³² Conducting multi-modal analysis tends to have minimal ethical considerations since there are no participants involved during research. Moreover, the data being used for analysis is available on publicly accessible platforms and thus can be used for public consumption. Critics might argue that prior permission should have been taken from respective newspapers used for analysis. However, content has been published online for public viewing and is available for free without gaining consent from the selected newspapers. Hewson, Vogel and Laurent³³ stated that data that is available online can be used for unobtrusive research, can be used without gaining consent and is ethically acceptable. The research would follow all the required guidelines and would be conducted considering all the ethical requirements. During the process of analysing news articles, the research would maintain the anonymity of the names of farmers or protesters that might have been included in news articles. Personal details of farmers and protesters will not be reproduced in my research. The research would not cause any harm to farmers or protesters named in the articles. The research remains transparent, and no trace of bias will object my study.

Analysis of the study

News Article 1- Dainik Jagran³⁴

Headlined 'Farmers' Agitation: Cops injured as protestors clash with police during Delhi tractor march | Dainik Jagran dated January 26, 2021

S1 (S stands for sentence) Protesters broke through the barricades put up by the Delhi Police. The police had to use tear gas to control the violent clash between police and protesters.

S2-S3 Protesting farmers breached the pre-decided route, broke the barricades, and entered Delhi forcefully. Upon reaching the Red Fort, protesters hoisted their flag.

S4-S6 Tractors with flags, men and women were welcomed in the city with flowers being showered on them. Many farmers marched on foot, holding flags of their unions, and raising various slogans. Protesters rode through motorcycles, horses and sang revolutionary songs. The Delhi Police tried to continue the rally on the route decided during the time of agreement.

S7 Local people from Delhi were seen offering water and food to the protesters during their rally.

S8-S11 Senior Police Officer mentioned that a group of protesters broke the barricades to make their way into the capital city. Post the beginning of the rally, protesters entered Delhi forcefully and organised themselves at Mukarba Chowk. From there, the rally was supposed to reach Bawana side, but protesters demanded to march on Outer Ring Road.

S12-S15 Reports of violent outbreaks between farmers and police officers had started to pour in. Some of the protestors pelted stones on the police officers. To control the violence Delhi Police had to use tear gas on protesting farmers. Due to violent clashes, the gates of metro station had been closed.

S16-S17 Prior to the Republic Day, protesters had agreed with the Delhi Police on the route for tractor rally and ensured that the rally would be conducted in a peaceful manner.

S18 Some of the protesters broke the agreement and started marching towards Outer Ring Road by breaking the barricades.

S19-S21 Sanyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM), the umbrella body representing 41 unions, stated that violent clashes were initiated by the members of Kisan Mazdoor Sangharsh Committee (KMSC). Members of KMSC had announced prior to Republic Day that they would march on Outer Ring Road.

S22 Another foot march has been announced by the protesting unions. On February 1, 2021, protestors would march while the annual budget is being presented.

S23-S26 Around 6000 security personnel have been posted in light of the 'Kisan Gantantra Parade' (Farmers' parade on Republic Day). Security has been intensified at power substations in Delhi post the threat of SFJ's (Sikhs for Justice) to disrupt the electricity supply.

S27 Strict vigil has been kept over Rajpath, where PM Narendra Modi and President of India Ram Nath Kovind along with other dignitaries would celebrate the Republic Day.

S28 Farmers in large numbers dominantly from the states of Punjab, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh have been protesting to repeal the three farm laws and a legal guarantee on MSP (Minimum Support Price).

News Article 2- Dainik Jagran³⁵

Headlined 'Farmers' agitation intensifies as protesters reach iconic Red Fort in Delhi, hoist flag | Dainik Jagran dated January 26, 2021.

S1 The injured police officers are being taken to hospital post the violence that broke out on 26th January 2021.

S2 Due to the violence, one of the Delhi Police personnel who was deployed got injured and fell unconscious.

S3-S4 Asian News International (ANI) posted visuals of Delhi Police officers looking after the injured policemen.

S5-S7 Violence near the ITO (Income Tax Office) area continued when the protesters on tractors tried driving over the police officers deployed. Protesters reached the ITO area by breaking the barricades, attacking police personnel and destroying vehicles. Due to the clash between police officers and protesters, several police officers suffered injuries.

S8-S9 Protesting farmers caused harm to the public property and targeted police personnel on duty. Farmers broke through the barricades to enter Delhi.

S10-S11 Delhi Police blocked the road in Nangloi to stop the farmers from moving ahead. Several metro stations were closed post the intensification of protest on 26th January.

News Article 3- The Times of India³⁶

Headlined 'Delhi: 37 rules agreed upon for rally, most tossed aside' from The Times of India dated January 27, 2021.

S1-S2 Protesters breached the agreement made with the Delhi Police prior to the Republic Day tractor rally. They violated the pre-decided route, entry and exit time due to which FIR (First Information Report) has been registered against the organisation.

S3-S5 37 conditions were agreed upon by the protestors prior to the Republic Day for their tractor rally.

S6-S7 The first condition was that the tractor rally would be conducted post the Republic Day parade. 12pm-5pm was the agreed time window for the same.

S8-S10 The first violation by the protesters happened a night prior to Republic Day. Group of protesters tried reaching the Red Fort on Monday (January 25, 2021) 10pm but failed because of closures.

S11-S12 On January 26, 2021, 6:30 am a group of protesters clashed with the deployed security personnel. They tried to enter the city while the Republic Day parade was going on.

S13-S16 Besides agreeing on the route for rally, farm leaders and protesters did not follow it. Protesters from all three borders (Tikri, Singhu, Ghazipur) took route leading them to central Delhi.

S17 Numerous tractors forcibly removed the barricades and entered Delhi.

S18-S20 Tractors with modification or armour like structures were prohibited from the rally in the agreement. Despite the agreement, many such tractors were part of the rally. Participants of the rally were prohibited from carrying any weapons or intoxicating materials and forbidden from doing acrobatics or stunt play during the rally.

S21-S24 Protesters breached the agreement and indulged in stunt play on bikes and tractors. Police reported finding liquor bottles from tractors. Moreover, tractors engaged in rage driving to intimidate the deployed police forces. Volunteers resorted to violent clashes at many points.

News Article 4- The Times of India³⁷

Headlined 'Republic daze: Delhi in farm's way' from The Times of India dated January 27, 2021.

S1-S3 Though an agreement had been prepared but nothing went according to it. Protesters broke through the barricades, deviated from the pre-decided routes, clashed with police officers. They forcibly entered the Red Fort and unfurled the Sikh flag.

S4-S8 The violence pushed the police to use force against the protesters. Due to violence 120 police officers were injured, few of them severely injured. One of the protesters died when his tractor crashed into barricades.

S9-S11 The agreed time for the rally was 12pm to 5pm but protesters began challenging the Delhi Police at 6:30 am. The barricades were brought down, and the rally began before the agreed time.

S12-S13 6000-7000 tractors had entered Delhi by 10 am and insisted on reaching central Delhi, deviating from the pre-decided route.

S14-S15 During a verbal confrontation between protesters and police, Nihang Sikh on horses with swords landed in a clash with police. To control the situation mild force and tear gas was used.

S16-S22 Group of farmers from Ghazipur border proceeded towards ITO and met with stiff resistance from police. Farmers became violent, broke the barricades and iron railings. Police fired tear gas and lathi charge.

S23-S24 The rally reached the Red Fort, where the protesters unfurled the Sikh flag, while the protesters were attacking the police.

S25-S29 To control the violence and empty the fort, police had to cut off the electricity supply to Red Fort. The clashes continued throughout the day.

S30-S31 The Delhi Police was struck between maintaining security for Republic Day celebrations and overseeing the tractor rally. The police had to use mild force, tear gas and suspend the internet.

S32-S33 Intelligence officials stated that the rally did not go according to agreement because the protesters were leaderless. On the day of the rally, the young protesters took charge while the elder union leaders were not present.

S34-S36 The designated route and time of the rally was decided after several rounds of meetings. Delhi Police commissioner requested the protesters to abstain from violence and carry out the protest in a peaceful way.

News Article 5- The Wire³⁸

Headlined as 'Fact-Check: Flags hoisted at Red Fort neither replaced tricolour, nor promoted Khalistan' from The Wire dated January 26, 2021.

S1 Famous personalities and news persons claimed that the flag hoisted in Red Fort on January 26, 2021, was the Khalistani flag which has been proved a false claim.

S2 To protest against the three farm bills, farmers' unions and Delhi Police had agreed on circular routes from three protest sites- Singhu, Tikri and Ghazipur border.

S3-S4 The routes decided for the rally were near the three protest sites. However, numerous protesting groups breached the pre-decided route. Violent clashes broke out, police had to do lathi charge and fire tear gas shells.

S5 Protesters entered the Red Fort and hoisted flags from domes and a flagstaff where the national flag of India is hoisted during Independence Day.

S6 Post the events inside of Red Fort, two claims were formed. Firstly, the protesters took down the national flag of India and secondly, they hoisted the Khalistani flag.

S7-S8 Questions were raised on why protesters removed the national flag?

S9-S12 BJP spokespersons and supporters spread the claim that the flag that was unfurled in Red Fort belonged to the Khalistan movement. Many right-wing websites like OpIndia supported the claim. Similarly pro-BJP twitter handles made similar claims about the Khalistani flag being hoisted in Red Fort.

S13-S14 A fact check was conducted to prove these claims as false.

S15-S17 Videos show that protesters hoisted the flag on an empty pole mast. The national flag of India was not removed, and it is visible atop Lahore Gate that is the entrance to the Red Fort.

S18-S19 Several pictures from that day clearly have the Indian national flag being hoisted. Moreover, the flags were hoisted on the domes of the fort and not by removing the Indian national flag.

S20-S22 The flag hoisted by the protesters was not the Khalistani flag but the Sikh religious flag. A triangular flag with the Khanda and two swords represent the Sikh flag which was hoisted in Red Fort.

S23-S27 Amandeep Sandhu, author of Panjab: Journey through fault lines mentioned that when a flag is hoisted as a symbol of regime or power change, the previous flag is brought down. However, in Red Fort, the Indian flag was not touched or brought down but the Sikh flag was hoisted to assert their identity and get their voices heard.

S28 Another journalist tweeted that the flag hoisted belonged to the Sikh religion and not Khalistanis.

S29-S31 Sikh flags are hoisted on the Punjab tableau during the Republic Day parades.

S32-S33 Thus the claim that the Khalistani flag was hoisted was proven false. Another claim that the Indian national flag was brought down was false as the flag staff was empty.

News Article 6- The Wire³⁹

Headlined as 'Activists Ask Why Police Allowed Groups to Breach Route, Question BJP Govt's Role' from The Wire dated January 29, 2021.

S1 BJP government has been accused of defaming the farmers' protest and filing false cases on leaders.

S2 Groups backed by the support of the BJP government have been accused of discrediting the peaceful farmers' protest on Republic Day.

S3 The pro-BJP media also labelled as 'godi' media by the protestors, showed the farmers in a negative light despite attacks by alleged BJP backed goons on protest sites at Tikri, Ghazipur and Singhu borders in Delhi.

S4 A media meeting organised by civil society representatives talked about the government's way of handling protests.

S5-S6 Supreme Court Advocate Prashant Bhushan mentioned that several questions were raised when people breached the designated route and entered Red Fort to hoist the Sikh flag. He added that the Indian national flag was not pulled off.

S7 Prashant Bhushan added that Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SMK) had agreed on a specific route with the Delhi Police. SMK mentioned that an organisation which was not part of SMK was allowed to sit on the Delhi side of Singhu Border. That organisation planned on January 25 to take the Ring Road route during the rally.

S8-S11 Delhi Police was aware of the organisation's plan to move away from the designated route. Deep Sidhu along with his group occupied a platform on the Singhu Border. He had stated on January 25 about the plan to deviate from the pre-decided route. Police did not stop them when they reached the Ring Road and allowed them to move to Red Fort.

S12-S14 The article mentions that groups who breached the routes and caused violence were close to the BJP government. Despite heavy security, alleged protesters were allowed to climb the walls of the fort and hoist their flag, everything happened under the presence of Delhi Police.

S15-S18 Bhushan spoke about the presence of Deep Sidhu, who hoisted the flag in Red Fort and did a Facebook live broadcast from there. Even during the presence of police, he left the spot and was not arrested for instigating violence on Republic Day. Post the violence it was found out that Deep Sidhu had connections with the BJP government.

S19-S23 The BJP government used the 'godi' media to show protest in a negative light. Deep Sidhu and his group shouted Khalistani slogans during the protest on 26 January 2021. With the assistance of Delhi Police, they made their way into Red Fort, climbed the walls.

S24-S25 Government harassed genuine farm leaders and filed false cases against them. Despite them ensuring a peaceful protest, according to the agreement made they have been falsely charged by the Indian Penal Code.

S26-S30 BJP government has been accused of using violent ways to end the protest. Previously police officers were sent to the Ghazipur Border to threaten the protesters. As the news spread about it, many more people reached the protest site to control the situation. BJP goons had spread violence in Jawaharlal Nehru University in the past had perpetrated similar violence on protesting farmers.

S31-S33 During Republic Day, only a small segment breached the route and caused violence at ITO and Red Fort. The violence was caused to attack the farmers' protest, as stated by a professor from Delhi University and Apoorvanand. The BJP government registered criminal cases against the farm leaders present during the agitation.

S34-S35 Prashant Bhushan on behalf of the civil society requested people to show solidarity with the protesting farmers by observing fast on 30th January that is Mahatma Gandhi's martyrdom day.

S36-S42 Dinesh Abrol of Nation of Farmers asked the citizens to thank the farmers for conducting a peaceful protest for two months. He stated that most of the farmers on the Republic Day rallied on the pre-decided route. Abrol appreciated that during the rally in which millions of farmers had participated did not cause any harm to the ordinary citizens. He compared it with the previous agitations by right-wing groups in which ordinary citizens suffer the most. The protesting farmers even served food to the police officers who threw tear gas and water cannons to stop the agitation. The agitation was not limited to Delhi. More than 50,000 farmers paraded in Mumbai and other places in India.

S43-S45 Abrol initiated a fact-finding enquiry into the incidents of 26th January 2021. Police arrested leaders of civil society and labelled them as urban Naxals. He said that farmers' protest is an important movement for the country's food security. Thus, the welfare of protestors and success of the protest is important.

S46-S50 A professor from the JNU said that the whole nation stands in favour of repealing the three farm laws. While the BJP government is not ready to answer the questions raised by protestors, instead has been criminalising, putting down the farm protest. Labelled protesters as anti-nationals. Even after all the negative light, people continue to support the protest and call it a 'secular protest.'

S51-S54 Kumar Prashant raised several questions after the events of 26th January 2021. He said that everyone owes their origins to farmers and their lands then how can the media stand against them.

S55-S57 The response of the BJP government towards farmers' protest was compared with another protest during the Citizenship Amendment Act. The government tried to portray the agitation wrongly to stop it.

S58-S60 Shabnam Hashmi, a social media activist, said that the government tried to threaten the protesters sitting on the Ghazipur border. Shabnam said the nation is witnessing a sold-out media running a government campaign against a peaceful protest.

News Article 7- Scroll.in⁴⁰

Headlined as "Delhi is our capital too": A blow-by-blow account of the farmers' tractor rally on Republic Day' from Scroll.in dated January 26, 2021.

S1 Protesters hoisting flags atop Red Fort were highlighted while residents welcoming the protesters were not shown.

S2-S3 On January 26, 2021, when the first group of farmers rallied on the national highway, the most visible symbol was the national flag of India. National flag of India dominated all the other flags that were being hoisted.

S4-S6 The news only broadcasted the unfurling of the Sikh flag atop Red Fort. Media called the Sikh flag the Khalistani flag, pointing towards a hidden conspiracy.

S7-S8 On the morning of January 26, 2021, while the President and PM celebrated the Republic Day like every year, thousands of protesters from various states marched towards the capital city.

S9 Roads of Delhi lit up in festive colours. Some farmers rode on tractors and trucks while some walked to protest against the three laws.

S10-S13 Slogans like long live farmer unity, down with the Modi government were spoken in loud voices.

S14-S16 A protesting farmer said that Delhi is not only the capital for ministers, but it belongs to them as well. He added that India is a democratic country, and it is their right to protest. They had to wait for two months on the border.

S17-S18 One of the members of Bharatiya Kisan Union who was first to travel to Delhi on November 26, 2020, was denied entry into the capital city. It is important for the farmers to reach the capital city since the laws were passed there and the PM of India resides there.

S19 The protesters demand the repeal of three farm laws which would destroy their livelihood and force them to work in accordance with big corporations.

S20 The government initiated talks with protesters after delays and wanted to end the protest before the Republic Day to cancel the tractor rally.

S21 Before the Republic Day, the government offered to suspend the three laws for one and a half years. However, the protesters rejected the offer and wanted laws to be dismantled.

S22-S23 Post that, the tractors made their way into the capital on the morning of Republic Day.

S24-S28 While a group of locals welcomed the tractor rally, there were people who did not support the protest.

S29-S30 All the farmer unions had agreed to follow the designated route and time. However, Kisan Mazdoor Sangharsh did not accept the route and timings decided in the agreement. **S31-S36** During the rally, several residents came out of their houses in support of the protest. They raised slogans and condemned the government's behaviour towards protesters.

S37-S39 By midday, the protesters were obstructed by the police barricades resulting in violence and chaos.

S40-S41 Police fired tear gas shells to control the situation. One of the farmers stated that police fired ten to twenty tear gas shells.

S42 Protesters from the Ghazipur border proceeded their rally in ITO area.

S43-S44 Since the beginning of the protest, protesters in Ghazipur border had been different from the Tikri and Singhu border. The Ghazipur border had farmers from Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, rural Delhi, and Madhya Pradesh.

S45-S47 The Tribune reported that protesters broke the police barricades to move away from the designated route. However, the police barricaded the agreed routes, lathi charged on farmers, post which they made their way towards ITO area.

S48-S50 When the rally reached the ITO crossing, police used lathis and tear gas to stop farmers from moving ahead.

S51-S52 Protesters claimed that one of the farmer's was shot dead by the Delhi Police. The police said the claims were false since the farmer died because his tractor overturned.

After clashes with the police, the protesters reached the Red Fort.

S56 As falsely claimed by news and social media, the Indian flag was not removed or disrespected.

S57-S60 SKM, the umbrella group of farmers union, released the statement stating that they dissociate with all the violent events that took place.

S61 Protesters and unions blamed Deep Sidhu for the violence and breaching the agreement.

S62-S67 During Republic Day, many protesters continued the rally in a peaceful manner. Some of the protesters were not aware about the violence since the internet facilities were shut down near protest sites.

News Article 8- Scroll.in⁴¹

Headlined as "Media is defaming us": Day after clashes with police, Ghazipur farmers say protests will continue' from Scroll.in dated January 28, 2021.

S1 While the majority of protest was conducted peacefully on Republic Day, media highlighted the images of a few thousand protesters in clashes with police.

S2-S5 On the day of Republic Day, January 26, 2021, farmers entered Delhi from three directions : Singhu in the north, Tikri in the west and Ghazipur in the southeast.

S6-S7 More than a lakh protesters conducted the rally according to the agreement between the protesters and Delhi Police prior to January 26, 2021. Small group of protesters from Ghazipur broke the barricades and forcibly entered central Delhi when the Republic Day parade was coming to an end.

S8 Around the Income Tax Office (ITO) area, clashes broke out between protesters and Delhi Police. Tear gas was fired, and batons were used to prevent the protesters from moving ahead.

S9-S10 During the clash, a 27-year-old farmer died. Farmers stated that police had shot the farmer while Delhi Police denied such an event happening.

S11 As some of the protesters climbed the Red Fort to hoist the Sikh flag, further clashes broke out between protesters and Delhi Police.

S12-S13 According to Delhi Police, 394 policemen were injured during clashes with protesters, but the number of farmers injured was not brought out.

S14-S15 Protesters at the Ghazipur border mourned for the farmer who died in the ITO area. Though the events of Red Fort were regretful, the protesters fumed at the national media to portray a peaceful protest in a negative light.

S16-S17 Farmers spoke how they were welcomed by showering flowers on them. Locals came out to welcome the rally. However, the national media failed to show the peaceful side of protest.

S18-S19 During the rally, slogans were raised condemning the dictator rule of Narendra Modi.

S20-S22 Days before the parade, the protest site at Ghazipur was filled with protesters which decreased after the events of January 26, 2021.

S23-S25 A farmer from Uttar Pradesh said that at least eighty percent of the farmers had come to Delhi for the first time especially, to participate in the protest.

S26-S28 Farmers blamed the carelessness of the police on the Republic Day.

S29-S30 Though there was confusion about the route amongst farmers, some groups of farmers felt that it is important to protest in central Delhi to get their demand heard.

S31-S33 Protesters at the Ghazipur border stated that violence that broke out on Tuesday was conspired by the ruling BJP to end the movement.

S34-S38 One of the protesters mentioned that there were people backed by the BJP government, who came on tractors and caused violence. On January 26, 2021, a person who stood next to the protesters while hoisting the Sikh flag inside Red Fort is Deep Sidhu. He has pictures with the PM, Amit Shah, and Sunny Deol. Deep Sidhu was part of the 2019 Lok Sabha election and has been the leader of youth Punjabi's to rebel against the central government. He was amongst the forty odd protesters who were summoned by National Agency Investigation over involvement of Sikh Seccessionist group during farmers' protest rally.

S39-S41 Farm leaders have blamed Deep Sidhu for the violence that broke out during Republic Day. People like Deep Sidhu focus on the Sikh identity primarily instead of focusing on the concerns of farmers' protest.

S42-S44 One of the protesters called Deep Sidhu as the government's agent who conspired the violence. The farmers were unaware of his intentions who followed him.

S45-S49 Protesters expressed their concern about losing public support post the Republic Day violence. Loss in public support would in turn weaken the protest.

S50-S51 Protesters were dissatisfied and furious at the media for only showing images of clashes between the police and protesters.

S52-S55 Group of farmers under Rashtriya Kisan Mazdoor conducted the rally according to the agreement and stayed on the designated route and time. They reached back at the protest site peacefully however, the media did not show that on news. Media only aimed at defaming the rally by showing clips of violence and clashes.

S56-S57 Furious about the media coverage, many protesters were not surprised by it. They stated that mainstream media has been portraying the protesting farmers as terrorists and Khalistanis.

S58-S60 However, the negative portrayal by media would not affect the movement. Farmers said that movement will continue till laws have been repealed.

Results and discussion

Based on the analysis conducted using the four validity claims (Table 1-4) certain conclusions are drawn. Fowler⁴²⁻⁴⁴ states that anything that is said or written about the world is formed on the basis of a particular ideology. Language is not a clear window but a refracting, structuring medium that could guide or misguide the audience. Media creates an opinion about the event rather than just mirroring it. Table1 shows the analysis of the selected news articles from Dainik Jagran. Both the news articles created one sided narrative about the violence that broke out. News Article 1 sympathised with the injured police officers

but did not mention about the injured protesters during the clash. The majority of space was occupied in showing the perspective of Delhi Police and government. Moreover, no mention about the peaceful side of the rally was made. Though the News Article had linguistic clarity, it lacked truthfulness and legitimacy because it focused on one perspective. Similar claims were found from the articles published in Times of India. Though both the selected articles were well structured, they lacked different perspectives about the violence. It focused on blaming the protesters and farmers for the violence. The articles had favourable claims towards the Delhi Police and government.

In comparison to the selected alternative media sources, the news articles from The Wire presented unbiased facts about the rally. The article mentioned about the violence but also stated the peaceful side of the rally. News Article 5 gave convincing evidence against the false claims that were spread about the Republic Day violence. The two selected articles stood strong on the four validity claims by giving unbiased reports. Similarly, articles published in Scroll.in, included the views of supporters and opposers of the rally. Different perspectives were found in both the articles.

Table 1 A comparison of the validity claims of The Times of India selected news articles

Validity claim	News article 1	News article 2
Comprehensibility	The news article lacks linguistic clarity. Certain key aspects about reasons behind violence are missing.	The technical and linguistic clarity is validated as it covers key elements about how the protest began followed by events of violence in Red Fort.
Truthfulness	The article states incomplete and biased facts. Information about injury to protesters is missing.	The article gives space to views of the farmers unions about Republic Day violence, but majority arguments are made about violence by protesters.
Legitimacy	The legitimacy of the article is questionable. The article only builds around the perspective of Delhi Police.	Though the article states opinions of Delhi Police and protesting farmers about the violence, majority of the article builds around the perspective of Delhi Police.
Sincerity	There is a direct link between portrayal of injured police officers and showing protesters vandalising public property. The Delhi Police is shown with sympathy to create a negative image of protest.	It is difficult to establish sincerity claims since the article gives background information about how the rally began. On the other hand, the article does not mention the peaceful side of the rally.

Source: Dainik jagran^{34,35}

Table 2 A comparison of the validity claims of The Times of India selected news articles

Validity claim	News article 3	News article 4
Comprehensibility	The news article is structured with focus on violation of rules by protesters.	The article mentions the events which led to the violent outbreak.
Truthfulness	The article presents biased facts towards the Delhi Police. Stance of protesters is missing throughout.	The article states biased and incomplete facts. Throughout the article only the violent side is narrated.
Legitimacy	There is inadequate representation of other perspectives except of Delhi Police.	Due to the lack in presenting the protesters' views, the article fails the legitimacy claim.
Sincerity	The article draws negative light to the protest by narrating one perspective.	The sincerity claim is established by stating the violent narrative to bring negative light to the protest.

Source: The Times of India ^{36,37}

Table 3 A comparison of the validity claims of The Wire selected news articles

Validity claim	News article 5	News article 6
Comprehensibility	News article provides evidence against the false claims being spread. It presents appropriate structural and linguistic clarity.	The article is framed with accurate linguistic clarity. It develops around the group of protesters that caused violence.
Truthfulness	The article presents unbiased arguments and provides evidence for false claims.	With the presence of unbiased statements, the truthfulness claim stands strong.
Legitimacy	In the presence of robust evidence against false claims and different perspectives, the article fulfils the legitimacy claim.	Considering the inclusion of different perspectives about perpetrators of violence and carriers of peaceful protest, the article stands legitimate.
Sincerity	The article stands on the sincerity claim by establishing evidence against the negative light brought to the rally.	The author establishes by stating claims from both sides that the whole rally was not involved in the violence. There was a peaceful side to it too.

Source: The wire^{38,39}

Table 4 A comparison of the validity claims of scroll in selected news articles

Validity claim	News article 7	News article 8
Comprehensibility	The article presents linguistic clarity, by stating all aspects of rally. From the beginning till the violence broke, a clear account is presented.	The key aspects in regard to the events of the rally have been presented.
Truthfulness	The article mentions complete and unbiased statements. It shows the peaceful side of the rally along with events which led to violence.	There are complete and unbiased arguments presented. The article mentions the peaceful and violent side of the protest.
Legitimacy	The article stands the legitimacy claim by stating different perspectives about the rally.	By stating the different perspectives regarding the Republic Day events, the legitimacy of the article is strong.
Sincerity	The article stands on the sincerity claim as it gives an account of the peaceful and violent side of the protest with proper reasons.	The article effectively portrays the sincerity claims by presenting both peaceful and violent aspects of the protest.

Source: Scroll.in^{40,41}

The first hypothesis stands true in the light of the above analysis. Mainstream media (Dainik Jagran and The Times of India) highlighted the narrative that the clash was perpetrated by protesters and farmers. Based on the selected sources, the second hypothesis fails to provide adequate results, as the analysis showed no trace of connection between violence and Khalistani movement. Though News Article 8 published in Scroll.in and Article 6 published in The Wire asserted that television news anchors and government owned media had portrayed protesters as terrorists and Khalistanis (refer to analysis of News Article 8 and News Article 6). The third hypothesis stands true in the case of above conducted analysis. The readers were informed about the violence, reasons behind the violence and the peaceful side of the rally by alternative sources. Such a narrative did not bring negative light to the protest rather raised several questions about the BJP government, biased media, and behaviour of police.

Policy implementations

- Guarantee MSP for all crops: To address the problem of declining farmer incomes, it is essential to guarantee Minimum Support Prices (MSP) for all crops. MSP is applicable to 23 crops but it is implemented only for wheat and paddy. There is also an assured price for sugarcane to be paid by the sugar mills. Hence only these 3 crops assure a profit which other crops do not and because of low profits cropping pattern has shifted in favour of these three crops. Consequently, crops that suit an agro-climatic zone are not grown there resulting in environmental damage. For instance, cultivating sugarcane in water starved areas of Maharashtra and paddy in Punjab. This leads to excess production of these three crops, large stocks with the government and more wastage since there is inadequate storage capacity. The Food Corporation of India (FCI) has been heavily subsidized for procuring and holding the stock and releasing it in the Public Distribution System (PDS). Once the MSP is implemented for all crops, profitability would be the same across all of them and crops would be grown based on their environment suitability in a given agro-climatic zone.⁴⁵⁻⁴⁸
- Grant monthly pension to farmers above the age of 60: Farmers have demanded pension guarantee of Rs 10,000 to all farmers aged above 60. The BJP government had pension of Rs2,000 per month to elderly farmers, arrangements for stray cattle that destroys standing crops. None of these promises have been fulfilled. The BJP government has been labelled as a government that does not keep promises.

Farmers, who are the backbone of the nation and have dedicated their lives to feeding the country, deserve support during their old age.

Recognizing their invaluable contributions, it is important to ensure their well-being in retirement through a guaranteed pension scheme.

Conclusion

The largest protest that history witnessed was started by the farmers, without whom the nation cannot develop. Indian agriculture is deemed to be the backbone of the economy. Despite being so valuable, the protest was put in a negative light by the media, and protesters were labelled as anti-nationals. The protest brought up several questions about the democratic crisis in the country and lack of freedom of speech. The research states that news published by the mainstream media had biases, for it showed the negative side of the protest. On the contrary the rising alternative media sources showed the two sides of the coin to the audience. The misleading statements by mainstream media led to unjustified hatred towards the protest and the farmers labeling them as 'threat to the society'. Such coverage raises questions about trust in media sources. Instead of aligning with a protest that would benefit the society and the nation, mainstream media discredited and defamed the protest to favour the ruling party and big corporates.¹⁴ Out of the three proposed hypotheses; two were proved true in the light of the research conducted. Using the CDA the research question got valid evidence on differential reporting by mainstream and alternative media. Though the research was conducted with a small sample size of two news sources of mainstream and alternative media, it still is responsible for framing public opinion either in favour or against the protest. The future could possibly witness more growth of alternative media and readers shifting from mainstream media to alternative sources to restore their trust in political systems and news delivery.

Acknowledgments

I am deeply grateful to the numerous individuals who contributed to this research project. I extend thanks to Dr. Giles Moss for his mentorship and encouragement throughout this journey. Additionally, I express profound gratitude to my family for their constant encouragement and prayers, serving as a source of motivation.

This research is dedicated to the memory of Sant Baba Ram Singh Ji who sacrificed his life for the Farmers Movement. His blessings have been the guiding light and the inspiration behind my research on this subject.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

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