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# **Media Propaganda and the Kashmir Dispute: A Case Study of the Kashmir Floods**

by

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# Acknowledgements

Sometimes ideas strike journalists to their very core. They want to dig deeper into the issues to understand them. However, due to the paucity of time and space, most of the time scribes fail to do so.

I wanted to go deeper into the issue of media coverage of the 2014 Kashmir floods, examining it as part of a broader political dispute. Neither time or space, nor the proper funds were available to carry out the study.

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# 1. Introduction

On September, 7, 2014, the river Jhelum, in Indian Administered Kashmir, surged like a big 'wall of water' smashing everything in its way. The flood waters, triggered by seven days of unusually heavy rains, caused havoc in the region. They washed away crops, orchards and decimated housing and business infrastructure.

The main brunt of the ferocious floods, described as the “*extreme of the extreme*”, was borne by Srinagar - the city known as the summer capital of Kashmir - home to around two million people. Many remained trapped on roof tops, evading flood waters, for weeks. All major hospitals, shops and pharmacies were inundated and roads were washed away, plunging the Kashmir valley into chaos and causing unimaginable suffering.

The worst disaster recorded in over fifty years left 280 people dead, damaged the region's infrastructure, snapped electricity cables, destroyed communication links and inflicted business losses amounting to an estimated \$US6718.583 million <sup>1</sup>.

More than half a million people, most of them in Srinagar, were trapped in their houses as the city was submerged under 18 feet water for more than three weeks. It was a nightmarish experience<sup>2</sup>. Media offices belonging to the international, local and national (New Delhi-based) media were also damaged and forced to remain closed. As local

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<sup>1</sup> Fayaz Wani, JK Government Seeks Rs 44000 Crore Package from Centre for Rehabilitation of Flood-hit People, New Indian Express, 11 Oct 2014  
<http://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/JK-Government-Seeks-Rs-44000-Crore-Package-from-Centre-for-Rehabilitation-of-Flood-hit-People/2014/10/11/article2472953.ece>

<sup>2</sup> Kashmir Floods: 6 Lakh Stranded, Nearly 50,000 Rescued, NDTV, Sept 10, 2014  
<http://www.ndtv.com/cheat-sheet/kashmir-floods-6-lakh-stranded-nearly-50-000-rescued-661647>

journalists, caught up in the floods themselves with no access to equipment, were unable to report the situation, Kashmir was effectively cut off from the world. However, national newspaper and broadcast journalists from New Delhi quickly began to be “paradropped” into Kashmir by their respective organisations.

All of these journalists remained embedded with the Indian Armed Forces, including the air force and army. This meant they inevitably filmed and documented relief efforts primarily from the perspective of their hosts.

The powerful 24-hours news channels were given exclusive access to film their stories from helicopters or rescue boats owned by the military.

The military claimed that it rescued more than one hundred thousand people from the flood waters and their claims went unchallenged by India’s national media which overplayed their efforts, often asking Kashmiris to remain grateful to the armed forces for saving them<sup>3</sup>.

Ajay Shukla, a columnist working for the Indian newspaper Business Standard, wrote in his column that if perspectives of the flood disaster in Jammu and Kashmir, especially the New Orleans-like inundation of Srinagar, were shaped only by national television, this would be a simple story of how the Indian Army again pulled the chestnuts out of the fire.

*“Day after day, this monochromatic narrative played out with minor variations, like the suggestion that Kashmiris should thank the army for saving their undeserving hides.*

*The insensitivity even took the form of taunting questions to Kashmiris about whether they should now learn to love the army that they criticised so much. Had TV channel editors warned off their half-baked correspondents, the army might have benefited enormously from public gratitude for its selfless work.*

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<sup>3</sup> Kashmir floods: The army gains where media fails, Rediff.com, Sept 16, 2014  
<http://www.rediff.com/news/report/kashmir-floods-the-army-gains-where-media-fails/20140916.htm>

*Instead, there was seething anger on the streets of Srinagar at this crass and tactless milking of nationalism,”*<sup>4</sup> wrote Shukla. He criticised the New Delhi-based media for its biased coverage for the Kashmir floods, simultaneously pointing out that the army’s humanistic face would have helped them to win over the hostile population.

The militarised coverage of the floods by India’s national media increased the anger of Kashmiris, who were already reeling from the floods and from an administrative failure to cope with the disaster. Kashmir’s population also accused the Indian army of prioritising its relief operations - focusing on rescuing the families of military personnel, the politically influential, and Indian tourists visiting the region<sup>5</sup>.

A Kashmiri journalist, working for New Delhi media, wishing to remain anonymous, narrated that when Srinagar was deluged, the Indian air force and military planes airlifted journalists to take aerial footage of the inundated areas.

*“They imposed a condition though,”* the journalist said in an interview with this researcher. *“That they would air lift me only if I produced a story favouring the army and the air force and covering their relief and rescue efforts. I refused to go.*

*“Instead, I waded through the chest deep waters to get a first-hand picture of the floods. It was quite shocking. The majority of the media outlets from New Delhi were operating from the military airbase in Srinagar. They were embedded and did not shy away from openly running a public relations operation for the military. It seems they were reporting for the military, and not for the flood victims,”* the journalist said.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup>Hafsa Kanjwal, *India turns Kashmir flood disaster into PR stunt*, Al Jazeera, Sep 20, 2014

However, the international media, and later the local media, presented a different picture of the disaster. For example, the Washington Post reported under the headline “*Anger rises in India’s Kashmir Valley as people remain trapped a week after floods*<sup>6</sup>,” highlighting the slow rescue efforts.

Al Jazeera America ran an opinion piece under title “*India turns Kashmir flood disaster into PR stunt*<sup>7</sup>” - contradicting the vigorous reporting of New Delhi-based media that the military had evacuated thousands of people from their submerged homes.

The local media, which was only able to start publishing news again 18 days after the floods, presented a different picture. They prominently featured the efforts of the local population, and how their brave acts saved many lives. They praised young people for forming self-help groups and for putting their lives in danger, evacuating people trapped in flood waters using inflated tubes and other inflatable items. They also praised youth and community services for establishing relief camps, and for wading through dangerous flood waters with aid for the flood survivors.

These contrasting narratives led to this study’s questioning of the New Delhi-based media’s coverage.

The study, the first analysis of media coverage of Srinagar’s floods, will ask whether the coverage by the New Delhi-based media was mere propaganda for the army, or objective reporting of the disaster.

The study poses two questions:

1. Was the coverage of the New Delhi-based media biased towards India’s Army/armed forces and therefore to the Indian government, regarding its rescue and relief operations during the Kashmir floods?

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<sup>6</sup> Annie Gowen, *Anger rises in India’s Kashmir Valley as people remain trapped a week after floods*, Sep 13, 2014 [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/anger-rises-in-indias-kashmir-valley-as-people-remain-trapped-a-week-after-floods/2014/09/13/975dc8ea-ed15-4d0f-a517-4c0ab71d3d0a\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/anger-rises-in-indias-kashmir-valley-as-people-remain-trapped-a-week-after-floods/2014/09/13/975dc8ea-ed15-4d0f-a517-4c0ab71d3d0a_story.html)

<sup>7</sup> Hafsa Kanjwal, *India turns Kashmir flood disaster into PR stunt*, Al Jazeera, Sep 20, 2014

2. How did reporting of the floods by the New Delhi-based media differ from reporting by international media?

The study uses content analysis methodology to help answer the questions. It examines the content of New Delhi-based media from September 7 to September 15. One print outlet – *Times of India* and one broadcast outlet - New Delhi TV (NDTV) news channel were studied.

It also compares the coverage of New Delhi-based media with a collection of international media stories, published over a longer period - between September 7 to September 20, 2014. The international stories were from Reuters News Agency, *New York Times*, Al Jazeera, BBC and the *Financial Times*, London.

I chose this particular time period because India's national press were the first to arrive on the scene and covered the floods heavily at the beginning, when the flood was at its highest. The international media took longer to get to the area and so their coverage started a few days later and lasted until September 20, 2014. The local Kashmir media could not be taken into account for this study as most of the offices remain submerged under water and so news could not be published for three to four weeks.

### **Political framing of disasters by the media**

Politics inevitably play a major role in disasters. For example, the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami had “divergent political outcomes”. In the armed conflict areas of Aceh, the scale of the disaster there eventually led insurgents to strike a peace deal with the Indonesian government, to end the conflict.

However In Sri Lanka, the disaster intensified the conflict between Tamil rebels and Colombo, as both the parties fought over aid, they “antagonistically politicized” and “opportunisticly wanted to seize the shift”, both fearful that allowing the rival side to “territorialize its aid would undermine their broader political struggle” (Billon & Waizenegger 2007).

The 2010 earthquakes in Haiti and Chile aptly illustrate the way media frames and portrays realities. Researchers found that in Chile the magnitude of the earthquake was



much higher than in Haiti. Chile suffered fewer deaths, but huge infrastructure damage. Due to different geo-political realities, the researchers identified several media frames which portrayed Haiti as “hell on earth, through descriptions of chaos and death, whereas Chile was framed in a way that illustrated an inefficient, slow but organised, response following the earthquake”. The framing elicited effective intervention from the international community in terms of aid and help to Haiti, but nothing of that sort happened in the case of Chile (Svitak 2010).

On June 15, 2013 torrential rains and flash floods, cloud bursts and landslides triggered devastation in the ecologically sensitive northern Indian state of Uttarakhand. The disaster claimed over 5,500 lives. The dead included tourists and pilgrims, who were on their way up to the mountainous Kedarnath shrine to pay obeisance.

While covering the Uttarakhand disaster the Indian media, including electronic and print, constructed frames that portrayed the most “compassionate interpretations “of the reality, seeking “commiseration and solidarity across the country”.

By contextualising the disaster in this way, the media garnered favourable public opinion for healthy intervention from the state and also from International humanitarian aid agencies, to counter the disaster aftermath.

Similarly in 2005, when Hurricane Katrina struck Louisiana, researchers found that media framing drew attention to “interracial and class-based inequalities, prejudices and tensions in the United States”. They found the culmination of media frames presented a “very chaotic picture where everything is going wrong”. Whether right or wrong, the images of the disaster formed in the minds of audiences, have come through media framing which portrayed “New Orleans as a disorganised city, on the brink of collapse, less from the storm than from its residents”, (Scanlon, Alldred, Al Farrell & Prawzick 1985). The media’s interpretation of political realities during disasters signifies political choices and their fallout on the overall politics and post-calamity intervention on a given territory.

### **This study and definitions**

Keeping the geo-political context in mind, this study aims to conduct comparative research into how the media framed stories to cover the realities of flood disaster in the contested Indian Administered Kashmir.

This research studies the media coverage/frames to analyse how the reporting of the disaster interpreted the intended political realities, thus revealing how disasters can be politicised by the media to suit the interests of the warring parties in contested zones.

In this paper, 'Indian national'- or 'New Delhi-based'- media are defined as outlets which are based in, and publish or broadcast news from, New Delhi, India's capital city.

The term 'international media' describes the global news organisations chosen for the study.

'Local media' comprises Kashmir-based media organisations, printing or broadcasting news, mostly based in Srinagar, Kashmir.

In the context of this paper the term 'Indian Armed Forces' includes both the regular Indian Army, including Indian paramilitary forces, and also the Indian Air force. These agencies are normally stationed in Kashmir due to the conflict between the Indian state and those Kashmiri people who want either independence, or a merger with Pakistan. Further details can be found in the chapter "Kashmir dispute and militarisation".

## **Methodology**

The study will first examine the historical and political context of the relationship between Kashmir and the Indian government and the role of the Indian Armed Forces in Kashmir. It will describe the media, both national, based in New Delhi, and local, based in Srinagar. It looks at the links between local media and Kashmir's political aspirations. The evidence from the content analysis will be presented in chapter five.

The content of the media coverage of the Kashmir floods was analysed by examining newspapers articles and television broadcasts, from the archives available online.

The study coded each report/video according to the language, headlines, phrases, visuals, frames and the sources used in the news. It also coded photo stories containing images of the armed forces and the captions used to explain the picture.

The main focus of the study was to code both the electronic and print news stories in relation to the role of the armed forces during the Kashmir floods. The stories were mainly categorised as: stories with either the army or armed forces mentioned, or as a source; stories having army/armed Forces visuals; human interest stories showing the armed forces as saviours; human interest stories with no quotes or mention of armed forces; reports about non-Kashmiri stranded persons without praising the army; stories about non-Kashmiri stranded persons praising the army.

## 2. The Kashmir Dispute and Militarisation

In 2004, the European Union described Kashmir as the “*World’s Most Beautiful Prison*”<sup>8</sup>, in an apparent reference to the militarisation of the region. Kashmir continues to remain one of the world’s most militarised zones and is often referred as a “*nuclear flashpoint*” between India and Pakistan in media and diplomatic circles.

*“With approximately one soldier to every 10 civilians in Jammu and Kashmir (on the Pakistani side figures suggest a lesser but still large number), the huge military presence is never far away”*<sup>9</sup>.

Militarisation has inevitably led to suffering and gross human rights violations, committed predominantly by the Indian forces (Chatterjee, Imroz, Navlakha, Din & Parvez 2009) to quell the rebellion against Indian rule which shook the region in 1989<sup>10</sup>.

Kashmir, a disputed territory, is divided between India and Pakistan, both of which are nuclear armed. Both claim the entire region, but each rules a part. They have fought two of their three wars over Kashmir.

The Kashmir dispute originated during the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947, which resulted in the formation of India and Pakistan.

Maharaja Hari Singh, then the Hindu monarch of the Muslim-majority Kashmir, was unable to decide whether to merge with India or Pakistan in 1947. However, he maintained the sovereign nature of the Kashmir region by signing a standstill agreement with Pakistan which allowed transport and other services from the country.

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<sup>8</sup>Summary Reports, Visits of the ad hoc delegation of the European Parliament to Kashmir, 8-11 December 2003 and 20-24 June 2004

[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004\\_2009/documents/cr/537/537832en.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004_2009/documents/cr/537/537832en.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> ibid

<sup>10</sup> Guardian, Sept 12, 2015

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/12/indian-forces-kashmir-accused-human-rights-abuses-coverup>

In October 1947, tribesmen from Pakistan's North Western Frontier Province attacked Kashmir. It had been reported that the Muslims in Kashmir were under attack and the Hindu Monarch was indecisive about joining either dominion<sup>11</sup>. After the attack Hari Singh sought India's military assistance, even as "*India's Governor-general, Lord Mountbatten, believed peace would best be served by Kashmir joining India on a temporary basis, pending a vote on its ultimate status*"<sup>12</sup>.

Kashmir was divided into two parts in 1948: Indian-controlled Jammu and Kashmir, with approximately 10 million people; and the smaller Pakistani-controlled part of Jammu and Kashmir, with a population of around three million<sup>13</sup>. The 460 mile de-facto boundary between the two parts of Kashmir is now known as the Line of Control or LOC.

However, the dispute over Kashmir continued. On January 1, 1949, India took the issue to the United Nations Security Council. The United Nations called for a free and impartial plebiscite within the region to decide whether Kashmir's population wanted to join either India or Pakistan.

The Kashmir dispute remained a festering issue between the two nuclear armed countries. They fought two wars in 1947- 48, in 1965 and a low intensity war in 1997, in the heights of Kargil, to claim the region, besides countless political stand-offs on the floor of the United Nations and other diplomatic venues.

After 1989 there has been an armed insurgency in the region against Indian rule. According to the 1995 report of Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, "Before 1989, India and Pakistan fought over Kashmir. Since late 1989, it is Kashmiris who have done [much of] the fighting—and most of the dying"<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> *Kashmir Profile*, BBC, Nov 26, 2014. [www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-11693674](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-11693674)

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>13</sup> Sumantra Bose, *Kashmir Roots of Conflict*, Harvard University of Press, 2003, p.2.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Sumantra Bose, *ibid*. p. 3.

In response, the Indian state sent more than half a million troops, including army, para-military, police and irregular forces, to quell the rebellion in Kashmir<sup>15</sup>. India has also imposed emergency laws such as the Disturbed Areas Act and the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, which allows soldiers to shoot a suspicious person on sight.

According to government figures, the fighting has left 43,460 dead, since 1990<sup>16</sup>. This figure is disputed by human rights organisations who say more than 70,000<sup>17</sup> people have been killed during the fighting between the armed guerrillas and Indian troops, besides leaving thousands of orphans and widows. These human rights organisations also state that so far approximately 8,000 people have been subjected to enforced disappearance by state forces, while recently more than 2,000<sup>18</sup> unmarked graves of unidentified Kashmiris were also reported to have been discovered in the region.

As Kashmir continues to be mired in armed violence and politically driven pro-freedom protest campaigns, a survey conducted by the Indian newspaper, the Hindustan Times, in 2010 revealed that about two thirds of Kashmir's population want to live as an independent country<sup>19</sup>.

The Indian militarisation of Kashmir has so far remained unsuccessful in winning over the Kashmiri people, despite India's claim that it "*has enabled [India] to penetrate and tightly grip Kashmiri society*"<sup>20</sup>.

Due to dense militarisation and dominant pro-freedom sentiments, Kashmiris often remain pitted against the Indian military, through public protests and armed resistance, to

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<sup>15</sup> An IPTK and APDP Report, *Structures of Violence*, 2015, p. 11-12.

<sup>16</sup> Randeep Singh Nandal, *State data refutes claim of 1 lakh killed in Kashmir*, Times of India, June 20, 2011  
<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/State-data-refutes-claim-of-1-lakh-killed-in-Kashmir/articleshow/8918214.cms>

<sup>17</sup> Jason Burke, *Kashmir unmarked graves hold thousands of bodies*, Guardian, Aug 21, 2011  
<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/aug/21/kashmir-unmarked-graves-thousands-bodies>

<sup>18</sup> Ibid

<sup>19</sup> *Two Thirds in Indian Kashmir want independence: poll*, The Express Tribune, Sep 12, 2010 <http://tribune.com.pk/story/49238/two-thirds-in-indian-kashmir-want-independence-poll/>

<sup>20</sup> *Three surprises from a visit to Kashmir*, Owen Bennett-Jones, BBC, April, 2014

end what they perceive as 'military occupation'. "*Many students in Srinagar are adamant: Indian rule is oppressive and they are willing, if necessary, to live their whole lives in resistance,*" the BBC's Owen Bennett-Jones reported in April 2014.<sup>21</sup>

The Indian Army has been constantly trying to implement a "perception management" strategy, to counter "separatist thought" in Kashmir. Some Kashmir observers believe New Delhi media coverage of the flood was intended to supplement this perception management strategy - planting the thought among the populace that the Indian Army was their own army, rather than an occupying force.

Rahul K Bhonsle, a retired Indian army officer currently managing a strategic risk and knowledge management consultancy, is author of *Winning Hearts and Minds: Lessons from Jammu and Kashmir* (Bhonsle 2009). In it he argues that in the complex socio-political environment of Kashmir, sponsored and encouraged by Pakistan, purely civic actions would not be enough to generate a positive wave of support for the government.

*"There is a need for integrating the three facets of WHAM by the army, by elaborating on perception management and people-friendly operations, and integrate the same with civic action to effectively manifest WHAM,"*<sup>22</sup> Bhonsle wrote.

Similarly, researchers (Nabi & Ye 2015) assert that after development, the most important element for the Indian military for its "*hearts and minds approach is to have some form of control over the media so that the masses can be informed about the military's plans.*"

Quoting Bhonsle (2009), who emphatically argues that India should manage the media in Kashmir, Ghulam Nabi and Jinzhong write that Bhonsle recommends the use of the radio and vernacular dailies, the most common modes of media in rural Kashmir, and that he stresses the importance of bringing the editors on board to let the "good stories" about the military spread.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid

<sup>22</sup> Ibid

*“This argument is echoed by Anant (2011). Media manipulation or spreading the message of “hope”, “peace”, “development” and “employment opportunities” under the military regime, and the destruction of these very elements by the insurgents are to be conveyed to the larger masses through the media”<sup>23</sup>.*

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<sup>23</sup> Quoted by Peer Ghulam Nabi, Jingzhong Ye, *Of Militarisation, Counter-insurgency and Land Grabs in Kashmir*, Economic & Political Weekly Nov 21, 2015 vol 46 & 47, p. 59.



### 3. India's National Media and the Kashmir Dispute

In October 2015, Shekhar Gupta, a senior Indian journalist, said that India's media had never been truthful to Kashmir as the "*truth was considered against the national interests*".

Gupta had been editor-in-chief of *The Indian Express* newspaper for almost 19 years, and so his admission was widely covered by the local media in Kashmir. It was the first time a high-ranking journalist had made such an observation.

*"The biggest problem in Kashmir is the way the place has been covered in the main land Indian media....,"* Gupta said. *"The problem has always been very closely linked to national security and military security, it has got inexplicably woven in that perspective.... The journalists were parachuted from outside. Mostly they were not Kashmiris and were not well versed with the language or ethos.... The media covered Kashmir purely as a security story...<sup>24</sup>".*

India's national media has generally followed the official line in relation to Kashmir. Instead of questioning militarisation, or examining pro-freedom sentiments in the region, the media has usually repeated the government's security-centric line: that Kashmir is an integral part of India; the unrest in Kashmir is Pakistani-sponsored and that the military is fighting Pakistan-sponsored militants.

However, the Indian media's bias means human rights violations, committed by the Indian army and other state forces, have been largely ignored in reports about Kashmir, and are often mentioned only as passing references.

The widespread killing of people, torture, setting alight of houses sheltering insurgents, extra-judicial killings, mass rapes, and major massacres perpetrated by state forces to

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<sup>24</sup> Kashmir Life, Media was Never Honest with Kashmir: Journalist Shekhar Gupta, Oct 15, 2015 <http://www.kashmirlife.net/media-was-never-honest-with-kashmir-journalist-shekhar-gupta-87403/>

suppress political gatherings and other rights violations, have either been completely blacked out or have found only passing mentions in the New Delhi press (Joseph 2000).

Syed Nazakat, a journalist based in New Delhi, wrote (Nazakat 2012) that the apparent lack of professional objectivity assumes greater significance when India's political claim on Kashmir seems morally deficient. He states that even the impact of the state imposition of curfews, which sometimes extend for days and cause extreme hardship to Kashmiri people, often goes unreported.

*“This includes the simmering dissent and anger of the Kashmiris against the Indian government. Indian media coverage of Kashmir generally tends to solely blame Pakistan for the unrest in the state. Although Pakistan is widely known to be arming the insurgents and promoting a separatist movement in the Kashmir valley, the situation was not entirely created by Pakistan. India has its share of the blame for the humanitarian crises in Kashmir”*,<sup>25</sup> Nazakat wrote.

By describing the human rights violations and demand for a right to self-determination as *“propaganda by Pakistan and militants,”* India's national press has always tried to justify the atrocities committed by its state forces. Journalists also called into question the damning reports on human rights, released by international media and human rights organisations, which often criticised government forces<sup>26</sup>.

India's national press, besides resorting to self-censorship to satisfy their patriotic aspirations, have also censored news items critical of government forces<sup>27</sup>. They have relied mostly on government press releases<sup>28</sup>, rarely appearing to question the veracity of official versions of event.

This report, published in *The Times of India* on January 1, 1992, and quoted by Teresa Joseph (Joseph 2000), makes the argument clear: *“The persistent propaganda campaign launched by certain terrorist outfits about the atrocities being perpetrated by the*

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<sup>25</sup> Syed Nazakat, *Indian Media Coverage of Kashmir— When Stories Clash with National Interest*, University of Wollongong, Australia, 2012, p. 2

<sup>26</sup> Teresa Joseph, *Contemporary South Asia: Kashmir, human rights and the Indian press*, 2000

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*

*security forces in the Valley was bound to have an effect on the morale of the personnel who were performing their duties under extremely trying conditions.”*

While analysing 423 reports on Kashmir in India’s three leading newspapers, including *Times of India*, *The Hindu* and *The Indian Express*, Joseph found that 78 percent of such reports relied on government sources<sup>29</sup>.

Such jingoistic coverage of events in Kashmir during the years of armed insurgency compelled Arundhati Roy, a noted Indian novelist, writer and political activist, to state that the Indian media had completely *“failed to highlight the plight of the ordinary Kashmiris who were being tormented and brutalised by security forces every day in the name of freedom and peace”*<sup>30</sup>.

*“Indian media is suffering from schizophrenia as its reports portray zero reflection about the reality in Jammu and Kashmir. Indian media is busy painting a rosy picture of normalcy, which is absolutely false,”* Roy told *The Hindu* newspaper in an interview.

While working as a journalist both in New Delhi and Srinagar, I have experienced how people in mainland India are completely unaware of the suffering in Kashmir, while at the same time they believe the trouble within Kashmir is being created by what they see as “Pakistan sponsored separatism”. Over the years monitoring media reports about Kashmir, I have found the Indian press has reported the Kashmir dispute in a way that appears to further the strategic aims of the state. It has not only sided with the government in the Kashmir dispute, but has also contributed to ensuring that public opinion in mainland India remains in favour of the status quo in the region.

In a conversation with the academic Chindu Sreedharan in March 2009, an unnamed editor of a national Indian daily said:

*“We are a main national newspaper. So we have to reflect the views of majority of Indians. That has to be. I am an Indian, my newspaper is Indian by nature...not originating*

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid

<sup>30</sup> Sandeep Joshi, *Withdraw Army from Kashmir, says Arundhati Roy*, *The Hindu*, Aug 31, 2005 <http://www.thehindu.com/2005/08/31/stories/2005083112711600.htm>

*from Kashmir or Pakistan. Pakistan may call that portion Indian occupied Kashmir, but for us it is Kashmir. Kashmir is part of Indian union. And it won't be Azad Kashmir [for the portion of Kashmir in Pakistan] in our news pages, come what may. It will be Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, not anything else. That is very clear<sup>31</sup>".*

Teresa Joseph reported that although human rights violations committed by Indian forces are ignored by the Indian press, the Indian press highlights the killings of minorities in Kashmir, such as Sikhs and Hindus, allegedly by rebel groups.

Joseph underlines the point that newspapers cover such stories prominently but they also publish human interest stories saying that minorities have become victims of 'rebel groups', supported and funded from Pakistan.

For this reason, the Indian media has been able to construct a narrative which portrays realities contrary to the Kashmiri political realities. Besides creating a favourable public opinion, this narrative has also helped the Indian state to get away with massive human rights violations, committed by its forces, to ensure the Kashmir territory remains part of India.

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<sup>31</sup> Chindu Sreedharan, *REPORTING KASHMIR: An analysis of the conflict coverage in Indian and Pakistani newspapers*, March 2009, p. 103.

## 4. Local Media and Kashmiri Political Aspirations

Kashmir's local media, comprising mainly of print, received a boost after 1989 - the year insurgency broke out against Indian rule. Before 1989 there were only 15 Urdu language newspapers<sup>32</sup> and one major English daily, the Kashmir Times.

However, as soon the militarisation of Kashmir began and the state expanded its security apparatus to suppress the rebellion by using force, stories of survival and human rights were prominently featured in the newspapers. Local newspapers were full of reports of civilian killings, encounters between the insurgents and the army, rapes and arson.

Since 1989 there has been an enormous expansion of the region's local media. There are now more than 372 registered and non-registered news publications<sup>33</sup> and more than 10 major English dailies. New Delhi-based media organisations and international organisations like AP, Reuters and AFP also have correspondents in Srinagar to cover the violence.

Local journalists tread a fine line while covering Kashmir. The media is subject to pressures from multiple sides, as well as official blackmailing. In the absence of local private industry to buy advertising, newspapers in Kashmir are often dependent upon government advertising. However, the government often threatens to withdraw its advertising from newspapers that fail to toe the official line. Sometimes, officials also threaten editors with the cancellation of their official registrations, which authorise them to publish.

If military and government require their viewpoint to be represented in the media, so do the insurgent groups. The general public also regard the conflict in a political context,

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<sup>32</sup> Speakers highlight 'sorry state' of Urdu journalism in Kashmir, October 19, 2015, Rising Kashmir Newspaper

<sup>33</sup> List of Approved And Non Approved Daily/Bi-weeklies/Weeklies/ Fortnightlies/ Monthly/ Quarterly Newspapers/ Magazines of Jammu Division And Kashmir Division, JK Department of Information And Publication

<http://www.jkdirinf.in/NewsPapers.aspx>

contrary to the state narrative. Thus, the majority of Kashmiris want local media to report their desire for independence.

Caught between these divergent narratives, I have experienced these pressures from various parties, either by political arm twisting, or through violence and intimidation. At least 10 journalists have been killed in Kashmir in the past 25 years, while life threatening attacks have been carried out against scores of other journalists. These threats remain ongoing<sup>34</sup>.

Despite working under adverse conditions, most of Kashmir's media continue to report fearlessly on political issues, human rights and other problems facing the population. However, reporting on social topics such as the environment, administration, and health were not the newspapers' main concern. Their main focus continues to be human rights, politics and violence. Because of this, Kashmir's media is under constant pressure from diverse ideological groups, representing the different stake holders in Kashmir's political landscape.

The insurgency was at its peak during the 1990s. During this time, journalists in Kashmir reported events in a way that represented the aspirations of Kashmiri people. Journalists tried to reflect the people's "truth". Besides covering human interest stories about victims of violence, the media put a special emphasis on covering the human rights violations committed, mainly by Indian troops, to quell the armed rebellion.

This meant Kashmiri reporters found themselves opposing the Indian government's political ideology. The local media was accused of resorting to propaganda when reporting the facts pertaining to the conflict and history of Kashmir. The state, its bureaucracy, and the military accused local media of spreading "pro-Pakistan" and "pro-militant" propaganda.

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<sup>34</sup> Kashmir News Board, 10 journalists killed in Kashmir insurgency, May 2008  
<http://www.kashmirnewz.com/n000366.html>

Giving credence to this view Chindu Sreedharan, writes that many people, including New Delhi-based journalists, have looked at the local reportage with “*professional disdain*”. (Sreedharan 2010)

*“And the tendency among policymakers –federal politicians, state administrators, and security force officers –is to dismiss the local media as mouthpieces of militancy. Such criticism, and journalism, needs to be read in light of the constraints local newspapers labour under, however,”*<sup>35</sup> Sreedharan wrote.

Kashmiri media has always taken a contrary stand on significant issues concerning politics and human rights, compared to the New Delhi-based media. If the Delhi media highlighted small human rights violations committed by the militants, local media would project the large scale of rights violations committed by the Indian troops<sup>36</sup>. Although the local media was subjected to tremendous pressures and some outlets compromised on journalistic ethics, due to corruption and coercion, the majority of journalists in Kashmir represented local perspectives. This earned them the goodwill of Kashmir’s population, most of whom scorned India’s national press.

In an interview with the author, Faisul Yasin, political editor of the highly circulated local *Rising Kashmir* newspaper, said that Kashmir-based media is not homogeneous but its focus has always been on local issues: political, security-related and everyday problems of the people.

*“They have been able to give an in-depth detail of these issues concerning people. At the same time, Kashmir-based media has also been able to cover security-related issues properly.*

*“They have been able to bring the voice of the victims too as against the New Delhi-based media for which the so-called “national interest” remains supreme,”*<sup>37</sup> Yasin said.

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<sup>35</sup> Chindu Sreedharan, Reporting Kashmir: *An analysis of the conflict coverage in Indian and Pakistani newspapers* March 2009, pp. 92-94

<sup>36</sup> Anuradha Bhasin Jamwal, Kashmir’s media story, *Himal South Asia*, July 18, 2014

<sup>37</sup> Interview Political Editor *Rising Kashmir*, Faisul Yasin, 05 January, 2016

Although the pressure on Kashmir's media remains largely invisible, it has become more assertive since 2008. In the summer of that year an intifada-like uprising erupted in Kashmir, during which thousands of people took to the streets against Indian rule. The uprising, which initially started as a demonstration against the controversial transfer of land by the state to a Hindu shrine, broadened into major protests where people demanded the end of Indian rule in Kashmir.

More than 60 people, mostly young men and boys aged between 13 and 25 years who were part of pro-freedom demonstrations, were shot by the Indian forces in the uprising, and hundreds of others were injured. The events were heavily covered by the local press. Stories were published about the victims' families and photographs printed of young men and youths throwing stones at the Indian forces. Finally, the protests ended when a week-long curfew was imposed. Newspapers and local cable television channels were stopped from publishing and broadcasting news during the curfew<sup>38</sup>.

The local media were also subjected to open scrutiny, coercion and suffering during the 2010 public uprising against Indian rule, which lasted four months. More than 120 youths died, and thousands of civilians were injured, after state forces opened fire on the street protesters demanding freedom<sup>39</sup>.

The 2010 uprising was started after three civilians were killed by the Indian army in a staged encounter, in a mountainous area of Kupwara, close to the Line of Control, the de facto border dividing Kashmir into India and Pakistan<sup>40</sup>. People demanded action against the army and took to the streets.

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<sup>38</sup> Oneindia.com, *Most newspapers hit stands after 7 days, news channels still off*, August 31, 2008. <http://www.oneindia.com/2008/08/31/most-newspapers-hit-stands-after-7-days-news-channels-still-off-1220167954.html>

<sup>39</sup> The Indian Express, *One-man judicial commission to probe Kashmir killings in 2010*, June 19, 2014 <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/one-man-judicial-commission-to-probe-kashmir-killings-in-2010/>

<sup>40</sup> The Indian Express, *Rewind: A look back at 2010 Machil fake encounter case*, Dec 25, 2013 <http://archive.indianexpress.com/news/rewind-a-look-back-at-2010-machil-fake-encounter-case/1211599/0>



During one such protest on June 11, 2010, Tufail Matoo, a 17 year-old boy, was killed by police as he was coming home from private tuition<sup>41</sup>. After that incident protests grew and broadened into a widespread uprising across Kashmir. Hundreds of thousands<sup>42</sup> of demonstrators took to the streets to demand the end of Indian rule. The state's response was to fire tear gas canisters, cane charge and open fire on the unarmed protesters, for which it was criticised<sup>43</sup>.

The local media, which reported the brutality of the government forces in containing the civilian protests, was subjected to severe punishment by the state. On the pretext of maintaining so-called "law and order", Kashmir was turned into a police state which still continues.

Writing in the Indian national news magazine, Tehelka, in the Feb 05, 2011 issue, Pragya Tiwari, an Indian journalist with Tehelka, reported that for 30 days in 2010 no newspapers had been published in Kashmir because of the strict curfews imposed.

*She reported that "On a number of other days, newspapers would be stopped from being distributed in an area where violence had occurred. On others, entire lots of newspapers were seized from the press.*

*On the odd days that papers did come out, their resources were strained to the hilt. There was no saying how many staffers would be allowed to get to office. On some days there were no more than two-three people to work on some of the largest dailies<sup>44</sup>."*

Tiwari also reported that during the four month long agitation in 2010, journalists were beaten, their curfew passes were invalidated and mobile SMS was banned.

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<sup>41</sup> NDTV, One year on, Tufail Mattoo's family still awaits justice, Jun 12, 2012

<http://www.ndtv.com/india-news/one-year-on-tufail-mattoos-family-still-awaits-justice-458285>

<sup>42</sup> The Guardian, The mass graves of Kashmir, July 09, 2012

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/jul/09/mass-graves-of-kashmir>

<sup>43</sup> Christian Science Monitor, India draws up new strategy on Kashmir violence as criticism mounts, Sep 16, 2010

<http://www.csmonitor.com/World/terrorism-security/2010/0916/India-draws-up-new-strategy-on-Kashmir-violence-as-criticism-mounts>

<sup>44</sup> Pragya Tiwari, The Valley's media is being throttled. Giving rumours a free run of the conflict zone, Tehelka Magazine, February 05, 2011

Soon after the agitation was over, in the following months and years, the Indian state took punitive measures against local media for its coverage of the Kashmir uprising. It targeted the flow of government advertising to local newspapers, which are solely dependent on government ads.

The major newspapers, which during 2010 agitation widely reported the civilian suffering inflicted by the state, were particularly targeted.

*“Newspapers in Jammu and Kashmir have been targeted by controlling their advertisements and revenue flow by successive regimes for far too long. Selected newspapers from this state have been deprived of their due share of government and DAVP (Directorate of Audio and Visual Publicity) advertisements for more than two years, affecting their functioning and making them bleed financially since the financial dependence of these publications is mainly on advertisements, primarily government and DAVP advertisements, given the rather low level of corporate business in this state,”*<sup>45</sup> read an editorial in the *Kashmir Times* newspaper in 2013.

The New Delhi-based *Economic Times* newspaper reported that India's security agencies recommended stopping advertising to Kashmiri newspapers after it found that they were favouring “separatist ideology”. In April, 2015 the paper reported:

*“An analysis carried out by security agencies has indicated that these papers, Urdu and English, have been taking an anti-India stand in the Valley. Their reports and opinion pieces allegedly incite violence. The editorials in these papers also were accused by the analysis of supporting separatist ideology. The Centre hopes that the state government would rein in the newspapers trying to create trouble”*<sup>46</sup>.

In October 2011, India Today, a New Delhi-based news weekly, reported on the same issue:

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<sup>45</sup> Editorial, *Kashmir Times*, Feb 05, 2013

<http://www.kashmirtimes.in/newsdet.aspx?q=25661>

<sup>46</sup> Rahul Tripathi, Narendra Modi government may withhold ads to Jammu and Kashmir papers, *Economic Times*, April 24, 2015

[http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2015-04-24/news/61493989\\_1\\_narendra-modi-government-government-ads-davp](http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2015-04-24/news/61493989_1_narendra-modi-government-government-ads-davp)

*“Sources said the situation became critical after the "provocative" coverage of last year's stone-pelting protests by some newspapers in the Valley. More than 100 persons had died in the violent clashes. Reacting sharply to the alleged anti-India propaganda spread by a section of the media in the Kashmir Valley, the Union Home Ministry has cracked the whip on five newspapers, including the popular Kashmir Times, and decided to starve them of official advertisements and other support. Besides Kashmir Times, English dailies Greater Kashmir and Rising Kashmir and Urdu newspapers Buland Kashmir and Ethlaat are facing the home ministry's wrath. Buland Kashmir is a popular Urdu publication of the Greater Kashmir group<sup>47</sup>”.*

A 2012 in an article entitled “A success story amid all odds” on the media platform The-Hoot.org, Shujaat Bukhari, editor of *Rising Kashmir* (RK) newspaper, wrote that it was due the newspaper’s “fearless reporting in reflecting the situation on the ground and representing the sentiment of the people, RK has been punished with blacklisting for advertisements issued by DAVP<sup>48</sup>”.

He added the Indian Home Ministry advisory had clearly directed the concerned departments not to release advertisements to *Rising Kashmir* ostensibly for being on the side of the people in the region.

*“When I contacted Union Home Minister, P. Chidambaram, requesting him to reconsider the decision, he shot back: “Why should I give you advertisements since you preach secessionism?”*

*“When asked to show where we were guilty of his charge he had no specific answer,” Bukhari wrote.*

Despite the pressures from the Indian government, I have seen how some local media continues to report the ground situation as it is. However more recently, since 2013,

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<sup>47</sup> Maneesh Pandey, Home ministry cracks whip on Kashmiri newspapers over 'anti-India' news, India Today, Oct 11, 2011, <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/home-ministry-cracks-whip-on-kashmir-media-over-anti-india-news/1/154451.html>

<sup>48</sup> Shujaat Bukhari, *A success story amid all odds*, the hoot.org, Marc 17, 2012, <http://www.thehoot.org/media-watch/regional-media/a-success-story-amid-all-odds-5807>

there have been signs that pressure from the state has been having an effect. Editorial opinion pages seem to be more 'balanced'. They now offer two divergent political narratives, one which approves status quo - or pro-India - position, the other advocating the conflict and secessionist politics, representing the state and the Kashmiri people. Official statements and press releases also occupy considerable space on front pages. And it is often observed that human rights stories have been moved to the back pages.

## 5. The Evidence: Content Analysis of the Media

### 5.1 *Times of India*

#### Key Findings

The *Times of India* online archive was accessed to analyse the data, including reports, editorials and picture stories about the Kashmir floods, from Sept 7 to Sept 15.

A total of 79 news items were studied. These included 73 news stories, four picture stories, and two editorials. Of this number approximately 57 percent mentioned the army/ Indian government, the remainder were general and human interest stories.

The 73 news stories were divided into the following categories:

a) Stories mentioning/ or main source (in) Indian armed forces	29
b) Stories on non-Kashmiri stranded persons without praising army	11
c) Stories on non-Kashmiri stranded persons praising army	05
d) Stories on non-Kashmiri stranded persons praising local Kashmiris	01
e) General stories related to Kashmir floods	18
f) Political stories related to floods	05
g) Human Interest Stories	04

In category (a), stories about the army or where the army was cited as a main source, reports were about people being evacuated from areas cut off by the floods, help being provided by helicopter, efforts of armed forces members, and the number of armed forces involved in relief and rescue operations.

The stories mainly overplayed the efforts of the armed forces in “saving” the lives of the people; for example in one report, an army general claims the army “won’t return to barracks” till the last “man (Kashmiri)” is pulled out of the waters. Some of the news stories quoting the government of India and Indian national political parties heaped praise on the armed forces/army for working tirelessly to save Kashmiris during the floods.

The general impression conveyed by reports in category (a) (most of which also included images of armed forces, Indian air force and other paramilitary forces evacuating Kashmiris) is that the armed agencies were the only rescuers and were solely responsible for saving thousands of people from the floods.

In categories (b), (c) and (d), the focus of the media coverage was of people stranded by the flood. It is notable that all of these news stories published about stranded people were about non-locals i.e. Indians visiting Kashmir for work or tourism, and not about local Kashmiris. For example, in category (b), the 11 stories carried by the newspapers on stranded persons concerned missing people from various other parts of India. Stories contained some general information about the missing people, while a few included quotes from their relatives. Stories in category (b) were not about the army.

Category (c) consists of five personal stories about stranded people who said they had been evacuated by the army. They praised the army and its efforts for evacuating them and saving their lives.

Only one story, in category (d), was about a stranded person who praised locals (Kashmiris) for saving his life.

In category (e), there were 18 general stories related to the floods, which included reports about the restoration of electricity, phone networks, relief operations by aid agencies, shortages of Kashmir apples, saffron prices in Indian markets, and so on.

There were also five political stories, category (f), relating to Kashmir floods. One story was about India's Prime Minister extending a helping hand to Pakistan to provide assistance to the people of Pakistan Administered Kashmir, as they too were suffering from floods. One story reported how the 'distance vanished' between Delhi and Kashmir, due to the efforts of armed forces during the floods, pointing out the chasm between the diametrically divergent political ideologies over the years.

Lastly, in category (g), the four human interest stories were about how local Kashmiris were in dire need of medicines. One story reported that local Kashmiri journalists formed a volunteer group to evacuate hundreds of people from marooned water, whilst another reported on Kashmiri students studying in India and worrying about their families in the floods.

### **Photo Stories**

The *Times of India* posted four photo stories on its online site. All the photo stories featured the armed forces, particularly the army and air force, carrying out relief and rescue operations: pictures of military helicopters, men wearing olive-green uniforms wading through water, soldiers taking victims to helicopters etc. Almost all the images are action-packed and depict India's armed forces as the only agencies providing relief and rescue to the Kashmiris.

There were 11 images in the first picture story, of which nine featured the army and two showed civilians in the water. The second picture story contained nine pictures, of which five showed soldiers and military helicopters in action in flood waters, while four were pictures of flood victims. The third story was on similar lines.

Another photo story, comprised of 25 pictures, depicted the army and air force working: from lifting adults and children, to building bridges. Below are some examples of the overtly political messages in the captions and headlines accompanying these pictures:

Headline: **We salute Indian army**

Caption: They hope that Kashmiris will now realise that only the rest of India can protect them and the anti-India sentiments will disappear slowly.

### **Indian army rescues a woman in J&K**

Caption: Many hope that these floods will serve as an eye opener for people advocating freedom from Kashmir.

### **Without Indian army, J&K rescue efforts could not be possible**

Caption: Earlier the army was viewed as an occupational force in Kashmir.

### **Army and its rescue efforts in Kashmir**

Caption: Many people have criticised Omar Abdullah (Chief Minister of Kashmir region) for failing to provide proper assistance. The residents say it is the army that has come to their rescue and not the state government.

### **Indian army helps flood hit victims**

Caption: The defence forces are working non-stop to rescue people.

### **Indian army helps stranded victims in J&K**

Caption: These were the same people who used to throw stones and hand grenades at the army personnel in tense situations.

### **India's rescue operations in J&K**

Caption: Indian defence forces were considered invaders by the local population. The separatists too were attacking them and maligned the Indian army, and maligned them for almost 30 years. But the same army has become their saviours.

The headlines and their captions clearly illustrate how the army/armed forces role was projected in the region, considered to be a 'hostile territory'. This also confirms that the armed forces' role was projected in the photo stories as political and an attempt to win the "hearts and minds" of Kashmiris, who are considered "separatists," always against the "occupational army".

### **Editorials**



Both of the two *Times of India* editorials analysed for this study contained the term 'Armed Forces' in their headlines.

**Facing the floods: Kashmir tragedy and Army's rescue mission is above politics as India unites in support.**

and

**Missing in action: Army and Air Force carry out Kashmir flood relief but state government's collapse is shocking.**

In both editorials, the role of armed forces was glorified, while the role of the state government was criticised for not dealing with the crisis adequately. Both editorials were political and carefully framed. They gave a clear view of the competing political ideologies - pro-India and pro-separatism - that rule Kashmir's political landscape, and how they perceived the floods were closing the "distance" between them.

### **Words, Terms and Headlines**

The words and terms used in many of the articles reflect the political distance between New Delhi and Kashmir, in particular how the Indian army, perceived in Kashmir to be "occupational," was regarded in New Delhi as "saviours" and "humanitarian".

The stress on phrases such as the "crisis for the whole country" signified how the media attempted a sympathetic interpretation of the disaster.

One story regarding the "relief and rescue operation by the army", was headlined "occupational force to humanitarian agency", which could be interpreted as mocking those Kashmiris who consider the Indian army to be an occupational force.

Many stories repeated the sentence: "security forces making tireless efforts to save victims of floods." This emphasised the efforts of the armed forces saving Kashmiris. Other phrases used in newspaper editorials, such as "reordering of perceptions", signified how India's army was consciously presenting its human face to the people of Kashmir, who otherwise associated it with human rights violations.

Concepts raised in articles, such as the “isolation” of “Kashmiris from India” being ended by the army’s efforts, appeared to be political in nature, aimed at carving out a political space for India.

Some headlines over the stories also make an interesting read. Either they mention ‘armed forces working tirelessly to evacuate Kashmiris’, or are a direct reference to the politics of Kashmir. Some of the headlines are below:

**Army, IAF work throughout night battling to rescue**

**Army rescues trapped people in Jammu and Kashmir floods**

**Flood washes away J&K's isolation**

**Army evacuates 20,000 in JK**

**Army, NDRF must put in more efforts to overcome the deluge in Jammu and Kashmir**

**7-ways-in-which-flood-washed-away-J&Ks-isolation**

**In flood-hit J&K, ‘occupation force’ hailed as saviour**

**NDRF jawan injured in attack by angry J&K locals**

**J&K floods: Congress hails role of armed forces**

**J&K floods: Over 90,000 rescued, but many refuse to leave home**

## **5.2 New Delhi Television (NDTV)**

### **Key Findings**

An analysis of NDTV news channel’s news output between September 7 and September 15, 2014, demonstrates that the channel’s reporting was overwhelmingly in favour

of the armed forces, promoting the idea that the armed forces were only agencies protecting Kashmiris from the flood waters.

The research analysed NDTV's online archives. A total of 37 news items, including prime time shows, were studied. Of this number, 97 percent of items mentioned the army, while the single remaining story was a human interest story.

News stories and news shows were of the following duration:

6 minutes to 55 minutes	Six programmes of this duration were carried including the prime time shows
4 minutes to 9 minutes	Eight news items
1 minutes to 4 minutes	23 news stories

The content was categorised as follows:

a) Stories with Army/Armed forces mentioned or source	36
b) Stories having Army/Armed Forces visuals	36
c) Human Interest stories showing armed forces as saviours	10
d) Human interest stories with no quotes/mention armed forces:	01

The study found (category a) that the armed forces were quoted as the main source of the information in almost all (36 out of 37) reports. It was also notable that almost all

stories (category b), 36 out of 37 had visuals containing armed forces, military helicopters, soldiers holding ropes and military boats. This gave the impression that the only rescue mission was led by the government forces.

Only one human interest story, which reported the difficulties faced by a bridegroom getting married during the floods, did not mention the army (category d). All other human interest stories (category c) were told through the prism of the armed forces.

The amount of coverage devoted to the army may have been partly due to the fact that most of the New Delhi-based reporters were embedded within the armed forces during the floods.

It is likely that this was a choice made by these reporters. There were opportunities for them to cover the floods independently. They could have hired boats, or embedded with local relief organisations or local rescue teams to cover the disaster. But most chose to report from army helicopters and boats.

In all of the television stories, the stranded passengers spoke about the armed forces and how they were rescued by them during the flood waters.

In one 25 minute-long programme, soldiers were shown treating babies who had been saved from a flooded hospital. Even the relief camps, from where survivors would tell their tales of suffering, were established by the armed forces. Reporters would elicit information from survivors, mostly praising armed forces for saving them.

Another significant aspect of the reportage was that, apart from glorifying the work of the armed forces, it also praised the military for multi-tasking. They were rescuing people at the same time as guarding the border and being involved in counter-insurgency operations.

In a number of news programmes, former army generals and Indian Air Force personnel sat on panels to discuss the floods. Besides praising the soldiers, they also discussed details of rescue and relief operations.

It was also notable that journalists reported from military helicopters and army boats did their 'piece to camera' while soldiers carried out relief work in the background.

### **Words, Headlines, Frames and Wider Political Connotations**

As anti-India sentiment runs deep in Kashmir, the visuals, images and words had the effect of carving out political space in Kashmir among the local population, who often regard armed forces as occupying forces.

The quotes and repetition of tag lines such as "Army won't move until all are safe" and "Army cantonment under water, but will not rest till all men rescued" demonstrated how the national media attempted to elicit political sympathy from the Kashmiri people.

Phrases such as "Incredible effort by armed agencies", "soldiering for public good", "Army, IAF, NDRF (National Disaster Response Force)", "Salaam (Urdu word for Salute) to armed forces" and "Holding rope and the hand of soldier" were often used by TV channels.

The idea of a "trust-deficit" - that the army's efforts in the floods would mitigate the distance between Kashmiris and the government was repeatedly alluded to.

It was strange to watch, but reporters embedded with the armed forces at times told flood victims that they must be thankful to armed forces for saving their lives. In one report, a female reporter asked a victim, who had been airlifted by the armed forces, whether she would be thankful to the military for saving her. In another programme, the anchor asked the reporter to question a "separatist" leader and to ask whether he was thankful to the armed forces for their tireless service to save Kashmiris.

One, 55 minute 53 second news show, entitled "Army at the Heart of Rescue - Turning point in Kashmir", specifically discussed whether the army's rescue mission would be a "turning point" in the way Kashmir's population view the armed forces.

During this programme the anchor raised several questions such as "Will the separatists who abuse the army be chastened?" "Will separatists thank the army" for their "incredi-

ble” work saving people. Later, the panelists, many of them former armed forces officials, politicians, and others, discussed how the efforts of armed forces might change the perception of India’s army in Kashmir.

A 13 minute programme titled, “Tireless service of battalion and its boat” portrayed how armed forces, despite not knowing the fate of their own families marooned in water, continued to rescue people. It concluded: “A few good men (soldiers) are keeping alive the hope...” in Kashmir.

Headlines also reveal how reporters covered the floods:

**Army at the heart of rescue-turning point in Kashmir**

**On board an airforce helicopters mission in flooded Kashmir**

**Damage to border raises security concerns**

**Soldiers asked to remain calm if attacked with stones, says Kashmir army commander**

**In Jammu, safeguarding the border while braving the flood**

**Army ready to wrap up and state government not yet in, Jammu camps head for chaos**

**Tireless service of battalion and its boat**

## **5.3 International Media**

### **Key findings**

The study undertook analysis of the coverage of the following news organisations: Reuters, *New York Times*, BBC (online stories in English), Al Jazeera English Online and the *Financial Times*, London.

A total of 41 items were studied, categorised as follows;

News Stories (Text)	28
News Stories (Video) (Al Jazeera, Reuters, BBC)	04
Photo Stories (Reuters, BBC)	05
Opinion-Editorial	02
Media/ Social Monitoring Stories	02

The research found that the international media coverage of the flood was significantly different to coverage by the Indian national media.

All the 28 print news items (text), and four video stories, were balanced, with quotes from locals, volunteers, and the army.

The international media reported on general stories concerning health, anger among the residents over the slow rescue, lack of medicines, and local volunteers.

As opposed to the Indian national media coverage, which indicated that the armed forces were the only rescuers operating in the region, international reporters focused on stories about flood victims and volunteers that helped them. They also reported how Kashmir's population viewed the army's role in the flood.

The international media reported that one week after the floods began, tens of thousands of people were still stranded.

*“Tempers rose on Wednesday with some angry that relief efforts were only reaching them six days after the floods began. Others complained about living conditions in temporary camps,”* reported Reuters news agency under the headline, *“Tempers flare as mass flood evacuations begin in Kashmir”*<sup>49</sup>.

The international media, quoting local people, also reported that armed forces were selectively rescuing stranded people, giving priority to their own men and non-Kashmiri tourists.

The *New York Times* quoted a flood victim saying:

*“He echoed the complaints of many of his neighbours, saying that the soldiers made it a priority to rescue the trapped families of the police and government officials, and avoided heavily Muslim neighbourhoods.*

*“For many, it was like these people were rubbing salt on their wounds,”* he said<sup>50</sup>.

The international media also contextualized the stories from the perspective of the lingering Kashmir dispute, pointing out that Kashmiris were rejecting aid from the armed agencies due to the strained relations between them.

*“In much of the violence-scarred Kashmir Valley, where a militant separatist movement has been largely vanquished but a heavy security presence remains, interactions with the military and law enforcement are often strained,”* reported the *New York Times*<sup>51</sup>.

Reuters reported:

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<sup>49</sup> Rupam Jain Nair, Tempers flare as mass flood evacuations begin in Kashmir, Reuters, Sep 10, 2014 <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-southasia-floods-idUSKBN0H50FE20140910>

<sup>50</sup> Betwa Sharma & Nida Najar, Kashmiris Cope With Flooding, and Resentment of India, NYT, Sep 15, 2014 [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/16/world/asia/kashmiris-cope-with-flooding-and-resentment-of-india.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/16/world/asia/kashmiris-cope-with-flooding-and-resentment-of-india.html?_r=0)

<sup>51</sup> Betwa Sharma & Nida Najar, In Srinagar, Floodwaters Recede, but Anger Remains, NYT, Sep 10, 2015 <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/11/world/asia/floods-india-pakistan.html>



*“As the same army craft made its way through the narrow canals, a boat of several men shouted angrily at the soldiers.”*

*“We don't need your help!” one man yelled. “Whatever you have, we don't need any of it!”<sup>52</sup>*

Both print and electronic media covered the volunteers and survivors of the floods. They reported that local volunteers risked their lives to save victims stranded in flood waters.

The BBC reported that *“local volunteers emerged as a ray of hope”* with the headline *“Volunteers wade into Kashmir floods to rescue thousands”<sup>53</sup>.*

There were also reports about makeshift boats being used by volunteers and how Kashmiris were often left to fend for themselves.

The *Financial Times*, under the headline *“India's flood response failings stoke Kashmir separatist passions”* reported:

*“Now the flood is having political consequences too, with the tardy and ill-organised response of the Indian authorities enraging an already alienated population of Kashmiri Muslims and reigniting their passion for independence from Hindu-majority India.”<sup>54</sup>*

The *New York Times* reported:

*“At a mosque where residents had set up a relief camp, Ghulam Hassan was coordinating efforts to feed 2,000 people. He said the volunteers were on their own. “India says that we are theirs, and Pakistan says that we are theirs, but we really don't belong to anyone,” he said, referring to the disputed Kashmiri border. “If we did, someone would come to help us.”*

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<sup>52</sup> Krista Mahr and Fayaz Bukhari, A week on from flood, 150,000 still stranded in Kashmir, Reuters, Sep 14, 2014

<sup>53</sup> Shujaat Bukhari, Volunteers wade into Kashmir floods to rescue thousands, Sept 18, 2014  
<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-29218301>

<sup>54</sup> Victor Mallet, India's flood response failings stoke Kashmir separatist passions, Financial Times, Sep 17, 2014  
<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/112fb526-3e33-11e4-b7fc-00144feabdc0.html?siteedition=intl>

*Residents have built rafts using planks of wood with tires attached in an effort to evacuate flooded neighbourhoods.*

*70 percent of the population of nearly 1.2 million have been affected by the floods.”<sup>55</sup>*

Some news stories also pointed out the fact that local people were angry that the Indian national media had “*politicised the disaster*” by glorifying the army.

Al Jazeera English, under the headline “*Anger rife in Kashmir amid slow rescue*”, reported:

*“In Kashmir where anti-India sentiments run deep, the Indian media has come under fire for “politicising” the rescue efforts launched by thousands of its soldiers stationed here to quell an armed rebellion that erupted in 1989.”<sup>56</sup>*

The *Financial Times* reported:

*“Stories are relentlessly repeated of how Indian television stations have glorified the army, while troops have insulted Kashmiris by flinging down packets of out-of-date food from helicopters and ignored appeals for help from flood survivors on the upper floors of their homes.*

*In Srinagar, however, Kashmiris are almost unanimous in saying they have been abandoned to their fate by all arms of the Indian state”.<sup>57</sup>*

Editorials in the *New York Times* and Al Jazeera discussed how the Indian government was refusing international aid for Kashmir.

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<sup>55</sup> Betwa Sharma & Nida Najjar, In Srinagar, Floodwaters Recede, but Anger Remains, NYT, Sep 10, 2015

<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/11/world/asia/floods-india-pakistan.html>

<sup>56</sup> Wasim Khalid, Anger rife in Kashmir amid slow rescue, Aljazeera Online, Sep 15, 2014

<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2014/09/anger-rife-kashmir-amid-slow-rescue-2014911111852495276.html>

<sup>57</sup> Victor Mallet, India’s flood response failings stoke Kashmir separatist passions, Financial Times, Sep 17, 2014

<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/112fb526-3e33-11e4-b7fc-00144feabdc0.html?siteedition=intl>

A *New York Times* editorial, headlined “Preventable disaster in Kashmir”, called on India to accept international aid<sup>58</sup>. It also reprimanded the Indian government for being ill-prepared to counter the disaster.

One Al Jazeera opinion piece: “Indian Turns Kashmir Floods into a PR Stunt”<sup>59</sup> reported that the Indian media had presented only one side of the story. It also criticised India for not allowing International aid to reach thousands of marooned victims, claiming India was politicising the disaster in order to enhance the its own reputation. The editorial also pointed out that the public relations exercise had backfired, as the state had failed to deal with the disaster adequately.

The five photo stories analysed in the international press portrayed the general sufferings of marooned survivors. A few pictures also depicted the army providing relief to Kashmiris.

Two segments, carried by Al Jazeera and the BBC, were about how the Indian media’s coverage of Kashmir floods had backfired.

Al Jazeera’s programme, “The Stream” was titled “*Relief efforts and politics collide in #KashmirFloods media coverage*”<sup>60</sup>. The programme discussed how ‘netizens’ reacted to the Indian national media coverage of the disaster.

*“Many argued Indian media disproportionately covered the army disaster rescue forces (NDRF) operations and offered little analysis of local efforts,”* The Stream reported<sup>61</sup>.

Quoting netizens it also reported: *“Indian media was acting as a PR lobby for the Indian army and the government, whose action on the ground has been dismal.”*<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Preventable Disasters in Kashmir, NYT, Sep 16, 2014

<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/17/opinion/preventable-disasters-in-kashmir.html>

<sup>59</sup> Hafsa Kanjwal, *India turns Kashmir flood disaster into PR stunt*, Al Jazeera, Sep 20, 2014

<http://america.aljazeera.com/opinions/2014/9/kashmir-floods-indiarescuerelieffort.html>

<sup>60</sup> The Stream, *Relief efforts and politics collide in #KashmirFloods media coverage*, Aljazeera, Sept 10, 2014, <http://stream.aljazeera.com/story/201409102053-0024144>

<sup>61</sup> *ibid*

<sup>62</sup> *ibid*

Similarly the BBC also reported: "*Controversy over coverage of Kashmir relief effort.*<sup>63</sup>" This noted that the Indian media's coverage of the army's role in providing relief "*provoked a debate, with some critics saying that the coverage amounts to a 'free public relations exercise' for the army*".

It also pointed out the strained relations between the military and the Kashmiris, adding that the military had been accused of human rights abuses in Kashmir.

Quoting a local journalist, Faisal Yaseen, the BBC reported:

*"Yaseen describes the media coverage as a "free public relations exercise" for the army, adding that the national media are ignoring rescue efforts launched by local volunteers and that the army "could not match the job done by the locals."*<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Controversy over coverage of Kashmir relief effort, BBC Monitoring, Sep 16, 2014  
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/monitoring/controversy-over-coverage-of-kashmir-relief-effort>

<sup>64</sup> Ibid

## 6. Conclusion

Based on a detailed analysis of the New Delhi-based media's coverage of the 2014 floods in Kashmir, the study concludes that its reporting was biased and subjective. This study does not put forward any evidence that the policy was deliberate, but it is clear from the content analysis that reports of the disaster by the Indian national media rarely represented the local, Kashmiri point of view. While the motivations for this biased coverage are not proven, it may have represented a bid to appease Indian citizens, as well as to carve out political spaces for the Indian state.

International media coverage was, by comparison, far more objective. It included representations of all actors involved in the flood relief efforts, including local Kashmiri people. The reporting also included a balanced political context of the ongoing conflict in the region.

The study posed two questions:

1. Was the coverage of the New Delhi-based media biased towards India's Army/armed forces and therefore to the Indian government, regarding its rescue and relief operations during the Kashmir floods?
2. How did reporting of the floods by the New Delhi-based media differ from reporting by international media?

It is clear from the analysis of reports between September 7 and 15, 2014, that the Indian media provided securitised coverage of Kashmir - i.e. a security-centric view of Kashmir. This security-centric reporting appeared to be aimed at creating sympathetic political spaces within Kashmir for the Indian armed forces, typically seen as occupiers in the region.

The study found that New Delhi-based media coverage was overwhelmingly in favour of the army/government, with *Times of India* devoting more than half (57%) of its coverage specifically to the army's relief efforts and NDTV focusing almost entirely (97%) of its content on the army and government's role in the crisis.

The study also demonstrates that New Delhi-based media appeared to ignore the contribution made by local volunteers in providing relief to Kashmiris marooned in the floods. Instead, it almost entirely focused on the rescue efforts of the armed forces.

The reports, photographs and videos in the Indian media gives the clear impression that despite the army being considered hostile and involved in human rights abuses against Kashmiris, the military did a commendable job and Kashmiris should now consider their benign, human side.

Some of the reports even demanded that Kashmiris should thank the armed forces for saving their lives.

The research findings also reveal that the Indian media did not report the many offers of aid to Kashmir made by international aid agencies. As the Indian government refused to accept foreign aid, the media only reported the government side of the story, glorifying its relief and rescue efforts. This may have given the impression that the armed forces were unable to deal with the crisis.

The words, images, headlines, phrases, languages and construction of stories appeared politically motivated, often depicting the distance between Delhi and Kashmir. They also suggested that the efforts of the armed forces could close the divide between the two sides, while asking Kashmiris to acknowledge India's efforts to save them.

As already discussed in the introduction to this research paper, politics often play a role in disasters, for example the impact of the 2004 Tsunami upon the armed conflict areas of Aceh and Sri Lanka. In the same way, the political contextualisation of the Kashmir floods is also obvious from the manner in which the New Delhi-based media interpreted the ground realities, creating political and sympathetic spaces for India's armed forces.

When the bulk of Indian national media stories so clearly concentrated upon the human face of the army in Kashmir, the floods appear to have been used as an opportunity to promote the interests of Indian state. India's media completely ignored the rescue efforts of locals and local volunteer groups who bravely saved people from the flood waters.

With reference to the second question posed by the study, the comparative analysis found that international media presented a very different picture of the flood coverage.

A far more balanced view of the story was provided, taking into account all actors involved in relief and rescue operations. The international media politically contextualised the stories and constructed frames which reported that the floods had actually increased “anti-incumbency sentiments in Kashmir”.

International coverage also reported local complaints against the Indian army, for example that half a million people remained stranded in their homes, in more than 12 feet of water, for seven days and neither ‘Indian military or civilian administration came to their rescue’.

The stories highlighted allegations by Kashmiris that the army ‘rescuers’ had ignored them and rescued only tourists and construction workers, originally from other parts of India, besides insulting Kashmiris by “firing out of date packets of food to them from helicopters”.

The international media even reported that Kashmiri people were aware of and angry about what they perceived as biased coverage of the disaster by the New Delhi-based media. Some international reports covered the local response to claims that the armed forces had been described as the sole saviours of Kashmiris during the floods.

International media questioned the role of the New Delhi-based media in covering the disaster, with some outlets, including the BBC, asking whether Indian media was acting as a “*PR lobby*” for the Indian army and the government.

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