Mass Media in Theory and Practice: An Historical Appraisal of "Aman Ki Asha" Campaign

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Abstract

History of unfriendly relations between India and Pakistan is very long and an updated record is accessible. However, there is very less information and research work available on the peace efforts between the two nuclear states of South Asian region. Many incidents aggravated the tension between two neighboring states and it was strongly observed that the role of media from both sides was not condemnable in past seventy two years. Nobody can deny the vital role of print, electronic and social media in modern international relations. In current age of information technology and fast communication, mass media is very important among different sources of information and communication. Through internet and social websites people to people contact is becoming very strong and effective. On the other hand, Interstate conflicts are threating peace and security in different regions of the world. Most of such conflicts started in 21st century and number of experts felt a crucial need to study the diverse dynamics of interstate conflicts specially to initiate the procedure of conflict management. Therefore, many factors and elements

including mass media have been identified as sources of conflict management which are required to be analyzed. Modern mass media through agenda setting initiated and boosted many sociopolitical changes in different regions of the world like a wave of political unrest (Arab Spring) in Middle East. Therefore, it is important to study the media role in conflict situations. This study focuses on the two major countries of the South Asian region: Pakistan and India. Kashmir issue is the major bone of contention between the two countries and having history of uncordial relations. "Aman ki Asha" (Hope for peace or Desire for Peace) is a drive mutually initiated by the two top media groups: The "Jang Group" in Pakistan and "The Times of India" in India to develop relations in cultural, economic, and social sectors.

This study focuses on the evaluation of outcomes in terms of successes and failures of this campaign up till now. It would also emphasize on the study of the policy of conflict and cooperation at the same time on tense border status.

Keywords: Pak-India Relations, Communication Technology, Aman ki Asha, Cooperation, International Relations, Conflict Management

Contextualizing Aman Ki Asha

Aman Ki Asha¹ campaign was launched on Jan 1, 2010 as an attempt to create soften atmosphere for dialogue between India and Pakistan to resolve their historic differences. But ongoing developments in the region are showing that this media campaign is still far from its objectives. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's decision to revoke article 370 and 35a of Indian constitution and consequently withdrawal of special status of Indian occupied Jammu and Kashmir created serious tension between two nuclear powers. Similarly, On February 26, 2019 the Indian Air Force violated Pakistan's airspace and conducted few airstrikes at Balakot, Pakistan. It was claimed by India that those

strikes were conducted to target Jaish-e-Mohammad camp, who accepted responsibility of Pulwama attack. Later, the local people denied the presence of such group or any Mudersa / seminary working there. On next day Pakistan hit back and an Indian warplane was targeted by Pakistan Air force and shot down and its pilot was arrested. Afterward he was returned to India on March1, 2019 as goodwill gesture, just to avoid any escalation and maintain the peace of the region.

Earlier, on February 14, 2019, a cavalcade of automobiles carrying security personnel in Jummu Srinagar, Pulwama district India, was targeted by a suicide attacker. Due to sudden attack reportedly, forty people belonged to Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) of India were killed. Nobody could identify the attacker as he also lost his life on the spot. Later, India accused Pakistan in urgency for the incident, Pakistan strongly condemned the sad occurrence and refused to accept such Indian response.

Theories of international relations clarify mechanism of international system. There are many theories which provide foundations to policies of current political systems at interstate and intrastate level. For example, "theory of Realism" advocates that world is an anarchic place and "struggle for power" is the solution to maintain peace in the world. On the other hand, "Theory of liberalism" supports "cooperation" among nations for peace and prosperity. Under such theories, sources of conflict and cooperation are being regularly analyzed and experts are in search of more and more sources in this regard.

Interstate conflicts are the most important threats to peace in different regions of the world such as Palestinian - Israeli conflict in Middle East, Kashmir conflict between India and Pakistan in South Asia and Kivu conflict between Congo and Rwanda in Africa etc.

Many conflicts started in 21st century and it develops a crucial need to study the diverse dynamics on interstate conflicts and to accelerate the procedure of conflict management. Therefore, many factors and elements has been identified which are required to be analyzed. In current age of information and fast communication, mass media is very important among all because through internet and social websites now people to people contacts are becoming very strong. Modern mass media has initiated many socio-political changes in different regions of the world, for example a wave of political unrest (Arab Spring) in Middle East can be considered as one such moves.

There are different cradles of awareness but in recent years, major consciousness has created by mass media as awareness about global warming environmental issues. So it is important to study the media role in conflict situations. This study focuses on the two major countries of the South Asian region: Pakistan and India. Kashmir issue is the bone of contention between two counties and having history of uncordial relations. There are number of drives to resolve the mutual differences of Pakistan and India but Aman ki Asha² is also a drive mutually in vain. initiated by the two top media groups: The "Jang Group" in Pakistan and "The Times of India" in India to develop relations in cultural, economic, and social sectors.

Now the question arises that, what is the nature, pace and effect of both media groups for promotion of cooperation between India and Pakistan as peace journalism model? Main objective of the study focuses on to concept of Journalism for peace as *Aman Ki Asha* is a joint venture of major Pak-India media groups. The study will focus on different aspects of the campaign for promotion of peace & cooperation and Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) between Pakistan and India. Survey random interview method has been employed to

examine the theme and concept defined by the both media groups in their campaign.

On January 01, 2010, efforts were started to improve bilateral relations between two neighboring countries India and Pakistan. It was mainly initiated by educated and visionary civil society, business community and showbiz industry. Major portions of Public from both the countries are willing to stop blame game and upset due to unsuccessful diplomacy at state level. It is a quest for peace by table talk, seminars, conferences, cultural exchange programs and meetings.

There are three different levels of communication to resolve the conflicts, first one is Debate, second Discussion and third is Dialogue. The campaign has committed and has organized scholarly debate, strategic discussions and dialogue in trade and business sectors and focused on mutual interest. As Campbell (1999) said that "the only battle we might lose was the battle of hearts and minds. The consequence would have been NATO ending and losing the war" ³. Consequently, *Aman-ki-Asha* is an effort to win the hearts and minds of the public of both the states.

Aman-ki-Asha campaign is focused on media as a strategy to pursue its objectives based on betterment in Indo-Pak relations. It is general understanding in modern period that Media is a very strong medium for shaping public opinion in democratic societies as Ross Howard (2006) expressed:

"The news media is the curious instrument. It can be a weapon of war, or it can uphold prospects for peace The news media is also capable of causing considerable damage when no one is intentionally doing so at all. Under ideal conditions the news media is supposed to have a mind of its own

and operate according to professional codes of conduct"⁴.

The influence of media is very evident in different societies especially in post 1990s period, so both state and non-state actors try to manipulate such power of media to achieve certain objectives. As Anup Shah (2009) expressed that "Some nations can influence and control their media greatly. In addition, powerful corporations also have enormous influence on mainstream media." In this age of globalization and fast communication mega business groups are using media for promotion of their interest but the positive aspect of such phenomenon is the mutual interest policy based on win-win strategy. In this way they are playing effective role with the reference to media for establishing peace and stability. Anup Shah further added that:

"In some places major multinational corporations own media stations and outlets. Often. media many institutions survive on advertising fees, which can lead to the media outlet being influenced by various corporate interests. On the other hand, the ownership interests may affect the coverage. Stories can end up being biased or omitted so as not to offend The ability advertisers or owners. citizens to make informed decisions is crucial for a free and functioning democracy but now becomes threatened such by concentration in ownership." 6

In a report published by Andrew Puddephatt (2006), he focused on an emerging idea that media might play an important role in preventing wars in conflict zones in

future. He expressed the role of the media in conflict resolution:

"The growing recognition of the crucial role the media can play in helping provoke conflict has led many to examine how the media can play a constructive role in resolving conflict. This created considerable controversy – should journalism stay detached, even from horrific events unfolding around them, or should it take up the stance suggested by Martin Bell and become attached to a cause – even that of peace." 8

The term "peace journalism" sounds very positive but there is contradiction and confusion regarding different media's preplanned agendas and roles in different states at regional and international level. Print and electronic media provide forums to journalists to express thoughts, information, notions and stories to the listener, viewer or reader. So, following these lines they try to explore the reality. However, at times the journalist considered as a reliable source which share the multiple opinions, viewpoints and perceptions practiced in a specific society. The role of journalist is very important and responsible in this regard due to transmission of optimistic and productive thoughts which provide a structure that carries to start the debates among intelligentsia employed in the society.

At the end of Cold War mass communication was promoted tremendously and role of IGOs, NGOs and multinationals especially concerned with mass communication is very significant in peacebuilding process. Concept of mutual interdependence with the blend of mass media is another important aspect of this phenomenon. On such strategy the concept of *Aman-ki-Asha* was introduced, as Badar Iqbal

Chaudhary (2014) expressed his views about Mahatma Gandhi that, that he always supported peace. Further, Yadav quoted Gandhi that: "Indians and K.C. Pakistanis are brothers who have separated. Let them live in different homes and continue to remain brothers". Consequently, Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinah at initial stages of his political activates, was in favor of Hindu -Muslim harmony in united India and received the title of " Ambassador of Hindu- Muslim Unity" at the end of Lucknow pact in 1916. Traditional and cultural ties are more strong as compare to religious believes, as professor Naeem ur Rehman Faroogi, former Pro Vice Chancellor of Allahabad University says that "Cultural and linguistic bonds of a civilization are stronger than its religious bonds". The same was repeated by Ammar Shahbazi, "the connection between India and Pakistan is inherent and intrinsic, something that no political and military power can ever erode."¹⁰

Jhon Gultung's Theory of Peace Journalism¹¹ may be applied as theoretical frame work for the description of the study to answer of the research question and to test the hypothesis. Johan Galtung, a Norwegian, peace researcher, sociologist and expert proposed the idea of peace journalism for print and electronic media. He proposed these ideas to monitor that how a prejudice and favoritism towards violence can be avoided when perform duties of reporting in war and conflict zones.

Journalism for peace is now a worldwide unorganized movement of journalists¹², academics, researchers and activists in Africa, USA, Europe and Asia. Academic programs are currently being offered in the, Australia, UK, USA, South Africa, Mexico, Costa Rica, Sweden, Norway and many others countries. 13 In 1970s an idea journalism emerged. peace was Christian organizations including, "The World Council of Churches" and "The World Association for Christian Communication" also are following the principals of peace journalism. M. Rama Rao (2011) expressed his

view regarding peace journalism in his review article he wrote: "As a practitioner of the craft, the reviewer knows the truism - peace is an unexciting non-event and has no ebb and flow like war. It doesn't offer itself to a screaming headline, notwithstanding 'Aman Ki Asha' project jointly launched by The Times of India, 'Old Lady of Bori Bunder' and The News International, founded by a thorough bred media professional, Mir Khalil- ur- Rahman, 'who always claimed his love to Pakistan with the passion of a devotee and always wanted his newspapers to be Pakistan heralds of good news'. As a reviewer of Chattarji's work in a Pakistani daily said, "Nawa-e-Waqt has its counter parts in India, which have not given up dreams of 'Akhand Bharat". 14

The issue of terrorism was particularly highlighted by both English, Urdu and Hindi dallies from both sides of the neighboring states. Initially, the news about terrorism was published without any verification of the valid source and intelligence agencies of the both countries were blamed despite of any solid proof. Masses took it as "stories" and as such have not taken serious at any level beyond their propaganda wattage. However, recently a story appeared with evidences of involvement of RAW agent in terrorism activities in Pakistan in March 2016. ¹⁵

Coincidentally, in Pakistan the English dailies such as The News, Dawn and the Express Tribune, though covering all type of thoughts and agendas of different leading institution and agencies so that to promote and maintain the tradition the of liberty of expression. However, it is difficult to manage the "disagree" factor in journalism and produce quick results in favor of Pakistan by addressing the issues of distribution of river waters and fishermen issues, cricket matches and IPL. *Aman-ki Asha* program contains subjects of trade and business, investments, finance structure and networks, art and cultural activities, travel for medical and religious purpose without free movement status visa

policies, sports, people to people contact, reviving existing road links, marketplace entrance, separated families issues, the dilemma of convicts (fisherman issues etc.)

To find out public opinion about Aman-ki-Asha campaign, Random sampling Survey Method is applied and got the feedback from the questioner filled by print and electronic media personal, intellectuals, politicians and youth representatives. Johan Gultung's theory of Peace Journalism define that media coverage of conflict is different from usual coverage of the different incident. It is observed that usually media take the "Low Road" for the coverage of war and conflict situations and highlight the intense features; media does not address the peaceful solutions of the issues. Therefore, Gultung has developed the concept of Peace Journalism, which can be applied to reduce the tense situation between the conflicting groups. Theory of Peace Journalism is very important with the reference of Pak – India relations as both countries had clash in 1948, 1965 and 1971. At that time media was not as active and important as today. For instance, in 1999 Kargil War was the major small scale war between two countries and print & electronic media from both sides was actively involved in building up war mania. Media played comparatively negative role by the propagation of war craze and aired differences and hate instead of focusing on the common interest and peace between the two conflicting states. Media mostly follow the State's policy & behavior, especially in case of conflict. Different states use media as tool for the circulation of animosity against rivals. Broadcasting of stereotyped images and conventional messages, Aman-Ki-Asha is the first step in the media history of Pak- India relationship which is for the promotion of peace. Critical analysis of Aman ki Asha will prove its importance though there are many who oppose it.

According to Johan Gultung's theory of Peace Journalism, following are the major common factors for the need of the peaceful relations between rival parties like Pakistan and India:

- 1. Both are nuclear states in South Asian region;
- 2. Thickly populated regions of the world;
- 3. Poverty is the common issues between two states;
- 4. Strategic location of Pakistan;
- 5. Fast economic growth of India.

Subsequently, *Aman-Ki-Asha* is one of the positive steps to reduce differences and to promote common interest between two rival states through media.

Survey Interviews and Comparative Study of Different Point of Views:

Q.1. Do you think *Aman ki Asha* will have a catalyst role in transforming media relations between Pakistan and India?

Most of the respondents of the survey replied for this question that conventional media of Pakistan and India is highly influenced by sensationalism, dramatization, panic and action. Such ventures are also associated with war and conflict therefore coverage of mutual issues according to this policy or method promotes hatred, violence and prejudice. If the two countries have sore relations, media relations will be strained too so it depends on the nature of political relations between Indian and Pakistan.

Unfortunately, anti-Pakistan sentiments are sellable products for Indian Media. Both countries are not focusing on their basic issues such as poverty, unemployment, health, water and many other social issues in general and Indian politics always focuses on anti-Pakistan sentiments in particular. This behavior of Indian media got acceleration after the takeover of *Bahrtia Janta Party* (BJP) government as PM Nirendra

Modi pursue anti Pakistan sentiments to achieve his own political goals however *Aman Ki Asha* is a positive step in the frozen relations of the two states. It is hoped that neutral and independent media would act as a catalyst.

Q.2. Do you think *Aman Ki Asha* initiative will help in positively changing peoples' perceptions across the borders?

In the survey, responses received for question two, mainly focuses on the opinion that perceptions cannot be changed overnight. Nevertheless, if people to people contact becomes a norm, relations between the two states will hopefully have a positive impact. This is an age of globalization and Information Technology (IT), people are connected with each other beyond boundaries. According to theoretical frame work of research both leading media groups should focus on the importance of alliance between the conflicting parties. Transparency in media coverage is required in this regard. This way perception can be changed with coverage of ordinary public instead of elites as sources for media stories. Aman-ki-Asha program provided a platform to the public of India and Pakistan to share their views; Therefore, Bottom Up approach is very important to change the perceptions of the public of Pakistan and India.

Q.3. Can *Aman ki Asha* be regarded as a vehicle for overcoming hostilities and creation of trust between Pakistan and India?

In response to question number three respondents describe the importance of Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) through media. Peace is desirable at any level and place. Pakistan, as a Muslim state is associated with the concept of Peace. This basic concept can be used as an instrument through media to minimize conflicting issues and promotion of commonalities between India and Pakistan. From Pakistan's side there

are many positive examples such as "Pakistan's deals regarding Fishermen Issues" but lack of cooperation is seen from Indian counterparts therefore CBM measures are the need of the hour. Culturally, Indian society is close to our society but there is difference of opinion resulting in hostilities between people on both sides of the borders. Many journalists visited India and according to their statements people are very helpful, caring, and positive towards Pakistanis, and the same positive response was observed when Indian journalists visited Pakistan. However, there is hostility between the two establishments, this could only be reduced when the relationships of both the sides are softened.

Q.4. Is *Aman ki Asha* is a bold initiative towards transcendence? And can it help the two sides move towards constructive problem solving?

Question number four was about the constructive problem solving approach. Respondents addressed the issue and highlighted that it depends on the nature of relations between the two countries. Policies can remain unfriendly for some times but the problems in both countries are at common level. Aman Ki Asha is a bold initiative from both leading media groups of Pakistan and India but seems to be failed due to the hostilities on both sides of the border, e.g. Violation of line of control (LOC) and extremist Hindu Mudi Regime. Under his leadership Gujrat Killings and other many controversial incidents occurred in the past. There is a need to focus on people to people contact instead of governmental channels. There is a dire need of exchange of delegations for Confidence Building measures (CBMs) from leading media platform such as Aman- Ki- Asha. Respondents stressed on the requirement of political benevolence for sustainable peace program between India and Pakistan.

Q.5. In your view, is *Amna ki Asha* at best an important component of Citizen's diplomacy that is very much dependent on the political goodwill?

In response to question five, it is said that there is not any scale to measure and judge the level of willingness but it is observed that these trends are growing. *Aman Ki Asha* is a bold initiative and we have to exchange delegations, consisting of the common people through *Aman Ki Asha* platform. This can be a type of *track three diplomacy*, through the mutual cooperation of media and citizens.

Q.6. How would you assess the success rate of various dialogues organized under the auspices of *Aman ki Asha*?

For question six, acquainted data is not available, but if Pakistan India relations are revived through *Aman Ki Asha* platform witch will impact on lower scale on critical diplomatic relations. The Social, cultural and media exchanges are always helpful in achieving peace and stability in conflicting situations. However, recognition of friendly relations by the state is very important in this regard. Respondent shared their experience.

Q.7. In your view has Aman ki Asha helped in developing empathetic attitude for each side among the journalists of the two sides?

In response to question seven it is stated that many Indian journalist friends who are working in Pakistan during 2003-2014 when they arrived here they were confused but when they went back they were positive and remained in contact with Pakistani Journalists. However, behavior of establishment has always negative impact on journalists of both sides. They are chased and harassed by the intelligence agencies. They always faced visa issues, such as last year two Indian journalists were sent back to India from Islamabad.

Officially Pakistan and India have signed an agreement for the post of two journalists in embassies (from Pakistan one journalist of PTV and APP and from India journalist the Hindu and one from PTI) but Pakistan has failed to post journalist from 2008 and Indian journalists have been working till previous year but now posts are vacant.

Q.8. What in your view can be done to make *Aman ki Asha* more effective so that the primary objectives of the initiative are achieved?

About Question eight it is described that, Primary objectives of Aman Ki Asha are not properly advertised by both media groups on all mass media on both sides. Furthermore, rival groups are also propagating negative views about them. However, in principle, Pakistan and India both should have to work for peaceful mutual relations in favor of their poor population. Pakistan and India have the potential to work together for the economic uplift of this region by establishing peace in the region. Promotion of regionalism interdependence may change the whole scenario of the region by following the example of European Union (EU). It is recommended that strong Pak India relations at governmental level may increase media interactions, bureaus of media houses of both the countries and close people to people contacts. It should be launched by press/media clubs as Aman ki Asha is the first drop of the rain and set examples for others.

Q.9. Has *Aman ki Asha* espoused the true spirit of Peace in the sense Galtung has defined it?

In response to question nine it is said that, Johan Gultung has introduced different models of peace journalism as result of his research of conflicts of Iraq, Korea, Yugoslavia and Vietnam. In his study he highlighted the importance of media reporting during conflict situation especially in Persian Gulf war, presence of journalist in war zone set a new trend for

media coverage, especially in war/conflict reporting. With this reference it is proved that *Aman ki Asha is* an initiative taken by leading media groups of Pakistan and India reflects Gultung's theory of 'Journalism for peace'.

Q.10. Would you say *Aman ki Asha's* goal and mission are elusive?

Question number ten was addressed by the respondents in very interesting way. They stressed on identification of those external elements, promoting hostility between the two neighbors. Some were hopeful for the success of *Aman Ki Asha while* others showed their reservations about the future of this joint venture. Overall response was positive about the continuation of such initiatives.

Analysis:

Historically, Aman ki Asha is a ground breaking step in South Asian region for promotion of Peace and stability between to traditional rivals since 1947. In modern era the popularity of internet and rapid means of communications are endorsing the concept of 'friends border, 16. without Many recent international development in international relations are making the new mile stones in human history such as 'people to people' contact is another important thought getting admiration in many parts of the world and especially in South Asian and Central Asian region. 'Dil Se Dil' is another emotional and attractive slogan for the public of the both countries and very close to the local and regional psychology of the native of both countries. There are many other factors including common history, culture, language and traditions which may play positive role to reduce tension and enmity between the governments of the both states and people may travel to each other's countries like Canada and America. Dialogue and communication at all levels must be open between the two countries and if they cannot fully follow the example of European Union, they may find some areas of common interest for the sake of their poor public.

Recommendations in the light of Johan Gultung's Theory of Peace Journalism:

Both States should concentrate on following:

- 1. Focus on common interest and to avoid addressing the conflicting issues as first step towards CBMs, it should be the part of media policy of the both states India and Pakistan.
- 2. Give importance and weightage to the public opinion instead of elites and stereotype norms.
- 3. Learn from the EUs successful experience of mutual economic growth.
- 4. Media coverage from both sides should fulfill all the requirements for the promotion of cooperation and peace as well as discouraging hostility.
- 5. Reportage on peace initiatives should be transparent and give respect and apply logical approach on conflicting issues.
- 6. To counter and stop negative role of media as happened in past.
- 7. Role of media peace campaign such as *Aman ki Asha should* be encouraged at all levels and this should be promoted by both states as well as societies.
- 8. The media buddies are convincing and also highlighted hindrances in this process but these should not reversal the progress of *Aman-ki-Asha*.
- 9. Identification of external elements that promotes the hostility between the two neighbors.

Conclusion: According to the available arguments and survey responses it is analyzed that the *Aman-ki-Asha* campaign reflects the Galtung's theory of peace and

journalism. Pakistan and India are the captive of history of bitter relations therefore cooperation and friendly behavior of the both states cannot be established within short span of time, it is difficult but imaginable. The Aman-ki-Asha venture has given light at the end of the tunnel. The unsuccessful efforts of reconciliation by Pak India governments have been recompensed by the struggles of the two leading media groups, the Jang Group and the Times of India. The perceptions are in process of slow and gradual change and both the societies are less negative towards each other according conducted polls recently on websites Aman-ki-Asha. It is time to reinstate the constancy; the civil society must not remain the silent majority due to the narrow vested groups.

Media is such an influential source equipped with the ability to add a fruitful twist to a story of sore Pak- India relations. It has the dynamic strength to classify the irritants and hindrances to peace and will not reluctant towards the more controversial issues such as Kashmir, water disputes and the problem of terrorism. It can recommend mutual solutions and influence the decision makers towards a long-lasting peace in the South Asian region. The media can provide an appropriate ground to innovative and fresh thoughts which can promote the peace process at governmental level. The media can make sure that all kinds of opinions are considered among the inflexible policy strategies. It can filter prejudice mind set and renew the nobility of morale which is a distinctive quality of the people of this region. The media can propagate that peace is sustained in this region even in addition to controversial issues. At political level, leaders of both Pakistan and India have had missed many chances to resolve the mutual differences through peaceful manners. The Jang Group and Times of India Group have taken positive step to refresh the harmony procedure. As a first step both states and societies should revive and refresh the campaign of Aman ki Asha and then they should try to focus on to pick the low hanging fruit instead of more complex and disputable goals. The majority of people on both sides of the border have strong wishes for peace and prosperity. They owe it for their unborn generations to formulate the trail for a lifecycle, without despair and misery. In both Pakistan and India, it is very painful to read the figures verifying the issues of the basic facilities of life such as food, access to clean drinking water, health, education, employment, shelter, and poverty. All social development indicators point towards a lack of determination and matters will continue likewise until the war clouds are dispersed that threaten the skies. All of this is conceivable if every soul will stand with initiatives like Aman-ki- Asha as campaign and movement.

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The term *Aman ki Asha* means 'hope for peace'. *Aman* is an Urdu word, meaning peace. *Asha* is a Hindi word, meaning hope. The combination of the two languages reveals the combined spirit of this campaign.

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