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

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Abstract
This study investigates the press representation of sectarian conflicts in Gilgit-Baltistan within Indian media discourse. Using a qualitative framing analysis, it explores the key themes, dominant narratives, and reporting patterns employed in coverage of this sensitive issue. The research was motivated by the need to understand how media narratives shape public imagination, particularly when constructed through a geopolitical lens. The study examines how Indian media represented the concerned parties, attributed causes, and proposed solutions to sectarian conflicts, while also assessing the broader impact of these narratives on societal perceptions. Findings reveal that Indian media largely adopted a conflict-centric framing, often neglecting historical and contextual dimensions and portraying Gilgit-Baltistan as a volatile region marked by extremism. The analysis further indicates that national political agendas significantly influenced coverage, with narratives characterized by sensationalism, criticism of Pakistani institutions, and the absence of local voices. The study concludes that such representations contribute to skewed perceptions of the region. These insights may assist policymakers, media practitioners, and citizens in working toward a more nuanced and balanced understanding of Gilgit-Baltistan.

INTRODUCTION

The media's struggle to report sectarian strife in Gilgit-Baltistan often falls between informed reporting and sensationalism, raising questions about bias and responsibility. Gilgit-Baltistan, formerly known as the Northern Areas, is part of the broader conflict-ridden region of Jammu and Kashmir. Since the independence of India and Pakistan in 1947, the Kashmir conflict has persisted, fueling militarism, extremism, protracted warfare, and socio-economic instability across South Asia (Khan, 2022). Covering 72,971 square kilometers, Gilgit-Baltistan is home to approximately 2.5 million people belonging to at least 24 ethnic and linguistic groups. Its religious composition is diverse, with Shiite Muslims (39%) forming the majority, followed by Sunnis (27%), Ismailis (18%), and Noorbakshis (16%) (Singh, 2013).

Geographically, Gilgit-Baltistan is uniquely positioned at the crossroads of China, Central Asia, South Asia, and Afghanistan, which makes it vulnerable to regional spillovers from militant

activities. It is also the only region in Pakistan where Shias form a majority, rendering sectarian dynamics particularly sensitive (Hunzai, 2013). Since the 1980s, sectarian conflict has escalated, partly due to increased connectivity via the Karakoram Highway, which linked the once-isolated region to China and mainland Pakistan.

The first major sectarian outbreak occurred in 1983, followed by a devastating assault in 1988 when armed tribesmen attacked Shia villages, killing nearly 400 people (Hussain, 2021). More recent attacks include the killing of 18 Shia pilgrims on the Karakoram Highway in 2012, followed by additional massacres in Chilas and Babusar Pass the same year, which left dozens dead (Holden, 2019). These atrocities shocked local populations and highlighted the state's inability to provide adequate protection. The violence peaked in 2012 with over 100 deaths, sparking retaliatory killings in Gilgit town and surrounding areas (Dad, 2016).

The emergence of sectarian violence in Gilgit-Baltistan can be linked to broader ideological shifts, including the 1979 Iranian Revolution, General Zia-ul-Haq's Islamization policies, and the Afghan conflict of the 1980s (Hunzai, 2013). These events contributed to the region's ideological polarization, fueling sectarian unrest (Sheikh et al., 2012).

Given its geopolitical location, Gilgit-Baltistan has become deeply entangled in Pakistan-India rivalries, particularly within the framework of **hybrid warfare**—the use of both conventional and non-conventional strategies to achieve political objectives (Abbas & Ahmad, 2021). Media narratives form a crucial dimension of this hybrid conflict, with Indian press coverage frequently shaping geopolitical perceptions of the region (Sari, 2017). Indian media portrayals often emphasize sectarian, political, and social discord in Gilgit-Baltistan, reinforcing a conflict-centric image that affects public opinion and diplomatic discourse (Mikae, 2021; Malik, 2020).

Although historical and socio-political aspects of sectarian conflict in Gilgit-Baltistan have been studied (Ahmed, 2016), little attention has been given to how Indian media frames these conflicts. This research seeks to fill that gap by conducting an in-depth framing analysis of Indian newspapers' coverage of sectarian violence in Gilgit-Baltistan. Specifically, the study aims to examine how narratives are constructed, what dominant frames emerge, and how these representations influence perceptions at both societal and geopolitical levels.

Objectives

- To analyze the nature of coverage of sectarian conflicts in Gilgit-Baltistan in selected Indian newspapers.
- To identify the predominant frames employed by these newspapers in their coverage.

Research Questions

RQ1: How did the selected Indian newspapers frame sectarian conflicts in Gilgit-Baltistan during the period under study?

RQ2: What dominant frames emerged in the coverage of sectarian conflicts in Gilgit-Baltistan?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The role of media in reporting sectarian conflicts has been widely studied, highlighting the complex intersection of journalism with political, social, and ethical considerations. Scholars note that media representation significantly influences geopolitical perceptions, particularly in regions affected by persistent conflict. Gilgit-Baltistan, with its turbulent history and socio-political complexities, has become a focal point for researchers seeking to understand sectarian tensions through the lens of media coverage.

The Brussels-based International Crisis Group (ICG) has argued that sectarian conflict in Pakistan is directly linked to state policies of Islamisation and the marginalization of secular democratic forces. Instead of strengthening democratic institutions, successive governments co-opted religious groups to counter civilian opposition. Such political use of religion fostered competition among clerical elites of Sunni and Shia sects, leading to the establishment of religious parties, madrassa networks, and even militant organizations (Kumar & Banerjee, 2019). Despite state action against extremist groups, the

entrenched terror infrastructure has proven resilient.

Scholars of conflict resolution and peace studies provide useful perspectives for contextualizing sectarian conflict. Wellensteen emphasizes that conflict management can help reduce crises, build confidence, and lessen suffering by containing violence, while conflict resolution aims to address the root incompatibilities between parties. In Pakistan, particularly in the 1990s and early 2000s, managing the Shi'a–Sunni conflict seemed nearly impossible. However, efforts by the government, civil society, and religious leaders have reduced violence in recent years, especially following the Lal Masjid crisis of 2007 and military operations against militant groups in the tribal areas (Kumar & Banerjee, 2019).

Amstutz (2013) argues that conflict management can make conflict constructive by managing disputes without destroying the social fabric of communities. He stresses that conflict management provides institutional mechanisms to resolve disputes efficiently while preserving freedom and autonomy. Similarly, Wellensteen highlights that conflict management often focuses on limiting the armed dimension of conflict to contain destruction and prevent spillover into neighboring regions. Drawing parallels, scholars note that while Northern Ireland established institutionalized conflict management, sectarian groups in Pakistan have yet to achieve a similar framework. Religious tolerance and intra-faith dialogue are often suggested as sustainable means of mitigating sectarian violence (Ahmar, 2007).

Kumar and Banerjee (2019), in their work on sectarian and ethnic violence in India, connect these conflicts with human rights violations by both state and non-state actors. They emphasize the need to integrate human rights education into academic curricula, arguing that communal violence in diverse democracies offers valuable lessons for global human rights discourse.

In the context of Gilgit-Baltistan, Ahmed (2016) underscores the complex interplay of ethnic and sectarian disputes and their long-term socio-political consequences. Similarly, Hunzai (2013) traces the historical roots of sectarian divisions in the region, illustrating how demographic changes, ideological influences, and political neglect intensified conflict.

A critical strand in the literature highlights the role of Indian media in shaping perceptions of Gilgit-Baltistan. Scholars argue that media coverage often amplifies sectarian tensions, emphasizes violence, and frames the region as unstable in ways that align with broader geopolitical interests (Malik, 2020). Media portrayals not only contribute to international lobbying narratives but also risk inflaming local grievances by reinforcing stereotypes and marginalizing indigenous voices.

Overall, the literature converges on the idea that sectarian conflict in Gilgit-Baltistan is a product of deep historical, political, and social forces, with Indian media playing a pivotal role in framing and reinforcing these conflicts. The present study situates itself at the intersection of media discourse, local geopolitics, and sectarian identities to explore how Indian newspapers frame sectarian conflict in Gilgit-Baltistan. By examining media frames, this study contributes to understanding the dynamics of media bias, ideological influence, and the broader diplomatic implications of press portrayals beyond Pakistan's borders.

METHODOLOGY

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

Data Collection

Depending on readership, geographical influence, sentiment, and overall positioning, five internationally recognized Indian newspapers—*Hindustan Times, Kashmir Monitor, Kashmir Observer, The Indian Express,* and *The Times of India*—were included in the sample (Van Dijk et al., 2023). Only news stories were considered that directly or indirectly mentioned sectarian conflict in Gilgit-Baltistan.

The study employed a **stratified sampling method**, dividing the population into discrete subsets (strata) based on critical characteristics relevant to the research question. This approach allowed for a more precise analysis, ensuring that significant areas of interest were fairly represented. The research did not aim to generalize findings but instead focused on an in-depth investigation of the issue. Stratified sampling was thus chosen to allow

for a thorough examination of sectarian violence in Gilgit-Baltistan.

Each instance of sectarian conflict in Gilgit-Baltistan was allocated one month, with news stories incorporated within 30 days of the initial coverage. This timeframe provided adequate opportunity to assess how frames developed in response to specific events. Reports deemed irrelevant to the central theme or outside the time frame were excluded.

To further refine selection, the researcher applied **systematic sampling**. From an initial dataset of 100 relevant news stories across the five newspapers, a 30% sample (n = 30) was established through proportional allocation. Stories were arranged chronologically, and every third story was selected to ensure temporal spread and minimize selection bias. This process preserved the study's goal of analyzing framing patterns across three major sectarian conflict events in Gilgit-Baltistan while ensuring equal representation across periods and publications. Systematic sampling enhanced the credibility, transparency, and replicability of the study by reducing researcher subjectivity. However, the summary table for the process is stated as:

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

Data Analysis

This research employed a **framing analysis** to examine how Indian newspapers reported on sectarian conflicts in Gilgit-Baltistan. Framing analysis allows researchers to identify dominant narratives by focusing on recurring themes, metaphors, images, and the portrayal of actors in the news (Gul et al., 2020).

The rationale for this approach lies in the need to understand how Indian media constructs discourses around Gilgit-Baltistan, a region of strategic and ideological importance to both India and Pakistan. Media not only reports events but also shapes the meanings attached to them, influencing societal and geopolitical perceptions (Ulnicane et al., 2021). The selection of the five newspapers ensured a diversity of editorial stances and readership demographics (Mokhberian et al., 2020).

The analysis combined **predetermined and emergent coding categories**. Stories were examined for recurring frames, key themes, metaphors, and depictions of sectarian conflict, with attention given to the ways Indian media framed the involved groups and conflict dynamics.

Operational Definitions

Sectarian Conflict

Violence, tension, or conflict between religious or sectarian groups in Gilgit-Baltistan, with emphasis on Shia-Sunni interactions. This study focused on episodic conflicts to build a comprehensive dataset, acknowledging the region's long history of sectarian unrest shaped

by political and religious dynamics (Nagri, 2023).

1st Muharram Incident in Gilgit City (August 2022)

Sectarian tensions escalated on the first day of Muharram 2022 following disputes between Sunni and Shia groups, resulting in multiple casualties. A disagreement regarding the convoy route of a Shia cleric triggered violence, prompting authorities to impose curfews and heightened security (Iftikhar et al., 2023).

Blasphemy Allegations (August 2023)

In August 2023, blasphemy allegations against a Shia cleric sparked widespread protests in Diamer, Chilas, and Skardu. Sit-ins on the Karakoram Highway disrupted travel, and competing demands between Shia and Sunni groups further escalated tensions. Despite government efforts, including inter-sectarian peace committees and deployment of Rangers, protests persisted, deepening sectarian rifts (Abbas et al., 2024; Nagri, 2023).

Chilas Bus Attack (December 2023)

On December 2, 2023, unidentified gunmen attacked a passenger bus traveling from Gilgit to Rawalpindi via Chilas, killing nine and injuring 25. Though no group claimed responsibility, the incident was widely viewed as sectarian terrorism, further intensifying insecurity in the region (Bacha, 2023).

Indian Newspapers:

Newspapers based in India and especially those that are written in English especially, *Hindustan Times, Kashmir Monitor, Kashmir Observer, The Indian Express, The Times of India.*

Theoretical Framework

Theories of **media framing** and **agenda-setting** provide useful perspectives for understanding how media influences its intended audience (Freyenberger, 2013). As Vreese (2005) explains, framing highlights multiple aspects of an issue, emphasizing some over others depending on their perceived importance. While agenda-setting focuses on which issues are considered significant, framing concerns how those issues are presented and interpreted (p. 53).

This research seeks to analyze how the Indian media reports and constructs discourses on sectarian conflicts in Gilgit-Baltistan. The objective is to identify dominant narratives on sectarianism in the region and to understand how such representations shape public perceptions within the broader context of India–Pakistan relations. Framing theory is particularly relevant here, as it reveals how media constructs perceptions of internal problems in Gilgit-Baltistan and situates them within the geopolitical rivalry between the two countries.

To assess how the Indian media reports on sectarian strife, this study adopts a framing approach. Framing theory allows us to examine how media outlets emphasize certain aspects of a story while minimizing others, thereby influencing public interpretation and discourse. In the case of sectarian violence in Gilgit-Baltistan, the analysis focuses on the use of **episodic frames**—frames that highlight individual events while downplaying historical or structural contexts of the conflict. This approach aligns with findings from previous research on Chinese media framing of the Kashmir conflict, where coverage tended to emphasize episodic frames while neglecting broader historical narratives (Amrah, 2020).

The qualitative framing analysis conducted here categorizes frames in Indian media reports of sectarian conflicts into conflict, leadership, and responsibility frames, as suggested in the literature (Malik, 2020). By closely examining the construction of these frames, this study explores their implications for societal perceptions and policy responses to sectarian issues.

Framing Analysis

Framing analysis is essential for investigating how Indian media coverage of sectarian conflict in Gilgit-Baltistan influences the formation of public perceptions and debates. It helps unpack the interpretive schemas that shape the representation of sectarian issues. Sequential

framing analysis further enables the identification of changes in frames over time, particularly in relation to political developments or social movements (Zhigadlo, 2023).

The frames identified in the Indian media's coverage of Gilgit-Baltistan include **humanizing, dehumanizing, and savior frames**, which have also been noted in studies of other crises (Perreault, 2019). By analyzing coverage across different media sources, the study examines the prevalence of sectarianism in reporting, while also identifying possible biases or vested interests (Mateu & Dominguez, 2019). Such analysis reveals how frames shape public opinion and policy discourses on sectarian tensions in Gilgit-Baltistan (Rzyska, 2018).

The framing analysis employs a coding structure to classify aspects of press coverage, including the parties involved, causes emphasized, proposed solutions, tone of reporting, and indicators of bias or neutrality. Data were organized and analyzed qualitatively, with emphasis placed on identifying the frames through which Indian media represents sectarian conflict. This systematic approach highlights the multiple dimensions of coverage and their broader implications for understanding sectarian conflict in Gilgit-Baltistan.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The following section presents the findings obtained through framing analysis of selected leading Indian newspapers regarding their coverage of sectarian violence in Gilgit-Baltistan. The review focused on three major events: **the Muharram Incident (August 2022), the Blasphemy Allegations (August 2023), and the Chilas Bus Attack (December 2023).** The analysis is based on coverage by *The Times of India, The Indian Express, Hindustan Times, Kashmir Observer,* and *Kashmir Monitor*. Using framing theory as a lens, the study categorizes news content by frame, examines underlying trends, and identifies socio-political concerns raised in the coverage.

Dominant Frames Identified

Conflict Frame

The conflict frame emerged as the most dominant in all outlets. Indian newspapers generally reported the incidents as manifestations of violence and inter-religious strife. For instance, during the Chilas Bus Attack of December 2023, headlines emphasized brutality, using terms such as *"massacre," "brutal ambush,"* and *"sectarian bloodshed"* (Hindustan Times, 2023; The Indian Express, 2023). Reports rarely provided historical context, presenting violence as spontaneous and cyclical. This approach reflects Entman's (1993) notion of framing, where specific aspects of reality are repeatedly highlighted to reinforce a particular perception. Recurrent use of conflict-driven vocabulary contributed to constructing Gilgit-Baltistan as an inherently volatile and unstable region (Ahmed, 2016).

Attribution of Responsibility Frame

Another prominent frame was the attribution of responsibility, particularly evident in coverage of the 2023 Blasphemy Allegation case. Indian media often highlighted the Pakistani government's inability to manage protests and maintain law and order. *The Indian Express* criticized state institutions for their "failure to respond expeditiously" and their "inability to prevent recurring sectarian unrest" (The Indian Express, 2023). Such framing aligns with earlier scholarship that shows media frequently places responsibility on the state in contexts of governance failure (Javed et al., 2022). It also resonates with India's broader geopolitical narrative portraying Pakistan as incapable of governing Gilgit-Baltistan effectively (Malik, 2020).

Victimhood and Vulnerability Frame

Coverage of the August 2022 Muharram Incident prominently employed a victimhood narrative, particularly around Shia mourners and clerics. The reporting emphasized minority persecution and structural discrimination, echoing Hunzai (2013) and Hussain (2021),

who argue that Shias, though locally significant in Gilgit-Baltistan, are vulnerable within Pakistan's Sunni-majority context. However, such narratives often ignored mutual tensions and the region's complex socio-political dynamics, thereby oversimplifying the conflict. While such portrayals generate sympathy, they risk reducing the conflict to a one-sided narrative (Ahmed, 2016).

Geopolitical and Strategic Contextualization

Some stories situated sectarian violence within a larger geopolitical frame. Reports suggested that sectarian unrest in Gilgit-Baltistan provided Pakistan with opportunities to tighten its control over the region, in line with alleged "hybrid warfare" strategies (Sari, 2017; Malik, 2020). These narratives reinforced India's strategic claims on Gilgit-Baltistan and reflected broader arguments that media coverage of conflict-prone regions often advances foreign policy objectives (Ashraf, 2021).

Thematic Patterns in Media Coverage

Episodic vs. Thematic Reporting

Coverage was dominated by **episodic framing**, with sectarian violence portrayed as isolated incidents. For example, the 2023 Blasphemy Allegation crisis was framed as an immediate law-and-order emergency rather than as an outcome of entrenched political and demographic tensions (Javed & Nazir, 2022). Only a few outlets, notably *Kashmir Observer*, employed thematic framing by situating the events within historical and structural contexts. This finding reflects the literature that distinguishes episodic journalism (event-centered) from thematic journalism (context-centered).

Sensationalism and Language Use

The analysis found extensive use of sensationalized language, particularly in coverage of the Chilas Bus Attack. Headlines such as *"Terror on Karakoram"* and *"Another Bloody December in G-B"* (*Times of India, 2023*) heightened emotional impact but also reinforced stereotypes of Muslim-majority areas as inherently violent (Kumar & Banerjee, 2019).

Lack of Local Representation

Local perspectives were notably underrepresented. Most reports relied on official statements from Pakistani or Indian authorities and foreign analysts, with little space given to victims' families or local politicians. This lack of local voice risks reinforcing external narratives while neglecting grassroots perspectives (Ahmed, 2016).

Variations in Newspaper Coverage

National vs. International Outlets

National newspapers such as *The Times of India* and *The Indian Express* primarily framed sectarian violence through strategic and political lenses, portraying Gilgit-Baltistan as evidence of Pakistan's governance failures. Their coverage aligned closely with the Indian state's official narrative, treating the region as both a security threat and a contested territory. This finding is consistent with Gupta's (2015) observation that national discourses often remain confined within dominant ideological frameworks.

By contrast, international outlets like *The Guardian* and *The New York Times* provided limited but more humanitarian-focused coverage, highlighting minority persecution, religious violence, and underdevelopment. Although relatively neutral, these reports often lacked deep contextual understanding and risked oversimplifying the conflict. While more balanced than national outlets, international coverage still reduced complex socio-political dynamics to simplified narratives about instability.

Ideological Biases

Editorial biases were also evident. *The Times of India* consistently linked sectarian violence in Gilgit-Baltistan to Pakistan's failures in Kashmir and its alleged support for terrorism. Conversely, *The Indian Express* demonstrated relatively more balanced reporting by acknowledging humanitarian consequences without heavy politicization (Malik, 2020).

Summary of Frames

Frame Type	Usage Frequency	Media Examples	Effect on Audience 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

Implications of Findings

Overall, Indian media coverage of sectarian conflict in Gilgit-Baltistan framed the region primarily through lenses of violence, victimhood, and geopolitical rivalry. These portrayals reinforced perceptions of Gilgit-Baltistan as an ungovernable space while simultaneously serving India's strategic narratives against Pakistan. The absence of local voices and limited thematic framing led to oversimplified accounts that neglected the region's socio-political diversity and peacebuilding initiatives (Javed, Nazir & Chaudhry, 2022).

Such representations carry significant consequences. As Bhatti et al. (2022) argue, media in conflict zones often configures reality rather than reflecting it, by selectively emphasizing problems and solutions. In this case, Indian media portrayals of Gilgit-Baltistan risk shaping public opinion in ways that justify diplomatic hostility, militarized responses, and soft power rivalry (Ashraf, 2021). Furthermore, the lack of attention to local peace initiatives marginalizes grassroots actors engaged in interfaith dialogue and conflict resolution.

Echoing Rzyska (2018) and Gul et al. (2020), this imbalance between sensationalism and contextualization contributes to polarized sectarian identities, undermining pluralism and silencing peace-oriented discourse. Thus, Indian media cannot be considered a neutral platform in this case; instead, it functions as an instrument of political narrative-building.

Future reporting could benefit from greater inclusion of local perspectives, deeper thematic analysis, and peace-oriented framing. Such approaches would not only enrich understanding of Gilgit-Baltistan's complex socio-political reality but also contribute to ethical journalism and regional stability.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

This conclusion directly responds to the two research questions presented in this study by synthesizing the main findings obtained from the framing analysis of Indian media coverage of sectarian violence in Gilgit-Baltistan. The study aimed to assess how Gilgit-Baltistan was represented in Indian media, particularly regarding sectarian conflict, using framing theory as the analytical lens. Coverage of three major incidents was examined: the Muharram Incident (2022), the Blasphemy Allegation Crisis (2023), and the Chilas Bus Attack (2023), as reported in five leading English-language Indian newspapers: *The Times of India*, *The Indian Express*, *Hindustan Times*, *Kashmir Monitor*, and *Kashmir Observer*.

The first research question (Q1) asked: **How did the selected Indian newspapers frame various sectarian conflicts in Gilgit-Baltistan during the period under study?** Findings revealed that Indian media predominantly employed a

conflict frame, portraying Gilgit-Baltistan as a territory consumed by extremism and recurring violence. Reports tended to emphasize immediate bloodshed using hyperbolic terms such as *"massacre," "bloodshed,"* and *"terror,"* while neglecting historical, political, or socio-demographic contexts. This approach reinforced an image of perpetual chaos and instability, while overlooking peace-building initiatives or systemic issues.

The second research question (Q2) asked: **What dominant frames were produced by the selected Indian newspapers in their coverage of sectarian conflicts in Gilgit-Baltistan?** Analysis identified four key frames:

- **Conflict Frame** – the most prevalent, focusing on disorder, violence, and instability.
- **Attribution of Responsibility Frame** – frequently blaming Pakistani institutions and law enforcement for governance failures, particularly during the blasphemy unrest.
- **Victimhood and Vulnerability Frame** – highlighting Shia populations as victims, while often overlooking Sunni perspectives and complex inter-sectarian realities.
- **Geopolitical Frame** – most evident in *The Times of India* and *Hindustan Times*, which situated the conflict within Indo-Pakistani rivalry, portraying Pakistan as either incompetent or manipulative.

A significant finding was the **absence of local voices**. Most stories lacked perspectives from residents of Gilgit-Baltistan, religious leaders, peace activists, or local officials. Instead, reports leaned heavily on Indian officials, international experts, or anonymous sources. This top-down reporting reinforced external narratives, sidelined indigenous voices, and raised ethical questions about fairness and inclusivity in conflict journalism.

Overall, the findings suggest that Indian media coverage of Gilgit-Baltistan's sectarian violence is shaped heavily by **strategic and geopolitical considerations**, positioning media as an active geopolitical actor rather than a neutral observer. The emphasis remained on violence and instability, with minimal attention given to underlying causes or solutions. This reflects missed opportunities for journalism to foster peace-building, interfaith understanding, and constructive dialogue.

In conclusion, this study highlights the pressing need for a more **accountable and inclusive journalistic approach**. Such an approach should prioritize thematic reporting, amplify marginalized voices, and engage with the complex socio-political dynamics of Gilgit-Baltistan. Only through these shifts can media contribute meaningfully to informed public discourse, societal understanding, and regional stability.

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