

MS THESIS

INDIAN MEDIA COVERAGE OF SECTARIAN CONFLICT IN
GILGIT-BALTISTAN: A FRAMING ANALYSIS



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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of
Science

In the

Department of Media and Communication Studies Faculty of Social Sciences

International Islamic University Islamabad

August 2025

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Certificate of Approval

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Declaration

I, Ahsan Raza hereby certify that this work, which I now submit for assessment for the program of study leading to the award of MS entitled “Indian Media Coverage of Sectarian Conflict in Gilgit Baltistan: A framing Analysis” is entirely my own work, that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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Acknowledgement

I become enabled to write this note of thanks and acknowledgment after the comprehensive period of six months. It has been a period of acute learning for me, not only on an academic platform but also on a personal level. I would like to reflect on the people who have supported and helped me so much throughout this period. First and foremost, enormous gratitude is due to ALLAH ALMIGHTY who has provided me the strength to complete my dissertation in a scheduled time in spite of various complications. I also dedicate this study to Hazrat Muhammad Mustafa (S.A.W.W) who advised Muslims to get Education from cradle to grave. I want to express my special appreciation and sincere thanks to my supervisor Dr. Muhammad Junaid Ghauri for his continuous support in order to complete this research. I am also thankful to him for his patience, motivation, enthusiasm, and immense knowledge in the field of media. His guidance helped me a lot in the writing of this thesis, without his guidance and support, I would not be able to carry out this research within the stipulated time period. I am also grateful to our teaching staff, to my family, friends and every individual who provided every possible help and motivated throughout of thesis journey. Thank you very much, everyone.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my beloved parents, whose utmost support and encouragement have been the foundation of my journey. They leave no stone unturned to support me in my academic journey. Their belief in my potential and their sacrifices have inspired me to reach for my dreams.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	i
CHAPTER1: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Background of the Study	1
1.2 Statement of the Problem	4
1.3 Significance of the Study	5
1.4 Objectives of the Study	5
1.5 Research Questions	5
1.6 Delimitations of the study	5
1.6.1Scope of Media Sources	6
1.6.2Language Constraints	6
1.6.3Geographical Focus	6
1.6.4Methodological Limitations	6
1.6.5Exclusion of Non-Media Factors:	6
CHAPTER2:LITERATURE REVIEW	7
2.1 Review of the Related Literature	7
2.2Sectarian Conflict in Pakistan	7
2.3 Coverage of Sectarian conflict in Indian media	9
2.4 Theoreticalframework	14
CHAPTER3:METHODOLOGY	15
3.1 Research Design	15
3.2 Sampling	15
3.2.1Selection of the Newspapers	15
3.3 Operational Definitions	16
3.3.1Sectarian Conflict	16
3.3.2Muharram Incident(The Unrest of August 2022)	17
3.3.3Blasphemy Allegations(Unrest of August 2023)	17
3.3.4 Chilas Bus Attack(The Unrest of December 2023)	17
3.4 Indian Newspapers	18

3.4.1 <i>Hindustan Times</i> _____	18
3.4.2 <i>Kashmir Monitor</i> _____	18
3.4.3 <i>Kashmir Observer</i> _____	19
3.4.3 <i>The Indian Express</i> _____	19
3.4.4 <i>The Times of India</i> _____	19
3.5 Framing Theory _____	20
3.5.1 Cultural Context _____	21
3.5.2 Platforms of Digital and Social Media Analysis _____	21
3.5.3 Historical Analysis _____	21
3.5.4 The Framing Theory _____	21
3.5.5 Framing Perspectives _____	22
3.6 Overview of the Framing Theory Overview _____	22
3.7 Instrument _____	26
3.8 Data Collection _____	26
CHAPTER4: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS _____	27
4.1 Dominant Frames Identified _____	27
4.1.1 Conflict Frame _____	27
4.1.2 Attribution of Responsibility Frame _____	27
4.1.3 Victimhood and Vulnerability Frame _____	28
4.1.4 Geopolitical and Strategic Contextualization _____	28
4.2 Chronological Listing and Sampling Implementation _____	28
4.2.1. Data Collection & Cleansing _____	29
4.2.2 Initial stories Count (Raw) _____	29
4.2.3 After Data Cleansing (Relevant Stories Only) _____	29
4.3 Sampling Methodology: Kth N/n Approach _____	31
4.4 Chronological Listing and Sample Selection _____	31
4.5 Final Sample Dataset Overview _____	33
4.5.1 Synopsis of Data Listing and Sample Selection _____	35
4.6 Thematic Patterns in Media Coverage _____	37
4.6.1 Episodic vs Thematic Reporting _____	37
4.6.2 Sensationalism and Language Use _____	37

4.6.3 Local Perspectives Inadequately Represented	37
4.7 Variations in Newspaper Coverage	37
4.7.1 National and International Outlets	37
4.7.2 Ideological Biases	38
4.8 Summary of Frames	39
4.9 Implications of Findings	39
4.10 Chapter Summary	41
CHAPTER5:CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION	42
5.1 Recommendations	44
5.2 Recommendations for Media Practitioners	44
5.3 Suggestions for Academic Investigators	46
5.4 Future Research Directions	47
6. Reflection	49
REFERENCES	51
Appendix A	55
Appendix B	57
Appendix C	60
Appendix D	60
Appendix E	61
Appendix F	61
Appendix G	62

ABSTRACT

This study examines how the Indian press represents sectarian conflicts in Gilgit-Baltistan. Using a framing analysis, it explores the key themes and patterns through which the media constructs narratives around this sensitive issue. The research investigates how these narratives influence public discourse by assigning geopolitical dimensions to the conflicts, and how parties and causes are portrayed. A qualitative approach was applied to analyze press discourse. Findings indicate that the Indian media largely adopts a conflict-centric narrative, often minimizing contextual and historical factors and presenting Gilgit-Baltistan as a volatile region associated with extremism. Coverage was shaped by national agendas, characterized by sensationalism, criticism of Pakistani institutions, and the exclusion of regional perspectives. These insights highlight how media framing can influence perceptions of sectarian conflict and may assist policymakers, media practitioners, and citizens in developing more balanced understandings of the region.

Keywords: *Sectarianism, Indian Media, Press Representation, Framing Analysis*

CHAPTER 01

1. INTRODUCTION

With the media struggling to deal with this sectarian strife, a lot of reporting falls in between the lines of informed reporting and sensationalism, in which issues of bias and responsibility are raised.

1.1 Background of the Study

Gilgit-Baltistan is a territory that is part of the more expansive, and war-torn state of the Jammu and Kashmir. Before it was renamed Gilgit-Baltistan, it used to be called the Northern Areas. The territorial dispute between India and Pakistan over Jammu and Kashmir has persisted since their independence in 1947. The Kashmir conflict in South Asia remains a prominent catalyst for militarism, protracted warfare, extremism, and socio-economic instability (Khan, 2022). Gilgit-Baltistan, spanning an area of 72,971 square kilometers, is situated in the hilly region of northern Pakistan. The estimated population of this region consists of approximately 2.5 million people, belonging to at least twenty-four different ethnic and linguistic groups. Additionally, there are four major schools of Islam represented among the population: Shiite (39%), Sunni (27%), Ismaili (18%), and Noorbakshi (16%) (Singh, 2013).

Gilgit-Baltistan, a geographically unique region next to the contested area of Jammu and Kashmir, is situated at the confluence of China, Central Asia, South Asia, and Afghanistan. Its strategic and geopolitical nature renders it susceptible to the overflow of conflicts originating from nearby active militant groupings. Pakistan has the most significant gathering of Shia Muslims beyond Iran, with Gilgit Baltistan being the sole region in the otherwise Sunni country where Shias constitute the majority (Hunzai, 2013). The conflict between Shia and Sunni groups has escalated since the 1980s, particularly with the establishment of the Karakoram Highway, which has linked this so far secluded area with China and mainland Pakistan.

Sectarian violence in Gilgit commenced in 1983, marking the initial occurrence of significant unrest. In 1988, a rumor of a Sunni massacre perpetrated by Shias led to a violent

assault by several armed tribesmen from the southern region. This attack resulted in the deaths of about four hundred Shias and the destruction of multiple Shia villages (Hussain, 2021). On February 28, 2012, a total of eighteen Shia pilgrims were brazenly murdered on the Karakoram Highway in the Kohistan province as they were making their way back from Iran. Four on April 3, a separate assault claimed the lives of twenty individuals in Chilas. Similarly, on August 16, another incident resulted in the deaths of twenty-two individuals in Babusar Pass. These attacks specifically targeted Shia individuals, but also resulted in the deaths of four Sunni individuals who were protesting (Holden, 2019). The occurrences have greatly shaken the populations of Gilgit-Baltistan, who have unanimously denounced these atrocities and called for resolute action from the government.

In 2012, there was a significant increase in sectarian violence, resulting in the deaths of over one hundred individuals. The subsequent retaliatory killings in Gilgit town and its surrounding areas, carried out by armed militants from both parties, have further contributed to the widespread violence and heightened sense of terror (Dad, 2016). The emergence of religiously motivated violence in Gilgit-Baltistan is a relatively new phenomenon, resulting from changes in demographic dynamics, limited political options for certain groups, and the growing impact of religious extremism originating from mainland Pakistan. The Islamic revolution in Iran (1979), the Islamisation efforts led by Pakistan's commander General Zia-ul-Haq, and the Afghan conflict in the 1980s all affected Gilgit-Baltistan (Hunzai, 2013). These events collectively brought about a perspective motivated by ideology, which is currently observable in the form of sectarian unrest (Sheikh et al., 2012).

Pakistan and India, the two major states in South Asia, have been in an endless cycle of conflict since their independence (Riaz, 2009). Gilgit-Baltistan, an area of significant geopolitical significance in South Asia, has been encountering a wide range of obstacles associated with hybrid warfare (Abbas & Ahmad, 2021).

Hybrid warfare refers to the utilization of both conventional and non-conventional strategies by opposing states to accomplish their political goals, while circumventing traditional limits of conflict. Given its unique geopolitical location and historical circumstances, the region is very susceptible to the utilization of media for hybrid warfare strategies. The complications in the tight diplomatic relations between India and Pakistan

have been causing the regions such as Gilgit-Baltistan to gain a lot of media attention over it (Sari, 2017). The way the Indian media, namely, depicts the issues of internal affairs mainly on sectarian, political, and social level in the Gilgit- Baltistan has a significant impact on a geopolitical mental image (Mikae, 2021). The press portrayals on matters play an impressive role in shaping the opinion of people and the foreign relations of nations (Malik, 2020). Historical and socio-political intricacies of the sectarian conflict in Gilgit-Baltistan have been well chronicled (Ahmed, 2016). This study intends to carry out an in-depth framing analysis to determine the way the Indian media portrays sectarian conflict in Gilgit-Baltistan.

Sectarian Conflict in Gilgit-Baltistan (GB)

Ahmed. (2016) underscored the complex nature of ethnic and sectarian disputes in Gilgit-Baltistan, underlining the significance of comprehending the historical backdrop and the consequences of these tensions on the region's socio-political dynamics. In his research (Hunzai, 2013) gets deeper in understanding the complexity of conflicts in Gilgit-Baltistan. He also illuminates the roots, the historic reasons, the growth of tensions and conflicts within GB. Malik., (2020) dwelled upon the influence of the media construction of the Gilgit-Baltistan dispute on Indo-Pak relations. He brought research and underlined the potentially significant influences that media discourses play in perception building and how this affects interactions among nations. He stressed the necessity to make an in-depth study of the influence of media coverage on the tensions in the region.

In a wider sense, the Pakistani media presents an overview of tensions in Gilgit-Baltistan according to the discussion of Indo-Pak by Riaz., (2009). Moreover, he also highlights the significance of interdependence among media representations and deliberation of geopolitics issue stressing the fact that media is able to trigger regional conflicts or facilitate their solution. The current discussion by Riaz, (2009) entails an analysis of the geopolitical process and sectarian conflicts in Gilgit -Baltistan. The geographical positioning as well as the history of the region adds to the intricacy of the sectarian conflicts because the region is susceptible to external influence. On the whole, this study necessitates the detailed discussion of the image of the Indian media that produces a sectarian tension in Gilgit-Baltistan. They underline the mutual dependence of media images, views and a larger aspect of geopolitics present, and it, therefore, makes the significance of the understanding and study

of the way how media talk influences the change in regional dynamics tremendously important.

Threat of sectarianism in Gilgit-Baltistan has been discussed in the new research by Javed et al. (2022) and the findings of the researchers reflect the natural connection between politics and constitutional rights with the sectarian forces. The researchers relied on a quantitative research approach that involved collecting primary information through questionnaires to specific targeted populations, including students, civil personnel, and academicians (Javed & Nazir, 2022). Having used the Constructivism theory, the findings indicate that the fundamental causes of sectarianism in Gilgit-Baltistan include unstable political system, religious conservatism found in academic institutions, and century's old ethnic tension. All this not only exacerbates the socio-economic and political problems in the region but also highlights the necessity of the immediate need of the actions aimed at stabilizing the region and addressing the drivers of conflict (Chaudhry, 2022).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

There has been considerable media attention on Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) in the wider context of India Pakistan tensions, there has been a wide lack of studies on the nature of how sectarian struggles in the area are captured in the Indian media. Although the region is often in the media headlines due to a geopolitical and strategic significance, little attention has been paid to the portrayal of sectarian violence. Such a gap limits a holistic view of the ways that stories are developed and how they influence the discussion of G-B. The existing situation is also worsened by the fact that the Indian media tends to present the region in a conflict biased, security driven agenda at the expense of historical, social, and cultural dimensions. These types of framing not only constrain the way in which the public looks at issues, but also shapes policy debates, as well as international understanding of the region, in such a way that and can reinforce rather than clarify stereotypes.

This research aims to deal with the issue by evaluating press reporting on sectarian violence in Gilgit-Baltistan, relying on a framing analysis method. It seeks to determine themes that prevail and how the parties, causes, and offered solutions are framed in media discourses. Through this, the study aims to demonstrate how press discourse influences opinion and policymaking, and how it shapes geopolitical outlooks, insights of which can

help create more balanced and informed perspective toward the region.

1.3 Significance of the Study

This study has become very essential since it seeks to fill one of the most important research gaps by carrying out an intensive analysis on the way Indian media has been reporting sectarian conflicts in Gilgit-Baltistan. Findings of the present paper will offer valuable information on how regional complexities are presented in the Indian journalism reports. It is essential to understand the dominant narratives, perspectives, which are announced by the press about sectarian conflicts to interpret how they can thereby influence the shaping of the views and discussions of policies. Also, this research is essential for demonstrating the significance of press narratives in influencing geopolitical perspectives, specifically with regards to India-Pakistan ties. The outcomes of this study can be instrumental in informing policymakers, media practitioners, and stakeholders about the impact of Press framing on regional tensions, thereby contributing significantly to both academic discourse and real-world diplomatic considerations.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

To analyze the nature of coverage of sectarian conflicts in Gilgit-Baltistan within the selected Indian Newspapers.

To identify the predominant frames produced by the selected Indian Newspapers regarding conflicts in Gilgit-Baltistan.

1.5 Research Questions

Q1- How did the selected Indian newspapers frame various sectarian conflicts in Gilgit Baltistan during the time period under study?

Q2- What are the dominant frames produced by the selected Indian Newspapers in their coverage of various sectarian conflicts in Gilgit-Baltistan?

1.6 Delimitations of the study

This study has confined itself to the following delimitations.

1.6.1 Scope of Media Sources

This study has focus on analyzing coverage from prominent English-language Indian newspapers and online news portals known for their extensive reporting on international affairs.

1.6.2 Language Constraints

Given the linguistic expertise and accessibility, this research has concentrated solely on English-language media sources due to constraints in analyzing multiple languages.

1.6.3 Geographical Focus:

The study has only focused on comprehending how Gilgit-Baltistan's sectarian conflicts are portrayed in Indian media, leaving out other regions or conflicts in order to provide a more thorough examination of the selected location.

1.6.4 Methodological Limitations

Considering the constraints of the framing analysis approach, including possible biases in data collecting and inherent difficulties in interpreting framing analysis.

1.6.5 Exclusion of Non-Media Factors:

The research has only concentrated on examining press portrayal, without further exploring the complex impacts of socio-economic issues, cultural dynamics and government policies on media representation.

CHAPTER 02

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The role of media in reporting sectarian conflicts has been extensively studied, revealing a landscape where journalism intersects with political, social, and ethical considerations.

2.1 Review of the Related Literature

The influence of media representation on geopolitical opinions, especially in areas of conflict, is a subject that has attracted significant academic attention. The chaotic history and complicated socio-political dynamics of Gilgit-Baltistan have attracted the interest of researchers and scholars who want to understand the multifaceted aspects of sectarian conflicts by analyzing media coverage.

2.2 Sectarian Conflict in Pakistan

According to the Brussels based International Crisis Group (IGC), “sectarian conflict in Pakistan is the direct consequence of state policies of Islamisation and the marginalization of secular democratic forces. Instead of empowering liberal, democratic voices, the government will co-opted the religious right and continues to rely on it to counter civilian opposition. The political use of Islam by the state promotes an aggressive competition for official patronage between and within the many variations of Sunni and Shia Islam, with the clerical elite of major sects and sub-sects striving to build up their political parties, raise jihadi militias, expand madrassa networks and, as has happened on Musharraf’s watch, become a part of the government. “According to the IGC report, “like all other Pakistani military governments, the Musharraf administration has also weakened secular and democratic political forces. Administrative and legal action against militant organizations has failed to dismantle a well- entrenched and widely spread terror infrastructure. Kumar and Banerjee, (2019).

Peter Wellenstein, who is a renowned expert in the field of peace and conflict studies, argues that “Conflict Management can help in reducing the danger of crisis, creating some

confidence and lessening (potential or actual) suffering. Conflict resolution is more ambitious as it tries to affect the basic issues, the incompatibilities that direct the conflicting parties. Sometimes, conflict management may also appear to be ambitious if the parties involved are not interested even in giving a break to the conflict proceedings. In case of Shi'a-Sunni conflict in Pakistan, there was a time during 1990s and till 2006 when it appeared very difficult to de- escalate violence and reduce the level of human casualties, but in the recent past, because of concerted efforts of the government, the religious leaders from both sects and the civil society, it has now become possible to manage the conflict and lessen its intensity. Also since the Lal Masjid incident of 2007 and the military operation against Pakistani Taliban groups in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and North Western Frontier Province (NWFP), the intensity of the sectarian conflict in Pakistan has been reduced to a great extent. Kumar and Banerjee, (2019)

According to Amstutz (2013) the process of CM appears to manage issues which can escalate a conflict. He argues that, “Conflict Management assures that conflict is in part constructive and beneficial. It seeks to manage social and political conflict, rather than to eliminate it altogether or to disregard its consequences. This approach seeks to resolve disputes without destroying the fabric of a free society based on the political independence of actors. Conflict Management thus seeks to maintain human communities based on the free and responsible action of members, while establishing procedures and institutions that resolve conflicts and settle disputes effectively and efficiently. Whereas, on the other hand, according to Peter Wellenstein, “Conflict management typically focuses on the armed aspect of the conflict bringing the fighting to an end, limiting the spread of conflict and thus containing it. Such actions may even be regarded as successes. The interest in a particular conflict may disappear. Conflict management thus refers to actions taken to mitigate or contain ongoing violent conflict, trying to limit the scale of destruction and suffering in order to avoid spillover potential into other regions or neighboring countries. In both the cases of the Shi'a-Sunni and the Protestant- Catholic conflict in Northern Ireland, it was possible to scale down the level of violence. In case of Northern Ireland, a full-fledged mechanism of conflict management is in place, (despite its fault lines) whereas, in case of sectarian conflict in Pakistan, both Shi'a and Sunni communities still have a long way to go in order to give an institutional shape to the process of CM. Religious tolerance and intra-faith dialogue to

rebuild sectarian harmony is a viable option to manage sectarian conflict in Pakistan. (Ahmar, 2007)

2.3 Coverage of Sectarian Conflict in Indian media

According to Kumar and Banerjee, (2019) in “Sectarian violence and ethnic conflict in India” human rights education is no longer considered an alien normative and discursive practice in the inter-governmental discussions and civil society actions because human rights have increasingly become more universal in the sense that they are held to be a guarantee of ideals of equality and enhance moral autonomy of rational human beings, irrespective of their own specific desires, identities or partial interests. They have discussed ethnic conflict and sectarian violence in India in the context of human rights violations by the state and by non-state actors. Given the relative silence of discussion of sectarian violence in human rights literacy, they argue that interrogation of various types of ethnic violence is urgently required for understanding the evolution of universal and inalienable regime of human rights in varying institutional and cultural contexts across nations. Based on empirical data, it is concluded that the case studies of sectarian and communal violence from a plural, diverse democracy like India have potential to contribute to reframing the discussion of human rights literacy in the universities and college/school class rooms. Kumar and Banerjee, (2019).

Furthermore, Ram Charan Gupta., (2015) in Identity and violence: Sectarian conflict in post-independence Indian literature, addresses that the procession’s ringleader, is said to be “highly respected for his ‘moderate’ and ‘reasonable’ views. However, his turns out to be the most fanatic of the voices represented in the novel. Gupta offers views connected to Hindutva ideology: he calls his Muslim neighbors “foreigners” and “evil people” who are “more loyal to a foreign religion, Islam, than to India.” Gupta’s depiction of the Muslim community as the ‘other’ in Indian society is in sharp contrast to that of Lucky, the town’s government official and part of the English-educated elite. He believes that India and Indianness is for everyone: “Let everyone feel they are as much Indian as everyone else: that’s the secret,” Lucky states, “ensure that democracy protects multiple identities of Indians, so that people feel you can be a good Muslim and a good Bihari and a good Indian all at once. To Lucky, the dream of a pluralist, peaceful India as envisioned by Nehru had become reality: “We have given passports to a dream, a dream of an extraordinary, polyglot, polychrome,

polyconfessional country but who, in all of this, allowed for militant Hinduism to arise. Lisa Freigang in which sectarian identities are so narrowly defined that they become the dominant system of classification, overshadowing other identities as well as divisions between members of this allegedly unique identity. The novel shows how “identity shifts that follow divisive politics” can thus foment violence between different communities who have previously lived together peacefully. (Ahmar, 2007).

Implications for Indian Media Coverage

The study article on the topic sectarianism in Gilgit Baltistan An analysis presents a thorough study of the different factors contributing sectarianism in the region. This discussion is important to understand how the Indian media can depict such disputes. The results described in this paper can produce a significant contribution to the existing research on the subject regarding the socio-political relations and the role of media in creating the narratives regarding the sectarian issues.

Again, it also focuses on the fact that sectarianism in Gilgit-Baltistan has its roots deep into the history, politics, and social background of the region. The area is faced with a lot of demographic changes which have worsened as a result of political instability and external factors. This history is important in future research because it gives a framework of analysis of whether the Indian media could present such conflicts. As an example, historical grievances and demographic changes may be the subject of media stories because the topic is posed as a long-running crisis that has to be addressed by the Indian government and the international community (Javed, 2022).

Political Dynamics and Media Representation

In the literature analysis of the research, the critical aspect is exposed on how the Gilgit-Baltistan is exposed to the vulnerable political setup, as key decisions are often arrived at by the Federal Government through the GB Council. Having the whole power in a single center of authority could cause the feeling of marginality to the local people which could be portrayed in sectarian conflict. Hence, the current study can conduct an analysis of how Indian media reporting can promote these political activities and is seen as something unstable and that needs action. Such portrayal of the issues related to local governance can

shift the view of the population in India and, therefore, influence the policy discussions regarding Gilgit-Baltistan (Nazir, 2022).

The influences of ethnic and religious fanaticism in the upsurge of sectarian violence. As is noticed, educational establishments can decrease or aggravate these tensions, depending on their approach to issues of diversity and tolerance (Chaudhry, 2022). This element is related to the current study in particular; since Indian media could focus on the cases of extremism to build up the picture of chaos in Gilgit-Baltistan. The attention of the media to the instances of violence and extremist groups may shape the mindset of the people who will have a perception that the region is a hotbed of terrorism. Such constructing may imply massive consequences of the position of the Indian government toward its foreign policy toward Pakistan and its regions.

An important conclusion which was achieved in the study is the active exclusion of the nationalist parties in the political landscape of Gilgit-Baltistan. The isolation has led to the ramping up of sectarian activities, since probably marginalized groups do exercise some efforts in the pursuit of their identities and a resolution to their grievances. We can affirm the relevance on how the Indian media has falsely or truly reflected such dynamics. The media discourse can present the sectarian movements as a possible threat to security in the region, thus, creating an argumentation of why the Indian government should be much more aggressive. Such a portrayal is also capable of influencing the opinion of the civilians and making them provide greater support to such military or diplomatic efforts.

Media's Impact on Sectarian Narratives

The outcomes presented in the paper show that the federal government, with the help of the bureaucrats, has maintained a state of affairs that aggravates the sectarian difference (Javed & Nazir, 2022). The observation is of importance in further research since it raises questions on the role played by media in facilitating such divisions. The Indian media coverage can enforce section formations without necessarily intending to do so because it is the conflicts and shed blood that they highlight instead of promoting discourse that would support the idea of unity and co-existence. This may lead to an endless cycle of misunderstanding and hatred, both on the domestic levels within Gilgit-Baltistan and transnationally between India and Pakistan.

Finally, the results of the article in research can be one of the most important sources of this study entitled Indian media coverage of sectarian conflict in Gilgit Baltistan. In order to develop better understanding of the extent to which media narratives drive the popular judgment and the governmental reaction, it is important to gain the understanding of historical, political and social contexts of sectarianism. The overlap between the sectarianism and the coverage of the media is varied and this analysis can bring a better understanding of that interaction.

Going a step further in the study, we can examine how Indian media can control sectarian relations by causing aggravation or alleviating the same through reporting. By analyzing the stories presented in the media thoroughly, we can underline the importance of the responsible journalism, which will help achieve understanding and positive dialogue, instead of making divisions and conflict. The given approach does not only improve the study but also helps to expand the general debates around the presence of the media in violence-affected regions.

Also, (Malik, 2020) in the paper entitled, Indo-Pak Kashmir Conflict: Chinese Media Framing and the Proscribing Perspective she speaks through the word of media framing how Kashmir conflict is displayed by the hallowed English language Chinese dailies, i.e., China Daily and Global Times. This article presents informative insights into the attitude of Beijing to the Indo-Pak conflict, in particular, in the context of August 5, 2019, the abolition of Article 370 of the Indian constitution (Malik, 2020). This study will seek to understand how the Chinese newspapers frame and explain the Kashmir dilemma and the Indo Pakistan conflict. The study also discusses the role of media in developing the views of people and highlights the role of Beijing as a key third party agent in the region (Malik, 2020).

The study employs the concept of framing and employs content analysis that helps analyze how the news articles covering the period between the annulments of Article 370 up to the end of the session of the 74th UN session of the General Assembly on September 30, 2019 portrayed the conflict (Amrah, 2020). The results reveal the fact that the two newspapers, China Daily and Global Times, employed similar frames in their coverage of the Kashmir issue despite the variation in the breadth of the reporting. The most common framework was the leadership, followed by the conflict, peace, and the responsibility

framework. This evidence suggests that the coverage was largely based on individual events, which implies that the further delay in resolving the Kashmir conflict might exert significant effects on the stability in the region (Malik, 2020).

The researcher finds out that the media reportage mainly reflects and gives support to the foreign policy stance of Beijing on Kashmir. It can be seen that the Chinese press is synchronized with the political aspirations of the government especially when it comes to matters of international policy (Malik, 2020). The other aspect highlighted in this study is how media framing affects the overall debate around the Kashmir conflict and also draws light to the implications on the international relations and irrespective developments to China.

In the light of this, Indian media coverage is one of the most important contributors of the conflict. The literature describes that the Indian media can either augment or perpetrate sectarian tensions by encouraging themselves in religious extremism, accentuating violence, or portraying faults in the government. This media framing can be discussed as geopolitically motivated and it is often in line with the national foreign policy positions, as its evident examples are similar scenarios like Kashmir (Malik, 2020). These repercussions are two-fold, one is that Gilgit-Baltistan can be positioned by Indian media sources as a region going through some instability to depict political claims or to further engage in international lobbying efforts; two is that this positioning poses the risks of exacerbating local grievances and ordering a complex regional dynamic.

Each of the studies concurs with the notion that the sectarian conflict in Gilgit-Baltistan is a product of a complicated historical, political, and social background and the media, specifically Indian media, plays a tremendous role in terms of articulating the discourse in such conflicts based upon selective stories. This research comparison of these frames and situates itself at the intersection between media discourse, local geopolitics and sectarian identities in order to show how journalistic practice might fuel or facilitate constructive dialogue. Based on this, this framing study is important to understand the media bias, influence and the larger ideological and diplomatic consequence of the portrayal of Gilgit-Baltistan beyond its boundaries.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

Both theories of media framing and agenda-setting in communication can be of help in understanding the way in which the media can choose to influence its intended audience (Freyenberger, 2013). In a nut shell, (Vreese, 2005) has it that frame being a reference to the highlighting of multiple things about a subject in regard to their importance. The agenda-setting theory is interested in the significance of problems whereas framing is related to that area which touches on the portrayal of the problems. (p. 53).

This research therefore seeks to analyze how the Indian media is reporting and constructing the sectarian conflicts in Gilgit-Baltistan. The aim is to understand the specific dominant discourse and focus on the issue of the sectarianism in the region which shows how such images can influence consumer understandings and the context of the discourse in India and Pakistan relations. The framing theory can be considered relevant in the present context, as the study will focus on the distinctive ways in which the media constructs and forms the perception of the internal problems in Gilgit-Baltistan, especially in relation to sectarianism in a larger framework of India-Pakistan relations.

CHAPTER 03

3. METHODOLOGY

Methodology is systematic, theoretical analysis of the methods applied to a field of study.

3.1 Research Design

This research has applied a framing analysis to review how Press coverage of sectarian conflicts in Gilgit-Baltistan appears in Indian newspapers. However, framing analysis allows researchers to study media content by paying attention to the main messages in the news (Gul et al., 2020). In addition, the rationale for this research based on idea of the importance of understanding how media in India reports on conflicts between various communities in Gilgit-Baltistan, since this area matters strategically and ideologically for both countries. Media does not only show public what happens; it also helps to create the meanings behind social and political events. As a result, studying how media frames stories reveal important ideas, biased views and political aims (Ulnicane et al., 2021). Furthermore, the rationale for the selection of a diverse spectrum of editorial stances and audience demographics is provided by the five selected Indian newspapers: Hindustan Times, Kashmir Monitor, Kashmir Observer, The Indian Express, and The Times of India (Mokhberian et al., 2020).

3.2 Sampling

3.2.1 Selection of the Newspapers

Depending on their readership, geographical influence, sentiment and overall positioning 5 internationally recognized Indian newspapers (*Hindustan Times*, *Kashmir Monitor*, *Kashmir Observer*, *The Indian Express* and *The Times of India*) has been included (Van Dijk et al., 2023). Only news stories were included though, which already or indirectly mentioned the topic of sectarian conflict in Gilgit-Baltistan.

a) Sampling Method

The sampling method used in this research is a stratified approach which involves the division of the population into a series of discrete subsets (referred to as strata) based on significant amounts on the basis of critical characteristics applicable to the research question. This approach allows carrying out a narrower analysis, which ensures that specific areas of interests are represented in a fair manner. To make sure that the range of opinions and sources are reflected in this context, the study targets the reports of the sectarian violence in Gilgit-Baltistan. Stratified sample was chosen due to the reason that the research is not aimed at generalizing the results, but at studying the problem in detail. Because the research focuses on in-depth investigation rather than broad generalizations, stratified sample was selected to allow for a more thorough analysis of the problem.

b) Time Frame

Each instance of sectarian conflict in Gilgit-Baltistan was allocated one month. Each news story was incorporated 30 days following the initial coverage of an incident. It provides observers with sufficient time to comprehend the manner in which frames were generated as a result of the event. Results that were either extraneous to the primary theme or outside of the designated time frame were excluded.

c) Data Analysis Method

Qualitative framing analysis is implemented in the proposed study. The research employs predetermined and newly formed frameworks to code the stories in conjunction with the process. Nevertheless, the study focused on the repetition of images, metaphors, themes, and the individuals who are most frequently criticised in the media. Additionally, data analysis included an examination of the manner in which the media presents specific ideas and the manner in which the conflict is depicted differently from one side to the other.

3.3 Operational Definitions

3.3.1 Sectarian Conflict

Violence, tension, or conflict between religious or sectarian groups in Gilgit-Baltistan, with a specific focus on the interactions between Shia and Sunni Muslims. This study considers several episodic conflicts to gather a comprehensive dataset. The region has

a history of sectarian tensions, often exacerbated by political and religious dynamics (Nagri, 2023).

3.3.2 1st Muharram Incident in Gilgit City (The Unrest of August 2022)

Following an event involving a dispute between parties representing the Sunni and Shia communities, sectarian tensions in Gilgit city significantly increased on the first day of Muharram, 2022. There were several injuries and fatalities from this altercation (Iftikhar et al.,2023). A disagreement over the Shia head cleric's convoy's intended path is said to have sparked the incident, which resulted in violent fighting. In order to stop the situation from getting worse, local officials put in place a temporary curfew and increased security measures all throughout the city. The broader sectarian conflicts that have plagued the area for a number of years were reflected in the tensions that existed during this time.

3.3.3 Blasphemy Allegations (Unrest of August 2023)

Gilgit-Baltistan experienced a wave of instability in August 2023 as people became aggressive following sectarian clash of opinion that led to the mass protests in the region. The riot started on an allegation of blasphemy against a prominent Shia cleric by the members of another religious grouping. Demonstrations were also carried out in Diamer and Chilas sites where the population demanded that a First Information Report (FIR) should be registered against him on September 20th. At first, the Skardu police retaliated but ultimately an FIR was filed on the 23th of August on the provisions of the Pakistan Penal code (Abbas et al.,2024). This action resulted in increased discontentment that prompted increased demonstrations by the Shia activists due to speculations of the arrest of the priest. Traffic and stranded travelers came as a result of sit-ins in karakoram highway. The hustling of Gilgit-Baltistan government through the establishment of inter-sectarian peace committees to contain the situation was not useful as Shia activists objected and insisted that the FIR must be withdrawn. This caused the Sunni factions to see that the cleric be arrested and this caused even more Tension. The seriousness of the situation made the government establish Rangers and GB Scout to control law and order (Nagri, 2023).

3.3.4 Chilas Bus Attack (The Unrest of December 2023)

December 2, 2023, was an unfortunate day because in Gilgit Baltistan unidentified

attackers attacked a passenger bus that was going to Rawalpindi to Gilgit via Chilas. The passengers were attacked, in which nine persons lost their lives and 25 were injured. Even though no particular group took credits of the attack, it was mostly seen as a terrorist incident, pointing to the security issues that have been dogging the region. This incident escalated the sectarian tensions that already existed and pointed to the fact that the risk of violence remains present, although the government and local communities do everything to promote peace and stability in Gilgit-Baltistan (Bacha, 2023).

3.4 Indian Newspapers:

Newspapers based in India and especially those that are written in English especially,

1. *Hindustan Times*
2. *Kashmir Monitor*
3. *Kashmir Observer*
4. *The Indian Express*
5. *The Times of India*

3.4.1 Hindustan Times:

Hindustan Times is an Indian English language newspaper, founded in 1924 that enjoys a reputation of providing extensive coverage of the local and global news, political affairs, events, businesses and entertainment ("About Hindustan Times," n.d.). They circulate more than 1.5 million copies per day. The newspaper has an editorial policy that emphasizes on objective and fair reporting aimed at reporting accurate, fair and believable news ("Editorial Policy," n.d.). The reason to select is, it involves Gilgit Baltistan and Kashmir related news, especially those that are geopolitically oriented, politically stressed, security related, and human rights alienated ("Hindustan Times," n.d.).

3.4.2 Kashmir Monitor:

Kashmir monitor is a leading English newspaper published in Jammu and Kashmir India. It was founded in 1998 and covers the entire regional news with political processes, social situations, cultural events, etc. Its write-ups also cover diverse areas of interest, such

as local governance, human rights, security issues and continuation of the Kashmir conflict. The rationale based on selecting this site is, *Kashmir Monitor* is a very important journal in informing people with events and occurrences taking place in the region. Its details and critical coverage help in knowing more about the complicated socio-political life of Jammu and Kashmir as well as the problems that also influence the regional picture in the area.

3.4.3 *Kashmir Observer*:

Kashmir observer is a leading English language based newspaper in Jammu and Kashmir a region of India. It was founded in 1997. The newspaper has broad selection of topics such as regional news, politics, social issues, culture, and sports. *Kashmir Observer* enjoys a large circulation in the Kashmir Valley, but as far as the greater region is concerned, *Kashmir Observer* has a heterogeneous readership audience. It covers the matters of local governance, human rights, security trouble, and the Kashmir continuing conflict.

3.4.4 *The Indian Express*:

Another well-known English language paper in India is the *Indian Express* founded in 1932 whose journalistic policies are fearless and independent. It has more than 400,000 copies circulated daily. It is regarded as a service with wide coverage on both the domestic and international events, news, politics, business, sports etc. *Indian express* has been known to be a key figure in aiding the public form as well as the global discourse.

3.4.5 *The Times of India*:

The Times of India started in 1838, is the largest English language newspaper in India, and its daily circulation passed the 3 million copies mark. *The Times of India* has all that it takes to cover the national and international news, politics, business, sports, entertainment and the rest. The reason behind the selection is, they address the writes beyond government to general international affairs, such as geopolitical developments. It can include the Wars in other parts of the world, in case they hold great repercussions on India or the larger South Asian continent.

3.5 Framing Theory

Framing theory refers to the conceptualized framework that assists researchers in examination of the information presentation and manipulation of senses of the mass media. It is a manipulation of some elements of a perceived reality in order to heighten their usefulness and therefore establishment the way an audience perceives and interprets events. This attracts special attention in the media because, on the one hand, this theory enables the analysis of how certain aspects of the issue are being emphasized or being deemphasized in the news (Malik, 2020). Children keep postulating the following key areas in the theory of framing: Other basic principles and precepts of the theory of framing underline the fact it is the multidisciplinary and multiparadigm framework with the main concern being the manner in which communication shapes perception and understanding. Another critical element in this theory is the concept of "frames", which are mental constructs that influence the prioritization and interpretation of information and often leads to varying representations in the media and social commentary (Lam, 2020) (Albaladejo & Medina, 2014). Though a number of types of frames have been identified by researchers, disagreements remain on definitions and methods and it is argued that integrative models that combine previously different information and ideas are also needed (Borah, 2011) (Albaladejo & Medina, 2014). Nevertheless, both agenda-setting and framing theory are related to each other because the media influences the perceptions of society by focusing on specific issues (Illera, 2018). Such intricacy means that there is constant need to carry out research to examine production and effect of frames, especially in certain areas of studies such as in the case of heritage studies which can rely on an interdisciplinary approach to glean added insight (Waterton & Watson, 2013).

The following are some of the main ways to use the framing theory during the research. How the Media Affects Opinion The media plays an important role in influencing public opinion. Media influence has been there since time immemorial as differentiating between the two is always vital. There has never been a time in history when the media has not taken center-stage in building opinion. Nor has there been a time when public opinion has not been critical in society.

The framing theory is often taken into consideration during a research study in order

to study the manner in which different media outlets discuss the same story. Through investigation on the frames that are being used, researchers are able to determine how these frames are affecting the decisions of the population on a variety of issues such as political, health and social justice. It falls in line with the basic concept of agenda-setting according to which the media shapes the agenda about what is important to people.

3.5.1 Cultural Contexts

Researchers utilize framing theory to study the influence of cultural origins to media messages interpretations. Context is very significant in media studies as various cultural perceptions can lead to varying perceptions of a single problem. This is highly relevant in the current time of integrated media in which several groups of people can consume the same content.

3.5.2 Platforms of Digital and Social Media Analysis

The concept of framing theory is increasingly becoming popular to analyze how information is represented on social media and other digital places. Researchers examine the gap between pseudo and genuine framing, often in connection to the unleashing of fake news in the social media.

3.5.3 Historical Analysis

This article by McCombs and Shaw claims that the roots of the framing theory in the past have been used to provide the background of the contemporary studies. To understand how media framing has evolved and remains relevant in shaping media content and shaping of audience perceptions, scholars often look into previous studies.

Common use of framing theory in literature aims at the analysis of media influence on the formation of the opinion of people, the perception of culture, dynamics of digital media, behavioral, or historical issues, which is why this concept is an important element in any media research.

3.5.4 The Framing Theory

To review the manner in which the Indian media reports on the sectarian strife in an episodic nature, we will employ a methodological approach of framing theory. The concept of framing theory guides us to understand the technique in which media houses select and

emphasize certain aspects of a story and underrate others, hence influencing the interactions and voices of people. In the conditions of sectarian violence in Gilgit-Baltistan, we are going to seek to find out the exact frames that are used in the coverage of the news to make analysis of episodic frames that focus more on individual episodes at the expense of methodical wider analysis of the problem in historic or contextual terms that are related to the conflict. The technique is related to the findings of the research as to how Chinese media reports the Kashmir war. The research concluded that there is a great focus on single episodes, i.e., episodic frames, and larger historical narratives are disregarded (Amrah, 2020).

To systematically analyze how events are reported in Indian media we has conducted a qualitative analysis of news items and reports focusing on sectarian conflicts in Gilgit-Baltistan. This discussion has involved categorizing the frames that are present in the coverage as conflict, leadership, and responsibility, as the literature indicates about media framing (Malik, 2020). By looking deep at the build of these frames and the discourses these frames promote, we can assess the implications on the societal understanding and policy response to sectarian matters.

3.5.5 Framing Perspective

This paper, Indo-Pak Kashmir Conflict: Chinese Media Framing and Evolving Perspective, identifies the role of the frame theory in the comprehension of the media reportage on the Kashmir conflict.

3.6 Overview of the Framing Theory Overview.

The Framing theory is a theoretical perspective which helps scholars in analyzing how information is shared by the media and the process of shaping the society based on this information. It involves a selection of certain features of a perceived reality to focus them, thus contributing to the understanding of events and analysis by audience. The theory gained especial importance within the media studies discipline, as, through it, it is possible to analyze the focus or trivialization of some topics found in coverage (Malik, 2020).

3.6.1 Use in the Media Studies

In the study of media, framing is used in understanding how media houses choose to highlight certain story lines or themes and ignore others. This will be a thoughtful deliberate

creation that can significantly influence the opinion of the general population and the debate among the important individuals. Based on the literature reviewed as part of the study, researchers have adopted varying framing theories to explore the Kashmir problem, including the conflict and the episodic-thematic frames (Amrah, 2020). The literature analysis too recognizes that there are other studies that have been carried out with a view to look at Indo-Pak Kashmir dispute in various light, employing varied concepts and methods. This body of work reveals the complexity of the war and the different perspectives that are given out in the media stories. It is noteworthy that the research addresses the use of conflict frames in the comparing of the Indian and Pakistani newspapers. It also underlines the need to perform a similar investigation in the Chinese media space (Amrah, 2020).

It also seeks to find out the way in which the Kashmir problem has been introduced and understood by the Chinese newspapers specifically the China Daily and the Global Times. The statement notes the fact that presentation of the conflict in such media resources is rather impacted by the government policy and the dynamic perception of Beijing towards the problem. The results indicate that the media menu is strictly correlated with the political goals of the government, thus proving the idea that the media in the context of authoritarian government in many cases become the source of state propaganda (Malik, 2020).

The findings of the study on how the crisis in Kashmir is depicted on Chinese media provide an excellent ground to draw assumptions and make comparisons on the issue of Indian media coverage of sectarian conflict in Gilgit-Baltistan. The current publication has the same theoretical character of the previous study that applied the theory of framing in order to understand how the narratives that are established through media may affect individuals and these narratives can dominate the entire political discourse. Chinese media reports about the Kashmir conflict provide the representation of official policies, which not only have been changing the perspective about this land but also the Chinese geopolitical interest. In the same vein, it is possible that the Indian media coverage of the subject matter relating to sectarian conflicts in Gilgit-Baltistan would have been in line with the national interests and political agendas at the disadvantage of apathy towards local sentiments and concerns . The analysis identifies a large gap in the representation of the views of Kashmiri in the Chinese media casting a shadow of doubt on whether the Indian media is inclusive when it comes to the

narratives of Gilgit-Baltistan. This means that the domestic feelings in Gilgit-Baltistan could also be pushed aside to adopt other national narratives.

In addition, the Chinese media research throws light on the relationship between media framing and regional stability related to the case in Gilgit-Baltistan. The coverage of the sectarian conflicts by the Indian press has the capability of not only influencing the popular view but also affecting the policy decisions, and thus can not only lead to the growing harm but also to fruitful dialogue. The use of leadership and the use of conflict frames by the Chinese media bolsters the foreign policy of the Beijing, and the use of sectarian concerns by the Indian media can stimulate state narratives that affect the socio-political system in Gilgit-Baltistan. It is possible to re-examine these similarities and thus advance our understanding of how the Indian media framing shapes the perception of conflict and its effect on the geopolitical situation affecting South Asia in general.

3.6.2 Framing Analysis

Qualitative research method type that seeks to determine and examine the underlying story, theme, and opinion in media coverage. Framing theory is the theory that provides theoretical backbones to peace journalism. Framing has no single standard definition (Entman, 1993) but in general terms since a news framing is considered as the attempt to arrange a news story, in both thematic, stylistically and factually in a manner to send across particular story line. Framing has in more recent times been explained as second level agenda-setting. McCombs et al. (1997) believed that the concepts of agenda-setting and framing constituted a convergence since framing is an elaboration of agenda setting. In the initial stages of agenda-setting process, object salience passes on. In framing level 2, which is considered to be the indicator of salience, we get the depiction of how media instruct us to think of something which is a repeat of a renowned statement by Bernard Cohen implying that the media inform us regarding what to think about. Shortly after the widened theoretical discourse on framing as a second agenda-setting level, new studies have already been initiated. The technical analysis of framing may also provide an educational role and disseminate media literacy, where the audience must learn to identify and critically perceive the content of the frames displayed in media coverage (Rzyska 2018).

It is also observed that framing can generate certain thoughts and ideas among the

news audiences as evidenced in a huge body of research that has been dedicated to framing effects (Iyengar, 1991). As stated by (Entman, 1993) framing refers to a choice of some characteristics of an apparent reality and make them more obvious to a communicating normal text in a manner that would encourage a specific problem definition, causal explanation, ethical judgment and / or recommendation of the treatment of the item at hand.

The framing analysis of mass media research is an important device understanding the presentation of information. It implies introducing selective definition and emphasis of certain aspects of reality, which subsequently influences the opinion of people and influences speech. Such a strategy has been distinguished by the variety of researchers and methods, as new studies have stressed.

General definition of framing can be defined as the study on the manner through which media constructs information and how it shapes people's perceptions on things through their selective emphasis on elements on a given subject. The subtitle behind the music (Wibisono & Rusdi 2022). Operational Construct, this is a technique of influencing the perspectives of the media consumers and most times this is done in the interest of the political bodies. We should also have implemented a policy known as a more effective method of helping to take part in the growing trend of the sharing economy (Demianchuk & Roshuk 2024). Pan and Kosicki model build on the traditional framing studies and combine theories such as of the fraud hexagon to test media coverage of specific topics, e.g. illegal online loans. It would have altered the personality of the child (Irwandi & Shonhadji 2024).

In order to use framing analysis in such a study as Indian Media Coverage of Sectarian Conflict in Gilgit- Baltistan: A Framing Analysis, one has to know how the media frames influence the formation of perceptions and discussion of issues. Framing analysis allows strategically unpicking the interpretative schemas that shape the way sectarian issues are put forward and perceived. Sequential framing enables the researcher to analyze frame changes over a period of time, especially with regards to a social movement or political transformation (Zhigadlo 2023).

The frames that have been employed in coverage of GB in the sectarian coverage of the Indian media mentioned by the Researcher include such frames as humanizing, dehumanizing, or savior frames, which have been identified in the context of other crises

(Perreault 2019). Using different media sources, it is possible to scale the presence of sectarianism on various platforms determining any biases or special interests (Mateu & Dominguez 2019). Bringing forth the meaning of the frames may explain the way they affect the opinion of people and policy towards sectarian problems in GB. (Rzyska 2018). In his/her attention toward the sectarian conflict in Gilgit Baltistan, the researcher analyzed the taken-forward by the Indian media. By means of such an analysis, the study will shed light onto how these newspapers address the discourse around the conflicts, in terms of what narratives, biases, and implications they have introduced in covering the conflicts.

3.7 Instrument

The analysis tool implicates a coding structure to classify the aspects of press covering in particular referring to the framing analysis. It is within the practice of the analysis of framing process that this framework has been used systematically to present several facets of media coverage i.e. involved parties, causes covered, recommendations, tone, possible biases/neutralities, among others. The data obtained have been organized and analyzed by qualitative analysis of data, with emphasis laid on framing analysis.

3.8 Data Collection

The selected media sources have collected and saved the data of the selected episodes of conflicts, to record a very recent but rich range time of reporting the sectarian conflicts in Gilgit-Baltistan. It has gathered news based on sectarian conflicts in Gilgit-Baltistan specifically.

CHAPTER 4

4. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This chapter presents research obtained by framing analysis of few leading Indian newspapers in terms of how they present the sectarian violence in Gilgit-Baltistan. The review of news coverage of three major events, namely The Muharram Incident (August 2022) The Blasphemy Allegations (August 2023) and the Chilas Bus Attack (December 2023), was done following *The Times of India*, *The Indian Express*, *Hindustan Times*, *Kashmir Observer*, and the *Kashmir Monitor*. Presented through the prism of the framing theory, the analysis includes division of media content by frames, by the analysis of trends behind it and by socio-political concerns that it raises.

4.1 Dominant Frames Identified

4.1.1 Conflict Frame

The conflict frame became the leading viewpoint in all types of media reports. Indian newspapers mostly reported the events in the context of violence and inter-religious conflict. In the case of the Chilas Bus Attack in December 2023, headlines highlighted the scale of violence, using words like "massacre," "brutal ambush," and "sectarian bloodshed" as common features of coverage (Hindustan Times, 2023; The Indian Express, 2023). Reporting mostly avoided historical context, representing violence as spontaneous and cyclical. However, this is consistent with Entman's (1993) definition of framing as selection and salience of certain aspects of a perceived reality. Repetitive use of conflict-prone words helped to build Gilgit-Baltistan as an ever-volatile and unstable region (Ahmed, 2016).

4.1.2 Attribution of Responsibility Frame

Responsibility attribution model has been employed by various media, most notably the 2023 Blasphemy Allegation case, in which Indian media assessed the attitude of the Pakistani state towards protests. In particular, *The Indian Express* observed the law-and-order machinery's failure to respond expeditiously and the government's "inability to prevent recurring sectarian unrest" (The Indian Express, 2023). Furthermore, this aligns with earlier academic studies demonstrating that media tend to blame the state for the intrinsic causes of

violence in reaction to governance failure (Javed et al., 2022). It also aligns with India's geopolitical framing of Pakistan's governance failure in Gilgit-Baltistan (Malik, 2020).

4.1.3 Victimhood and Vulnerability Frame

The victimhood narrative was most strikingly present in reporting of the August 2022 Muharram Incident. It focused on the targeted Shia clerics and mourners and appealed to the minority victimization and structural discrimination tropes repeatedly. This is only to be expected of Hunzai's (2013) and Hussain's (2021) research on Shia vulnerability in Gilgit-Baltistan, where Shias are a regional majority but a minority in relation to Pakistan's Sunni majority. But media narratives rarely acknowledged mutual tensions or complex local dynamics. Such simplification, as it generates sympathy, risks reducing the story to an oversimplification and hiding the socio-political complexity of the conflict (Ahmed, 2016).

4.1.4 Geopolitical and Strategic Contextualization

The geopolitical context rendered the conflict within the region strategically relevant, especially in the context of India-Pakistan relations. Certain stories placed the events within the context of Pakistan's hybrid warfare strategy, positing that sectarian violence provided Islamabad with the opportunity to quell dissent and keep the region in its control (Sari, 2017; Malik, 2020). However, this paradigm often emphasized India's claims on Gilgit-Baltistan, thus making journalistic reporting follow the country's strategic agenda. Such reports support existing research that argues that media reporting on conflict-vulnerable regions can be employed to promote foreign policy interests (Ashraf, 2021).

4.2 Chronological Listing and Sampling Implementation

This section delineates the methodical procedure employed to gather, purify, sample, and categorise news stories for framing analysis pertinent to sectarian disputes in Gilgit-Baltistan, as reported by specific Indian newspapers from August 2022 to December 2023. The research concentrated on coverage pertaining to three pivotal incidents:

- Muharram Incident – August 2022
- Allegations of Blasphemy – August 2023
- Chilas Bus Attack – December 2023

4.2.1. Data Collection & Cleansing

News Stories were obtained from five Indian newspapers through digital archives, library databases (such as ProQuest and LexisNexis), and the official websites of the newspapers. Search keywords included:

- "Sectarian conflict in Gilgit-Baltistan"
- "Shia-Sunni violence in GB"
- "Blasphemy allegations in Gilgit"
- "Chilas bus attack in Gilgit"
- "Muharram clash in Gilgit 2022"

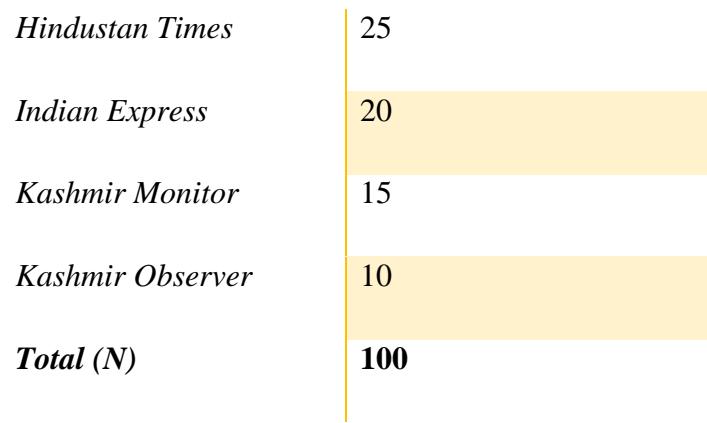
4.2.2 Initial stories Count (Raw):

<i>Newspaper</i>	<i>Raw Stories</i>
<i>Times of India</i>	50
<i>Hindustan Times</i>	40
<i>Indian Express</i>	35
<i>Kashmir Monitor</i>	25
<i>Kashmir Observer</i>	20

4.2.3 After Data Cleansing (Relevant Stories Only):

Stories unrelated to sectarian conflict (e.g., tourism, development issues, cricket news) and duplicate reports were excluded.

<i>Newspaper</i>	<i>Relevant Stories (n)</i>
<i>Times of India</i>	30



4.3 Sampling Methodology: Kth N/n Approach

A proportional stratified sampling method was adopted using the Kth's formula:

$$\text{Sample Size (from each source)} = \frac{N/n}{\text{Total Number of News Stories}} \times \text{Total Desired Sample}$$

Newspaper	Relevant Stories (n)	Desired Sample Size (s)	K = n/s (Rounded Interval)
<i>The Times of India</i>	30	6	5
<i>Hindustan Times</i>	25	6	4
<i>The Indian Express</i>	20	6	3
<i>Kashmir Monitor</i>	15	6	3
<i>Kashmir Observer</i>	10	6	2

Total Sample Size Chosen: 30% of 100 = **30 stories**

Sampling Interval: Every 3rd story (rounded) from each list in chronological order

4.4 Chronological Listing and Sample Selection

A. *The Times of India*

Date	Headline	Selected
02-Aug-22	Violence Erupts in Gilgit	✓

10-Aug-22	Shia Leaders Demand Justice	✓
23-Aug-23	Blasphemy Charge Sparks Violence	✓
26-Aug-23	Sectarian Clashes Spread to Skardu	✓
02-Dec-23	Chilas Bus Attack Leaves 9 Dead	✓
05-Dec-23	Survivors Recount Chilas Horror	✓

B. Hindustan Times

Date	Headline	Selected
03-Aug-22	Sectarian Violence Breaks Out in Gilgit	✓
08-Aug-22	Internet Suspension Amid Muharram Violence	✓
23-Aug-23	Blasphemy Allegation Sparks Riots	✓
24-Aug-23	Thousands Protest Outside Police Station	✓
02-Dec-23	9 Killed in Chilas Sectarian Bus Attack	✓
06-Dec-23	Survivors Recount Horror	✓

C. The Indian Express

Date	Headline	Selected
02-Aug-22	Sectarian Protests Rock Gilgit Towns	✓
08-Aug-22	Religious Leaders Demand Peace in GB	✓
22-Aug-23	Mob Targets Mosque Over Alleged Blasphemy	✓
24-Aug-23	Violence in Diamer Leads to Army Clampdown	✓
02-Dec-23	Terror on Highway: 9 Killed in Sectarian Shooting	✓

03-Dec-23	Govt Blames External Hand in GB Attack	✓
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D. Kashmir Monitor

Date	Headline	Selected
03-Aug-22	Sectarian Flares Grip Gilgit-Baltistan	✓
10-Aug-22	GB Tense but Under Control, Say Officials	✓
23-Aug-23	Religious Mob Attacks Police Check post	✓
04-Dec-23	Gilgit Locals Mourn Chilas Victims	✓
05-Dec-23	Rangers Deployed Across Skardu	✓
06-Dec-23	Chilas Victim's Funeral Attracts Thousands	✓

E. Kashmir Observer

Date	Headline	Selected
02-Aug-22	Muharram Violence Breaks Silence in GB	✓
23-Aug-23	Alleged Blasphemy Leads to Protests in Diamer	✓
03-Dec-23	GB Under Siege after Chilas Massacre	✓
04-Dec-23	Community Leaders Urge Calm	✓
05-Dec-23	Interfaith Peace March Held in Gilgit	✓
06-Dec-23	Civil Society Condemns Sectarian Killings	✓

4.5 Final Sample Dataset Overview

Newspaper	Incident Category	Date	Headline
<i>The Times of India</i>	Muharram Incident	02-Aug-22	Violence Erupts in Gilgit

	Muharram Incident	10-Aug-22	Shia Leaders Demand Justice
	Blasphemy Allegation	23-Aug-23	Blasphemy Charge Sparks Violence
	Muharram/Spread	26-Aug-23	Sectarian Clashes Spread to Skardu
	Chilas Bus Attack	02-Dec-23	Chilas Bus Attack Leaves 9 Dead
	Chilas Aftermath	05-Dec-23	Survivors Recount Chilas Horror
<i>Hindustan Times</i>	Muharram Incident	03-Aug-22	Sectarian Violence Breaks Out in Gilgit
	Muharram Incident	08-Aug-22	Internet Suspension Amid Muharram Violence
	Blasphemy Allegation	23-Aug-23	Blasphemy Allegation Sparks Riots
	Blasphemy/Protests	24-Aug-23	Thousands Protest Outside Police Station
	Chilas Bus Attack	02-Dec-23	9 Killed in Chilas Sectarian Bus Attack
	Chilas Aftermath	06-Dec-23	Survivors Recount Horror
<i>The Indian Express</i>	Muharram Protests	02-Aug-22	Sectarian Protests Rock Gilgit Towns
	Peace Efforts	08-Aug-22	Religious Leaders Demand Peace in GB
	Blasphemy Allegation	22-Aug-23	Mob Targets Mosque Over Alleged Blasphemy
	Army Deployment	24-Aug-23	Violence in Diamer Leads to Army Clampdown
	Chilas Bus Attack	02-Dec-	Terror on Highway: 9 Killed in

		23	Sectarian Shooting
	Govt Reaction	03-Dec-23	Govt Blames External Hand in GB Attack
Kashmir Monitor	Muharram Incident	03-Aug-22	Sectarian Flares Grip Gilgit-Baltistan
	Govt Response	10-Aug-22	GB Tense but Under Control, Say Officials
	Blasphemy Protest	23-Aug-23	Religious Mob Attacks Police Check post
	Chilas Aftermath	04-Dec-23	Gilgit Locals Mourn Chilas Victims
	Peace Measures	05-Dec-23	Rangers Deployed Across Skardu
	Community Reaction	06-Dec-23	Chilas Victim's Funeral Attracts Thousands
Kashmir Observer	Muharram Incident	02-Aug-22	Muharram Violence Breaks Silence in GB
	Blasphemy Allegation	23-Aug-23	Alleged Blasphemy Leads to Protests in Diamer
	Chilas Aftermath	03-Dec-23	GB Under Siege After Chilas Massacre
	Community Outreach	04-Dec-23	Community Leaders Urge Calm
	Peace March	05-Dec-23	Interfaith Peace March Held in Gilgit
	Civil Society Response	06-Dec-23	Civil Society Condemns Sectarian Killings

4.5.1 Synopsis of Data Listing and Sample Selection

The primary technique employed by the researcher to select news stories for this study

was systematic sampling. This approach was selected for its capacity to offer a structured, unbiased, and replicable sampling strategy from a chronologically ordered dataset that was larger in scope. A 30% sample size ($n = 30$) was established by proportional allocation based on the contribution of each source, following the collection and purification of 100 relevant news Stories from five Indian newspapers. The stories were subsequently arranged in chronological order for each newspaper, and every third story was selected to ensure temporal spread and eradicate selection bias. This method ensured that the study's objective of examining framing patterns across three key sectarian conflict events in Gilgit-Baltistan was maintained while ensuring equal representation across time periods and publications. As a result, systematic sampling improved the credibility, transparency, and generalizability of the findings without introducing researcher subjectivity into the selection process. However, the summary table for the process is stated as:

Newspaper	Raw Stories Collected	Relevant Stories After Data Cleansing (n)	Proportion (N/n)	Sample Selected
<i>The Times of India</i>	50	30	$30/100 = 0.30$	6
<i>Hindustan Times</i>	40	25	$25/100 = 0.25$	6
<i>The Indian Express</i>	35	20	$20/100 = 0.20$	6
<i>Kashmir Monitor</i>	25	15	$15/100 = 0.15$	6
<i>Kashmir Observer</i>	20	10	$10/100 = 0.10$	6
Total	170	100	1.00	30

4.6 Thematic Patterns in Media Coverage

4.6.1 Episodic vs. Thematic Reporting

Findings show the widespread use of episodic framing, in which sectarian events were framed as isolated events, without the extensive historical or structural context. As an illustration, the 2023 Blasphemy Allegation crisis was framed as an emergency because of riots and not because of underlying demographic, religious, and political factors (Javed & Nazir, 2022). Less than a handful of outlets, like *Kashmir Observer*, provided thematic frames, debating longstanding ethnic conflict and government concerns in Gilgit-Baltistan. This is consistent with framing literature that differentiates between episodic (event) and thematic (context) journalism.

4.6.2 Sensationalism and Language Use

Many stories used sensationalized and emotive language, particularly regarding the Chilas Bus Attack in December 2023. Headlines such as "Terror on Karakoram" and "Another Bloody December in G-B" used motifs of fear and violence (Times of India, 2023). While sensationalism heightens the salience of news coverage, it risks cementing stereotypical representations of Muslim-majority regions as violence-prone (Kumar & Banerjee, 2019).

4.6.3 Local Perspectives Inadequately Represented

The research found a big gap in the representation of local voices. Almost all of the stories quoted Pakistani authorities, Indian experts, or foreign experts. Few mentioned locals, victim families, or local politicians of Gilgit-Baltistan. This kind of representation gap leads to biased representation and continues to promote outside narratives (Ahmed, 2016).

4.7 Variations in Newspaper Coverage

4.7.1 National and International Outlets

The Times of India and *The Indian Express* are examples of national newspapers that persistently interpreted sectarian violence in terms of strategic, political, and security focused considerations within Gilgit-Baltistan. These stories often framed the violence as part of Pakistan's meltdown and under-functioning governance system, stressing the growing

violence in the region and attributing it to Islamabad's purported sponsorship of extremism. The coverage often reflected the Indian state's official line that placed Gilgit-Baltistan both as a war theatre and a theatre of strife of Pakistan's mismanagement. This verifies Gupta's (2015) remark about national discourses being prisoners of dominant ideological narratives and thereby enduring in a single framework with no regard to elaborate details.

Conversely, the international newspapers include *The Guardian* and *The New York Times*, which covered the dispute within a human rights and humanitarian perspective. Their very limited but focused coverage brought attention to the issues of persecution of minorities, religious violence, and underdevelopment, often citing some international bodies, human rights activists, and other non-partisan specialists. For the most part, these outlets did not take sides politically, albeit suffering from an acute lack of local knowledge and context. They risked repeating the problems of Indian national outlets by reducing the conflict to an oversimplified narrative about Pakistan or South Asia, which was framed more neutrally than other nationalist approaches, and treated more sophisticated layers of the conflict as mere narratives around instability. While exercising more balance, these outlets still oversimplified the nuances of the sectarian conflict.

There is a noticeable difference, therefore, in tone, framing, and intent which defines the contrast between national and international newspapers. The focus of national outlets remained on reinforcing state-centric narrative and geopolitical stakes, while international media paid more attention to violations of freedom of religion and global security. This primary distinction shows the different directions in which media framing changes as a result of proximity to the conflict, editorial decision priorities, and the geopolitical direction of the outlet.

4.7.2 Ideological Biases

Editorial biases were also observed in some media sources. *The Times of India* always linked the sectarian concerns in Gilgit-Baltistan to Pakistan's general failures in Kashmir and terror support. Conversely, *The Indian Express* was quite balanced in reporting, accepting the humanitarian consequences without explicit politicization (Malik, 2020).

4.8 Summary of Frames

Frame Type	Usage	Media	Effect on Audience
	Frequency	Examples	Perception
Conflict Frame	High	All outlets	Reinforces instability narrative
Attribution of Responsibility	Moderate	Indian Express, TOI	Shifts blame to Pakistan's governance
Victimhood Frame	Moderate	Kashmir Observer	Generates sympathy for Shia communities
Geopolitical Frame	High	TOI, Hindustan Times	Aligns with India's strategic position on Kashmir
Humanizing/Peace Frame	Low	Kashmir Monitor, KO	Offers alternate views, rare

4.9 Implications of Findings

The findings illustrate the case of Indian media paraphrasing the sectarian conflict in Gilgit-Baltistan region as a conflict due to religion while also reproducing the existing geopolitical powers at play in the region. The overarching frames that associate blame, and/or a responsibility of a particular conflict within the region, to the media's conflict digging like capture the essence of Indian media framing Gilgit Baltistan as a violent ungovernable region. While such illusionary images are created by the media, pulls Pakistan deeper into their geostrategic rivalry. The lack of local voices with sparse coverage of the region's attempt to solution provides an overshadowed perception of sectarianism driving conflict in Gilgit-Baltistan. In juxtaposing the region's violent-ethnic politics and simplifying these clashes as

the violence at the core is dominantly reported, the Indian media overlooks the region's complex socio-political reality, including its demographic diversity, the local attempts toward peace building, and historical neglect (Javed, Nazir & Chaudhry, 2022).

This distortion comes with a price to pay and impacts coverage of politics and public policy. Bhatti et al. (2022) argue that media in conflict zones does not depict reality as it is; rather, it assists in configuring reality through focused attention, problem definition, and solution provision. With regard to Gilgit-Baltistan, the violence and blame culture selectively portrayed by Indian media can affect perception toward foreign power policy, justify diplomatic hostility, and garner public sympathy for militarized policy frameworks. As Ashraf (2021) notes, what may be termed as national myopia in terms of the internal feuds of the other is a problem of both Indian and Pakistani media when it comes to the problem of the contested regions. These kinds of nationalist representations eliminate the internal line of attack, suppress other counteraction histories of unity of opposing sects, civil action, or internal political threats termed as grass roots.

Such silences form a world that pays little or no attention to the voices of promoting peace thereby undermining the democratic discourse and pluralism. Besides that, according to Rzyska (2018) and Gul et al. (2020), the such an imbalance between contextualization and sensationalism in the South Asian conflict coverage conditions the development of the very landscapes infested with polarized sectarian identities, in the context of which peace discourses are no longer relegated to the margin but rather, comprehensively, undermined and silenced. In these circumstances, media cannot be regarded any longer as a neutral platform of debate; it turns out, instead, an instrument of soft power rivalry.

Such framing habits influence the way people discuss things in many different ways:

They encourage a passive manner of approaching the question of critical engagement with sectarianism by presenting the phenomenon as circular patterns of violence rather than as a social condition with historically and politically embedded context.

According to the conflict governance approach, such practices strengthen punitive forms of conflict governance without focusing on the socio-economic and revolutions in governance that would reduce conflict drivers.

In the endeavor to resurrect peace, they marginalize local players and organizations involved in interfaith dialogue thus hampering emergence of counter-extremism efforts.

Coverage of Gilgit- Baltistan sectarian conflict by Indian media does not only report but also creates meaning and justification of an assortment of politically useful actions at the expense of other accounts. Hopefully, any subsequent media projects will be aimed at bringing peace to the region and develop positive relationships through adding more emphasis on local representation, depth of theme and in-depth analysis.

4.10 Chapter Summary

Indian media reporting of the sectarian violence in Gilgit-Baltistan is largely a projection of dominant political narratives, with weak indigenous representation. While strategic and humanitarian interests are present, overdependence on sporadic and sensationalized reporting constricts public awareness and can increase regional tensions. To encourage a more balanced representation, it is important that future reporting includes thematic analysis, indigenous voices, and peace-oriented frameworks to promote positive discourse and facilitate ethical reporting.

CHAPTER 05

5. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This conclusion directly responds to the two research questions presented in this study by encapsulating the principal findings obtained from the framing analysis of Indian media coverage about sectarian violence in Gilgit-Baltistan. This study aimed to assess the representation of the Gilgit-Baltistan region in Indian media, specifically regarding sectarian violence, utilising framing theory as a framework. This study examined news coverage of three significant episodes: the Muharram Incident (2022), the Blasphemy Allegation Crisis (2023), and the Chilas Bus Attack (2023) in five leading English language Indian newspapers: *The Times of India*, *The Indian Express*, *Hindustan Times*, *Kashmir Monitor*, and *Kashmir Observer*.

At the outset of the study, the initial research inquiry posed was: Q1-How did the selected Indian newspapers frame various sectarian conflicts in Gilgit Baltistan during the time period under study?? Research indicated that Indian media mostly utilised a conflict framework, depicting Gilgit-Baltistan as a territory engulfed in religious extremism and bloodshed. Media portrayals frequently prioritised immediate violence, neglecting historical, political, or socio-demographic contexts, and employed hyperbolic terminology such as “massacre,” “bloodshed,” and “terror.” This method fostered a perception of continuous turmoil without addressing underlying systemic problems. Proposed solutions or peace-building initiatives were infrequently addressed, reflecting a deficiency in journalistic rigour and a lost opportunity for meaningful dialogue.

The second research question enquired: Q2-What are the dominant frames produced by the selected Indian Newspapers in their coverage of various sectarian conflicts in Gilgit-Baltistan? The investigation discerned four principal frames: Conflict Frame - Predominantly utilised, emphasising violence, disorder, and instability.

Attribution of Responsibility Frame - Pakistani institutions and law enforcement are often criticised for their inability to uphold order, particularly during the blasphemy demonstrations. Victimhood and Susceptibility Shia populations were routinely shown as

victims, whilst Sunni viewpoints and the intricate inter-sectarian dynamics were frequently neglected.

The geopolitical framework, particularly in *The Times of India* and *Hindustan Times*, portrayed the conflict through the lens of Indo-Pakistani competition, depicting Pakistan as either strategically incompetent or duplicitous. The findings indicate that Indian media narratives are influenced by national interests and foreign policy stances, frequently reinforcing official state viewpoints while disregarding the on-the-ground reality of the populace in Gilgit-Baltistan.

One of the most important findings was the inadequacy of local voices. An observable absence of direct quotes or opinions of residents of Gilgit-Baltistan, religious officials or religious leaders, peace activists, or government officials characterised most publications. It was mainly based on Indian officials, anonymous sources or comments around the world. This lack of local agency repeats a top-down discourse that treats Gilgit-Baltistan instead of entering into a dialogue with it. Issues of fairness and inclusiveness in the reporting process thus pose ethical concerns to the coverage process hence limiting the ability of the media to generate informed public discourse.

It is concluded in the paper that the strategic and geo-political influences form an important part of the Indian media coverage of the sectarian violence towards Gilgit-Baltistan. In its place, rather than practising fair, encompassing media, most of the coverage focuses on violence and instability, with very little attention paid to the causes and potential ways out. This way the Indian media acts as a geopolitical actor rather than an objective observer. But there are also neglected opportunities emphasised by this research. Journalism has the potential to produce accounts that stimulate peace building, interfaith understanding and transnational cooperation. Nonetheless, this potential remains inadequately exploited. The study advocates for a more accountable and inclusive methodology in journalism that prioritises thematic reporting, amplifies marginalised perspectives, and examines the intricate dynamics of sectarian violence. Media can only contribute significantly to societal understanding and regional stability through such transformation.

5.1 Recommendations

5.2 Recommendations for Media Practitioners

5.2.1 Thematic Reporting with a Contextual Approach

Instead of concentrating on singular acts of violence (episodic framing), media practitioners should employ thematic reporting focused on more comprehensive socio-political and historical contours of sectarian conflict. This includes:

- The development of sectarian relations in Gilgit-Baltistan.
- The political relegation of certain communities.
- Under socio-economic conditions, over a period of time, along with the government's reaction to it.

This has help in more effective audience engagement while peeling the simplistic depiction of violence.

A: Indigenous Perspectives to the Narrative

Media narratives must integrate the perspectives of:

- Residents of Gilgit-Baltistan regardless of sect Shia or Sunni.
- Survivors and victims of conflict.
- Local peace activists, scholars, and other relevant stakeholders.

Bringing such perspectives on board has aid in resolving issues, therefore, less government or foreign expert commentary is relied upon to critique what is happening at the scene and provide the true accounts.

B: Avoid Sensationalist Reporting

Use of vivid language that widens the scope and scale of a conflict for the sake of news should not be done by the Indian media. Reporting for the sake of garnering attention hardly does any good, rather, it leads to:

- Heightened fear mongering and bias against certain sects.

- Weakens already fragile stereotypes.
- Endorses aggressive policies at the expense of citizen welfare and brand it as defending the country.
- Shifts towards more responsible journalism, especially in areas of conflict is sorely needed.

C: Encourage Journalism of Constructive Conflict Resolution

Policies of peace journalism ought to be adopted to help reframe the narrative beyond the conflict of oppressor and oppressed. They need to:

- Advertise instances of dialogue, cooperation, and reconciliation between and among the sects,
- Showcase attempts of the community in de-escalating tensions.
- Make room for those who deal with conflicts to speak, or faith leaders who seek reconciliation.

This type of journalists can help change people's mindsets for the better and help foster discourse aimed towards peace instead of division.

Guidelines for Policy Action

A: Understanding the Influence of Media on Foreign Relations:

Policies are formulated based on how current affairs are covered in the media and this is something that should be prioritized. Area of concern should also include:

- The scope of incursion or civil strife already covered by the media of the country under consideration.
- The possibility of any escalated tensions due to heated exchanges being reported sparingly.
- The obligation to shape foreign policy based on essential missing pieces of information.

B: Support Procedures for Covering Conflicts from an Ethical Perspective

Policymakers and legislators must come together to create and endorse laws that control conflicts involving ethical media coverage having regard to:

- Finding verification of fact, neutrality, and bias in reporting coverage.
- Prevention of ghettoization of peripheral groups and communities for ethical reasons.
- Providing journalist training on conflict-sensitive reporting.

These principles have raise the standards of reporting and at the same time limit the use of media as instruments of state propaganda and disinformation.

C: Promote Collaboration between Regional Media:

Where Indian & Pakistani Media Stand Together along with Global Allies

Regional Indian and Pakistani media, alongside foreign partners, should be planned together to ease the reporting or journalist exchange. These efforts has:

- Become aware of the mechanisms and dynamics of the region.
- Adopt more reciprocal and balanced approaches towards one another for reporting.
- Overcome extreme nationalistic attitudes and professional camaraderie by promoting deeper understanding.

5.3 Suggestions for Academic Investigators

A: Expand the Boundaries of Media Examination

Further examination ought to shift focus from newspapers to include:

- Television news channels.
- Online news aggregators and other digital platforms.
- Social media networks such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube.

This has help build information capture around a younger audience who significantly rely on digital avenues for news.

B: Perform Cross-Regional and Cross-Border Comparative Studies

It would make a strong comparative study to assess how sectarian or ethnically religiously motivated conflict is framed in:

- Some other conflict hotspots in South Asia like Kashmir, Baluchistan, and Assam.
- Cross-national studies of Indo-Pak and the Chinese media.
- Regional language press versus international English language press coverage.

This type of comparative work has enhanced our understanding about how ‘narratives’ are constructed across political and cultural divides.

C: Conduct Research Using a Longitudinal Approach with Strategic Impact Focus

Investigator should look into storytelling and narrative of media and examine how they change over time:

- Assess the impact of framing in media on public perception over time.
- Examine how narratives influence policy, ratified interfaith dialogue, conflict escalation.
- The role media could play in extremism and reconciliation countering.

D: Social Responsibility of the Media

This research highlights the dual role of the media as an informer and as an influencer. As the context of Gilgit-Baltistan is of high geopolitical sensitivity, the media is expected to act responsibly; reporting while also ensuring that no harm is done.

- For media outlets and journalists to contribute towards a more educated, compassionate, and peaceful South Asia, they must implement measures of balance, contextuality, and inclusion.

5.4 Future Research Directions

While this study adds to the understanding of how Indian media portrays sectarian conflict in Gilgit – Baltistan, there is room for further consideration. The following suggestions can help future researchers widen this study:

A: Analyze Coverage in Non-English and Local Languages

This study was conducted on English newspapers only. There is a need to analyze the coverage of the same events in Indian regional language papers, television, and radio. Such outlets are important as they serve a wide and diverse population which is due to the political,

cultural, or ideological settings of the area.

B: Study the Framing and Social Media Discourse Along with Automated Enhancing

As news is increasingly consumed online, studying the framing of sectarian conflict on social media platforms such as Twitter (X), Facebook, and YouTube might provide insight into how sectarian narratives are created and amplified or even contested. The impact of bots and disinformation as well as digital influencers needs to be investigated as well.

C: Study Framing by the Pakistani and International Media in Comparison

There is a gap in studying how diaspora viewers and the Pakistani side diaspora portray the same incidents and how international media portrays them alongside Pakistan. Understanding how media operates in different countries would help understand if there is a unified alignment toward politically charged events or other audience driven motives.

D: An Audience Reception Analysis and Assessment of Media Literacy

Evaluating how audiences decode or internalize the given frames is very important. Focus group interviews or reception studies might suggest:

- The relationship between framing and public sentiment in opinion and policy elicitation.
- Media literacy as an important component when analyzing sectarian narrative critique.
- Domestic versus diaspora audience reception differences.

E: Cross Sectional Research on the Changes in Framing over Time

Conducting a longer period time series analysis, both pre and post prominent sectarian events, alongside other notable shifts in politics, public diplomatic sentiment, and public sentiment could showcase if the media narratives are predominately covertly violent or peacefully constructive, or if they robustly revert to strong antagonistic divisive views.

F: Analyze Journalistic Ethics and Gatekeeping

The research value of how journalists and editors make decisions regarding sensitive topics, such as sectarianism, in contested regions is more significant. This can be accomplished by conducting interviews with reporters or by analysing the policies that are

implemented in the newsroom from the perspective of:

- State pressure
- Restricted conflict coverage editorial line
- Ethical considerations of distanced, un-embedded sourcing reporting

Researching such areas can allow for a multi-faceted understanding of media in conflict societies, enhancing scholarly research while aiding in conflicts.

6. Reflection

The study opened with a relatively simple yet urgent inquiry: In what way does Indian media coverage of sectarian violence in Gilgit-Baltistan affect the region's image, and in what manner is that image constructed by the media? As a researcher, I remember feeling academically and morally obliged to investigate the relation between media's portrayal of identity, politics, and public opinion within a region that is historically troubled and socio-religiously complex. Applying a framing approach, it became apparent that media narratives are real agents in shaping public realities of constituents and subjects of politics. They do not only reflect but also construct, shape perceptions, reinforce state ideologies, and respond to international relations. The Indian media's preeminent use of conflict, responsibility, and geopolitical frames often overlooks the actual lives of people of Gilgit-Baltistan and their reproduction of narratives serves national interests. We live in an age characterized by the rapid and widespread dissemination of information in which media ethics regarding inclusivity and reporting need to be upheld more than ever. Within my academic discipline of media and communication, I have come to appreciate journalism as a practice that not only involves conveying facts, but also includes the dynamics of who gets to tell the story, who has the floor, and how these participants are constructed. This study has reaffirmed my understanding that framing, as previously stated, is not passive. Rather, it is a strategy and practice of either bringing people together or tearing them apart even further.

Above all else, this dissertation requests that people begin reclaiming narrative spaces those spaces in which the denizens of Gilgit-Baltistan are made to be not merely subjects of international media, but full, first-person active role players and narrators of the stories they

tell. The region's complexity entails that it be removed from sensational and superficial episodic portrayals, or geopolitical pigeonholing. Media coverage requires a fortifying, historical-local-people-engagement approach. As a scholar, I also understand that these gaps within the research are some of the many unexplored gaps left on the table, though I hope this one serves as step forward in the derailing of the oversimplified narratives that marginalize the place of journalistic plurality and peacemaking work. Ultimately, framing is essential. It shapes what we accept as the truth, whom we hold accountable for various issues, and what we consider possible. In relation to Gilgit-Baltistan, reframing the narrative from the violence cycles toward understanding, local agency, and regional empathy may be the first approach to shattering the silence and perhaps the conflict itself. This placed travel bugs not only enhanced my academic knowledge, but also deepened my personal belief that the narratives we construct about others significantly influence the future we anticipate.

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Appendix: A

Framing Categories Used in Analysis

Frame Type	Operational Definition	Indicators in Media Text
Conflict Frame	Focuses on violence, clashes, and disagreements between sectarian groups.	Use of words like “riot”, “clash”, “violence”, “tensions”, “attack”, “bloodshed”; emphasis on casualties and destruction.
Attribution of Responsibility	Assigns blame or responsibility for the conflict to individuals, institutions, or governments.	Mentions of government failure, police inaction, biased authorities; calls for accountability or demands for justice.
Victimhood Frame	Emphasizes suffering of a specific community, often portraying them as innocent victims.	Focus on loss of life, attacks on religious processions or places, use of phrases like “minority under threat”, “targeted killing”, emotional testimonies.
Geopolitical/Strategic Frame	Places the conflict within the broader context of India-Pakistan relations or regional politics.	References to LOC, Kashmir dispute, Indian foreign policy, hybrid warfare, national interest, security strategy.
Peace/Humanizing Frame	Highlights reconciliation, local dialogue, or efforts to	Mentions of peace committees, interfaith dialogue, communal

	reduce violence and promote unity.	harmony, protests for peace, calls for tolerance.
Sensational Frame	Uses dramatic or emotional language to exaggerate or intensify the narrative.	Overuse of adjectives like “horrific”, “shocking”, “brutal massacre”; headlines designed to trigger emotional response or panic.
Episodic Frame	Focuses on specific events without linking them to broader historical or social causes.	Isolated reporting of incidents without contextual background, no mention of structural issues, policy failures, or historical tensions.
Thematic Frame	Offers historical, structural, or systemic context for the conflict.	Inclusion of causes, history of sectarianism, socio-political factors, quotes from experts, and analytical commentary.

Appendix: B

Coding Sheet:

Story Title	Newspaper	Date	Episode	Frames Present	Language/Tone	Stakeholders Mentioned	Local Voices Present?
Violence Erupts in Gilgit	The Times of India	Aug 2, 2022	Muharram Incident (2022)	Conflict, Responsibility, Victimhood	Alarmist, Emotional	Shia clerics, Pakistani Govt	No
Shia Leaders Demand Justice	The Times of India	Aug 10, 2022	Muharram Incident (2022)	Responsibility, Victimhood	Empathetic, Urgent	Religious leaders, Protestors	Yes (brief)
Blasphemy Charge Sparks Violence	The Times of India	Aug 23, 2023	Blasphemy Allegation (2023)	Conflict, Responsibility	Moderate, Reactive	Police, Protesters	No
Sectarian Clashes Spread to Skardu	The Times of India	Aug 26, 2023	Muharram Incident (2022)	Conflict, Expansion	Escalatory, Sensational	Government, Clergy	No
Chilas Bus Attack Leaves 9 Dead	The Times of India	Dec 2, 2023	Chilas Bus Attack (2023)	Conflict, Geopolitical, Sensational	Sensational	Anonymous Officials, Victims	No
Survivors Recount Chilas Horror	The Times of India	Dec 5, 2023	Chilas Bus Attack (2023)	Victimhood, Human Interest	Emotional, Personal	Victims, Families	Yes
Sectarian Violence Breaks Out in Gilgit	Hindustan Times	Aug 3, 2022	Muharram Incident (2022)	Conflict, Responsibility	Alarmist	Protesters, Officials	No
Internet Suspension Amid Muharram Violence	Hindustan Times	Aug 8, 2022	Muharram Incident (2022)	Control, Escalation	Restrictive, Tense	Telecoms, State	No
Blasphemy Allegation Sparks Riots	Hindustan Times	Aug 23, 2023	Blasphemy Allegation (2023)	Conflict, Responsibility	Informative	Police, Protesters	Yes
Thousands Protest	Hindustan Times	Aug 24,	Blasphemy Allegation	Conflict, Victimhood	Reactive, Charged	Protesters	Yes

Outside Police Station		2023	(2023)				
9 Killed in Chilas Sectarian Bus Attack	Hindustan Times	Dec 2, 2023	Chilas Bus Attack (2023)	Conflict, Geopolitical	Sensational	Security Forces, Anonymous Officials	No
Survivors Recount Horror	Hindustan Times	Dec 6, 2023	Chilas Bus Attack (2023)	Victimhood, Human Interest	Emotional, Mourning	Victims' Families	Yes
Sectarian Protests Rock Gilgit Towns	The Indian Express	Aug 2, 2022	Muharram Incident (2022)	Conflict	Alarmist	Protesters, Police	No
Religious Leaders Demand Peace in GB	The Indian Express	Aug 8, 2022	Peace Efforts	Peace, Thematic	Constructive	Religious Leaders	Yes
Mob Targets Mosque Over Alleged Blasphemy	The Indian Express	Aug 22, 2023	Blasphemy Allegation (2023)	Responsibility, Conflict	Moderate, Informative	Police, Religious Groups	Yes
Violence in Diamer Leads to Army Clampdown	The Indian Express	Aug 24, 2023	Blasphemy Allegation (2023)	Conflict, Control	Security-Centric	Army, Protesters	No
Terror on Highway: 9 Killed in Sectarian Shooting	The Indian Express	Dec 2, 2023	Chilas Bus Attack (2023)	Conflict, Sensational	Sensational	Victims, Police	No
Govt Blames External Hand in GB Attack	The Indian Express	Dec 3, 2023	Chilas Bus Attack (2023)	Geopolitical, Attribution	Political, Defensive	Govt Sources, Agencies	No
Sectarian Flares Grip Gilgit-Baltistan	Kashmir Monitor	Aug 3, 2022	Muharram Incident (2022)	Conflict	Alarmist	Citizens, Security	No

GB Tense but Under Control, Say Officials	Kashmir Monitor	Aug 10, 2022	Muharram Incident (2022)	Responsibility, Peace	Balanced	Officials	No
Religious Mob Attacks Police Check post	Kashmir Monitor	Aug 23, 2023	Blasphemy Allegation (2023)	Conflict, Security	Urgent	Police, Clergy	No
Gilgit Locals Mourn Chilas Victims	Kashmir Monitor	Dec 4, 2023	Chilas Bus Attack (2023)	Victimhood, Human Interest	Mournful	Victim Families, Local Residents	Yes
Rangers Deployed Across Skardu	Kashmir Monitor	Dec 5, 2023	Muharram Incident (2022)	Control, Peace	Security-Led	Rangers, Govt	No
Chilas Victim's Funeral Attracts Thousands	Kashmir Monitor	Dec 6, 2023	Chilas Aftermath (2023)	Victimhood, Emotional Frame	Emotional, Human Interest	Public, Families	Yes
Muharram Violence Breaks Silence in GB	Kashmir Observer	Aug 2, 2022	Muharram Incident (2022)	Conflict, Thematic, Peace	Balanced, Constructive	Community Leaders, Peace Committees	Yes
Alleged Blasphemy Leads to Protests in Diamer	Kashmir Observer	Aug 23, 2023	Blasphemy Allegation (2023)	Conflict, Responsibility	Informative	Protesters, Police	Yes
GB Under Siege After Chilas Massacre	Kashmir Observer	Dec 3, 2023	Chilas Bus Attack (2023)	Conflict, Sensational, Geopolitical	Alarmist	Govt Officials, Security Forces	No
Community Leaders Urge Calm	Kashmir Observer	Dec 4, 2023	Chilas Aftermath (2023)	Peace, Thematic	Constructive	Local Leaders	Yes
Interfaith Peace March Held	Kashmir Observer	Dec 5, 2023	Peace building Efforts	Peace Frame	Optimistic, Hopeful	Religious Groups	Yes

in Gilgit								
Civil Society Condemns Sectarian Killings	Kashmir Observer	Dec 6, 2023	Chilas Aftermath (2023)	Responsibility, Human Rights	Civil, Activist	NGOs, Civil Society		Yes

Appendix C: *The Times of India*

Date	Headline	Selected
02-Aug-22	Violence Erupts in Gilgit	✓
10-Aug-22	Shia Leaders Demand Justice	✓
23-Aug-23	Blasphemy Charge Sparks Violence	✓
26-Aug-23	Sectarian Clashes Spread to Skardu	✓
02-Dec-23	Chilas Bus Attack Leaves 9 Dead	✓
05-Dec-23	Survivors Recount Chilas Horror	✓

Appendix D: *Hindustan Times*

Date	Headline	Selected
03-Aug-22	Sectarian Violence Breaks Out in Gilgit	✓
08-Aug-22	Internet Suspension Amid Muharram Violence	✓
23-Aug-23	Blasphemy Allegation Sparks Riots	✓
24-Aug-23	Thousands Protest Outside Police Station	✓
02-Dec-23	9 Killed in Chilas Sectarian	✓

	Bus Attack
06-Dec-23	Survivors Recount Horror ✓

Appendix E: *The Indian Express*

Date	Headline	Selected
02-Aug-22	Sectarian Protests Rock Gilgit Towns	✓
08-Aug-22	Religious Leaders Demand Peace in GB	✓
22-Aug-23	Mob Targets Mosque Over Alleged Blasphemy	✓
24-Aug-23	Violence in Diamer Leads to Army Clampdown	✓
02-Dec-23	Terror on Highway: 9 Killed in Sectarian Shooting	✓
03-Dec-23	Govt Blames External Hand in GB Attack	✓

Appendix F: *Kashmir Monitor*

Date	Headline	Selected
03-Aug-22	Sectarian Flares Grip Gilgit-Baltistan	✓
10-Aug-22	GB Tense but Under Control, Say Officials	✓
23-Aug-23	Religious Mob Attacks Police Check post	✓
04-Dec-23	Gilgit Locals Mourn Chilas Victims	✓
05-Dec-23	Rangers Deployed Across Skardu	✓

06-Dec-23	Chilas Victim's Funeral	✓
	Attracts Thousands	

Appendix G: *Kashmir Observer*

Date	Headline	Selected
02-Aug-22	Muharram Violence	✓
	Breaks Silence in GB	
23-Aug-23	Alleged Blasphemy Leads	✓
	to Protests in Diamer	
03-Dec-23	GB Under Siege After	✓
	Chilas Massacre	
04-Dec-23	Community Leaders Urge	✓
	Calm	
05-Dec-23	Interfaith Peace March	✓
	Held in Gilgit	
06-Dec-23	Civil Society Condemns	✓
	Sectarian Killings	