

## **Framing Analysis of the Coverage of Mullai Periyar Water Conflict News in the Tamil Newspapers**

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### **Abstract**

The Media is believed to have shaped up an extravagant conflict over Mullai Periyar issue between the two states Tamil Nadu and Kerala over the right of ownership of the dam, speculation over managing the water levels, and the safety rights of the ancient structure. The coverage over the issue has received a wider coverage both from the regional and the national media. In order to investigate and find factual information on the role played by the regional newspapers, this paper aims to study the Frames constructed in the newspapers on the Mullai Periyar conflict news stories and to analyse various angles of news published. The prime aim is to study the frames constructed in the newspapers on the Mullai Periyar conflict news stories and to find out the distribution of Angle in the news stories.

**KEYWORDS:** Frames constructed; Media and Mullai Periyar; Water conflict; Mullai Periyar.

### **Introduction**

Mass media consists of the various means by which information reaches large numbers of people, such as television, radio, movies, newspapers, and the Internet. All these forms use technology to propagate the message. Hence we could define all these media as media technology. How it was portrayed in Tamil Nadu newspapers. Mullai Periyar dam issue is one of the sensational water dispute issues between the state of Tamil Nadu and Kerala in India. The coverage of this dispute has received a wider coverage both from the regional media and the national media. This study will attempt to find the role the media played particularly the Tamil popular Tamil newspapers in writing about the Mullai Periyar dam issue.

### **Studies related to Media and Conflict**

Jake Lynch & Annabel McGoldrick (2005) defines Conflict as, relationship between two or more parties (Individual or groups) who have, or think they have, incompatible goals, needs and interests. Conflict can be also conceptualized as a 'distribution' or 'collaboration' problem between parties with competing and incompatible demands. (Zartman & Rubin, 2000) commonly in such a situation, one party (intentionally or otherwise) frustrates over another actor's objectives (Frey, 1993). Conflict can also be perceived as a contest that parties try to win through various strategies (Schelling, 1960) Inequality can also be a decisive influencing variable that determines the level of conflict (Dutta & Mishra, 2005), and it is important to understand that this extend to both inter-state and intra-state scenarios.

Different roles are attributed to the media: to report and cover events; to interpret and suggest a broader meaning to events; to monitor the powerful and strong in society; to advance the weak and promote social justice; to mediate between the public and the political leadership; and to enable individuals to practice their freedom

of speech. Some expect journalists to report conflicts “objectively.” However, the very presence of the media might change the course of the conflict, and in fact interfere in its dynamics. Sometimes the media becomes an active actor within the controversy (Gamson & Modigliani, 1992). In the 1960s, the conflict theory in the social sciences pointed out the emergence and escalation of many conflicts. Sometimes the media plays a double role in conflicts. On one hand, it covers them; and on the other hand, the media’s very choice of topics and words reflects a point of view with regard to the conflicts at stake. The more the media covers disputes – the more arrows of public criticism might be pointed at it. As with any other representation of reality, the media’s picture of it is, by definition, partial, and does not necessarily reflect it without bias. The more a complex a conflict, the harder it is to agree about its coverage by the media (Caspi, 1995).

In a linear model suggested by (Wanta 1997), the types of sway and the extent to which the media influences the agendas of individuals are determined by a set of variables that include demographic traits, behavioural patterns, and dependence on the media as a reliable source of information. Printed newspaper shaves an advantage over television because they enable readers to perceive the dispute’s depth and complexity, and they allow each reader to process the information at his or her own pace. Reporters and editors are structurally dependant on dominant power groups as sources of information, partly because they offer a regular supply of news. Although journalists tend to support the dominant value system (Gans, 1979), other research shows that they tend to be slightly more liberal than either the general public or the elite groups (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1986). This also suggest that media at times have the capacity to produce stories critical of the status quo. The media can also influence the strategies and behaviour of those in power.

When violence break out for example, leaders come under tremendous pressure to do something and the press is the important agent for creating this sense of urgency. The influence of a news media on a peace process is best seen in terms of a cycle in which the changes in the political environment lead to changes in media performance that often lead to further changes in the political environment. This principle is referred to as politics-media-politics (PMP) cycle. The myth circulated by news media help consumer of mass media to construct a world view. This worldview in the long run can make the consumers accept as being ‘natural’ something impact is a manufactured reality, created to mask the real structures. In other words mass media plays a crucial ideological role, promoting the values and interest of dominant groups and implanting beliefs and representation that sustain and legitimize their domination (Thussu, 2006). The propaganda model argues that there are 5 classes of ‘filters’ in society which determine what ‘news’ is; in one-time words, what geton paper in newspapers. Herman and Chomsky’s model (1998) also explains how dissent from the mainstream is given tiny, or zero, reporting, at the same time as governments and big business gain easy access to the public.

The research agenda can potentially contribute to recent literature about India filled with success stories of emerging strong and vibrant democracy (Kohli 2001; Corbridge & Harriss 2000). These works do not consider politics of resource sharing between the States. Those who examined federal structural relations have largely focused on the relations between the Centre and the States (Manor 2001); others examined historical reasons for its stability (Dasgupta, 2001); some others focused on movements for reorganization within the states (Kale 2007). My research addresses

the gap about how politics of interstate competition for resources impact federal relations and democratic spaces within a nation-state. At policy level, the research contributes in multiple ways. First, the interstate water is put debate in India, largely dominated by techno-legal perspectives, can benefit from a political approach through an understanding of how politics are mobilized and put to action in emergence, recurrence and mitigation of interstate water disputes. Second, the long history of interstate water disputes resolution and policy dialogues are already showing inclination towards considering alternative means of addressing the problem by exploring approaches outside formal redressal mechanisms (Iyer, 2009).

### Methodology

The study works on the basis of quantitative content analysis. Four leading Tamil newspapers based on sales, *Daily Thanthi*, *Dinamalar*, *Dinakaran* and *Dinamani* were selected for the analysis. The entire news cycle of the conflict, which starts from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2010 to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2010, was taken as the period of the study. Articles and news stories of various forms – News, Features, Columns, and Editorials and others pertaining to the conflict become the primary data for the study. In order to meet the objectives of the study the researchers developed a detailed coding sheet to collect the relevant data. The coded data was analyzed by using percentage analysis.

### Research Sample and Design

For the present research, following type of research design selecting newspaper and News stories.

News Papers	News Stories
Daily Thanthi	36
Dinakaran	27
Dinamalar	23
Dinamani	19
<b>Total</b>	<b>105</b>

### Results and Discussion

To study the Frames constructed in the newspapers on the Mullai Periyar conflict news stories, the researcher intended to study the Frames constructed in the newspapers on the Mullai Periyar conflict by the four regional newspapers. The Constructed frames in the news stories, Angle, Tone of the news paper, Agenda setting provided by the newspapers on a whole and Intention of the news stories about the issue of the news stories of the conflict were analyzed to study the Frames constructed in the newspapers of the conflict. The obtained results are presented in this section.

**Table 1**

*Newspaper wise distribution of Constructed frames in the news stories*

News Papers	Constructed frames in the news story						Total	p
	Political Frame	Anti Kerala Frame	Anti Tamil Nadu	Water scarcity Frame	Agricultural Frame	Law and order Frame		

			Frame					
Daily Thanthi	15 (41.67%)	11 (30.56%)	2 (5.56%)	0	4 (11.11%)	4 (11.11%)	36 (100%)	0.804
Dinakaran	13 (48.15%)	5 (18.52%)	5 (18.52%)	1 (3.70%)	2 (7.41%)	1 (3.70%)	27 (100%)	
Dinamalar	8 (34.78%)	5 (21.74%)	4 (17.39%)	1 (4.35%)	3 (13.04%)	2 (8.70%)	23 (100%)	
Dinamani	7 (36.84%)	4 (21.05%)	1 (5.26%)	1 (5.26%)	3 (15.79%)	3 (15.79%)	19 (100%)	
Total	43 (40.95%)	25 (23.81%)	12 (11.43%)	3 (2.86%)	12 (11.43%)	10 (9.52%)	105 (100%)	

The table above explains the distribution of constructed frames in the news stories of the four Tamil dailies. It is observed in all the four Tamil dailies that the political frames is occupying the predominate space. Thus, the political frame is 41.67% in Daily Thanthi, 48.15% in Dinakaran, 34.78% in Dinamalar and 36.84% in Dinamani. Another constructed frames that was covered widely in all the four dailies is the anti-Kerala frame. Thus, it is found that *Daily Thanthi* with 30.56%, *Dinamalar* with 21.74%, *Dinamani* with 21.05% and *Dinamalar* with 18.52%. It is noteworthy to mention that the anti-Tamil Nadu frame and agricultural frames share equal space in all the newspapers with 11.43%. Finally, the Law and Order frame and water scarcity frame are found to be getting the meagre attention with only 9.52% and 2.86% respectively in all the four newspapers.

**Table 2**

*Newspaperwise distribution of Angle in the news stories*

News Papers	Angle			Total
	Educative	Informative	Sensation	
Daily Thanthi	0	24 (66.67%)	12 (33.33%)	36 (100%)
Dinakaran	0	19 (70.37%)	8 (29.63%)	27 (100%)
Dinamalar	1 (4.35%)	14 (60.87%)	8 (34.78%)	23 (100%)
Dinamani	0	11 (57.89%)	8 (42.11%)	19 (100%)
Total	1 (0.95%)	68 (64.76%)	36 (34.26%)	105 (100%)

The above table shows the Newspaper wise distribution of Angle in the news stories in all four Tamil Dailies in Tamil Nadu. It can be concluded that the Angle of *Informative* is dominating in all the four newspapers. Thus, the *Informative* angle is seen in *Dinakaran* with 70.37%, *Daily Thanthi* with 66.67%, *Dinamalar* with 60.87% and *Dinamani* with 57.89%. Followed by the angle *Informative*, *Sensation* angle occupies largely the rest of the space in all the four newspapers. Hence, 42.11% in *Dinamani*, 34.78% in *Dinamalar*, 33.33% in *Daily Thanthi* and 29.63% in *Dinakaran*. The angle *Educative* literally found least percent, that too, only in one newspaper with

4.35% and the other three newspapers did not even provide any news on *educative* angle.

Fisher’s exact test

There is no association between news papers and angle of the news paper.

**Table 3**

*Newspaper wise distribution of Tone of the news paper in the news stories*

News Papers	Tone of the news paper					Total	p
	Pro Kerala farmers	Pro Tamil farmers	Anti – Tamil Government	Anti – Kerala Government	Neutral		
Daily Thanthi	7 (19.44%)	9 (25%)	6 (16.67%)	6 (16.67%)	8 (22.22%)	36 (100%)	0.396
Dinakaran	7 (25.93%)	9 (33.33%)	2 (7.41%)	1 (3.70%)	8 (29.63%)	27 (100%)	
Dinamalar	1 (4.35%)	11 (47.83%)	3 (13.04%)	4 (17.39%)	4 (17.39%)	23 (100%)	
Dinamani	3 (15.79%)	7 (36.84%)	4 (21.05%)	3 (15.79%)	2 (10.53%)	19 (100%)	
Total	18 (17.14%)	36 (34.29%)	15 (14.29%)	14 (13.33%)	22 (20.95%)	105 (100%)	

Percentage wise distribution of the Table 3 reveals that 19.44% of *Dina Thanthi*, 25.93% of *Dinakaran*, 4.35% of *Dinamalar* and 15.79% of *Dinamani* provided news stories on pro-Kerala farmers. Similarly 25% of *Dina Thanthi*, 33.33% of the *Dinakaran*, 47.83 % of *Dinamalar* and 36.84% of *Dinamani* covered news stories on pro-Tamil farmers. With regard to the new stories on anti-Tamil Government, 16.67% of the coverage is provide by *Dina Thanthi* 7.41 by *Dinakaran* 13.04% by *Dinamalar* and 21.05% by *Dinamani*. Furthermore, the news coverage on anti-Kerala Government, 16.67% by *Dina Thanthi*, 3.70% by *Dinakaran*, 17.39% by *Dinamalar* and 15.79% by *Dinamani*. In comparison with the above mentioned percentage wise comparison, next to Pro-Tamil farmers, the ‘Neutral’ coverage provided by all the four newspapers is quite high. Thus, *Dina Thanthi* exhibits 22.22%, *Dinakaran* 29.63%, *Dinamalar* 17.39 % and *Dinamani* 10.53 %.

Fisher’s exact test

There is no association between news papers and tone of newspaper.

**Table 4**

*Newspaper wise distribution of Agenda setting provided by the newspapers on a whole in the news stories*

News Papers	Agenda setting provided by the newspapers on a whole					Total	p
	Water dispute must be Resolve	Kerala Government must release water	Tamil Nadu Government must	Both the governments should abide the	No agenda		

	d		consider the views of Kerala Government	law			
Daily Thanthi	3 (8.33%)	3 (8.33%)	1 (2.78%)	12 (33.33%)	17 (47.22%)	36 (100%)	0.726
Dinakaran	0	2 (7.41%)	4 (14.81%)	11 (40.74%)	10 (37.04%)	27 (100%)	
Dinamalar	3 (13.04%)	1 (4.35%)	2 (8.70%)	8 (34.78%)	9 (39.13%)	23 (100%)	
Dinamani	1 (5.26%)	1 (5.26%)	1 (5.26%)	5 (26.32%)	11 (57.89%)	19 (100%)	
Total	7 (6.67%)	7 (6.67%)	8 (7.62%)	36 (34.29%)	47 (44.76%)	105 (100%)	

The above table shows the percentage wise distribution on the Agenda setting role played by the Newspapers on a whole. It can be found that 44.76% of all the four newspapers had no agenda on the water dispute issue at all. 34.29% of the newspapers said that the both the governments should abide by the law. Thus, it is clear from the table that majority of the coverage given by all the newspapers did not lay any agenda on the water dispute and they stressed the need for resolving the water dispute by abiding the law by both the governments. Other agenda settings views did not find much space in all the newspapers. The view that Tamil Nadu government must consider the views of Kerala government occupied only 7.62%, the view that the Kerala government must release water was only 6.67% and the view that water dispute must be resolved was focussed only by 6.67%.

Fisher's exact test

There is no association between news papers and Agenda setting by the newspapers on a whole.

**Table 5**

*Newspaper wise distribution of Intention of the news stories about the issue in the news stories*

News Papers	Intention of the news stories about the issue					Total	p
	Prevent the conflict	Trigger the conflict	Peace building measure	Voice on Farmers' rights	Upholding the constitutional rights		
Daily Thanthi	0	7 (19.44%)	6 (16.67%)	5 (13.89%)	18 (50%)	36 (100%)	0.208
Dinakaran	0	5 (18.52%)	2 (7.41%)	4 (14.81%)	16 (59.26%)	27 (100%)	
Dinamalar	0	10 (43.48%)	1 (4.35%)	5 (21.74%)	7 (30.43%)	23 (100%)	
Dinamani	1 (5.26%)	2 (10.53%)	1 (5.26%)	3 (15.79%)	12 (63.16%)	19 (100%)	



	)						
Total	1 (0.95%) )	24 (22.86%)	10 (9.52%)	17 (16.19%)	53 (50.48%)	105 (100%)	

The above table reveals the intention of the news stories about the issue by all the four newspapers. It can be found that majority of the news stories in all the newspapers were stressed the need for upholding the constitutional rights with 50.48%. Furthermore, 22.86% of the news stories on triggering the conflict 16.19% of the news stories on the voice of the farmers' rights, 9.52% of the news stories on peace building measures and only 0.95% of the news story on the prevention of the conflicts.

### Summary of the Findings

Media has played a vital role in the Mullai Periyar water conflict, but not as criticized by any many agencies that blamed media for sensitizing the conflict. The news coverage on regional paper reveal that Political Frame has been the dominating constructed frames in the news stories in majority of the newspapers giving large amount of information about the ongoing debate between the two state governments. While some newspapers had pro-Tamil content still most of the vernacular newspapers had neutral content indicating that conflicting remarks were not induced by the newspapers. To further prove that the newspapers were sensible in their conflict reporting, most of the reports had content that was intended to uphold constitution rights.

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