

A Comparative Study Of Media Framing And Narratives By Shillong-Based Newspaper On The 1979 And 2018 Social Conflicts

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses the journalistic perspective to delve into the intricate social fabric and cultural nuances of Shillong, the capital of Meghalaya in North-East India. Given Shillong's unique characteristic as an old capital and its transition deserves attention, particularly concerning its people and their diverse cultural expressions. The paper investigates into the historical development and contemporary life of Shillong, challenging the perception of the city as a mere cosmopolitan haven, which is also reflective of the state's overall perception as well. Through a comprehensive critical analysis of historical archives, this study aims to present a holistic view of Shillong's social landscape. An emphasis is placed on understanding the challenges and fragilities in Shillong's cosmopolitan identity. Contrary to common assumptions, deep-seated social and cultural divisions have influenced the city's social geography from its inception. As Everett M. Rogers (1976) puts "development is a widely participatory process of social change in a society intended to bring about social and material advancement for the majority of the people through gaining greater control over the environment."

This paper analyses the journalistic narratives during the times of conflict. The paper specifically looks at the building and deployment of frames by respective media houses, drawing comparison between the English dailies and the vernacular Khasi dailies. This paper also draws comparison between different eras as the paper analyses papers from 1979 and 2018, to look at the change in language and editorial standpoints. Content analysis method was used on archival material to analyse the data and the derivatives using quantitative research methods.

Key Words: Shillong, Journalism, conflict, emotional vocabulary

1. Introduction

Shillong, which serves as the capital of Meghalaya, is a well-known hill station that can be found in the northeastern region of India. Shillong bears a heavy colonial burden, similar to other cities that emerged during the British Raj (Goswami, 2004). But Shillong has not developed in the way it was first planned, unlike other cities. Shillong stands in sharp contrast to its adjacent city, Guwahati, in Assam, which has been experiencing rapid development and is now the commercial center of the northeastern area (Baruah, 2005).

The city has always enjoyed special privileges and power due to its long history as the capital of undivided Assam. Shillong maintained its status as the capital of Meghalaya when the state gained its independence on January 21, 1972. As Sen (2010) points out, the city underwent a drastic change in the course of time and occupies a distinct position in the national consciousness of India, since many Indians more easily recognize it than Meghalaya itself. Shillong has been an integral component of Meghalaya's growth throughout the years, especially in the almost 200 years since it was founded. Because of this emphasis, Shillong has become a veritable cultural hub, where

individuals from all over the world come together and engage, weaving together a complex web of social tales (Lyngdoh, 2022). It is in this setting that journalism becomes a potent force, shaping public agendas, concerns, and narratives. Beyond its reporting, the media has a substantial impact on public opinion and debate (McQuail, 2010).

There is no greater force than the media and journalists in the fight for mutual understanding and peace. They facilitate conversation and understanding by giving different people a chance to share their stories, which is especially important in a place where there has been a lot of ethnic strife and turmoil (Galtung & Ruge, 1965). Ethnic tensions, especially between indigenous and non-indigenous populations, and socio-political instability, which has frequently rocked the city's peace, are among the issues being studied. The significance of investigating journalistic techniques in order to reveal the complex truths of Shillong sheds light on the city's conflict narratives, which are complicated and frequently ignored. The media's role in shaping Shillong via historical and contemporary conflicts will be examined in this study.

An in-depth examination of Shillong's social fabric requires an understanding of the effects of these disputes and the narratives created by the media. One example is the events that occurred in Shillong in late 1979. They were a watershed moment in the city's history and have a permanent place in everyone's memory and sense of self. Both the social order and the city's enduring story are shaped by these occurrences (Sen, 2010).

The impact of media coverage on public opinion and social dynamics in Shillong during these crises is the focus of this research. This study seeks to offer a comprehensive perspective on how journalism influences and mirrors Shillong's socio-cultural environment by analyzing historical archives and current news. In doing so, the article will help shed light on the city's character and the persistent obstacles it encounters in attempting to achieve unity and harmony.

1.2. The Concept of Media Framing

Framing is a major theory in media studies, often seen alongside Priming as part of the second level of Agenda Setting Theory (McCombs, Llamas, Lopez-Escobar, & Rey, 1997) as it is concerned with salience of issue attributes (Scheufele, 2000) in media reporting. Scheufele (2000) contests this by asserting that framing exercises far more influence on audiences than Agenda Setting as it invokes "interpretive schemas that influence the interpretation of incoming information" (p.309).

The way media frames issues, people, and region becomes important given the fact that it can influence people's perception and lead to cultivation of an image among those that are unfamiliar with the subject. Scheufele (2000) argues that empirical work has shown that framing stresses on "specific values, facts and other considerations, endowing them with greater apparent relevance to the issue than they might appear to have under an alternative frame" (Nelson et al, 1997, p.569). A similar explanation is provided by Snow and Benford (1992) whereby they define frame as "interpretative schemata that signifies and condenses the 'world out there' by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences, and sequences of action in one's present or past environment" (p.137). An often-cited work on media framing is of Gitlin (1981), who provides that media framing is important for both the media outlets as well as the audience. For the media outlets, it helps them in organising their information as it provides a guiding line, and for the audience, they make meanings based on these frames provided by the media (p.7). In this way, it can be interpreted at any point in time, when media presents a story, it is already 'framed' by giving it certain discursive, visual, and thematic value while ignoring the rest.

1.3. Role Of Media In Conflict

Research has shown that during the times of conflict, when people don't have any first-hand access to information on conflict zones, their only source of information are the stories carried by the media (Bratić, 2006). Here, whatever is fed by the media, becomes imprinted in the minds of the audience as the 'truth'. Thus, people's opinion and idea about the conflict is fully painted by the news media. Therefore, news media is expected to encourage a rational public debate by providing information about the roots of the problem in order to find various options for ending it (Yang & Ishak, 2012). Peter du Toit (2020) states that journalists must keep in the mind the ways their reporting can negatively impact a conflict. He is critical of the inaccuracy, bias, sensationalism and propaganda that some reports carry, which can aggravate a conflict leading to considerable loss of life and property (p.7).

In India, all newspapers, magazines, journals and television news channels are subject to journalistic principles and ethics on reporting any issue or person, as per the guidelines laid down by the Press Council of India (abbreviated as PCI) – a statutory body that serves as the watchdog over all press in the country. It states: "The

fundamental objective of journalism is to serve the people with news, views, comments and information on matters of public interest in a fair, accurate, unbiased, sober and decent manner” (p.1). The PCI has been sensitive to reporting conflict and has also mentioned ways to report such instances: News, views or comments relating to communal or religious disputes/clashes shall be published after proper verification of facts and presented with due caution and restraint in a manner which is conducive to the creation of an atmosphere congenial to communal harmony, amity and peace. Sensational, provocative and alarming headlines are to be avoided (pp. 21-22).

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Concept Of Shillong: The Romanticization Of Shillong

When looking up for literature on journalism in Shillong, it is a fact that there is very little literature available. However, what is available in abundance is the romanticization of Shillong, an idealistic place for poems, a heaven where love stories are made, is situated at an elevation of 4990 feet above the sea level. It is part of the Khasi Hills, currently under the jurisdiction of East Khasi Hills district, and enjoys a pleasant weather throughout the year, keeping on the colder side.

One of the central figures to idolise Shillong as a romantic place a century back was Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore, who visited Shillong in 1919 to 1927 (Bisharad, 2021; Purkayastha, 2023). During his stay in 1923, he composed a number of poems, songs and dramas with the most famous poem dedicated to Shillong being ‘Shillong-er-Chithi’ and his most famous dramatic creations as a playwright ‘Raktakarabi’ (Purkayastha, 2023). In contemporary times, many authors have found ways to connect to Shillong to keep its memory and name alive. For instance, Khanna (2014) is mesmerised with the beauty of Shillong to find love at Shillong peak. Similarly, (Misra & Misra, 2020) fiddle with Shillong as a place for its landscapes and romance and its people. (Purkayastha, 2022) also talks about the enthralling beauty of Shillong city, its tall mountains, its sky, its valleys in a collection of 50 poems about the city.

2.2. The Insider-Outsider Narrative

‘Insider Outsider or Dhkars, Chinkies & Role Reversals: Writings from the Northeast of India’ (2019) is a collection of short non-fiction poems and essays which sheds light onto the ‘otherization’ that happens in the north eastern region, between the tribals and the non-tribals or outsiders. In the book, Hasan (Hasan et al., 2019) and Bakshi (Bakshi et al., 2019) narrate their experiences in Shillong, of becoming an outsider.

A similar account, though with more nostalgia and allure for Shillong, Barua (2019) narrates the longing Assamese people have for Shillong, where they once resided but the division of Assam and creation of Meghalaya forced many such families to move back to Assam in what the author calls ‘reverse flow’.

Meanwhile, Sawian (2019) brings to life the horrors of violence against the ‘outsiders’ by the local Khasi tribe of Shillong in her book *Shadow Men* (2019) whilst also introducing to the world the Khasi cuisines and their musical inheritance.

Choudhury has a similar account to present, through the perspective of a 14-year-old who is yet to understand the world around him through his book ‘Shillong Times: A Story of Friendship and Fear’ (2018). He brings to light the word ‘Dkhar’ meaning ‘Outsider’ and what it means in the context of Shillong’s setting. He also draws attention to the fault lines between the Khasi and Bengali communities of Shillong, but does so in a light hearted manner. As Manmohan Bahadur (2018) puts it about the book, the teenage character’s journey follows that of “Assamese and Bengalis who once considered Shillong their home, but were forced by circumstances to leave it for other cities, where they were never at home.” (Bahadur, 2018).

The above literatures are sufficient evidence to elucidate that Shillong has been mostly expressed in two ways in literature be it fiction or non-fiction: a romantic paradise and its dark underbelly of violence. In this context, leaving out the anthropological works that focus on the lifestyle, culture and custom of Shillong’s dominant Khasi tribe, there isn’t much assortment of literature offered in terms of placing Shillong with more narratives. Therefore, it becomes increasingly more important to present a journalistic view on the city to highlight its other facets, add narratives and form a public sphere around it.

3. Methods

Two English newspapers and a Khasi newspaper were taken for the study; one English newspaper owned by a Bengalee and the other two owned by a Khasi, one in English and the other in Khasi. The newspapers taken were

The Shillong Times – owned by Manas Chaudhuri, The Highland Post and Mawphor – owned by (L) Reading Marwein during the period of the story. The reason for taking these newspapers is to analyse if journalistic viewpoints differ if they are owned by different communities having different perspective of presenting news that aligns with their own and their community's interest.

Specifically, occurrences from 1979 and 2018 are considered. The first recorded incident of ethnic violence in Shillong occurred in 1979, while the most recent incident occurred in 2018. Media Framing, a theoretical framework that investigates the ways in which news organizations and journalists influence the presentation and interpretation of news stories, is utilized in the study. This study uses the purposive sampling to be specific to events and understand the journalistic view point in not just covering the event and farming it, but also portraying the city in a certain light. The study was required to understand the deep fault lines present in Shillong city despite its projection as a peaceful place. The city has witnessed spells of conflicts between the tribals (the indigenous community) and non-tribals (the non- indigenous community or the outsiders) throughout its 52 years of existence. The study seeks to understand the way journalism approaches the underlying issues by applying the Media Framing Theory along with the concept of emotional vocabulary for its analysis. The concept of emotional vocabulary found under the Critical Language Study (CLS) approach, in Language and Power (Fairclough, 1989; 2001), studies words and vocabulary to reveal hidden powers that the media uses in order to build a narrative. Those words carry different values and undisclosed meanings that reach beyond the message itself (Fairclough, 1989; 2001). This includes the shaping of discourse, the selection and omission of information, the representation of events and subjects, as well as the utilization of specific language and vocabulary in its outputs (Fairclough, 1989; 2001). For the sake of this research, emotional vocabulary was defined as words that pertain a certain negative emotional association to them.

Words and ideas play an active role in establishing, maintaining, and challenging power dynamics, dominance, and inequality in our social and political landscape. One area of critical discourse analysis is the Critical Language Study (CLS) method. CLS examines the complex interplay between language and social systems, including power dynamics, social inequality, and ideological processes. Language is examined in terms of its placement of speakers and subjects, its construction of social identities and realities, and the ways in which it serves some groups while neglecting others. CLS explores the ways in which words have hidden meanings and implications, the ways in which language can support or weaken social power structures, and the sociopolitical consequences of language choices.

4. Time and Duration of the study period

Case Summary

In 1979, a crude bomb blast at the site of immersion of idols at River Umkhrah during the conclusion of Durga Puja on 1st October marked an abrupt panic among the revelries in the city. 14 people were injured in this blast, including a police official, with 4 in serious condition (1979). This was first such incident in the history of the city and the state. This also foreshadowed what was to come in near future. Nevertheless, the incident was quickly forgotten and there was no news of it in coming days. The next incident takes place on 22nd October, 1979, when there was a small scuffle between two local tribal boys and some non-tribals during the lifting of the idol of Goddess Kali for immersion at Laitumkhrah Beat House when the idol was broken, allegedly by the local boys. After few minutes, the local boys returned with 15-20 boys and began the process of severe violence in the city. While the 22nd remains quite peaceful, it was the 23rd of October that saw the city plunge into chaos. According to a report by The Shillong Times, till the morning of 26th October, one person had been killed, 24 were hospitalized with grievous injuries with 4 in very serious condition, 9 houses gutted, 225 shops and establishments looted, and 567 people evacuated from different pockets of the city (1979). However, the newspapers could only report this matter on 3rd November, 1979 since the papers were weekly during those days.

The air of fear and instances of sporadic violence continued for few more weeks, coming under some control only by the end of the year. In the next two months of violence, Alam (1999) states that 23 people died, 147 persons sustained injuries, 84 shops were burnt and over 100 shops looted.

There were similar conflicts in 1987 and 1992. After a long lull, conflicts again started in June 2018 involving the Harijan colony, also referred to as Sweeper Lane or Punjabi Colony, in Bara Bazar. A small altercation over parking of a public transport bus in a congested market area of Shillong between 5-6 people quickly escalated into a major event, requiring curfew to be imposed in the city and internet services being cut off for days. Although

the government machinery acted swiftly to control the situation, the residents of the Harijan Colony had to take shelter in the makeshift camp in the adjoining Army cantonment area at night for 2-3 weeks (Hazari & Malsom, 2023).

Although there haven't been any major incidents since 1992, the events of 2018 exposed the underlying tensions in the society that have remained unresolved for over 50 years.

For the year 1979, only The Shillong Times was referred to due to lack of archives from other newspapers. The coverage of 8 days was analysed from 6th October to 8th December, 1979.

There were essentially two research questions towards which the study was carried out. These were:

- RQ1: The framing of conflicts in Shillong by journalists and different news outlets;
- RQ2: The narrative or discourse built by the news outlets through their coverage of these events as well as usage of certain words that are evocative.

5. Findings

The research questions were answered and new insights into the impact of media framing on public opinion during the 1979 and 2018 Shillong disputes were provided by the study's findings.

5.1. RQ1: The framing of conflicts in Shillong by journalists and news outlets

In 1979, the media painted a highly emotional picture of the tensions in Shillong in an effort to evoke strong emotions in the viewers. An ominous tone is set for a plot rife with uncertainty and conflict by headlines such as "Durga Puja Ends In Shillong: Bomb Explodes" (October 6, 1979). Similarly, the unease and danger conveyed in "Fear Grips Non-Tribals" (November 24, 1979) were prominent. These headlines, which highlighted the presence of anarchy and peril, greatly impacted how the public perceived the events.

Table 1: News on conflict in October, November and December, 1979 of The Shillong Times

Reported Date	Headline
Oct 6, 1979	Durga Puja Ends In Shillong: Bomb Explodes
Nov 3, 1979	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centre Urged To Shift Its Offices • Chavan's Appeal For Restoring Amity • Shillong Inches Towards Normality • Genesis Of Shillong Disturbance: One Version • Laitumkhrah Durbar's Anguish
Nov 10, 1979	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Move To Topple Govt. In Meghalaya • Search For Arms In City • Missing Teacher's Deadbody Recovered From A Gorge • Shillong Peaceful • Centre Urged To Shift Its Offices
Nov 17, 1979	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quit Notice' On Non-Tribals • Lumparing incident: 10 arrested
Nov 24, 1979	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-Tribal, A Virtual Non-Entity • Fear Grips Non-Tribals • Steps to check Nepali Immigration
Dec 8, 1979	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tribals Committed To Protect Non-Tribals • Demand to rename Meghalaya

The editorial decisions taken by "The Shillong Times" extended beyond the scope of traditional reporting. An intentional framing to influence public perception and societal priorities is indicated by the shift from highlighting political turmoil - "Move To Topple Govt. In Meghalaya" (November 10, 1979) - to later signaling community solidarity - "Tribals Committed To Protect Non-Tribals" (December 8, 1979). This points to the media's influence in fabricating a new reality in which tribal people were viewed as guardians, and the media's portrayal of non-tribal people as marginalized beings ("Non-Tribal, A Virtual Non-Entity"; November 24, 1979).

According to Media Framing Theory, the media does more than reflect society; it shapes social reality. An alternate world was being shown by "The Shillong Times" by December 8, 1979. In this new reality, non-tribals

were entrusted with the responsibility of protecting tribal members. In this story arc, the protagonist did more than just reflect; she actively participated in repairing the societal fabric torn apart by violence.

Table 2: News Headlines and Emotional Words from 1979 with their respective dates “The Shillong Times”

Reported Date	Headline	Emotional Words
Oct 6, 1979	Durga Puja Ends In Shillong: Bomb Explodes	Ends, Bomb, Explodes
Nov 3, 1979	Centre Urged To Shift Its Offices	Urged
Nov 3, 1979	Chavan's Appeal For Restoring Amity	Appeal, Restoring, Amity
Nov 3, 1979	Shillong Inches Towards Normality	Inches, Normality
Nov 3, 1979	Genesis Of Shillong Disturbance: One Version	Genesis, Disturbance
Nov 3, 1979	Laitumkrah Durbar's Anguish	Anguish
Nov 10, 1979	Move To Topple Govt. In Meghalaya	Move, Topple
Nov 10, 1979	Search For Arms In City	Search, Arms
Nov 10, 1979	Missing Teacher's Deadbody Recovered From A Gorge	Missing, Deadbody, Gorge
Nov 10, 1979	Shillong Peaceful	Peaceful
Nov 10, 1979	Centre Urged To Shift Its Offices	Urged
Nov 17, 1979	'Quit Notice' On Non-Tribals	Quit, Notice
Nov 17, 1979	Lumparing incident: 10 arrested	Incident, Arrested
Nov 24, 1979	Non-Tribal, A Virtual Non-Entity	Non-Tribal, Non-Entity
Nov 24, 1979	Fear Grips Non-Tribals	Fear, Grips
Nov 24, 1979	Steps to check Nepali Immigration	Check, Immigration
Dec 8, 1979	Tribals Committed To Protect Non-Tribals	Committed, Protect
Dec 8, 1979	Demand to rename Meghalaya	Demand, Rename

5.2. RQ2: The narrative or discourse built by the news outlets through their coverage of these events as well as usage of certain words that are evocative

The news facilities constantly utilized terms such as "bomb explodes" and "fear grips" in order to provoke emotional reactions. Since it highlighted the feeling of urgency and fear, this portrayal of the events had a significant impact on how the public saw them. Using such graphic language likely heightened people's sense of danger and contributed to the narrative's overall tone of unpredictability and strife.

Table 2, which correlates specific headlines with emotive phrases, reveals how the media framed the 1979 Shillong disputes through the use of language.

When used in a festival setting, the word "Ends" usually means to conclude, but because of what comes after it, it can also imply tragedy or abruptness. The emotionally charged phrase "bomb explodes" conveys a sense of shock, terror, and urgency. Readers may experience anxiety and unease due to the fact that it deviates from the anticipated tranquility of a religious gathering. For readers who are familiar with the area, the exact location "In Polo Ground" may evoke personal associations and emotional reactions.

Seeing the word "appeal" in the title "Chavan's Appeal For Restoring Amity" can make one feel that they need to do something quickly to have things resolved. "Restoring" suggests a restoration to a peaceful state after disturbance or war has occurred. Depending on the piece, the word "inches Towards" could make the reader feel either excited or frustrated by implying a slow and steady advancement. "Normality" suggests things are getting back to how they usually are, which could be reassuring or maybe even hopeful.

The use of terms such as "minority groups," "disbanding," and "helpless" conveys an air of alienation, weakness, and hopelessness. The words "provoke" and "retaliation" evoke thoughts of premeditated hostility and reaction, causing people to feel tense and ready for future confrontations. A devastating event has a profoundly detrimental effect on people's lives, and the word "tragedy" conveys this impression with great force. The words "house burnt," "families fled," and "deaths" convey a sense of dread, sorrow, and catastrophe in a direct and painful way.

Because it denotes both a physical assault and a deep contempt for religious beliefs and practices, the mention of the desecration of an "idol of a goddess" can cause a strong emotional reaction from the community.

The song "Search For Arms In City" suggests a reaction to either current or imminent violent acts. Efforts to quell

possible violence or disturbance may be indicated by the hunt for weapons. "Shillong Peaceful," the headline may imply no fighting, but the existence of the word signals disturbances had occurred recently. A encouraging word to readers, "Peaceful" suggests a transitory or transient condition of tranquility. The violent conclusion suggested by "Missing Teacher's Deadbody Recovered From A Gorge" may have roots in community-wide social tensions, individual criminal activity, or both.

The title "Non-Tribal, A Virtual Non-Entity" gives the impression that the non-tribal people are being dehumanized or marginalized in the story. In a social and political setting, the word "Non-Entity" suggests oblivion or unimportance. Those who do not identify as tribal may feel more threatened or alienated by this headline, which conveys a powerful sense of exclusion.

When it comes to the events of 2018, every newspaper takes a somewhat different approach. "Mawphor" uses a sensational and community-focused slant, "The Shillong Times" is more measured, while "Highland Post" stresses the ongoing war.

Table 3: Coverage of 2018 conflict by different newspapers of Shillong

Reported Date	Coverages of Conflict		
	<i>The Shillong Times</i>	<i>Mawphor (translated)</i>	<i>Highland Post</i>
June 1, 2018	Scuffle flares up in the city	Total chaos in Motphran after Khasis were thrashed in sweepers lane, four injured in police tear gas shooting	Assault on STPS bus conductor leads to violence
June 2, 2018	Violence in the city on day 2	None	None
June 3, 2018	Govt study rehab reports before decision on sweepers lane, Arson case	Hyundai showroom set on fire, 12 scooties burnt	Tear gas, stone pelting continues
June 4, 2018	Attack on Sikh institutions, Government goes after those funding youngsters to unleash violence, protest	Curfew relaxations continue, chaos break again in the evening	After brief lull, Violence resumes in Motphran
June 5, 2018	HLC on Punjabi Lane relocation, Stone pelting	None	None
June 6, 2018	No violence, Sikhs reject idea of relocation	None	None
June 7, 2018	Govt to face legal hurdles in shifting Punjabi Lane, Minority community members says relocation is not feasible, First meeting on relocation issue	None	None

5.3. Comparative Analysis

"The Shillong Times" seems to adopt a more neutral, reportage style, focusing on the incidents and administrative responses without overly sensational language. For instance, headlines like "Scuffle flares up in the city" and "Violence in the city on day 2" provide a direct description of events without excessive sensationalism. This approach might have contributed to a more measured public understanding of the events.

"Mawphor" takes a more emotive approach, using headlines such as "Total chaos in Motphran after Khasis were thrashed in sweepers lane, four injured in police tear gas shooting" and "Hyundai showroom set on fire, 12 scooties burnt." These headlines are more sensational and emotionally charged, likely evoking strong reactions of shock and concern. The specific mention of the community involved ("Khasis") highlights the ethnic dimensions of the

conflict, which could influence readers to view the situation as more critical and ethnically divisive. Titles such as "Assault on STPS bus conductor leads to violence" and "Tear gas, stone pelting continues" in "Highland Post" highlight the ongoing nature of the dispute. With this framing, the continuous turmoil and the fight for peace are brought to light. Expressions such as "leads to violence" and "continues" imply an ongoing battle, which could amplify the idea that the region is unstable and tense. The audience may form diverse opinions as a result of the different perspectives offered by these periodicals. A reader of "Mawphor" may view the scenario as more critical and racially divisive, whilst a reader of "The Shillong Times" may have a more level-headed view of the events. Reading about the struggle in "Highland Post" could make readers feel hopeless or frustrated because it seems like it will go on forever with no sign of a resolution. Responsible journalism is especially important in times of conflict, since these results show how media framing can influence public opinion and societal narratives. The study highlights the media's power to amplify or reduce tensions by showing how various framing tactics impact public discourse and societal reactions to disputes.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

This study's findings show that the media has a significant impact on popular perceptions of the Shillong conflict. The impact of journalists' narrative choices and language choices on society's perception and reaction to conflicts can be observed by using Media Framing Theory and Critical Language Study (CLS) to the events of 1979 and 2018.

Titles such as "Durga Puja Ends In Shillong: Bomb Explodes" and "Fear Grips Non-Tribals" were utilized by "The Shillong Times" in 1979 to evoke strong emotions in readers. A feeling of danger and urgency was heightened by the framing, which highlighted the rapid and terrible unfolding of events. Words like "bomb explodes" and "fear grips" were intentionally used to heighten readers' sense of threat and add to the public picture of instability and conflict. As the situation developed, the media started to portray the incident through the prism of communal togetherness, using headlines like "Tribes Committed To Protect Non-Tribals," which suggested a shift towards reconciliation and protection.

Newspapers in Shillong employed a variety of framing techniques to report on the violence that occurred in 2018. With an unbiased reporting style, "The Shillong Times" documented the disagreement from both an administrative and procedural perspective. Using angry rhetoric, "Mawphor" adopted a more dramatic tone, drawing attention to the ethnic components of the conflict and the disorder. The conflict was portrayed as an ongoing struggle in "Highland Post," which underlined the endurance of hostilities.

The public's view was influenced by these divergent viewpoints. While "The Shillong Times" readers may be more level-headed, "Mawphor" readers may see the situation through a more critical and ethnically divided lens. Many people who read "Highland Post" may feel helpless or irritated because the issue is not going away any time soon. An important part of getting people to pay attention and react was using emotionally charged language in headlines. When people hear the words "bomb explodes," "fear grips," or "non-entity" on the news, it might make them feel a lot of different things. The media may shape public opinion and create social realities through their strategic use of words.

The findings demonstrate that during times of conflict in Shillong, specific framing strategies were employed by the media to shape public perceptions. In 1979, a narrative that hinted at social cohesion instead of disaster and chaos started to be used by the media. In contrast to "The Shillong Times" which remained neutral and informative all year round, "Mawphor" adopted a more dramatic and emotive tone, and "Highland Post" focused on the continuous bloodshed. The public's perception and reaction to the conflicts were shaped by these framing techniques, which brought attention to the media's role in raising or lowering tensions.

This study shows how the Shillong events significantly affected public opinion and society narratives by looking at how the media interpreted them. We may observe how journalists' narrative choices and language impact the public's understanding and response to crises by comparing events from 1979 with 2018. In 1979, the media skillfully used emotionally charged language and framing to create a story of danger, urgency, and, in the end, community cooperation. The research emphasizes how the media can portray society's problems and shape public opinion.

The dispute in 2018 was covered by newspapers using a variety of framing strategies, which had diverse impacts on public attitudes. "The Shillong Times" offered a balanced and informative perspective, "Mawphor" exaggerated and fueled emotions, and "Highland Post" focused on the ongoing violence. These strategies illustrate

how the media manipulate the frameworks they employ to impact society reactions and public opinion. The need of ethical reporting during times of conflict is emphasized by the results of this study. The media's portrayal of issues has repercussions for reaching consensus, public opinion, and social cohesion. Future research into the relationship between media framing and public perception is needed due to the dynamic nature of the media and its impact on public debate. Scholars, journalists, and lawmakers will all benefit from this study's elucidation of the interplay between public opinion, armed conflict, and news coverage.

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