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Whose Narrative Prevails? A Comparative Analysis of Local and National Print Media Coverage of the 2016 Kashmir Unrest

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ABSTRACT

Kashmir witnessed the longest and strongest rebellion after the killing of Burhan Wani, militant leader of Hizbul Mujahideen, on 8th July 2016. The number of people at his funeral procession sent a direct message to the authorities that not everything was right in Kashmir. Longest curfew, suspension of internet services and banning of local press hinted strongly at media gagging by the government. During the period, curfew passes issued to the local journalists were not honoured by the security forces hence, curtailing their movement. While Kashmir based local media was extensively reporting about use of pellet guns by the security forces to control the protesting people, the New Delhi based national media was focusing more on attacks on security forces by the protestors. New Delhi based Indian national media emphasised on the government's security centric line which asserted that Kashmir is an integral part of India and all efforts were made to prevent Pakistan sponsored terrorism in Kashmir. Indian National media seldom reported human rights violations in Kashmir while local Kashmir based media and international media were vocal about such issues. The focus of this study was to find out whether New Delhi based newspaper reported what happened on the ground in Kashmir and also to analyse how the reporting of New Delhi based media was different from reporting of Kashmir based local media.

Keywords: Kashmir Unrest 2016; Print Media; Media Framing; Content Analysis; National and Local Newspapers; Editorial Analysis

INTRODUCTION

Kashmir witnessed the longest and strongest rebellion after the killing of Hizbul Mujahidin Commander Burhan Wani on 8th July 2016 (Service, 2016). The number of people at his funeral procession sent a direct message to the authorities in India, that not everything was right in Kashmir (Ganai, 2016). This period marked the first instance in which the civilians, upon learning of encounters between the militants and security forces, reportedly rushed to encounter sites with the intention of facilitating the militants' escape, a phenomenon that had not been observed ever in Kashmir (Rashid, 2017). The imposition of an extended curfew, suspension of internet services, and the banning of local press outlets pointed to systematic attempts by the government to restrict media activity (Jaleel, 2016). During the period, curfew passes issued to the local journalists were not honoured by the security forces hence, curtailing their movement (Yaqoob, 2016).

As per the report published by Reporters Without Borders, at least 45 civilians were killed and more than 1,600 were injured in the protest that broke out on 8th July. The report further mentions that on the night of 15th July, police raided the offices and printing presses of newspapers like *Kashmir Times*, *Greater Kashmir*, *Kashmir Observer* and *Rising Kashmir* and seized a large number of printed copies. During the raids, 50,000 copies of the daily *Kashmir Uzma* were also reportedly seized (RSF, 2016). Condemning the raids on media houses and their printing presses, the Editors Guild of India president, Raj Chengappa, general secretary, Prakash Dube and treasurer, Seema Mustafa in a joint statement said, "The Editors Guild of India strongly condemns the efforts by the Jammu and Kashmir government to gag the media in the state... It is extremely unfortunate that the state government, under fire for its poor management of the law and order situation in the Valley, has sought to shoot the messenger" (TIE, 2016).

During the coverage of the protests that followed the killing of Wani, New Delhi based Indian national media emphasised the government's security centric line which asserts that Kashmir is an integral part of India and all efforts are being made to prevent Pakistan sponsored terrorism in Kashmir. Indian National media seldom reported human rights violations in Kashmir while Kashmir based local media was extensively reporting about use of pellet guns by the security forces. New Delhi based national media was focusing more on attacks on security forces by the protestors. Banning of Kashmir Reader newspaper in particular and media censorship in Kashmir in general, is the display of propaganda model conceptualised by Noam Chomsky and Edward S Herman which states, "In countries where the levers of power are in the hands of a state bureaucracy, the monopolistic control over the media, often supplemented by official censorship, makes it clear that the media serve the ends of a dominant elite" (Herman, 1988).

This contradiction between reporting by local Kashmir based newspapers and New Delhi based national newspapers is however not a new phenomenon. In a paper titled 'India's Kashmir War', Tapan Bose, Dinesh Mohan, Gautam Navlakha and Sumanta Banerjee (1990) assert that on January 26, 1990, P Upendra, then minister for Information and Broadcasting said that his government took serious note of exaggerated reports being filed by foreign journalists but he claimed that no foreign journalist had been asked to leave J&K. The Hindu reported on January 26 and 28, not only were all Indian and foreign journalists confined for three days in their hotel under armed guard, their film rolls and notes were seized at the Srinagar airport and the foreign journalists were served expulsion orders on January 24.

Teresa Joseph (2000) in her paper titled, 'Kashmir, human rights and the Indian press' states that though there is well documentation of gross human rights violation in Kashmir by both militants and security forces, the general reader does not get any such picture of the situation from the mainstream Indian press. The paper states, " Evidently, most Indian newspapers are merely concerned with reinforcing the standpoint of the Indian government vis-à-vis Kashmir, restricting their reporting to the reproduction of government data and information while failing to verify facts or send their own correspondents for first-hand coverage of the issues concerned." Syed Nazakat (2012) in his paper titled, 'Indian Media Coverage

of Kashmir When Stories Clash with National Interest' states, "There is widespread self-censorship and newspapers often avoid reporting on human rights violations by the Indian troops in Kashmir. Indian media coverage of events, issues and personalities about Kashmir is welded to the notion of 'for the national interest'."

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- 1) To find out whether New Delhi based newspaper was reporting what was happening on the ground.
- 2) To Analysis how the reporting of New Delhi based media was different from reporting of Kashmir based local media.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The study uses Quantitative and Qualitative Content Analysis to compare one New Delhi based most circulated English language newspaper (The Times of India) and one Kashmir based most circulated English language newspaper (Greater Kashmir) published from 9th July 2016 to 30th September 2016. The figure of circulation is provided by the Audit Bureau of Circulation in India. Newspapers of all the days published from 9th July to 30th September, 2016 were selected for the study. Front page Lead story and entire Editorial page (consisting of editorial, articles, and interviews) of the selected newspapers were analysed. However, the issues of Greater Kashmir for the dates 17 to 20 July, 21 & 30 August, and, 12, 15 & 16 September were not included due to no publication on these days owing to the imposed media ban.

A thematic content analysis of front-page lead stories was conducted. These lead stories were further examined for adherence to the inverted pyramid style of writing, the inclusion of the 5W's and 1H, the source of photographs, and their visual orientation. An in-depth qualitative content analysis of newspaper editorials was conducted to identify and categorise each editorial into three components namely code, content, and treatment, based on David Berlo's message structure within the SMCR model. In this study, "code" refers to the writing style and language structure of the editorial; "content" denotes the information related to the central theme of the editorial; and "treatment" pertains to the way the message is presented, particularly in terms of tone.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for the study is developed employing framing theory, agenda setting theory and gatekeeping theory to analyse the difference in newspaper coverage of the 2016 Kashmir unrest by local and national print media. Framing theory lends the most important lens that helps in examining the thematic emphasis, tone, and narrative structure developed through the meanings constructed by the newspapers. Agenda setting theory helps in analysing the importance of the front-page placement and editorial prominence. Gatekeeping theory supports in contextualising the institutional and structural limitations that influence the selection of news specially in conflict situations witnessing curfews and media restrictions. David Berlo's SMCR model has been used as an analytical framework to critically examine the editorial messages into code, content, and treatment.

DATA ANALYSIS**1) Quantitative Analysis of Editorial Pages****Table 1.1 Details of Editorials and Articles Related to Unrest on Editorial Pages of Greater Kashmir in the Month of July**

S. No	Type of Copy	No. of Items	With Picture	No. of words
1	Editorials	15	1	5522
2	Articles	45	10	36044
Total		60	11	41566

Table 1.1 shows the details of editorials and articles related to unrest that appeared on the editorial pages of Greater Kashmir newspaper in the month of July. All in all, 15 editorials and 45 articles were published on the editorial page in the month of July. 10 of these 45 articles also carried pictures whereas only one editorial write-up was complemented by a picture. The editorial with maximum number of words was published on 11th July with 448 word count whereas, editorial with minimum words was published on 29th July with a word count of 326. The article with maximum number of words was published on 25th July with 1689 word count, while article with least number of words was published on 28th July with a word count of 297.

Table 1.2 Details of Editorials and Articles Related to Unrest on Editorial Pages of Greater Kashmir in the Month of August

S. No	Type of Copy	No. of Items	With Picture	No. of Words
1	Editorials	17	0	6575
2	Articles	79	5	66829
TOTAL		96	5	73404

Table 1.2 highlights the details of editorials and articles related to unrest that appeared on the editorial pages of Greater Kashmir newspaper in the month of August. A total of 17 editorials and 79 articles were published on the editorial page in the month of August. Only 5 out of 79 articles carried pictures whereas no editorial write-up was accompanied by a picture. The editorial with maximum number of words was published on 1st August with a word count of 517 whereas editorial with minimum number of words was published on 16th August with a count of 342 words. The article with maximum number of words was published on 26th August with 1733 word count while the article with least number of words was published on 5th August with a word count of 408.

Table 1.3 Details of Editorials and Articles Related to Unrest on Editorial Pages of Greater Kashmir in the Month of September

S. No	Type of Copy	No. of Items	With Picture	No. of Words
1	Editorials	10	0	3803
2	Articles	44	0	40629
TOTAL		54	0	44432

Table 1.3 highlights the details of editorials and articles related to unrest that appeared on the editorial pages of Greater Kashmir newspaper in the month of September. All in all, 10 editorials and 44 articles were published on the editorial page in the month of August. Not even a single article or editorial was supplemented with a picture. The editorial with maximum number of words was published on 13th September with a word count of 426 whereas editorial with minimum number of words was published on 19th September with a word count of 332. The article with maximum number of words was published on 28th September with a word count of 1663 while article with least number of words was published on 6th September with 416 as word count.

Table 1.4 Total Number of Editorial and Articles on Editorial Page of Greater Kashmir in Three Months from 9th July to 30th September

S. No	Type of Copy	No. of Items	With Picture	No. of Words
1	Editorials	42	1	15900
2	Articles	168	15	143502
TOTAL		210	16	159402

The table above shows the total number of editorials and articles published on the editorial page of Greater Kashmir newspaper from 9th July to 30th September. A total 42 editorials and 168 articles related to the unrest were published by the newspaper. Only 15 articles out of 168 were accompanied by pictures whereas on one occasion even an editorial was accompanied by a picture. The combined word count of editorials and articles on the editorial page amounted to 1,59,402 words.

Table 1.5 Details of Editorial and Articles Related to Unrest on Editorial Pages of The Times of India in the Month of July

S. No	Type of Copy	No. of Stories	With Picture	No. of Words
1	Editorials	1	1	401
2	Articles	6	3	4933
3	Interviews	1	1	681
TOTAL		8	5	9869

Table 1.5 exhibit the details of editorials and articles related to unrest published on the editorial pages of The Times of India newspaper in the month of July. All in all, one editorial, one interview and six articles were published. The editorial and the interview carried a picture each whereas only three out of six articles carried pictures. The editorial had a word count of 401, while the interview was 681 words long. The longest article was published on 16th July with a word count of 929, whereas the shortest article was published on 30th July with a word count of 741.

Table 1.6 Editorials and Articles Related to Unrest on Editorial Pages of The Times of India in the Month of August

S. No	Type of Copy	No. of Items	With Picture	No. of Words
1	Editorials	1	1	382
2	Articles	3	2	2285
3	Interviews	1	1	729
TOTAL		5	4	9810

Table 1.6 represents the details of editorials and articles related to unrest published on editorial pages of The Times of India newspaper in the month of August. A total of one editorial, one interview and three articles were published. The editorial and the interview carried a picture each, whereas only two out of the three articles carried pictures. The editorial consisted of 382 words while the interview was 729 words long. The longest article was published on 19th August with a word count of 968, whereas the shortest article was published on 3rd August with a word count of 377.

Table 1.7 Details of Editorial and Articles Related to Unrest on Editorial Pages of The Times of India in the Month of September

S. No	Type of Copy	No. of Items	With Picture	No. of Words
1	Editorials	1	1	424
2	Articles	5	4	4225
3	Interviews	2	2	1576
TOTAL		8	7	6225

Table 1.7 highlights the details of editorials and articles related to unrest published on editorial pages of The Times of India newspaper in the month of September. A total of one editorial, two interviews and five articles were published. The editorial was complemented with a picture, and both the interviews carried a picture as well, however, only four out of five articles carried pictures. The editorial consisted of 424 words, while the longest interview had a word count of 794 and the interview with fewer words was almost equal in length with 782 words. The longest article was published on 7th September with a word count of 941, whereas the shortest article was published on 10th September with 684 word count.

Table 1.8 Total Number of Editorial and Articles on Editorial Page of The Times of India in Three Months from 9th July to 30th September

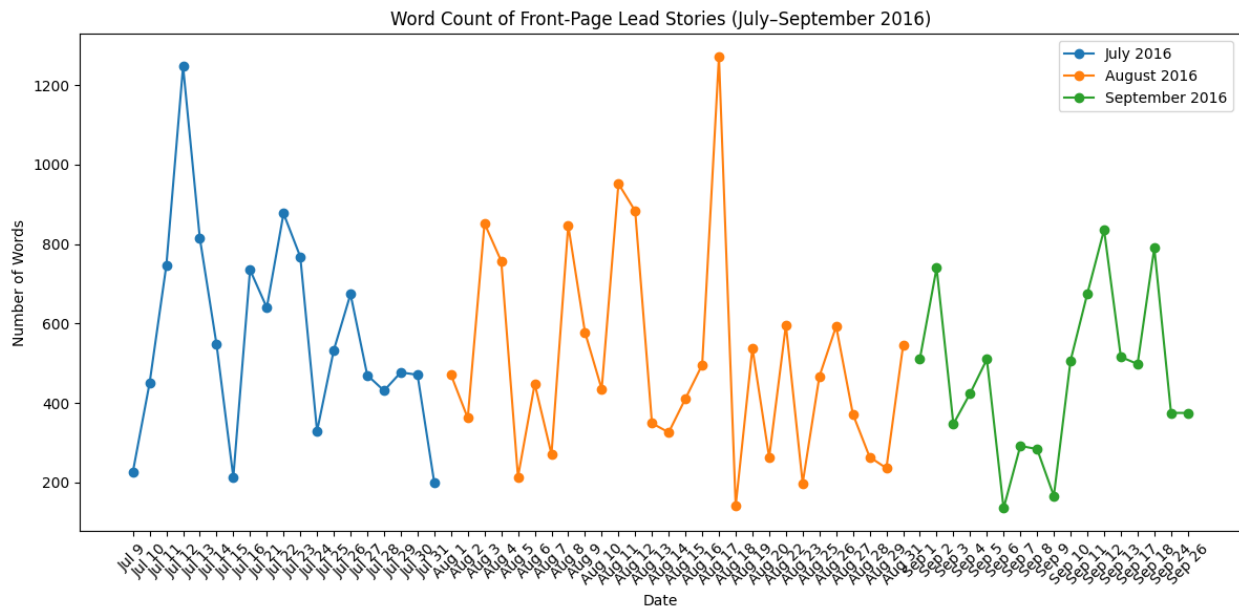
S. No	Type of Copy	No. of Items	With Picture	No. of Words
1	Editorials	3	3	1207
2	Articles	14	9	11443
3	Interviews	4	4	2986
TOTAL		21	16	15636

The table above shows the total number of editorial, and articles published on the editorial page of The Time of India newspaper from 9th July to 30th September. A total of 21 news items, including three

editorials, 14 articles and four interviews related to the unrest were published by the newspaper. All the editorials and interviews carried a picture, however only nine out of 14 articles were supplemented with a picture.

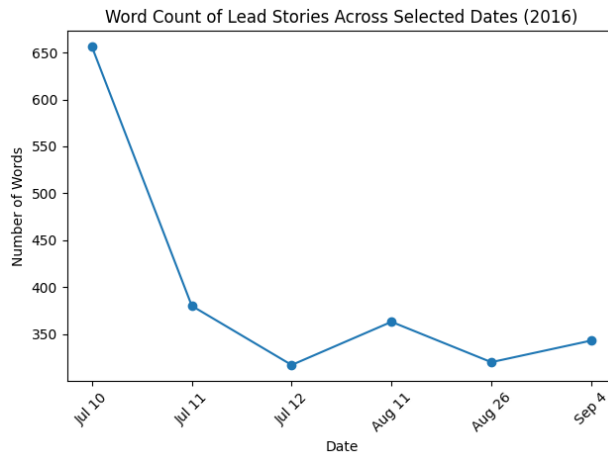
2) Quantitative Analysis of Front-Page Lead Stories

Graph 2.1 Details of Front-Page Lead Stories Related to Unrest in Greater Kashmir in Three Months from 9th July to 30th September



The graph above (2.1) shows details of front-page lead stories related to unrest published in Greater Kashmir newspaper. A total of 64 lead stories were published by the newspaper during the period of the study including 19 in the month of July 28 in the month of August and 17 in the month of September. Except for one story, every other news story was accompanied by a picture. The Story with maximum words (1272 words) was published on 17th August, whereas the story with minimum words (135 words) was published on 6th September. The combined word count of the 64 stories amounted to 32,967. 59 out of 64 lead stories carried the byline of staff reporters, whereas Press Trust of India and Greater Kashmir News Network were credited as the source in two stories each. On one occasion the paper carried a banner story of eight columns, on 11 occasions the paper carried a banner story of seven columns. Six column story nine times, five column story 11 times, four column story 19 times, three column story 12 times and two column story once.

Graph 2.2 Details of Front-Page Lead Stories Related to Unrest in The Times of India in Three Months from 9th July to 30th September



The graph 2.2 show the details of front-page lead stories related to unrest published in The Times of India newspaper from 9th July to 30th September. All in all, there were only six lead stories related to the unrest. All the stories carried pictures. Out of the six stories, two stories carried the credit line of Times News Network (TNN), while four stories carried the byline of staff reporters. The story with maximum words (656 words) was published on 10th July, whereas the story with minimum words (317 words) was published on 12th July. The combined total number of words used in these 6 stories amounts to 2,379. Out of the 6 stories, one story had a headline covering 5 columns, whereas on 5 occasions the coverage spanned across 4 columns each.

3) Qualitative Content Analysis of Editorials

Table 3.1 Indicators for Analysis

Code	Content	Treatment (tone)
Critical	Law & Order	Disappointment
Praise	Administration	Suggestive
Persuasive	Human Interest	Argumentative
Interpretative	Political	Didactic
Descriptive	Human Rights	Satire
	Court	Appreciation
	Religious	Joy
		Sorrow

Description of Editorials in Greater Kashmir for the Month of July

In the month of July, a total of 14 editorials were published on the Kashmir uprising following the death of Hizbul Mujahideen commander Burhan Wani. Of these 14 editorials, the language structure (code) of six editorials was critical; three editorials employed a praising code; one editorial was persuasive; two editorials were interpretative; and two editorials were descriptive. Regarding subject themes (content), five editorials focused on law and order, three on human interest, four on political issues, one on human

rights, and one on administrative matters. In terms of tone (treatment), it was observed that some editorials exhibited more than one tone like, disappointment combined with suggestive elements. Of the 14 editorials, four had a suggestive tone, three were argumentative, two reflected a combination of disappointment and suggestive tones, two expressed appreciation, one was didactic, one combined joy and suggestive tones, and one combined appreciation and suggestive tones.

Description of Editorials in Greater Kashmir for the Month of August

In the month of August, a total of 16 editorials on the Kashmir uprising were published in Greater Kashmir. It was observed that the language structure (code) of 11 editorials was critical, while three editorials were descriptive, one was interpretative, and one was a combination of praise and criticism.

Subject themes (content) of the nine editorials were political in nature, three focused on law and order, two combined human interest and political themes, one addressed issue related to law and order as well as the judiciary, and one focused exclusively on court-related matters. In terms of tone (treatment), two editorials were found to be both argumentative and suggestive, while two reflected a combination of disappointment and suggestive tones. Two editorials adopted a suggestive tone, and two conveyed disappointment. One editorial was sarcastic, one combined argumentative, disappointment, and suggestive tones, one expressed appreciation, and four editorials adopted an argumentative tone.

The findings indicate that the newspaper maintained a predominantly critical stance toward the situation in Kashmir, with an apparent intent to draw the attention of political parties at both the state and central levels. Notably, more than half of the editorials fell under the political theme. The prevailing tones of disappointment, argumentation, and suggestion reflect the intensity of the unrest, perceived political neglect, and dissatisfaction with the measures adopted to address the issue.

Description of Editorials in Greater Kashmir for the Month of September

In the month of September, a total of 11 editorials on the Kashmir uprising were published in Greater Kashmir. Of these 11 editorials, the language structure (code) of five editorials was descriptive, four employed an interpretative code, and two used a critical language structure. The analysis revealed that four major themes were discussed in the editorials. Of the 11 editorials, five focused on human interest themes, four were political in nature, one addressed issue of law and order, and one focused on religion. In terms of treatment (tone), the editorials exhibited suggestive, sorrowful, disappointing, and argumentative tones. Of the 11 editorials, six adopted a suggestive tone, two combined sorrow and suggestive tones, one was argumentative, one reflected disappointment, and one combined disappointment and suggestive tones. The findings indicate that the September editorials predominantly emphasized a suggestive treatment of human-interest issues alongside political concerns. The editorials were largely descriptive and suggestive in nature, highlighting both the problems and proposed solutions related to the Kashmir situation. This suggests that the newspaper sought to draw the attention of political parties toward human rights-related issues in Kashmir.

Description of Editorials in The Times of India for Three Months from 9th July to 30th September

Over the three-month period under study, The Times of India published only three editorials on the Kashmir issue, one in each month. In July, the editorial adopted an interpretative approach to political concerns in Kashmir, with a tone combining appreciation and suggestion. This indicates that the newspaper acknowledged the political initiatives undertaken to address the Kashmir issue while also offering additional recommendations. In August, the editorial was critical of the political initiatives

adopted in Kashmir, with a predominantly suggestive tone. This represented a departure from the stance observed in the previous month and suggested growing criticism of political parties' handling of the tense situation in the region. In September, the editorial adopted a descriptive approach toward political initiatives and continued to offer suggestions for possible solutions. The limited number of editorials published by The Times of India during the period under study indicates the relatively low editorial priority accorded to the Kashmir issue in mainstream national newspapers.

4) Qualitative Analysis of Front-Page Lead Story

4.1 Details of Front-Page Lead Stories Related to Unrest Published in Greater Kashmir Newspaper in the Month of July

During the month of July, Greater Kashmir published 19 front-page lead stories. Of these, 18 followed the inverted pyramid style of news writing. All 19 lead stories addressed the questions of who, when, what, and where in the lead. However, only nine stories explained why, while 17 addressed how. Eighteen of the lead stories were accompanied by photographs. Of these, only eight photographs were published with both a source and a cutline. Six photographs carried the name of the source but lacked a cutline. The photograph published on July 24 did not include either a source or a cutline, while the story published on July 22 was not accompanied by a photograph. An analysis of tone and treatment revealed that 12 of the lead stories published in July adopted a pro-Kashmir or anti-government orientation, six appeared neutral, and one reflected a pro-government orientation. Although the lead story published on July 24 addressed all five W's and one H, the accompanying photograph lacked both a source and a cutline, while the overall tone and treatment of the story suggested an inclination toward the government.

4.2 Details of Front-Page Lead Stories Related to Unrest Published in Greater Kashmir Newspaper in the Month of August

In the month of August, Greater Kashmir employed the inverted pyramid style of news writing in all 28 front-page lead stories related to the Kashmir unrest. All 28 stories addressed the questions of who, when, what, and where in the lead. However, four stories did not explain how, and five did not address why in the lead. All 28 lead stories were accompanied by photographs. Of these, 20 photographs were published with both a source and a cutline, while six carried a source but lacked a cutline. The photographs accompanying the stories published on August 10 and 11 did not include either a source or a cutline. An analysis of content and tone revealed that 21 lead stories reflected a pro-Kashmir or anti-government orientation, four appeared neutral, and two exhibited a pro-government orientation. Although the lead story published on August 10 addressed all five W's and one H, the accompanying photograph lacked both a source and a cutline, while the overall tone of the story suggested a pro-government orientation.

4.3 Details of Front-Page Lead Stories Related to Unrest Published in Greater Kashmir Newspaper in the Month of September

In the month of September, Greater Kashmir published 16 front-page lead stories related to the Kashmir unrest. All the stories followed the inverted pyramid style of news writing. Each of the 16 lead stories addressed the questions of who, when, what, and where. However, only 12 stories explained why, while 14 addressed how in the lead. 12 stories were accompanied by photographs carrying both a clear source and a cutline. One story published during the period used a file photograph of Greater Kashmir without a cutline. An analysis of content and tone revealed that 10 lead stories reflected a pro-Kashmir orientation, five appeared pro-government, and one was neutral in orientation. The story sourced from the Press Trust of India (PTI) exhibited a tone and treatment suggestive of a pro-government stance.

4.4 Details of Front-Page Lead Stories Related to Unrest Published in The Times of India Newspaper from 9th July to 30th September

During the three-month period following the death of Burhan Wani, only six lead stories were published by The Times of India between July 9 and September 30. Of these, five followed the inverted pyramid style of news writing. All six stories addressed the questions of who, when, where, and what in the lead. However, only four stories explained how and why. All the lead stories were accompanied by photographs; however, only two photographs included both a source and a cutline. In three instances, the source of the photograph was missing. The PTI photograph published on August 26 did not carry a cutline. The lead story published on August 26 was sourced from the Press Trust of India (PTI), and the tone and treatment of the story suggested a pro-government orientation.

5. Thematic Content Analysis of Front-Page Lead Stories Published in Greater Kashmir from 9th July to 30th September

5.1 Use of Force

Over the three-month period under study, Greater Kashmir published 64 front-page lead stories covering the Kashmir uprising. All these stories reported what was described as indiscriminate firing by security forces. The coverage repeatedly emphasized the alleged “ruthless” use of pellet guns, tear gas, and bullets to suppress protests. The stories also documented incidents of stone pelting by protestors in response to security actions. Several reports highlighted cases of protestors sustaining pellet and bullet injuries, with many stories detailing the severity of such injuries. Following the death of an ATM guard due to pellet firing on August 4, protestors were reported to have raised slogans condemning what they described as “state terrorism.” Several locals alleged that security forces beat civilians while chasing protestors.

Almost every lead story included information on fresh clashes, restrictions, and the imposition of curfews. From July 9 to September 24, the reported death toll reached 88. Many stories carried statements from victims and witnesses alleging unprovoked firing by the forces. On numerous occasions, boxed reports accompanying lead stories highlighted the plight of pellet victims and were supported by graphic photographs. Religious and resistance leaders, including Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, strongly condemned the Northern Army Commander’s statement that pellet gun injuries were “not lethal,” describing it as an attempt to mislead the international community. He further expressed disappointment over restrictions on public mourning, characterising such actions as extreme oppression.

On September 4, Members of Parliament reportedly demanded a ban on pellet guns. Subsequently, following sustained appeals from various quarters, the Central Government announced the replacement of pellet guns with PAWA shells. Reports indicated that approximately 1,000 PAWA shells reached Kashmir on September 5. Several stories documented cases of youth, women, and children losing vision in one or both eyes due to pellet injuries. Medical professionals confirmed the critical condition of many injured persons and reported the need for retinal surgeries. On July 30 alone, 19 pellet injuries were reported within a span of 24 hours. While official accounts stated that pellet guns and tear gas were used in response to stone pelting, locals consistently claimed that the firing was largely unprovoked. On August 15, Asiya Andrabi was reported to be among seven individuals injured during shelling and pellet firing at an all-women’s march in Tral.

On the other hand, on August 26, The Times of India reported the government’s decision to replace pellet guns with chilli shells for use by security forces deployed in Kashmir. Apart from this report, no other front-page lead story during the period under study focused on the use of force in controlling the Kashmir unrest. On the same day, the newspaper carried a statement by Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti, in which

she alleged that protestors were using children to attack security forces. She further stated that “95 percent of those who have been killed are youngsters belonging to poor families.” On September 4, the newspaper reported that Kashmir’s most-wanted militant had threatened to turn the region into a “graveyard” for armed forces. The reference was to Mohammad Yusuf Shah, chief of the Hizbul Mujahideen. Earlier, on August 11, a lead story in The Times of India reported that the Pakistan Army had assisted Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) in stirring unrest in Jammu and Kashmir.

5.2 Pro Freedom Demonstrations

A significant number of lead stories reported security forces foiling pro-freedom rallies across the Kashmir Valley. The newspaper consistently described large-scale pro-freedom demonstrations organised by protestors, with reports noting the participation of women and children in these rallies. The coverage indicated that security forces employed pellet guns, tear gas shells, and bullets to disperse protestors. Several reports documented the detention of resistance leaders for organising pro-freedom demonstrations. Large-scale demonstrations following Friday prayers were reported on a regular basis.

The newspaper also carried reports alleging that security forces damaged public address systems in mosques, which were reportedly used to mobilise protestors for pro-freedom demonstrations and for raising pro-freedom and anti-India slogans. On July 28, resistance leader Syed Ali Shah Geelani was quoted as stating that “peaceful programmes are being met with extreme force and pressure by the forces, who themselves vitiate the peaceful atmosphere and then accuse pro-freedom leadership and youth of disrupting peace.” He further remarked that Kashmir resembled a “big prison,” where people were “suffocating” under the actions of security forces and police. Many reports alleged that pellet firing during funeral processions had become a recurring practice. According to police records cited by the newspaper, 31 incidents of stone pelting were reported on September 10 alone during pro-freedom rallies across Kashmir. On September 11, it was reported that nearly 200 individuals were injured across the Valley as security forces continued to disrupt pro-freedom demonstrations. On the other hand, no front-page lead stories related to pro-freedom demonstrations were published by The Times of India during the period under study.

5.3 Unabated Curfew

A recurring theme in the coverage was the imposition of an unabated curfew across Kashmir. Several headlines at regular intervals highlighted the continued enforcement of curfew and the clampdown imposed by the authorities. Despite these restrictions, the reports indicated that protestors continued to organise pro-freedom demonstrations. The news coverage frequently referred to a complete shutdown across the Valley, with reports of undeclared curfews forming a significant part of the reportage. It was reported that the strictest curfew was imposed across parts of old Srinagar and South Kashmir on July 28, during which even ambulances were reportedly restricted. On August 6, security forces were reported to have foiled the “Dargah Chalo” programme using what was described as full force, resulting in the imposition of a stringent curfew. On August 12, reports indicated that curfew had been imposed in all major towns across the Valley. The persistence of curfew was underscored by headlines such as “37 Days: Still Curfew, Bullets, Pellets,” published on the thirty-seventh day of the protests. Although some reports mentioned the lifting of curfew in a few localities, the overall coverage suggested that curfew remained in force in some or all parts of Kashmir throughout the period under study. On the other hand, no lead stories addressing the issue of an unabated curfew in Kashmir were published by The Times of India during the period of study.

5.4 Personal Narratives of Victims

During the period under study, Greater Kashmir regularly published boxed reports alongside front-page lead stories that focused on the plight of pellet victims. These reports primarily comprised personal narratives of individuals who survived pellet attacks, as well as accounts from family members of those who lost their lives due to pellet injuries. Although these narratives employed a high degree of emotional appeal, the reports largely retained factual accuracy and were supported by photographic evidence depicting the injured and deceased. On the contrary, no accounts of victims were carried out in the lead stories of The Times of India during the period of study.

5.5 Statements by State Actors

During the period under study, Greater Kashmir frequently reported what appeared to be contradictory statements issued by state actors, including the police and government officials. On several occasions, official versions presented by the police differed markedly from accounts provided by locals and victims. While police statements often described the situation as normal, alternative narratives from civilians were simultaneously reported, frequently accompanied by specific figures relating to fatalities and injuries like on July 27, police sources stated that the situation across the Valley remained peaceful and under control. In contrast, residents of Hawal in Srinagar alleged that personnel of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) had entered homes and damaged household property. The following day, a headline reported the imposition of a “stringent curfew” across parts of old Srinagar and South Kashmir, noting that even ambulances were reportedly restricted and that police, paramilitary forces, and CRPF personnel had placed concertina wire on major roads to enforce the curfew. On the same day, police officials issued a comparatively moderated statement claiming that curfew was not imposed in most parts of Kashmir, except in the jurisdiction of 12 police stations in Srinagar and in the towns of Kulgam, Awantipora, Baramulla, Pattan, and Anantnag. On September 6, the Central Government assured the Supreme Court that conditions in the Valley were normal. Earlier, on August 10, the Prime Minister stated that “Kashmir enjoys the same freedom as every Indian,” and praised the Chief Minister, Mehbooba Mufti, for ensuring the continuation of the Amarnath Yatra despite what he described as the “malicious intentions” of a few. The Prime Minister also appealed to the public to cooperate in nation-building efforts and assured full support from the Centre. On the same day, former Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah expressed disappointment, stating that the failure to act on the Interlocutors’ Report and the Sagheer Committee Report reflected prolonged political neglect, and that the ongoing unrest was a manifestation of a sustained erosion of public trust in Kashmir.

On August 20, Lieutenant General D. S. Hooda, in a press statement, urged all stakeholders, including separatist groups, to cooperate in restoring normalcy, emphasizing that continued stone pelting and clashes were causing widespread suffering. On August 26, the union Home Minister, Rajnath Singh, stated at a press conference that “India’s future cannot exist without Kashmir’s future.” During the same briefing, Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti remarked that those killed by bullets and pellets “were not out to buy toffees or milk,” underscoring the seriousness of civilian casualties. Throughout the period of unrest, the Central Government repeatedly emphasised the principles of “Insaniyat,” “Jamhooriyat,” and “Kashmiriyat.” Meanwhile, State Congress President G. A. Mir stated on July 24 that although an all-party meeting had agreed upon people-friendly measures, these had not been implemented. He further criticised the Prime Minister and the Home Minister for not condemning the use of force against civilians. On August 11, Congress leader Karan Singh described the Kashmir situation as a major humanitarian crisis, asserting that India must take decisive steps to resolve the issue.

The Times of India newspaper on Aug 11 reported that the Modi government made it clear that it doesn’t intent to engage with separatist in Jammu and Kashmir. The same story carried Home Minister Rajnath Singh’s statement that the only outstanding issue with Pakistan was the return of POK. While referring to

Pakistan PM Nawaz Sharif's letter to the UN seeking plebiscite in Kashmir, Home Minister also said that "no power on earth can snatch Kashmir from us."

5.6 Statements by Non-State Actors

On July 14, Greater Kashmir published statements issued by resistance leaders welcoming remarks made by the United Nations Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, regarding Kashmir. The leaders also criticized the Prime Minister's decision to send "Indian imams" to Kashmir, describing the move as ineffective. Resistance leaders Syed Ali Shah Geelani, Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, and Yasin Malik subsequently urged the public to observe August 15 as a "Black Day." On July 25, resistance leaders appealed for increased public participation in a march toward Anantnag. However, the proposed "Anantnag Chalo" rally was reportedly foiled by the authorities, and the resistance leaders were detained. On July 26, Geelani stated that Kashmir was "not merely a border issue but a human and political issue," and argued that it should be addressed through political means. Reports also indicated that resistance leaders continued to criticize what they described as the excessive use of pellet guns against civilians, even while in detention.

On August 23, representatives of the resistance camp asserted that the "right to self-determination" constituted the only viable solution to the Kashmir issue. This statement was issued in response to the Prime Minister's remarks about finding a permanent solution to the Kashmir problem. On August 18, independent MLA and Chairman of the Awami Ittehad Party, Engineer Abdur Rashid, called for the passage of a resolution seeking the right to self-determination and urged all MLAs to resign to exert pressure on New Delhi to acknowledge the disputed nature of the state.

On Sept 4, the lead story of the Times of India, published a statement of Hizbul Chief, Mohd Yusuf Shah "we will flood valley with suicide bombers". The story also carried out exclusive information about the Hizbul Chief in a box along with a file photo.

5.7 Curtailment of Religious Freedom

Several lead stories reported restrictions on religious practices, mainly the non-permission of Friday prayers at the Jamia Masjid in Srinagar for 11 consecutive Fridays. On September 13, the newspaper reported that residents across Kashmir largely stayed away from markets as mourning over civilian killings continued in the Valley, indicating that there was little inclination to celebrate Eid. The coverage further observed that the demand for sacrificial animals had declined by nearly 80 percent. Despite the subdued atmosphere, the Governor, N. N. Vohra, and the Chief Minister, Mehbooba Mufti, extended Eid greetings to the public. The lead story was accompanied by photographs depicting closed shops and deserted markets, visually reinforcing the impact of the restrictions and public mourning on religious observance. No news about curtailment of religious freedom was published as lead story by the Times of India during the period of study.

CONCLUSION & DISCUSSION

The "K-word" assumed a central position in news discourse following the killing of Hizbul Mujahideen commander Burhan Wani, marking a critical phase in media coverage of the Kashmir unrest. Both the local media in Kashmir and the New Delhi-based national media reported on the developments in the Valley; however, the nature, intensity, and framing of this coverage varied significantly. Despite facing severe constraints such as internet shutdowns, curfews, and media restrictions, the local newspaper Greater Kashmir provided extensive coverage of the unrest. In contrast, the New Delhi-based national daily under study, The Times of India, offered comparatively limited coverage. This disparity is particularly striking and reveals contrasting editorial priorities.

The findings show that during the period under study, Greater Kashmir published 210 items on its editorial page related to the Kashmir unrest, including 42 editorials and 118 articles. In contrast, The Times of India published only 21 editorial-page items, comprising three editorials, 14 articles, and four interviews. Similarly, Greater Kashmir carried 64 front-page lead stories amounting to 32,967 words, whereas The Times of India published only six front-page lead stories with a total word count of 2,379. An analysis of tone and content revealed that 43 front-page lead stories in Greater Kashmir reflected a pro-Kashmir orientation, while all six front-page lead stories in The Times of India exhibited a pro-government orientation. This sharp numerical and ideological contrast points toward the existence of two parallel and competing narratives in the coverage of the Kashmir unrest.

Further analysis of editorials revealed marked differences in code, content, and treatment between the two newspapers. Most editorials published in Greater Kashmir were critical of political initiatives undertaken by both the state and central governments and adopted a suggestive tone. These editorials consistently called for immediate action to halt what were described as anti-human practices by security forces, including the use of pellet guns, bullets, and tear gas shells that resulted in fatalities and severe visual impairments. Several editorials also emphasised the inhumane nature of these actions, with tones of sorrow and disappointment forming an underlying current. In contrast, the three editorials published in The Times of India differed in code but shared similar content, focusing on political initiatives and governance-related perspectives. The overall tone suggested endorsement of official actions rather than critique. This divergence underscores the gap between New Delhi-based reporting and ground-level reportage from Kashmir.

The extensive coverage by Greater Kashmir provides insight into the lived realities of unrest and establishes the socio-political context within which the protests unfolded. Conversely, the limited coverage by The Times of India suggests a restrained editorial approach, possibly influenced by institutional or political considerations, resulting in reduced critical engagement with the issue. While the limited circulation of local newspapers poses challenges in disseminating such narratives nationally, the reluctance of a high-circulation national daily to engage extensively with the Kashmir unrest further restricts the free flow of information. This imbalance not only hampers the development of a comprehensive national discourse but also makes the circulation of balanced and pluralistic news narratives increasingly difficult.

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