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**CONSTRUCTING POLITICAL OPINIONS: A SOCIO-SEMIOTIC
ANALYSIS OF POLITICAL CARTOONS IN PAKISTANI PRINT MEDIA**

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ABSTRACT

Cartoon art is an essential aspect of political and social sarcasm, particularly in print media, where it is strategically employed to construct and shape public opinion. Though cartoons

represent an overstatement of a person or an event for producing a humorous effect, they highlight the harsh realities (i.e., social injustices, social evil, and corruption) of a society in an indirect and light manner. This article aims to explore the linguistic and semiotic aspects of cartoons in the editorial section of Pakistani English newspapers. More specifically, the study explores how Pakistani English newspapers' editorials make a satirical use of cartoon art to highlight the political and social issues; what political and social issues have been projected through cartoons; how the linguistic and semiotic choices within a cartoon art project its drawer's perception; and how these choices indirectly construct public opinion. The study followed qualitative methodology in exploring eight (08) cartoons collected through random sampling techniques from three Pakistani English newspapers—Dawn, The News, and The Nation. Kress and Leeuwen's (2002) visual communication model was employed as a theoretical framework for analyzing the linguistic and semiotic features of cartoons. The results indicate that the drawers expertly display their artistic skills in visualizing a harsh political and social issue in an indirect manner— satire and humor. These cartoons shape the worldview of the readers; therefore, they are an important aspect of print media editorials. The study is significant in highlighting aspects of cartoon art for disseminating information and constructing public opinions.

INTRODUCTION

This article deals with the socio-semiotic analysis of political cartoons in projecting political and social issues within Pakistani English Newspapers' editorials. Print media discourses play a significant role in constructing and propagating a desired version of reality to the masses. Political cartoons are effective means used by cartoonists to share their thoughts and idea about political problems, activities, or personalities in a specific period in a skillful manner. A political cartoon relies on an image, picture, or drawing to convey the message, information, and ideas whereas a typical newspaper article depends on hundreds of words for this purpose. As Heitzmann (1998) puts it: The cartoon conveys its message quickly, sometimes subtly, sometimes brashly, but generally gets its point across to more people than do editorials (P.3). The popularity of political cartoons lies in the fact that people with even minimal reading talents could understand and relate to the ideas presented effectively and humorously.

In the 21st century, media is playing a remarkable role in disseminating information around the world. Moreover, it is playing an important role in the construction of an identity of political figures, personalities, nations, and countries. Though these editorial cartoons seemingly represent a comic version of the political and social affairs of a country, they intend to effectively convey the harsh issues in an indirect but effective way. They represent various aspects of people, countries, relations, situations, and circumstances, etc. Cartoons have been a part of print media for the last two centuries. They could hardly be ignored as a humorous account of harsh social and political realities. However, comprehending a political cartoon could not be easy without knowing its context. Moreover, it depends on previous knowledge as well as good analytical skills. In such a situation, a simple cartoon could be proved more meaningful and effective than many words. In today's world, they cover almost all aspects of our lives, from popsubculture to environmental concerns. They are intended mainly to spread political information comically. Consequently, cartoonists inculcate a particular perspective in their intended audience. They construct a certain version of reality that they want to project. A political cartoon is an image that makes a factor about a political issue or a current event clear

but also makes a person laugh as well. Cartoonists use a variety of methods to get their message across through their images. It is an art that makes people think about different perspectives.

This article aims at explores the linguistic and semiotic aspects of cartoons in the editorial section of Pakistani English newspapers. More specifically, the study explores how Pakistani English newspapers' editorials make a satirical use of cartoon art to highlight the political and social issues; what political and social issues have been projected through cartoons; how the linguistic and semiotic choices within a cartoon art project its drawer's perception; and how these choices indirectly construct public opinion.

The study is significant because it reveals how cartoons could be used as an effective means to illustrate a politically correct yet comic version of harsh political and social affairs in Pakistani society. The study identifies how injustice, corruption, and other social evils are skillfully projected by the cartoonist to educate the general masses. The study will make the readers aware of the various persuasive elements in political cartoons: symbolism, analogy, exaggeration, labeling, and irony. In this way, the study will show the real picture of the socio-political milieu of Pakistan through cartoons.

RESEARCH QUESTION:

1. What political and social issues do Pakistani English newspapers' editorials cartoons highlight?
2. What linguistic and semiotic choices do the editorial cartoonists employ in making their messages effective?
3. How do these choices, linguistic and semiotic, influence their respective readers?

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to (Johnson, 1937; Willett, 1993), political cartoons have their origin in ancient Egypt's culture. In the Pakistani press, the cartoons or semiotics that cover politics, military, and judiciary have some political complexion or connotation. Editorial Cartoons affect states of minds, opinions, and perspectives on social and political matters. The understanding and interpretation of cartoons require knowledge of history, culture, and politics. Since the cartoonists do not interpret visual and rhetorical artifacts themselves, so it is impossible to examine the motivation of the cartoonists. Foss (1992) maintained that images actively reflect beliefs of society, attitudes, and values of society rather than exclusively reflecting the views of their creators. Therefore, it is concluded that cartoons are not interpreted by cartoonists. Rather, they are actively explained by their viewers(Edwards & Winkler, 1997). Several studies have focused on different variables. As Steuter et al. (2008) talk about the procedure in which these editorial cartoons are composed according to those roles that are played by them in society.

According to Lamb's (2004) point of view, political cartoons are “critical artifacts used to lampoon political leaders and their contemptible policies”. Medhurst and DeSousa (1981) analyzed the nature of cartoons. They identified basic four principal themes: “political commonplaces, literary/cultural allusions, personal character traits, and situational themes.” According to Morris (1992) says, “Cartoons depictions are usually satirical; their militant effects are just like that of armory used for launching attacks on the political leaders and the democratic process through pictorial depictions.

Political Cartoons provide particular frames approximately certain troubles in a particular time or vicinity and that they put occasions inside a discipline of meaning. Political Cartoons will be greater persuasive with people sharing identical historical, political, or financial circumstances. Even if a few authors distinguish between social remark cartoons and political cartoons inside the editorial cartoons (Ashfaq & Hussein, 2013, P. 266), we used editorial cartoons both as social commentary visual illustration and a strict political visual illustration. Political life is divided into two perspectives one is a negative angle and the other one is a high-quality perspective. According to Edwards (1995), cartoons signify political discourse and national interests. DeSousa and Medhurst (1981) argue that political cartoons perform the functions of entertainment, aggression reduction, agenda-setting, and framing and have major themes of cultural allusions, character traits of persons, situational themes, and political objectives. Analyzing the political cartoons requires the readers to interpret those cartoons according to their perspective. All these steps will lead to a better interpretation of the cartoons. In recent years, political cartoons have become a very interesting area for research. Research is being conducted on these cartoons in many countries. Each researcher tries to highlight some specific aspects that are associated with this genre. Research has been done on the structure, various characteristics, and function of these cartoons. Various techniques have also been highlighted. Handelman (1984) asserted that editorial cartoons are a special breed in mass media and analyzed political cartoons that were published in Austrian newspapers and he highlighted the stereotyped characters (Hall, 2014). He analyzed and explored how those cartoons were stereotyped. He emphasized examination of how the images interpreted Austrian citizens. Quatley (1985), in another study on political cartoons purposed that it is necessary to understand and estimate the numerically dominant tendencies contained in those cartoons. The content analytic approach was used for analysis. Some critics have addressed the limitation of this method and have degraded it as limited. Burgelin (1996) as mentioned in Andrews (2009) has also criticized it that number and numerical value don't matter but it is the place that each item receives in an image. The main drawback of this method of analysis is its inability to comprehend meaning in the image due to its more emphasis on the analysis of numerical values.

Through the medium of cartoons, Gottschalk and Greenberg (2019) examine complicated concepts such as Islamophobia and stereotypes in a manner that is both accessible and comprehensive. They analyzed political cartoons that aimed at highlighting the way Islam and Muslim identities are portrayed by the west. They selected their data from American print media. This work truly explored the image of Islam that was being created by the American print media. This work also highlights the clash of civilizations. Secondly, this book is also referring to the appearance of the clash of civilizations. The clash that is on the verge between eastern and western civilizations. Simply, it showed that how Americans are creating a negative image of Islam and how they marginalize Muslims. Shaikh, Tariq, and Saqlain (2019) analyzed the political cartoons to develop and enhance the comprehension of the various features and

structures. Attempted to evaluate Pakistani media-political cartoons to develop enhancement towards structures and features of political cartoons. In this study, the researcher has done a semiotic analysis of the cartoons of Pakistani newspapers. These cartoons were published during the campaign of the election in 2013.

The author employed qualitative as well as quantitative approaches. This work interpreted that how those political cartoons propagated political themes. El-Falaky (2019) analyzed Egyptian political cartoons by implementing Kress and van Leeuwen (2002, 2020) model. They collected their data of editorial cartoons from the Al-Arham Egyptian newspaper. The cartoons depicted Egyptian people and their officials, social relations and gender empowerment, socioeconomic status of the country, national values and identity, 30th June revolution 2013, democracy and the powerful US, social equality, political conflict of interest, etc. The results of their analysis were that through editorial cartoons Al-Ahram conveys its political and ideological message to its viewers. The political cartoons in Pakistan play an important role and have a long and healthy tradition of criticizing intolerance, injustice, political corruption, and social evils. The Analysis below shows how critically the cartoonists present the above mentioned social and political issues.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

It is a critical study where the approach is Qualitative – the data of the study deals with the visual discourse with regard to politics. Kress and Leeuwen's (1996) model of visual communication has been selected for the present study. To formulate this model, they adopted Halliday's (1978) notion of the socio-semantic nature of discourse. According to this model, two important elements can be utilized for analyzing visual images: (1) the participants, (2) the relations. Both of the two elements have been further categorized. Multimodal discourse refers to the communication taking place on multiple modes when humans interact through texts and the real time interactions. These different modes have different affordances and constraints where we discuss how different 'cultural tools' make some actions easier and some others difficult. Social practices are reflected in the discourse and images while people interact with each other (Rodney, 2018). The participants are of two types. Represented participants (nouns) are the ones that have been depicted in the images while interactive participants are those who interact with each other through images, e.g., their producers and viewers. Similarly, the relations have also been subdivided into three kinds: (1) Relations between depicted participants; (2) Relations between interactive and represented participants (regarding the former's attitude towards the latter); (3) Relations between interactive participants

A total of 32 political cartoons were collected from the three leading newspapers of Pakistan using judgment sampling. However, keeping in view the constraints of space for analysis, through systematic sampling 8 of them were selected for analysis in the article. By selecting the images of political cartoons from the three different newspapers of Pakistan, the researchers have tried to show the true reflective picture of society. This is a fact that the way cartoons are published and the aspects they represent is reflective of a social thought and manifestation. The three newspapers are the leading and the most-read newspapers of the country. As stated and claimed by Barthes (2003), images convey more than the words. Eight political cartoons were collected from the Pakistani press using a deliberate sampling technique. The newspapers of 2019 and 2020 were consulted and a number of cartoons on politics were selected.

Subsequently, the most relevant which added to the political awareness of peoples were selected for analysis equally from both the years through deliberate sampling.

DATA ANALYSIS

This analysis focuses on several elements in political cartoons. It is based on how and what kind of techniques are used by cartoonists and what impact he intends to create on the viewers. Through these cartoons, the cartoonists try to show a true picture of society. The cartoonists use various symbols and metaphors to highlight the social issues and evils which include injustice, corruption, the downfall of the economy, etc. And through these cartoons, it is also shown that how keenly they manifest national interest and public welfare agenda in their cartoons.

4.128 March 2019

Through semiotic and linguistic analysis, it shows the Pakistan Peoples' Party's representatives in Sindh and their happy faces with their party flags in their hands, but the faces of the common people are showing the worries and their daily life struggles. By looking to the appearance of the represented participants



who are represented as a layman, it seems that each day is a battle for survival for the locals who lack the necessities to lead a normal life. There is no electricity, gas, schools, medicinal care, or even access to drinking water; living in sheer deprivation, uncertainty is what defines life out here. The railway track shows that the government still thinks that they are on track and working best for their people, but the reality is revealed by looking to the people standing aside. And the biggest irony is their slogan which was first used by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto around the time the PPP's manifesto was drafted in 1966, it helped Bhutto win the 1970 elections in West Pakistan.

“Maangta hai har insaan, roti kapra aur makaan”.

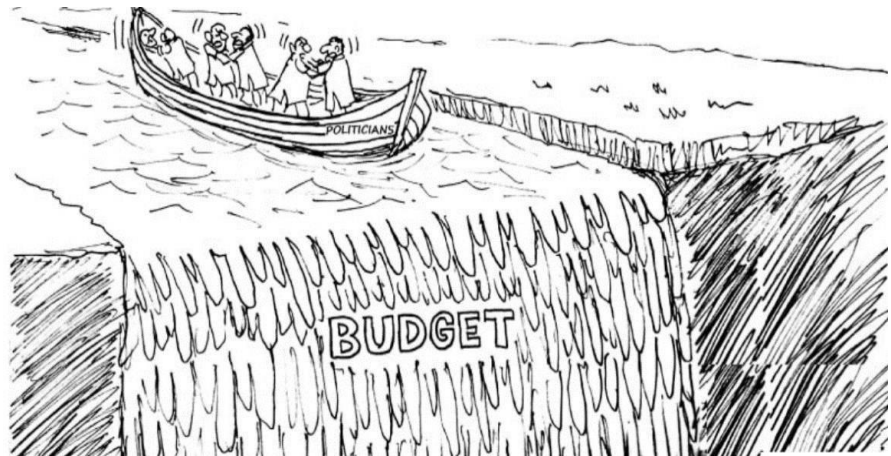
PPP is the worst nightmare for the people of Sindh. It is a shameless Provincial Government, which has turned a Province that has the potential to be the most developed into the least developed. Sindh belongs to the Bhutto family. The cartoon is a perfect depiction of the political monopoly of PPP in Sindh. First Zulfiqar Bhutto then Benazir Bhutto now Bilawal Bhutto Zardari and the process seems to continue. Elaborating it a little further, it's like the people of Sindh have accepted that PPP is their fate. They have somehow accepted the Bhutto family as the noble and they have the Supreme right to govern them. Opposite of the core values of democracy.

In a nutshell, Sindh belongs to the Bhutto's rule. The smoke going in backward directions in the picture not only represent the worse condition of the people of Sindh, but it also shows that the government of Sindh is also destructing the environment of that province for their benefits and then all the representatives get back to their homes, but their consequences remained there for

year and years. The cartoonist of this picture has generalized the whole Sindh, but the reality is that this picture depicts the lower and lower-middle-class of Sindh no other classes. It is not the dilemma of Sindh; other provinces are also following somewhat the same path but here the cartoonists highlighted the worse happenings of Sindh only. It might be due to some personal clashes with the PPP representatives as the press media is not neutral every time.

4.21st July 2019

Through linguistic analysis it is clear that the represented participants in these pictures are showing the Pakistani Politicians and through semiotic analysis, it is clear that they are fully indulged in clashes within themselves instead of focusing on that purpose for which they are elected and selected, and main victims are the ones



who have selected these politicians and soon these politicians will be the part of these sufferings too. If the budget is going downwards then it is clear that the economy is at its worst position. This is a cartoon depicting the worst economic period in the history of Pakistan. The economy is at its downfall and the politician kept their interest above national interest. The idiotic blame game was played in the arena of parliament, totally putting aside their real purpose of being there in the first place. This picture represents the non-seriousness of politicians towards the serious matter and the seriousness of Politicians towards non-serious matters.

Through this picture cartoonist does not only showed the present worse condition of Pakistan economy but also tries to make the viewers aware of their upcoming days where they will face more economic downfall as politicians are not paying any sort of attention to this economic matter, they are just working for their benefits. The main perspective of the cartoonists is to show the viewers the true picture of Pakistan's economy and the reasons behind that bitter reality. The design of this picture is depicting the downfall of the Budget and still, no concerns are shown by the politicians towards the falling budget.

4.36th Nov 2020

By linguistic analysis, this picture shows the biased attitude of the media. The characters in this picture are common people, one seems to be the father and the other one is his son. It's a matter of questioning the authentication of any



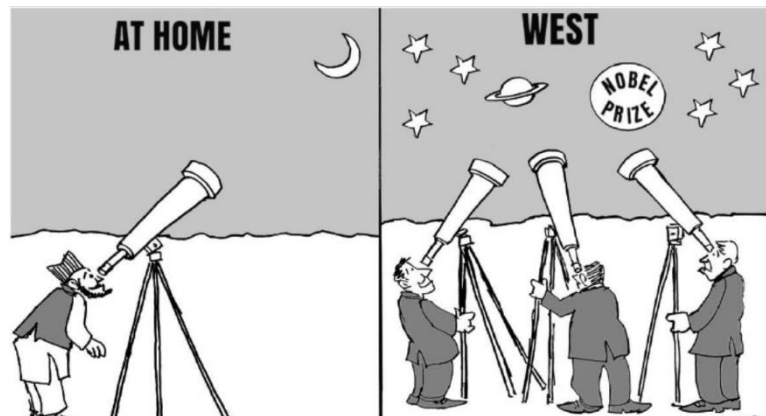
This cartoon is taken from the newspaper "The Nation".

medium. The represented participant leaves an imprint that we live in a world where authentication is a myth. There's no possible way for an average citizen to check whether he has the correct piece of information or not. We can see another dimension as well. Media is considered the 4th pillar of democracy. And if this pillar is biased and tilts in a specific direction, the building of democracy won't be perfect. One more important thing which is highlighted by cartoonists in this cartoon is, we always consider that what we are doing is correct and what others doing is wrong. We always try to find out flaws in others rather than ourselves. Here, the father signifies questioning authentication of the social media and the son is questioning the authentication of Press media.

Through this cartoon, Cartoonist has shown that now media is not neutral, and it is working for their benefits, no matter whether their coverage is authentic or not but for their social benefit they will keep posting and showing the news which is gaining the attention of the viewers. This cartoon always represents the blind followers of the media, those people which are fully dependent on media and considering that source of media to be the authentic one rather than creating or developing their own opinion regarding any matter and are only aware of the one side of the story. The main perspective of the cartoonist is to make the viewers aware of the biased attitude of media and through this design, cartoonists show the true picture of a society that how media is making us fool by just showing one picture of the story and we are considering that authentic.

4.410 October2019

Linguistically and semiotically this cartoon is a perfect comparison of us and the west but has two dimensions. First is the one in which we are being shown to use telescopes only to look at the moon to decide the new month of the lunar calendar.



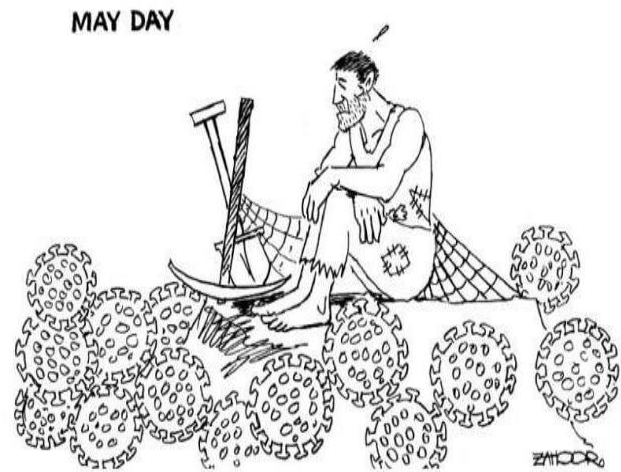
The second, which has the real meaning, is that we are not thinking out of the box. The world has captured images of black holes and we can't even get a consensus on the moon to decide, the Islamic month. In a nutshell, we are following in the footsteps of the Mughals. When they were building the lavish taj Mahal, the west was focused on universities. Time flies but we can see no innovations in our country, we are still the same as we were many years back. If we compare ourselves with the west, we are far behind them not in terms of advancements and technology even we are lacking in creativity too. One more important thing which is creating this difference more prominent is the age factor.

We are always looking for an experienced person for any task and we are ignoring the new emerging talent and new ideas always come from new talent. West people's interest and attitude of curiosity lead them to explore and harness science and technology, but we are stuck with our typical thinking. We are not ready to try something new or to explore something new. We are not polishing ourselves to get something new and secondly, we are not ready to take any risk, therefore, we are still somewhere there in past but the countries around us are competing for

each other with their ideas, creativity, and innovations. The main aim of the cartoonist is to boost the viewers to think out of the box and to polish the talent for the innovations to compete for the west.

4.5 1st May 2020

By Semiotic analysis, this represented participant is a middle-aged man in the center gives meaning to the things in his surroundings. The image represents or portrays the current scenario. In the image, this man seems to be a worker or labor wearing worn-out clothes and his tools show that the source of his income and coronavirus are surrounding the labor. From the physical appearance of the labor and by looking towards his face, it shows a lack of confidence, hopelessness, and hard struggle. The downward looks of the worker depict the miserable situation in the current moment, which is due to the coronavirus as he is not getting any work.



This cartoon is taken from the newspaper "DAWN".

Through this image and a labor single positioned in the center reflects that the cartoonist wants to draw the attention of viewers to the alarming situation and worse time for the working class and a fear of raising the unemployment level and it also reflects the reality of the current economic crisis. The tattered clothes, barefooted, unshaven, and unkempt hair, and all of such postures convey the masses' fear regarding the reopening of work and further employment. He looks sad, worried, and depressed as he is unable to earn a living because of the pandemic. In this image, fourteen COVID-19 virus structures are shown by cartoonists, which are portrayed as destructive machines destroying everything and causing destruction, especially for the lower middle class and lower class.

By linguistic analysis, the words "MAYDAY" is written in capital bold letters, relating it to the celebration of World Labor Day but the irony is that the distressed labor is looking for work to make his living, but because of the pandemic, he is unable to do so. As a whole, this whole image shows the worst time for the poor people, the one who works hard to earn a living but at this point when corona is at its peak, at the same time there is a downfall for the earning of poor people.

4.6 22nd October 2019

The cartoonist has hit hard the economic position of Pakistan as an internal matter. This cartoon represents the worse economic condition of Pakistan. This person or the represented participant who is hanged is the economy as by taking the IMF loan, our government tries to uplift the economy but in reality, it becomes worse. The cartoonist conveyed his message through symbolization. The basic purpose of this cartoon is to show that how lethal the IMF loan is for the economy of Pakistan. In this picture, it is crystal clear that our country is considered the bankrupt country in the world. The heavy weightage of IMF loan shows that over time IMF loan is becoming more powerful and strong and the economy is becoming weak. The stronger the IMF loan is weaker the economy is. The cartoonist also shows the future picture of the economy of Pakistan that in the future economy would be in worse condition and the IMF loan would be more powerful.



Figure 4.6: This picture is taken for the newspaper “The Nation”.

The worn clothes of the economy already depict that it is already suffering a lot, but this hanged man shows that still more to suffer. The cartoonist depicts how the IMF loan uplifts the economy with a heavy weightage/ burden, but it traps the loan receivers. Here is this cartoon, cartoonist depicts IMF loan as a trap in the neck. Normally, IMF loan is considered to be the medium of the uplifting economy but this cartoonist shows the other picture of the story that how IMF loans are considered destructive for the economy of Pakistan, how it is making the economy at its worse position. The worried face, worn-out clothes, seems to put a condemned person to death. This cartoon also shows the dependency of our economy on IMF loans. IMF loan is making us weak but still, our economy is dependent on that. This is an irony on the government and the nation for their ineffectiveness and inability to run the country.

4.725th November2020

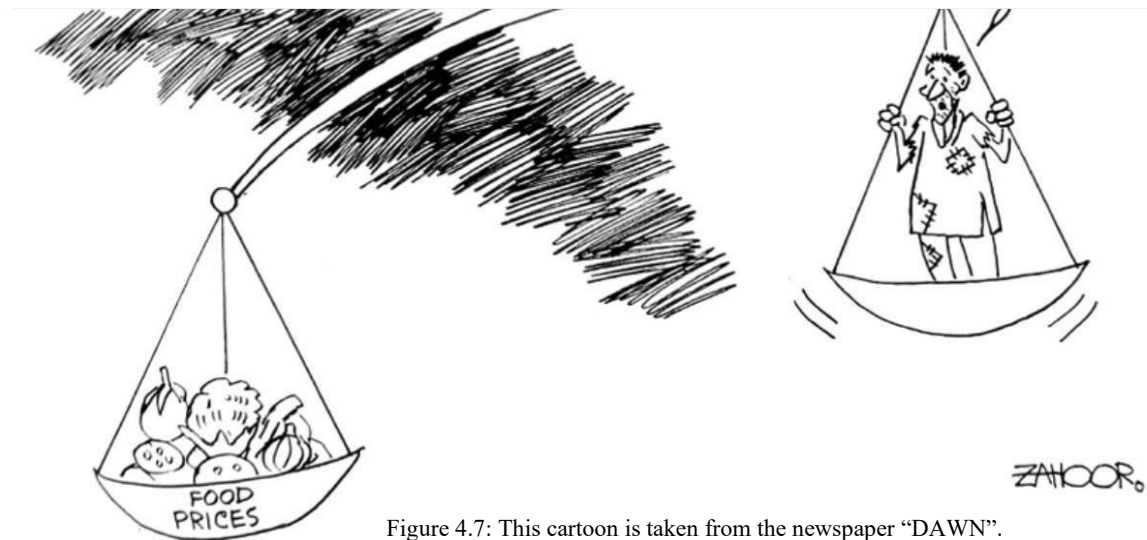


Figure 4.7: This cartoon is taken from the newspaper “DAWN”.

The cartoonists have shown the bitter reality. In this cartoon, a steelyard weight machine is carrying the weightage of a person, a person who is representing the whole middle-lower class and on the other side the basic necessity of us and that is food and here there is a comparison of food prices with the value of the middle lower-class person. The irony in this picture is, the humans who are considered as the ASHRAF UL MAKHLOQAAT, are light in weight as compare to the prices of food. It is simply inflation. The prices of food necessities are higher than the lives of humans. This means a lower-middle-class person cannot easily afford the necessities of daily life. This cartoon depicts that food is not part of life, it is considered to be life.

In this balanced machine, the person is already in a bad condition which reflects his helplessness and hopelessness. The way a person is looking at the food and its prices, it is crystal clear that a person is unable to buy those food items as they carry more weight than a poor person can afford. One more important thing which is evident in this cartoon is that Pakistan is an agricultural country but still the food which is being compared to the man is not any sort of meat, it is simply vegetables and fruits, therefore, the biggest irony is that a country which is growing vegetables and fruits itself is suffering from crisis and people within that country is unable to buy those food items which is easily available. The cartoon depicts that the food is available thought but not affordable.

4.817th November2020

The representative participants standing above the cloud and are four in number, they are the representatives of the administration. The two-person standing below the cloud with their shocked faces are representing a layman. The



Figure 4.8: This picture is taken from the newspaper” The Nation”.

term” WEALTHIEST LAWMAKERS” is reflecting the heavy pockets of the people of administration, the ones who are responsible for making laws are themselves breaking the laws by making their own pockets heavy. Wealthiest lawmakers never make any law by considering the situation of a layman, they pass any law just by looking into that from their perspective. It's a harsh reality that in this 21st century, still, the concept of proletariats and bourgeois exist.

This is the dark side of capitalism. Those who are not rich enough live their lives, fantasizing about a lavish living standard while some live that lifestyle. The cloud which is separating the lawmakers and common people shows that lawmakers observe the scenario from a different angle which is completely not in the favor of common people. The cartoonist is portraying that the representatives of administration or the landlords are working for their benefits and they are not considering the condition of common people. Here the wealthiest lawmakers are the liberals who consider their perspective to be the broad perspective but the ones for whom they are making laws are always becoming the victims of that broad perspective. Lawmakers are making laws of their interest and due to that, common people are not satisfied, and their worried faces can be seen in this cartoon. The difference of distance and height of lawmakers from the common people simply shows the difference in their perspective and actions that what common people think is opposite of what administration think and do.

CONCLUSION:

Nowadays, Political cartoons are a part of Press media and are present in every newspaper around the globe. These editorial cartoons can change people's points of view and they are used to convey the message, communicate information and ideas most effectively and humorously. The use of verbal communication like in articles and columns may cause issues or troubles for the writers but in the case of cartoonist depictions, this can be avoided. In Pakistani print media, political cartoons are used to criticize the injustice of the political system, the misuse of political powers, and the vast distance between the representatives of government and the public. These cartoons strike directly into the minds of the viewers through visual images and make them aware of the sociopolitical evils in such an effective way that it conveys more than an entire article, or a column may do. These political cartoons show the public thoughts about their government representatives. Even if you follow these political cartoons regularly it can also cause a change in the viewers' perceptions about political figures. Sometimes these editorial cartoons can also cause some controversies such as in 2006 and 2007. Due to these two issues, afterward, some rules and regulations were setups for the publication of editorial cartoons. These cartoons also have a universal language which everyone can read even a person with a minimal education too but in the case of a foreigner, it would be difficult for them to decode the Pakistani editorial cartoons, as they lack the background knowledge to interpret the current situation and events. As the sum of the discussion above, Therefore, it is observed that these editorial cartoons present the true image of the matters of the society. The images analyzed and discussed above show that cartoonists mostly seek the welfare of the country and the public. Therefore, it is justified that editorial cartoons are the epitome of national interest.

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