

# Comparative Analysis of the Open and the Caravan Magazine's Coverage of Farmers' Protest Potrick

Maseera Khan\*

## Abstract

On September 17, 2020, three farm laws were passed in Lok Sabha, viz., The Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020; The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020; and The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020. The laws received major backlash from the farmers whom they were intended for. The ordinances led to the largest, peaceful sit-in protest in the history of mankind. The issue also attracted global attention (which invited criticism from the mainstream media). The incident was a litmus test of balanced reporting. In this paper, the coverage of the protests shows that the media constructs reality and holds the power to tilt the audience in favour of or against one player of the story. The discussion focuses on two English magazines- The Open and The Caravan, and their reportage on the subject matter. Frame analysis is utilized to streamline the stance of the magazines.

## Keywords:

The Caravan • The Open, Farmers' Protest • BJP • Farm laws • Framing • Magazines

## Introduction

The unique ability to communicate through symbols, signs, and most importantly language is what sets human beings apart from the animal kingdom. We think and formulate our thoughts into decipherable messages which are then transferred to other human beings for successful communication. The act of interacting in all its forms is a vital element of humankind. In the past decades, fast advancing technology has rendered communication quick and easy. It has been facilitated by the ubiquitous media and there's no escaping it. There's a heavy reliance on news channels, newspapers, digital news portals, for information. We make sense of the world with the information that we receive from someone whom we've never met. This increased dependence on news outlets makes it imperative that we analyse the media that we consume incessantly. The Indian democracy has had a turbulent time. With two protests emerging a year apart, the media's role in upholding democracy has been widely debated. Now and then, an event occurs that redefines the power of the media and the future of the country. Farmers' Protest was that moment of truth. We saw media outlets, following different ideologies, pitted against each other. And because media constructs reality for the public, it is important to analyse the extent of this framing. Ever since the laws were introduced, they were vehemently opposed by the farmers hailing from Punjab and Haryana. They gathered in large crowds and marched to the capital to get heard. During their journey,

they were hindered by the police who tried to stop them from moving to Delhi [1]. They were attacked with water cannons and tear gas. The farmers have been sitting on the borders of Delhi for months now. They demand that the laws are repealed and Minimum Support Price is ensured by law. The government on the other hand has repeatedly said that these laws are meant only for the benefit of the farmers throughout the country and has given vague assurances that the MSP would not be done away with. The media in a democracy plays a significant role in swaying the audience's opinion. But for the first time, it has struggled to cover an event and report information to the public from the ground. With the government cracking down on Twitter handles of Farmer Unions and media outlets like The Caravan, the public has watched the chain of events unfold with bated breath. The movement had received a highly polarised treatment from media right from the beginning; where a faction strived to brandish the cause as anti-national and separatist, and the other that aimed at bringing out the farmers' side of the story, and resultantly, opposing the government. The research must be done to bridge the gap in the existing literature on the understanding of Indian media. It will lead to a better understanding of the content we consume and the sources we consume it from. A study like this makes the audience more aware, conscious and responsible with information. It ultimately makes them informed citizens who can make educated choices.

Department of Journalism Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, Delhi, India

\*Address to correspondence: Maseera Khan, Department of Journalism Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, Delhi, India Email: maseeraiissocial@gmail.com

**Copyright:** © 2021 Khan M. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the creative commons attribution license which permits unrestricted use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

**Received:** 02 November, 2021; **Accepted:** 16 November, 2021; **Published:** 23 November, 2021

## Aim and Objectives

The fourth pillar of democracy is an agent beyond the purview of government. It is independent, it is powerful and it has a responsibility to the public. In recent times, these guiding principles to media have been debased. One can easily tell that there is a certain bias that comes in the way of holding truth to power—the ultimate goal of journalism. In times like these, it is crucial to find out that whether or not the news that we consume is factual, free of prejudice, and serves society. The aim is to understand the relevance of digital print media in the current political climate. The Open and The Caravan are popular magazines that are not limited to their printed version. They are accessible through their fast-paced websites making them convenient and eventually enabling them to make an impression on the audience. The objective is to study the coverage from July 2020 to July 2021 and create a comparative frame analysis of Farmers' Protest and its construction of social reality. The paper also aims to understand the background and inclination of The Open and The Caravan and how it impacted their respective coverage of the issue in consideration. There appear to be lacunae in this area of research. Several studies have been carried out comparing English newspapers, but barely any on magazines.

Does the magazines' reportage differ in their projection of the farmers' protest?

Does the coverage make for a repository of balanced reporting and gives insight into a clear understanding of the issue?

What are the prominent frames that have been used?

## Review of Literature

Due to a lack of empirical research, there's no elaborate definition of framing. People interpret what is going around them through a primary framework (Goffman, E., 1974). Framing Analysis has its roots in sociology. According to Entman, (1993) "to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation or treatment recommendation for the item described." The existing text on frame and framing analysis is limited and doesn't constitute a conclusive study. The concept of the social construct of reality has been developed over time. Frames are organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world (Reese, 2001). Frames constitute references for the public about what is important, and the media has great power because of this. When studying news, one must pay close attention to the framing of the event as it is embedded in the language itself. The placement of photographs, the adjectives used in flashing headlines, all of this is a conscious framing effort on the part of the editors. When media tells us a story, it is constructing the reality for us by narrating the event. This always has a risk of distortion. Withholding certain elements can lead to the distortion of the truth. It is noteworthy that persuasion is the act of shifting an opinion by providing news information. Framing, on the other hand, is much more subtle. It is done to redefine the opinion or perception of the audience. And when done persistently, over time, it is effective in doing so. Successful political communication requires the framing of events, issues, and actors in ways that promote perceptions and

interpretations that benefit one side while hindering the other. The text and photographs are inserted in a frame to subtly influence the audience. When deducing frames in news stories, the placement of photos, the usage of keywords in headings, highlighting the cause of one side repeatedly, are all taken into account. These are conscious choices made by journalists, editors, media gatekeepers to give a certain angle to an event that may be a product of their personal or organisation's bias. In his Cascading Activation Model, Entman (2003) describes the notion of 'frame parity'. He elucidates parity as a comprehensive narrative that has an equal counter-narrative. To achieve frame parity, the news must proffer a counter-frame that presents an alternative account, problem statement, cause, remedy and moral judgment holding as much value as the government.

### The farm laws

According to an article published by the Indian Express, The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020, provides for contract farming, under which farmers will produce crops as per contracts with corporate investors for a mutually agreed remuneration. The Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020 liberates farmers by giving them the freedom to sell anywhere. The Essential Commodities Act, 2020 passed as an amendment to the existing ECA, 1955. It is aimed at deregulating commodities such as cereals, pulses, oilseeds, edible oils, onion and potatoes.

### The government

The laws are meant to reform the agriculture sector and allow private players in the market. The amendments make changes to the storage, pricing and sale of farmers' produce. It outlines rules for contract farming that allows farmers to modify their production to meet a specific buyer's demand. The most drastic change these laws propose is that of being able to sell anywhere, outside the Agriculture Produce Marketing Committees, which provide a minimum support price to the farmers. The laws in question enable the farmers to sell out of this mandi system to eradicate the "commission agents".

### The farmers

However, the farmers have concerns of their own. They feel that while all of this sounds well-meaning in writing, they don't know for sure how it will turn out in reality. Some states in the country do allow the farmers to sell anywhere, but these amendments constitute a national framework. The farmers fear this will lead to the elimination of the mandi system and the assured prices, stripping them off of security [2]. They state that in the absence of MSP they won't have a bargaining chip to negotiate with when dealing in contract farming. Hence, they demand that the MSP is ensured by law and the three laws be repealed as they do not want it. The concerns of the farmers are serious and demand serious action.

### Brief history of the magazines

Open has launched a decade ago, in a narrative journalism format. The magazine was caught up in a controversy in 2018. Cobrapost, a critically acclaimed Indian non-profit news website, known for investigative journalism, carried out a sting operation where a

journalist went undercover and introduced himself as a BJP representative who had come to further a Hindutva campaign in the magazine. The journalist met Karl Mistry, General Manager, Pankaj Jayaswal, Associate Publisher, at the Mumbai office and flew to Kolkata to meet Basab Ghosh, Marketing Head. In the interview, the magazine staff can be seen agreeing to run a smear campaign against the opposition parties. In fact, at a point in the investigation, Ghosh states that The Open follows a Pro-Modi editorial policy. He goes on to say that nobody supports the sangh as much as we do. According to the existing analysis and the revelations made in the sting operation, it is evident that the magazine is biased to the Right and follows a pro-government policy. The Caravan is also a decade old magazine. Its current political editor is Hartosh Singh Bal who was also the political editor of the Open. Bal was controversially fired as his views had led to the group's owner, Sanjiv Goenka make enemies. The Caravan has often attacked RSS, a right-wing, volunteer organisation that has close ties to the ruling party-BJP. The magazine is often condemned for its anti-political Hinduism or Hindutva stance. And it is said to have a left-wing bias; however, no conclusive study or analysis has been carried out to prove this claim.

Date	Title	Stance
44093	Protesting Punjab farmers say centre's farm bills will lead to corporate monopoly	Pro-Farmers
44099	Farm bills: Farmer unions in Punjab ask political parties to stay away from their protests	Pro-Farmers
44102	If rulers get stubborn it's a crime to sit at home: Punjab farmers' protests get popular support	Pro-Farmers
44103	Government should stop lying about MSP: Haryana farmer union head Gurnam Chaduni on farm bills (Interview)	Anti-Farm Laws and Govt.
44105	After welcoming it in Parliament, Sukhbir Badal claims he opposed CAA, Article 370	Anti-State opposition
44112	In Photos: Ten thousand farmers protest in Sirsa, call for Dushyant Chautala's resignation	Pro-Farmers
44123	Punjab assembly holds special session to bring in legislation to oppose farm laws	Balanced
44161	On eve of Delhi Chalo protest, Punjab farmers prepare langar at sealed Haryana border	Pro-Farmers
44165	Farmers at Kundli upset over media misrepresentation, accusations; confront "godli media"	Pro-farmers, Anti-media
44165	Farmers' bodies firm at Kundli border sit-in, reject attempts by	Pro-Farmers
	Yogendra Yadav, VM Singh to shift to Burari	
44167	"This is a mass movement": Haryana's farmers boost protest, call Punjab farmers "big brothers"	Pro-Farmers
44168	"When those in power get arrogant, they lose:" UP farmers to join protests	Pro-farmers, Anti-BJP
44170	No divisiveness here: Farmers welcome all solidarity at the Kundli protest	Pro-Farmers
44176	Going by the demands of its cadres, compromise is out of the question for farmer leaders	Pro-Farmers
44176	Cannot call this a "Punjab question" any more: Central Trade Unions reiterate support for farmers	Pro-Farmers
44178	"It is developing as a mass movement": Farmers' protest finds support across society	Pro-Farmers
44178	Caught between debt and landlessness, Punjab's protesting women assert fight for rights	Pro-Farmers
44182	"This is the time to unite": Trade unions, labourers support the farmers' protest	Pro-Labourers
44185	In court, the government continues its game to drive a wedge between farm protest leadership	Anti-BJP
44188	We'll be at corporates' mercy: Farmers march in Mumbai in solidarity with Delhi protests	Pro-Farmers
44191	Cultivating Deception: The Modi government's response to the farmer protests echoes colonial rhetoric	Anti-BJP
44195	Protesting farmers and Kundli workers support each other in fight for their rights	Pro-farmers
44198	Far from Delhi, frustrated with leadership, farmers at Rajasthan sit-in break barricades	Pro-farmers
44203	Image that Modi government doesn't retract statements is shattered: BKU (EU) head Joginder Ugrahan	Pro-farmers
44209	Left, Khaps, Gender, Caste: The solidarities	Anti-BJP

	propping up the farmers' protest		
44212	Bihar's failing PACS system shows what could happen after the farm laws	Anti-farm laws	
44213	Telangana farmers didn't join protests because MSP is already below costs: GV Ramanjaneyulu (INTERVIEW)	Anti-farm laws	
44221	Reportage, Field Notes: Dispatches from the farmer protests (February Issue)	Pro-farmers	
44221	Ghazipur residents say UP police trying its best to thwart Republic Day tractor rally	Anti-govt.	
44223	The New Khalistan Conspiracy The government is playing the same game that once led Punjab to disaster	Anti-govt.	
44227	Muzaffarnagar riots and legacy issues: Rakesh Tikait's unlikely rise to farmer leadership	Pro-farmers	
44228	Spaces and Times: How cultural initiatives nurture collective activity at the farmers' protests (February Issue)	Pro-farmers	
44229	Navreet Singh death: Eyewitnesses, family accuse police; expert says wounds consistent with bullet injury; police deny	Anti-govt.	
44232	Revolution in their blood: Two women whose fathers were killed by Khalistanis on why they are protesting the farm laws (Video)	Pro-farmers	
44233	Punjab Panchayats, lawyers step up efforts to aid farmers' protests post 26 January rally	Pro-farmers	
44234	Over 20,000 gather at Haryana's Charkhi Dadri mahapanchayat against farm laws	Pro-farmers	
44245	Tikait's 28 January speech, farm stir pivot western Uttar Pradesh's farmers against BJP	Pro-farmers	
44247	How the "toolkit" FIR connects the contents of Google documents with the 26 January violence	Anti- Delhi Police	
44249	In photos: Over a lakh farmers, labourers pledge unity at Mazdoor Kisan Ekta Maha rally at Barnala	Pro-farmer	
44250	Rakesh Tikait, Yogendra Yadav address thousands gathered at Sikar mahapanchayat in Rajasthan against farm laws	Pro-farmer	
44252	Thousands attend Kariri mahapanchayat to support Rakesh Tikait, farm protests	Pro-farmer	
44252	A century apart, currents of dissent bridge the farmers' protests and the Muzara Movement	Pro-farmer	
44253	"Labourers' fight bigger than that of the farmers": Strength and solidarity at the Mazdoor Kisan Ekta rally (VIDEO)	Pro-farmer	
44256	Mandi, Market and Modi: The BJP government's efforts to remake India's agricultural economy for large private players (March Issue)	Anti-BJP	
44256	Fielding Fire: The farm laws are an assault on Shudra power (Politics/ March Issue)	Anti-BJP	
44259	Why the farmer protests threaten the RSS: In the Hindu Rashtra, Sikhs must be either protectors or traitors	Anti-BJP	
44277	In the farm laws protests, are Punjab's landless peasants getting left behind?	Pro-labourers	
44295	How the Adani Group is poised to control the agricultural market following the farm laws	Anti-govt.	
44319	Six months on, farmers at Delhi's borders are here to stay	Pro-farmer	

**Table 1:** The caravan magazine tracking.

## Methodology

### Research method

The research follows the content analysis method. It is a research tool that comprises analysing the contents of a given data. It focuses on the presence of words, themes, and so on quantifiable data. With this method, the relation of the placed words, photographs, themes can be analysed quantitatively. Qualitative content analysis reads data deeply and enables the unearthing of underlying motives and meanings in contrast to quantitative analysis which only highlights the frequency counts leading to oversimplification of complex data and failing to take intricacies into account. Although, the latter does make for reliable data, and so has been employed to support the qualitative content analysis [3]. The selection of the magazines is done based on their circulation and availability. Hence, a combination of qualitative and quantitative content analysis of The Open and The

Caravan magazine would form the basis of research. The period in question is July 2020 to July 2021.

### Magazine profiles

The Open Magazine is a venture of the RP-Sanjiv Goenka group. It was launched in April 2009 in 12 cities. It is a weekly English magazine that covers a range of topics like politics, economy, society, international affairs, and sports, among others. Over the years, it has grown to attain a pan-India status. The Caravan was re-established in January 2010 and has since published 127 issues monthly. The Caravan is India's first magazine devoted to narrative journalism and strives to investigate stories that hold the powerful to account. The organisation has received several prestigious journalism awards like the Louis M. Lyons Award, Ramnath Goenka Award, Ladli Award, and Red Ink Award.

Date	Title	Stance
44099	Liberating the Indian Farmer: The farm sector reforms will end monopolies and give neglected states a level playing field	Pro-BJP
44101	'To Build a Unified Market, Establish a National Online Spot Exchange' Farmer protests are more against what was not said in the three farm Bills than what was said, notes IGIDR economist Sudha Narayanan	Pro-Farmer, Balanced
44127	Punjabi Rap: Political brinkmanship in Punjab has taken a dangerous turn after the farm reform laws	Anti-opposition
44169	Comment is Free: The Canadian prime minister's remarks on the farmers' agitation add to his record on gaffes	Pro-government
44169	Rage and Reality: Punjab's farmers are at Delhi's doors demanding a rollback of the farm reform laws—reforms meant to help poorer states that today produce much more than Punjab under more difficult economic conditions. Isn't it coercion by a pampered lot?	Pro-BJP, Pro-Farm Laws, Anti-farmers
44190	Portrait of a Protest: When subversion becomes a feature of democracy	Anti-farmers, Anti-CAA Protest
44204	The Politics of Grievance: The cycle of agitations against the Modi government is unlikely to end anytime soon	Pro-BJP, Pro-Narendra Modi
44211	The Court in the Middle: After the court passed an	Anti-farmers

interim order on a clutch of petitions related to three farm reform laws passed by Parliament, it found itself in the midst of a firestorm

44218	Nawabs of Negativity: Look who has lost faith in Indian democracy	Pro-government
44225	Rampage at Red Fort: The tactic and the goal of the farmers' protest were devious: 'invade' Delhi in such numbers that the government is forced to react violently	Anti-farmers
44225	Protesting Too Much? Is Modi Derangement Syndrome at work?	Anti-farmers
44227	Covering the Protests and Counter-Protests at Singhu: An account of the drama that unfolded at the epicentre of the farmers' protests	Pro-farmers
44229	Protest and Pandemonium: Protests are society's pressure valve. The problem begins when small-group interests trample upon others' interests	Anti-farmers, Anti-Punjab
44232	Farmer Friendly: Food subsidy and minimum support price data show the persistence of the government's generosity	Pro-Farm laws, Pro-government
44234	Celebrities as Mercenaries: Rihanna and Thunberg highlight the pitfalls of exploiting stardom to champion a cause	Pro-farm laws
44239	Punjab and Protest: A forgotten legacy	Pro-government
44246	Fixing the Narrative: The cost of the failure to articulate the truth on farm laws	Pro-farm laws
44253	A Toolkit for the Post-Truth World: If you care about democracy and liberty, stop distorting the undistorted	Anti-farmers, Anti-CAA Protest
44267	Punjab: Harvesting a Protest If there is trouble from a resurgent Khalistani politics, it is unlikely to follow the roadmap of the 1980s. Siddharth Singh travels across Punjab to find out what has changed	Anti-Punjab
44344	The End of an Agitation: Something that has not gone unnoticed in the politically aware community	Pro-Government
44407	The Redundancy of an Agitation (News Briefs)	Anti-farmers, Pro-Government

Table 2: The open magazine tracking.



### Sampling procedure

The universe of this study comprises all the editions of the selected magazines from the calendar year July 1, 2020, to July 1, 2021. It also includes all the pieces published on their websites.

The research follows a complete census during the 12 months and doesn't study a random sample. It has been almost a year since the three laws were framed and passed leading to the protest.

Taking a random sample would've led to risks of missing out on stories on the farmers' protest.

### Presentation

This study is made up of news stories/briefs, essays, cover stories, features, editorials, articles, columns, photo essays, interviews, and videos published in the selected magazines.

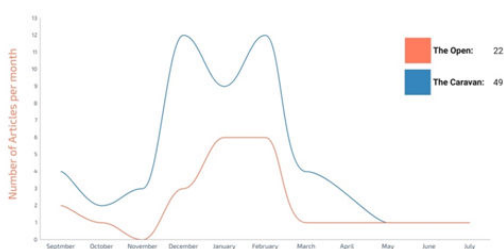
### Placement

The paper observes closely the placement of the stories, whether they made it to the cover page or remained restricted to the inside pages of the issues.

- Cover Page
- Editorial Page
- Website

## Discussion and Findings

Coverage of Farmer Protest

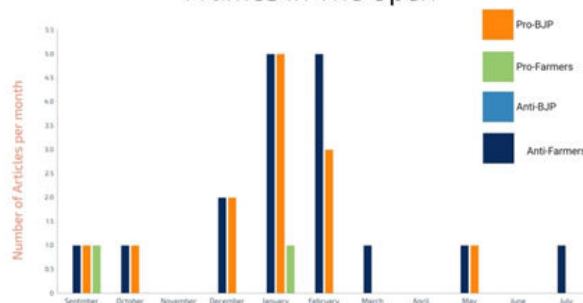


**Figure 1:** The Caravan produced a large volume of news reports on the farmers' protest. Detailed ground reports were carried out where the journalists engaged with the farmers.

Upon analysing the coverage carried out by Open, it was found that the magazine started paying regular attention to the farmers' protest as late as December 2020. Before that, hardly any pieces were done on the matter, barely three- out of which two were done by the editor at large, Siddharth Singh, who has written the most on the matter and one interview conducted by Ullekh NP. The magazine had avoided writing on the issue as long as it could. It was only when the movement gained immense popularity that the articles were written and the matter was addressed. The magazine has carried out twenty-two pieces during a year. Out of these twenty-two articles, only two look at the farmer's issue with sympathy and ask genuine questions. These pieces were done by Ullekh NP. His interview with, IGIDR

economist Sudha Narayanan, called, 'To Build a Unified Market, Establish a National Online Spot Exchange', is insightful. He asked legitimate questions which addressed what these laws would mean for the farmers and the agriculture sector [4]. The questions were intelligent and fair and did not favour any side. Rather sincerely attempted to understand the question in hand. He asked the economist, what was the hurry behind passing these laws, and if contract farming is viable in India or not. Another piece by Ullekh was done in January 2021. This was written in a long-form, narrative style. By this time, Red Fort violence had already taken place. He wrote an account of his visit to a protest site, which also happens to be the only article written based on the reports from the ground, titled, 'Covering the Protests and Counter-Protests at Singhu'. He describes the scene at the Singhu border a day before Republic Day. The spirit was high as everyone was psyched for the tractor rally. He interacted with elderly men, women and youngsters alike. He narrates that he was received by beaming faces and laddoos. For the first and the last time, Open engaged with the farmers and talked to them. Ullekh also described what he called a 'violent assault' on farmers. Some outsiders were lent inside the protest site that then pelted stones at the farmers. All of this happened while the police kept watching idly. The account narrates events that took place at the site and refrains from inserting opinions. Most of the articles published are written by Siddharth Singh. He started covering the issue in September and did not try once to interact with the farmers or the government. All of his work is opinion based, biased and vehemently anti-farmers. The anti-farmers framing has been done persistently and certain keywords have been used repeatedly like professional agitators, synthetic protest, combatant farmers, Khalistan elements, pampered farmers, and rotten cause. The earliest piece, 'Liberating the Indian Farmer', has carefully used the word, 'liberating' to frame the reform laws as good and benevolent. In the entire article, he criticizes the opposition parties-the Congress, SAD, etc and praises only the BJP and Narendra Modi. It also took jibes at the farmers by using adjectives like, 'swanky new tractors' to show that the farmers are financially sound and even rich. A similar frame is progressed in the article, 'Protesting Too Much', where 'unshackled' is used to further the message.

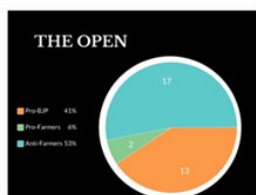
Frames in The Open



**Figure 2:** The coverage done by The Open, on the whole, is Pro-Government, Pro-farm laws, and anti-farmers. It has constantly tried to malign the movement.

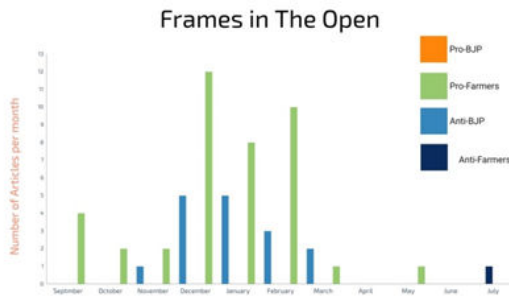
The coverage done by The Open, on the whole, is Pro-Government, Pro-farm laws, and anti-farmers. It has constantly tried to malign the movement by inserting keywords like 'Khalistan', 'Shaheen Bagh', 'anti-CAA', 'pampered farmers', and so on. It is

noteworthy that comparisons to anti-CAA protests are made repeatedly to revive the memory of the event and incite remorse towards this movement too. The magazine initially tries to turn things around in the favour of the government by making arguments based on numbers, statistics, etc. But then resorts to propagate this message that the government is fighting tooth and nail for the welfare of the farmers but political actors like the union leaders, opposition, separatists are spreading lies about the farm laws and instigating this agitation. More than thrice it is mentioned that the government has won with a phalanx-like majority. It paints the ruling party as the one who deserves sympathy, and on other occasions, a force to reckon with because it has been undoing the mistakes of the previous governments like Nehru, Indira Gandhi and Manmohan Singh's. The magazine labelled the farmers' protest as "agitations", a term it describes in one of its articles different from 'protest'. It says that agitation involves riots, blockades, arsons, strikes happen with little regard for public convenience. The word, agitation, appears twice in titles like, 'The End of An Agitation' and 'The Redundancy of An Agitation'. The word placement and the title itself is a testament to anti-farmer framing. Other than biased titles, these articles explain how the entire farmer's movement has 'thinned out' and failed. It praises the government for its patient strategy. According to the Open, the movement has died out, and it was all in vain. And one of the articles also ended on the note of Pakistan's involvement in the agitation and a conspiracy of the ISI to destabilise the border government. The word 'protest' appeared six times in the headlines. Except for one, all the headlines were against the farmers and repent the right to protest. In an article titled, 'Protesting Too Much?' the Republic Day violence is compared to the Capitol Hill attacks by Trump supporters. It compared the invasion of Red Fort as a scene fresh out of a Bollywood B movie. It claims the critics of the farm laws to be suffering from Modi Derangement Syndrome and called Red Fort a militant expression. Such narrative has been pushed and propagated throughout the coverage. Most commonly found frames and themes across the reportage are that the farmer's protest is just another version of Shaheen Bagh, the farmers are being misled, there's a bigger conspiracy behind this agitation, it's all politics and power struggle between the states, this is just about the farmers of Punjab and Haryana and the other states are happy with these reforms, the government is a beacon of modernity and growth, and so on. It is undeniable that the Open is only telling the government's side of the story. It lacks the basic elements of good journalism that are to tell both sides of the story. It fails miserably to achieve frame parity. It does not put forward a counter-narrative at all. It only writes to defend the government in one way or another. The reportage is unbalanced and highly biased.



**Figure 3:** The Caravan produced a large volume of news reports on the farmers' protest. Detailed ground reports were carried out where the journalists engaged.

As illustrated in Figures 1 and 3, The Caravan produced a large volume of news reports on the farmers' protest. Detailed ground reports were carried out where the journalists engaged with the farmers, the union leaders, labourers and so on. It is irrefutable that the magazine inclines towards the farmers and is critical of the government and the three laws. It started covering the issue in September 2020. In its reportage, it tries to explain what the issue is all about and puts forward both the sides of the farmers and the governments. Though, it focused more on the farmers' plight. When it wrote about the events that unravelled on Republic day, the magazine was careful and questioned the government. In the article titled, "The New Khalistan Conspiracy", it stated that people like Ajit Doval have dealt with Punjab before and that Delhi Police even gave statements that it had information on certain Khalistani elements and ISI agents would hijack and disrupt the tractor rally, so why didn't it do anything to stop it. It ends by calling the government 'egoistic'. In most of the pieces carried out by the magazine, there were fears allayed by the farmers that these laws are going to benefit corporate owners Ambani and Adani. 'We'll be at corporates' mercy: Farmers march in Mumbai in solidarity with Delhi protests', the frame here is in favour of the farmers and amplifies their claim of 'big corporates' getting benefitted from the laws. They derided the Reliance group and disparaged the use of Jio sims. Though, Caravan does not mention the felling of 1500 Jio towers in Punjab prominently. It is clear from the positive framing that they have tried to dispel all the popular frames/narratives about the farmers. The magazine attempts to establish that the farmers are not dumb, deceived and misinformed. They are well aware of what the laws mean and are not being misled by anyone. They mentioned the growing discontent amongst the farmers against the mainstream media. They are sceptical and wary of what 'Godi' media says about them. The analysis revealed that framing farmer's protests being similar to the anti-CAA protests done by Caravan is quite different from that of Open. The only parallel it draws between the two protests is that of the coverage. In 'Farmers at Kundli upset over media misrepresentation, accusations; confront "godia media", it claims that the malicious coverage of both the movements is eerily similar. It also does not use Shaheen Bagh to evoke any emotion, repeatedly and unnecessarily. On the other hand, in the article, 'Going by the demands of its cadres, compromise is out of the question for farmer leaders', it ends by saying that farmers' protest is different from anti-CAA as the government is unable to split or isolate it and the farmers are standing strong [5]. The three interviews done by the magazine were insightful. They spoke to farm union leaders and one industry expert. They did not engage with the government either. In its video coverage, the headlines read, 'Revolution in their blood: Two women whose fathers were killed by Khalistanis on why they are protesting the farm laws' and 'Labourers' fight bigger than that of the farmers': Strength and solidarity at the Mazdoor Kisan Ekta rally'. The placement of words like 'revolution' and 'solidarity' is deliberate and conscious. They have been placed to evoke a sense of harmony and support in the reader. A lot of articles were written to reflect the protests unity. These articles focused not only on-farm unions but farmer-labourer unity, Sikh-Muslim unity, and Dalit-OBC support.



**Figure 4:** The Caravan attempts to paint the protests in a good light. Its coverage is positive and amplifies the farmers' voice.

The Caravan attempts to paint the protests in a good light. Its coverage is positive and amplifies the farmers' voice only. It does not constantly go out on a limb to criticize or bad mouth the government per se, rather strives to bring out stories of the farmers. In a headline like this, 'Far from Delhi, frustrated with leadership, farmers at Rajasthan sit-in break barricades', it is not hard to notice that it tilts towards the farmers and blames the self-claimed leaders like Yogendra Yadav who have been masquerading as an ally and representative. It was a detailed report of what happened in Rajasthan and how farmers were attacked by the police when the leaders said they are not farmers but anti-social elements. The common themes in the coverage were state politics, farmers' concerns, the mass mobilisation of the protests, and so on. The Caravan has been critical of the RSS and thus the BJP. A certain left bias is visible in its coverage but that cannot be used to negate the extensive, abundant reportage that it has carried out on the issue. The longest, opinionated piece, 'Mandi, Market and Modi: The BJP government's efforts to remake India's agricultural economy for large private players', was published as the cover story of the monthly's March Issue. It was written by the political editor, Hartosh Singh Bal. This humongous essay says that "the farm laws were rammed through the parliament". It takes jibes at the government constantly, condemning them for propagating a false narrative against the farmers being misled. It also criticizes the economists who welcomed the laws like Ashok Gulati and Gita Gopinath. It goes on to debunk the claims made by the government about the protest. The tone of the essay is anti-government, pro-farmers, anti-farm laws and highly critical of the BJP. Caravan spoke to the farmers. Elderly men, women, youngsters, people from all walks of life and reflected what the mainstream media had refused to. From time to time, it criticized the malicious propaganda propelled by mainstream media like Aaj Tak, Zee News, and Republic on the government's cue. One can find thorough reports on what, why and how of the issue. It worked relentlessly to counter the popular narratives that were being promoted by the administration, and elites, as mentioned in the Cascading Activation Model. Since 63% of the coverage done by The Caravan was news reports; they talked at length about the farmers and their opinions instead of the journalist. All the headlines, by-lines, mentioned in the appendix are testament to the positive framing of farmers and negative of the government, corporates and mainstream media.

## Conclusion

In an idyllic world, the press coverage would be balanced and free of bias. But since we don't live in a utopian world, achieving parity remains a distant dream. Many factors come in the way of balanced and fair reporting. Financial reasons, government advertisements and elites remain one of the driving factors of how a media outlet covers any issue. In the case of The Caravan, since it follows a subscription-based model, the chances of it being influenced by investors remain low. Not to mention that its coverage of farmers' protests and previous events got the magazine the prestigious **Louis M. Lyons Award for Conscience and Integrity in Journalism**. It has been established that the Caravan supported the farmers and worked to amplify their voices, but it's hard to label their reportage biased. In contrast to Open, Caravan reported from the ground. It interacted with the farmers, protesters on-site and refrained from using demonizing language for them. The Open propounded heavily opinionated articles. The problem was no more about taking sides, but the fact that the articles were built on the author's opinion only. It lacked the basic source reporting. The Caravan and Thee Open are two prestigious digital and print magazines. In this research, we explored how the most high-status and impressive media organizations also fall prey to predilections. This facet of media was explored, assessed and discussed in the research and the assumptions of political leanings turned out to be true. Numerical data has been employed to support the hypotheses. Thus, the considerable difference appears in the coverage of the magazines depending on their financial interests and political influence. The research reveals that indeed media acts as the fourth pillar of democracy but has certain limitations to it. To be able to understand the political climate of the country, one can always look at the state of print media as it reflects the situation vividly.

## Limitations and Scope

This study consisted of only two English magazines while there is a wide repository of magazines published in the country. These magazines are national and even international with their digital issues but the study misses out on regional magazines. The coverage was subject to analysis and only the political stance and slant on Farmers' Protest was studied. Since only two English magazines are studied here, we cannot extrapolate the findings for all the magazines present. However, The Caravan was awarded an international award for its coverage and hence to hold its reportage reflective of the independent media is valid. The study contributes to the literature of frame analysis and media representation of Farmers' Protest. It demonstrates how frames shape up and colour the same event in different ways, depending on the gatekeepers. The study was mainly a qualitative analysis buttressed by numerical data. The frames were used as a basis for quantitative analysis which may be a result of preconceived notions.

## References

1. Lerche, Jens. "The farm laws struggle 2020–2021: class-caste alliances and bypassed agrarian transition in neoliberal India." *J Peasant Stud.* (2021): 1-17.



2. Lacatus, Corina. "Populism and President Trump's approach to foreign policy: An analysis of tweets and rally speeches." *Politics* 41, (2021): 31-47.
3. Walford, Nigel. "Patterns of Development in Tourist Accommodation Enterprises on Farms In England and Wales." *Appl Geograp* 21, (2001): 331-345.
4. Paul, Subin, and David O Dowling. "Digital archiving as Social Protest: Dalit Camera and the Mobilization of India's "Untouchables"." *Digital J* 6, (2018): 1239-1254.
5. Shani, Giorgio. "Towards A Hindu Rashtra: Hindutva, religion, and nationalism in India." *Religion, State Soci* 49, (2021): 264-280.

**How to cite this article:** Khan, Maseera. "Comparative Analysis of the Open and the Caravan Magazine's Coverage of Farmers' Protest Potrick ." . *J Mass Communicat Journalism* 10 (2021) : 441