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A Textual Analysis Of Selected Newspaper Reports On The Pahalgam Terrorist Attack In 2025

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Abstract: Newspapers publish reports on various topics. Mostly hard news gets the space at the first page of the newspapers. A reporter maintains objectivity in reporting incidents by following right representation of the incident without exaggerating the fact and figure, using right words to depict the situation, using relevant words to make the headline and lead sentence and narrating the incident by incorporating quotations from witnesses, government officials, affected people, celebrities, etc. Though it is the duty of the sub-editor to finalise the report along with the making of a suitable headline; reporters nowadays have to work hard to make the news print-worthy. This research paper aimed to identify the various methods that newspapers use when reporting incidents of terror attacks and attract readers' attention.

Index Terms - Pahalgam, terrorist, attack, Kashmir, headline, lead.

1.INTRODUCTION

On April 22, 2025, India and the entire world received a very shocking and heart-breaking news of the merciless killing of 26 innocent lives while they were on a vacation trip at the Baisaran Valley, Pahalgam, Kashmir. A heinous terrorist attack took place on that day in afternoon (around 2:40 p.m.) at the Baisaran valley. This place is also famous for its scenic heavenly beauty and is popularly called the mini Switzerland of India. (Raina, 2025). The incident resulted in an armed conflict between the two neighbouring countries, India and Pakistan after a few days of this terrorist attack. (DD News, 2025). The relationship between the two neighbouring states became bitter again. A series of strict diplomatic steps were taken by India against Pakistan as a response to this terror attack. (HT News Desk, 2025). The political leaders and country heads of nations like United States of America, United Kingdom, Germany, Russia, France, Japan and many other western and eastern nations expressed their deep concerns over the growing tension between India and Pakistan and a possible destabilising political condition in the South Asia. Though a strict ceasefire is now being maintained by both India and Pakistan, the two neighbouring states, the tension still prevails in the north and north-western border areas of India. (TOI Newsdesk, 2025). The Government of India has strictly warned Pakistan of facing severe consequences if any terror attack would take place inside the geographical territory of India in future after the ceasefire began between the two countries. (PTI, 2025). The war of words took place in media in both countries during this period.

The incident of April 22, 2025 terrorist attack in Pahalgam, Kashmir was reported by every newspaper in India and almost by a number of major dailies across the world in different languages. The reporting of this incident was carried out by different media houses in both objective and subjective ways. The agenda-setting theory has been followed by media houses with special emphasis on readership. The Telegraph is a noted English daily and it has a wide readership in India, especially in West Bengal. It is an English newspaper published by the Ananda Bazar Patrika group, a leading media house of West Bengal.

2. RESEARCH PROBLEM

What are the different ways followed by a newspaper to attract readers' attention towards any story on terrorism and the aftermath of the terror strike in a place?

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What are the different types of headlines and leads written by the reporters on any story on terrorism and the aftermath of the terror strike?
- What are the different types of words used in the reports on terrorism and the aftermath to arouse readers' sentiment and emotion?
- What do the photos accompanying the stories on terrorism and the aftermath try to depict?

4. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

To conduct textual analysis of the reports related to terrorism and the aftermath of the terror attack published in The Telegraph, Kolkata edition, a national level English newspaper.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

It is a descriptive research. 11 reports were taken from The Telegraph, a noted English daily for conducting the research. The sampling process of the units of analysis followed here is purposive sampling, a type of non-probability sampling. Then textual analysis of every report was conducted to analyse the data and meet the objectives. The textual analysis was done through finding the type of headline, dateline, words used in headlines and in the body of the text in different contexts, byline, photos, jumphead, page numbers and from where the reports were published.

6. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

6.1 Report 1:

Headline: "Mayhem in Meadow" by Muzaffar Raina, Page 1. April 23, 2025.

It is a label headline. All words in the headline are in bold and capital letters. It is a blanket headline and a 6-column headline. The dateline is Srinagar. The strapline spans 6 columns. The story spans 4 columns. The story starts with a summary lead. The word 'mayhem' means extreme chaos and disorder, which has a negative connotation. The word 'meadow' means a piece of grassland. Now, readers may realise the violent outcome of an incident in a meadow in Kashmir while they find the word 'mayhem' in the headline of a news story.

There are 2 photos with captions on the first page. Photos were collected from the Press Trust of India (PTI). One of these two gruesome photos depicted that one lady was found sitting beside her dead husband, lying in the Baisaran valley, Pahalgam. Another photo depicted a perplexed and frightened lady being assisted by a local person to run for a safe place from the place of attack. The second photo was a bit blurred.

Words and phrases depicting negative sense/fear are the following:

Killed (9), Militants...opened fire, imperil, horrific, opened fire, grievously injured, enormity of the attack, gruesome attack, mayhem, ominous, carnage, attack, spate of militant attacks.

Jump head: "26 killed in Kashmir militant strike" in Page 4.

The rest of the story under the jump head spans 5 columns. There were 5 photos which depicted the movement of security forces after the attack, injured victims under treatment at hospitals, half-naked dead body of a victim (blurred) and a wailing woman who lost her relative.

Number of quotes used: 3

1 quote of a tourist guide was reported here which depicted the peaceful atmosphere in the Baisaran valley, which was shattered by the terrorist attack. 1 quote of a witness was given here who lost her husband and 1 quote of the Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir, Shri Omar Abdullah, who depicted the horrific incident as “much larger than anything” happened to the tourists in the Kashmir valley at its worst scenario.

6.2 Report 2:

Headline: “Shah in J&K on Modi order” by Imran Ahmed Siddiqui. Page 4. April 23, 2025.

The dateline is New Delhi. All words in the headline are in bold font. The story starts with a descriptive lead. It is a 2-column headline, followed by a 2-column story. There is 1 shoulder / kicker. Emphasis has been given to the story by putting a shoulder. The Home Minister of India had to rush to the spot because of the heinous terrorist attack that took place just one day ago. The headline expressed the same and also underlined the immediacy of the reaching of a top government representative to the affected place as directed by none other than the Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi.

Words and phrases depicting negative sense/fear are the following:

Killed, militant attack, fired indiscriminately, death toll, attack, heinous act, dastardly act, perpetrators, harshest consequences, terror attack, scourge, cross-border terrorism.

Number of quotes used: 5

2 quotes by an unnamed government source were reported here that depicted that the Home Minister of India was given absolute freedom by the Prime Minister of India to take decisions that he found suitable then at Kashmir. 1 quote by the Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi, was used that narrated his condolences to the family members of the victims of the terror attack and a dire warning to the perpetrators of the terror attack to face severe consequences. 1 quote by the Home Minister of India, Shri Amit Shah, was used here that quoted him saying that the concerned people linked with this attack would face severe consequences. 1 quote by Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge was also reported that narrated his strong condemnation towards this terror attack and his urge to the Central government to take necessary actions. A photo of Amit Shah, clicked by PTI, was given in the report in which Shah’s facial expression looked serious.

6.3 Report 3:

Headline: Husband killed during snack after pony ride by Cynthia Chandran and Pheroze L. Vincent. Page 4. April 23, 2025.

The dateline is Thiruvananthapuram. The headline spans 3 columns and it is a blanket headline. It is also a comment headline. It is a 3-column story, accompanied with a smiling photo of Manjunath Rao, the slain tourist at Pahalgam. The photo carried a caption. The story starts with a descriptive lead. The headline denotes a very negative sense as a person was killed by terrorists while he was having snacks after a pony ride at the Baisaran Valley, Pahalgam, Kashmir. The headline expressed the feeling of a sudden incident that took away a person from his family members forever, which was not at all expected and not a natural death as well.

Words and phrases depicting negative sense/fear are the following:

Gunshots (2), pool of blood, terror attack, gunned down, dead, terrifying moments, bullet hit, go tell Modi, attack (2), victims, harrowing experience, warned.

Number of quotes used: 3

1 quote by slain Manjunath’s wife, Pallavi Rao was reported here that narrated how she and her son first mistook the gunfire as army’s routine firing and later realised that it was a terrorist attack there. 1 quote of Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah was given in this report that narrated the Government of Karnataka’s all kinds of help extended to the affected tourists in Kashmir. 1 quote of a tourist to Kashmir was reported that narrated the tourist’s good luck that caused him and his team members to arrive at the affected place late.

6.4 Report 4:**Headline: “Chaudhari tu bahar aa ja, militants said” by PTI. Page 4, April 23, 2025.**

The dateline was Mumbai. It is a quotational headline and also a waist headline. It is a news agency report. It spans 2 columns with a photo depicting a candlelight march by a group of Kashmiris after the terrorist attack. The march was carried out by the group of Kashmiri people in solidarity with the victims and survivors. The story starts with an anecdotal lead. The headline arouses a sense of a frightening condition, as the person was killed once he came out from the tent.

Words and phrases depicting negative sense/fear are the following:

Cowering in fear, shot him thrice, horrific attack, shot him several times at his back, firing began, evacuated, firing, terrorists and security personnel, killed innocent people, pumped three bullets, shot several other men, nobody to help, injuries.

Number of quotes used: 7

7 quotes of Asavari Jagdale were mentioned. She is the daughter of the victim, Santosh Jagdale. She lost her father and uncle in this attack. Every quotation by her narrated the horrific status of the terror attack at the Baisaran valley and how her father and uncle were mercilessly killed by terrorists in cold blood.

6.5 Report 5:**Headline: ‘Lost everything on this trip’ by Subhashish Mohanty. Page 4, April 23, 2024.**

The dateline was Bhubaneswar. It is a quotational and blanket headline, covering 3 columns and accompanying a filed photo of the victim, Prasant Kumar Satpathy with his family members. The photo carried a caption. The story starts with a blind identification lead. It is a 3-column story. The headline expressed a highly negative sense as the survivor narrated the inhuman killing of her husband by the militants and also expressed her present social and psychological status. To her, her husband was everything. Losing her husband, Priyadarshini, the wife of the victim, found the entire world bleak for her further sustenance.

Words and phrases depicting negative sense/fear are the following:

Killed, militant attack, died on the spot, lost everything.

Number of quotes used: 1

1 quote of Priyadarshini, the wife of the victim, was reported here that narrated her and her son’s devastated mental condition.

6.6 Report 6:**Headline: “IB officer on family vacation shot dead” by PTI. Page 4, April 23, 2024.**

The dateline was Hyderabad. It is a descriptive headline. The story starts with a blind identification lead. The headline spans 1 column and the story spans 1 column. It is a news agency made report. A crossline of 2 words is there. No photo was attached with the report. The headline expressed a deep shock to its readers by mentioning the official designation of a person, citing that even top brass government official was also not spared in this terrorist attack. The words ‘shot dead’ may arouse a sense of fear among the readers.

Words and phrases depicting negative sense/fear are the following:

Killed (2), died in the attack, wounded, succumbed to his injuries, deep condolences, victim’s family, hour of grief, injured (2), died, candlelight marches, victims.

Number of quotes used: 2

1 quote made by an unnamed source and 1 quote made by Devendra Fadnavis, The Chief Minister of Maharashtra were mentioned in the report.

6.7 Report 7:**Headline: “Rahul slams govt’s ‘hollow claims’” by Anita Joshua. Page 4, April 23, 2024.**

The dateline was New Delhi. It is a comment headline and is a single column story. The headline type is also a waist headline. The story starts with a summary lead. The headline depicted the criticising remarks of Rahul Gandhi aiming at the Central government for its security failure in preventing the terrorist attack in Kashmir again.

Words and phrases depicting negative sense/fear are the following:

Terror attack, terrorism, barbaric incidents, death, injuries, cowardly terrorist attack, condemnable, heartbreaking, bereaved families, injured, act of violence, reprehensible, terrorist attack, barbaric act.

Number of quotes used: 5

Five different quotes by five political personalities were quoted here. They were – Rahul Gandhi, Congress leader; Sonia Gandhi, Congress leader; Jairam Ramesh, AICC General Secretary; Mamata Banerjee, Chief Minister of West Bengal and M K Stalin, Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu. All the political leaders expressed their deep regret for this gruesome terror attack and urged the Central government to take necessary steps.

6.8 Report 8:**Headline: “US-based city techie falls to terror bullets.” By Monalisa Chaudhuri. Page 7. April 23, 2025.**

The dateline was Calcutta. It is a 4-column story. The headline is a two-liner and a descriptive and blanket headline. The story starts with a summary lead. 2 photos were attached with this story, clicked by PTI. The first photo described the three persons, the victim of the attack, Bitan Adhikary with his wife, Sohini Adhikary and their son, Hridaan Adhikary in a frame and the second photo is of the Government Medical College and Associated Hospital at Anantnag where the victims and injured were brought after the terrorist attack. The headline is shocking as it depicts that a person who just came from the United States of America to visit this beautiful place on earth (Baisaran Valley) to enjoy holidays with his wife and little son, met his destiny in such a pathetic way.

Words and phrases depicting negative sense/fear are the following:

Terrorist attack, attack, armed men, opened fire indiscriminately, suffered a bullet wound, Adhikary’s remains, devastating terrorist attack, console, hour of grief, his mortal remains, condolences, lost their loved ones, act of violence, reprehensible, dead.

Number of quotes used: 5

3 quotes were taken from Sohini Adhikary, the victim’s wife and 2 quotes were of Mamata Banerjee, the Chief Minister of West Bengal. Mamata Banerjee condemned the dastardly terrorist attack and shared her condolences with the wife of the deceased.

6.9 Report 9:**Headline: “Tourists stuck in Valley” by Sanjay Mandal. Page 7. April 23, 2025.**

The headline is a comment headline and the story starts with a punch lead. It is a 3-column story. 1 photo of the hotel was given along with a caption from where tourists were leaving after the terrorist attack.

Words and phrases depicting negative sense/fear are the following:

Terror attack (2), roads remained deserted, people running, army personnel barricaded.

Number of quotes used: 9

All the 9 quotes were taken from a tourist and two tour operation managers visiting Kashmir.

Jumhead: “Terror” in page 9.

The jumhead covers 1 column and the story covers two columns. No photo was attached here.

6.10 Report 10:

Headline: “Rare shutdown, protests in revulsed valley” by Muzaffar Raina. Page 1. April 24, 2025.

The headline is a comment headline and the story starts with a punch lead. It is a 2-column story. The headline follows the style of waist headline too. 1 photo of a protesting person holding a placard “I am Indian” was placed on the first page. The photo was taken from PTI. The headline depicts the turbulent political and administrative situation in the Kashmir valley. The report stated that it was very rare to find Kashmiris protesting against terrorism despite the fact that they lost a large number of their kith and kin in terrorist attacks since a long period. The story narrated that it was the first time to witness that Kashmiris were found coming to the streets in large numbers and protesting against the heinous terrorist attack that took place in Pahalgam on April 22, 2025. The story continued on the page 4 also.

Words and phrases depicting negative sense/fear are the following:

Shock, shame, anger, bloody enactment, sundered, hard-heeled security regime, stampede quotidian conduct of life, militant atrocity, shutdown, protests, merciless killings, grief over death, killings (4), denouncing, mourning, murder of humanity, grief, dead,

Number of quotes used: 4

1 quote by a resident, 1 quote by a government official, 1 quote by a Member of Parliament, Aga Syed Ruhullah Mehdi and 1 quote by the Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir. All of them expressed support for the protest and shared their condolences for the victims’ family members.

Jumphead: Protest in page 4.

The jumphead covers 1 column and the story covers 1 chimney column at the left.

6.11 Report 11:

Headline: “Body blow to tourism” by Muzaffar Raina. Page 1. April 24, 2025.

The headline is a comment headline and covers three columns. 1 photo of the deserted Ghanta Ghar with two armed security personnel, a famous tourist hotspot at Srinagar, was placed right below the headline and in the middle column. The story starts with a contrast lead. The report narrated how the tourism industry in Kashmir would face a jolt in the coming days, as tourism is a major source of livelihood for the Kashmiris. The story narrated that the terrorist attack at Pahalgam is the major reason for this severe outcome.

Words and phrases depicting negative sense/fear are the following:

Scramble among visitors to leave, unprecedented exodus, massive blow, threatens to shatter the success, ghost town, doomed, tourist exodus, terror attack, heartbreaking situation, exodus, triggered widespread panic, saddened by great loss.

Number of quotes used: 4

1 quote by a former Sarpanch of a village, 2 quotes by the Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir, 1 quote by the Chairman of the Kashmir Houseboat Association. The quotations expressed solidarity of the speakers with the family members of the victims of the Pahalgam incident.

Jumphead: Militant attack a body blow to tourism. Page 2

The rest of the story under the jumphead spans three columns with a photo depicting the tourists and local people at Srinagar protesting the terrorist attack at Pahalgam. The jumphead is a reason-why headline.

7.FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

Any report on terroristic activity is a kind of hard news and negative in sense. In these types of reporting, reporters narrate the stories with full details of the incident, the quotations of the witnesses (if any), family members or relatives of the victims, political leaders, local people, subject experts, psychologists, security persons and anyone related to the incident directly or indirectly. Words used in these types of reports are always chosen with due care and thought, as the language should not undermine the objectivity of reporting.

A series of words are used which may arouse a sense of fear among the readers. A text well narrated in words is worth presenting the same as a reality. Reports depicting the terror attack in Pahalgam in The Telegraph have narrated the incident in such a way that they are able to express the horrible situation in Kashmir during and after the terror attack. The panic among the tourists present in that place, the expression of the tourists, the solidarity of the local people with the tourists for their safe passage to their home states, the concerns of Jammu and Kashmir's political leaders irrespective of ruling party and opposition party, leaders of religious bodies for the safety of the tourists and their solidarity with the family members of the victims who lost their lives in the terrorist attack – everything has been narrated by reporters following utmost objectivity.

The possible outcome of the terrorist attack at Pahalgam i.e. reduction of tourists to the valley in the coming months as a result of this terrorist attack, has also been well narrated. Kashmir is famous across the world for its scenic beauty, and tourists across the world visit this place every year to enjoy the same. In recent years, data mentioned in these news reporting have indicated the surge in tourists' numbers to Kashmir. Tourism is one of the major sources of livelihood for many Kashmiris. The reduction in tourists' visits to Kashmir means a drastic blow to the economy of the Union Territory as a whole. The same has also been expressed properly here. Exaggeration of expression is not noticed in the reporting. The photos accompanying the reports have well expressed the real situation prevailing in Kashmir.

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