
A Critical Discourse Analysis of Selected News Articles on the Reasi Terror Attack in Kashmir (2024)

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.70670/sra.v3i3.2543>

Abstract

This study examines how three Indian English-language newspapers constructed the Reasi attack of 9 June 2024, in which a bus carrying Hindu pilgrims was fired upon in Jammu and Kashmir. Three hard news reports were analysed, one each from The Hindu, The Times of India and The Indian Express, published between 17 and 19 June 2024 and selected because they carried the name Reasi in the headline and reported the investigation and the official response rather than opinion. Fairclough's three-dimensional model provided the analytical frame, and each report was read at the level of text, of discursive practice and of sociocultural practice. Six categories emerged from the analysis: lexical construction of the attack, representation of the attackers, representation of the victims, representation of government and security forces, patterns of quotation and sourcing, and the framing of national security. Transitivity analysis was applied to the clauses describing the attack itself. The central comparative finding is that the three newspapers converge more than they differ. All three foreground terrorism as the category of the event, rely almost entirely on institutional voices, and give extended attention to state response, while differing in emphasis, with The Hindu weighted towards administrative procedure, The Times of India towards the individual suspect, and The Indian Express towards political authority. The study contributes a demonstration that reporting of this kind does not present the attack as an isolated security incident but locates it within a connected discourse of victimhood, terrorism and state capacity, in which dramatic description of civilian suffering sits alongside the routine legitimisation of official action. The analysis concerns media discourse and not audience reception.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis; Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model; Reasi Attack; Kashmir; Media Framing; Securitization; Indian Press

Introduction

The Reasi attack took place on the evening of 9 June 2024 in the Reasi district of Jammu and Kashmir, when gunmen opened fire on a bus carrying Hindu pilgrims returning from the Shiv Khori shrine towards Katra. The driver was hit, the vehicle left the road and fell into a gorge, and the gunmen fired again on the crashed bus. Reporting of casualties varied in the days that followed. Early reports on 9 and 10 June recorded between nine and ten deaths and between thirty-three and forty-one injuries, and the figures most commonly settled upon in later coverage were nine dead and forty-one injured. This variation is noted here because it appears in the corpus itself, where one

headline refers to ten deaths, and because the manner in which casualty figures are reported and revised is part of what a discourse analysis has to account for rather than a detail to be tidied away. The attack occurred hours after the swearing in of a new federal government, and the political response was immediate and highly visible. Coverage in the national English-language press was extensive. That coverage is the object of the present study.

News reports do not only record events. They select, name and order them, and in doing so they make some readings available and others less so. The analytical problem addressed here is therefore not whether Indian newspapers reported the attack accurately, which is a question for media monitoring rather than for discourse analysis. It is how the reports construct four things in language: the attackers, the victims, the state and its security apparatus, and the wider political and security context within which the event is placed. Setting the problem in this way allows the analysis to move from general observations about biased language to a specifiable account of the linguistic means by which particular positions are made to appear ordinary.

Despite a growing body of scholarship on media representations of conflict in Kashmir, limited attention appears to have been given to the discursive construction of the June 2024 Reasi attack in Indian English-language newspapers. Existing work concentrates on Pulwama, on Pahalgam and on the aftermath of the abrogation of Article 370, and much of it is comparative across the Indian and Pakistani press. The present study takes a narrower object, namely coverage within the Indian press of a single incident in which the victims were pilgrims and asks what discursive resources that coverage draws upon. The objectives are, first, to identify the lexical, syntactic and representational strategies through which the selected newspapers construct the attack; second, to examine how the attackers, the victims, the state and the security response are represented; third, to consider how the event is located within wider discourses of terrorism and national security; and fourth, to compare the three newspapers systematically. The following research questions follow these objectives.

- RQ1.** What lexical, syntactic and representational strategies are used by the selected Indian newspapers in constructing the Reasi attack?
- RQ2.** How are the attackers, the victims, state institutions and the security response represented in the selected reports?
- RQ3.** How do the selected newspapers frame the attack within broader discourses of terrorism, national security and state authority?
- RQ4.** What ideological assumptions and relations of power are reproduced through these constructions?

The contribution offered is a close linguistic account of a single, well-defined event in which the categories of victimhood, terrorism and state capacity can be seen working together rather than separately. The study concerns the discourse of the press. It makes no claim about how readers received that discourse, since no reception data were collected.

Literature Review

Critical Discourse Analysis and Media Discourse

Critical Discourse Analysis treats language as a form of social practice and asks how relations of power are produced and sustained through ordinary textual choices. Van Dijk (1993) sets out the principles of the approach and its concern with the reproduction of dominance, while Wodak (2001) develops the discourse-historical strand in which texts are read against the histories that surround them. Wodak (2014) describes the field as concerned with how words and phrases carry power and control, and Rogers (2004) notes that the approach allows researchers to trace how language shapes what people think and do. Montessori (2023) illustrates the application of these principles to policy texts. Li et al. (2024) show that discourse analysis is well suited to media material, since it brings into view the layered structures within media texts, and Kennedy (2022) argues for methodological tightening in the CDA of press coverage, particularly in the specification of corpora.

Media, Conflict and the Framing of Terrorism

Vartanova, Dunas and Gladkova (2021) review the academic literature on media and conflict and observe that the relationship is mutual rather than one-directional, since coverage shapes the conditions, it reports upon. Within South Asia, Sreedharan (2009) provides an extended comparative account of conflict coverage in Indian and Pakistani newspapers and establishes that reporting of Kashmir is patterned by national position. More recent work has narrowed the object to particular incidents. Jan and Barclay (2023) examined newspaper coverage of the Pulwama attack and showed how competing news discourses shaped what readers came to understand by the event. Wasim, Ahmed and Joiya (2023) worked at the level of lexis and collocation and found that terms such as terrorist, attack and martyr recurred with sufficient consistency to guide interpretation. Arshad, Abdullah and Shafiq (2022) reported a comparable pattern in the headlines of Daily Dawn, where attacks, terror and retaliation produced urgency and fear.

Kashmir Reporting and the Language of Power

Arif et al. (2025) compared Pakistani and Indian print coverage of the 2025 Pahalgam attack and found that Indian outlets tied the attack to Pakistani support for militants through emotive wording and prominence given to official measures. Siddiqua and Iqbal (2023) reached a similar conclusion for coverage following the abrogation of Article 370, where word choice and official statement did much of the work of setting the terms of the story. Zaheer (2016) compared Pakistani English and Urdu coverage and found the English press more measured than the Urdu press. A further group of studies treats media language as a question of power rather than of style. Farooq et al. (2021) analysed tweets posted by the Pakistani and Indian Prime Ministers on Kashmir and concluded that both used language to mark political positions. Islam and Khan (2015) found that the language of the pro-government press in Pakistan worked to support official policy, and Zhang (2014) concluded more broadly that political news language tends to reproduce existing arrangements of power. Two observations follow for the present study. The first is that the ideological work of news language becomes tractable once attention is paid to wording, which supports a close textual method. The second is that the existing literature addresses Pulwama, Pahalgam and Article 370, and rests largely on cross-national comparison. Coverage of the Reasi attack within the Indian press has received little attention, and it is that gap the present study addresses.

Theoretical Framework

The analysis follows the three-dimensional model developed by Fairclough (1992, 1995), in which any discursive event is examined simultaneously as a text, as an instance of discursive practice, and as an instance of sociocultural practice. The three dimensions are not stages to be completed in turn but perspectives on the same material, and an adequate analysis must move between them. The first dimension concerns the text itself. Fairclough (2001) directs attention to vocabulary, grammar and textual structure, and the present analysis attends to lexical choice, transitivity, modality, voice, nominalisation and the patterning of quotation. The second dimension concerns discursive practice, that is, the processes through which a text is produced, distributed and consumed. Here the analysis attends to the selection of sources, to intertextuality, to the recontextualisation of official statement within news narrative, and to the conventions of hard news reporting. The third dimension concerns sociocultural practice and asks how the text stands in relation to the social and political conditions surrounding it. Fairclough (2013) treats this level as the point at which the relation between language and society is made explicit. In this study the third dimension is addressed through nationalism, securitisation, the political situation of Kashmir, the relationship between media institutions and the state, and the representation of religious identity. The framework is used here as an analytical procedure rather than as an orientation. Each of the analytical sections below identifies a textual feature, states the discursive function it performs, and relates that function to the wider social formation within which the reporting occurs.

Methodology

Research Design

The study adopts a qualitative design and uses textual analysis as its technique. Belsey (2013) and Burrows (2004) describe textual analysis as a means of accounting for how meaning is produced within a text, and Hinchman and Moore (2013) note the value and the risks of close reading as a procedure. Harper (2011) and Hennink, Hutter and Bailey (2020) set out the criteria of transparency and systematic procedure against which qualitative work of this kind is assessed, and the reporting below follows those criteria.

Corpus and Sampling Criteria

The corpus consists of three hard news reports, one from each of three Indian English-language newspapers. The newspapers were selected on three grounds: national circulation and readership, established weight in the formation of political opinion, and sustained coverage of security matters in Jammu and Kashmir. Articles were retrieved from the online editions of the three newspapers. All three reports were retrieved from the publishers' online archives and were accessed on 14 August 2026. Full details of the corpus, including headline, byline, date of publication, length and source, are given in Table 1. The following inclusion criteria were applied. Reports had to be published between 9 and 30 June 2024, the three weeks following the attack. They had to carry the name Reasi in the headline. They had to be hard news reports of the investigation or of the official response, and editorials, opinion columns, photo features and wire briefs were excluded. Where a newspaper carried more than one qualifying report, the first substantive report of the transfer of the investigation or of an arrest was retained, so that the three reports would be comparable in genre and in stage of the news cycle. The resulting corpus is small, and the consequences of that are considered in Section 8.

Analytical Procedure

Each report was read four times. The first reading established the propositional content and the sequence of events as reported. The second identified lexical items used of the attack, the attackers, the victims and the state, which were recorded and grouped. The third coded clauses describing the attack for transitivity, following the categories of Actor, Process and Goal, and recorded quotation patterns, noting for each quotation the speaker, the institutional position held and the function of the quotation within the report. The fourth reading placed the accumulated features against the sociopolitical context. The categories reported in Section 5 emerged from this process rather than being imposed in advance and were then compared across the three newspapers. Two points of procedure should be noted. All material analysed is publicly available published journalism, so no ethical approval was required, and no individual is discussed other than in the public role reported in the press. As regards trustworthiness, every analytical claim below is tied to a quoted extract, so that a reader may assess the reading offered against the wording on which it rests.

Findings and Analysis

Lexical Representation of the Attack

All three reports name the event within the category of terrorism rather than within alternative categories such as militancy, insurgency or armed violence. The Hindu heads its report Union Home Ministry hands over Reasi terror attack case to NIA, The Times of India uses Reasi Terror Attack in its headline, and The Indian Express describes an ambush by terrorists. The choice is consequential, since terms of this kind differ in what they imply about legitimacy and about the appropriate response, and the selection of one over another sets the terms within which the remainder of the report proceeds. Alongside the vocabulary of terrorism runs a vocabulary of physical drama. The bus is described as having plunged into a deep gorge, the attackers as having opened fire, and bullet shells as having been found at the scene. Previous research has shown that lexical repetition of this kind accumulates into an interpretive position rather than remaining a matter of individual word choice (Wasim et al., 2023; Arshad et al., 2022). In the present corpus the two vocabularies operate together, the first supplying the category and the second supplying

the affective charge, and it is their combination rather than either alone that gives the reporting its character. Table 2 sets out the principal extracts with the function each performs.

Table 1. Textual features, discursive function and ideological effect

Extract	Lexical or syntactic feature	Discursive function	Ideological effect
terrorists opened fire	Actor identification in a material process	Constructs the attackers as active agents	Criminalization and security framing
the bus plunged into a deep gorge	Material process without external Actor	Foregrounds the outcome and backgrounds the agent	Emotionalization of the event
Prime militant associate	Evaluative nominal group	Constructs the suspect as central to the operation	Intensifies the representation of threat
seamless coordination	Institutional lexicon of process	Constructs inter-agency competence	Legitimization of administrative response
full spectrum of counter-terror capabilities	Institutional and military lexicon	Constructs state capacity as complete	legitimization of executive authority
area domination and zero-terror plans	Nominalization of policy	Presents contested measures as settled objects	Normalization of exceptional security measures
pilgrims from several states	Individuating identification of victims	Personalises those harmed	Establishes a moral claim upon the state

Representation of the Attackers

The attackers are represented in two distinct ways. In the description of the attack itself they appear as an undifferentiated collective, named simply as terrorists, without individuation, motive or organisational attribution. In the reporting of the investigation, by contrast, one individual is named and characterised in detail. The Times of India describes the arrested man, Hakam Din, as a prime militant associate who helped to harbour and guide the attackers. The contract is worth stating precisely. The evaluative nominal group prime militant associate performs two operations at once. It assigns significance, since prime marks the individual out as central rather than peripheral, and it assigns relation, since associate places him alongside actors who remain unnamed. The effect is that the individuated suspect stands in for a collective that is otherwise left without features. The present analysis finds, further, that no report attributes the attack to a named organisation, so that the agent of the violence remains a category rather than an actor throughout.

Representation of the Victims

The victims are individualized in ways the attackers are not. They are identified as pilgrims, their home states are given, and in the wider coverage their ages are reported. Identification by religious practice rather than by nationality or occupation is the most consequential choice here, since it makes available a reading of the attack as directed at a religious community rather than at civilians in general. Previous research has observed that personalisation of victims produces identification and sympathy in news reporting (Zaheer, 2016; Arshad et al., 2022). In the present corpus this pattern is visible in the naming of states of origin and in the attention given to the circumstances of the survivors. The analytical point to add is that the personalisation of victims and the de-individuation of attackers are complementary. The reports supply the reader with people on one

side of the event and a category on the other, and the moral asymmetry that follows is produced by the distribution of detail rather than by any explicit evaluation.

Representation of Government and Security Forces

The state appears in the reports as an actor that is orderly, coordinated and decisive. The Hindu reports the transfer of the case to the National Investigation Agency, a meeting chaired by the Union Home Minister, and the attendance of the National Security Adviser and the Chief of Army Staff, with the meeting described in terms of a review of security arrangements and of seamless coordination. The Times of India reports that the area was sealed off, that a search operation was launched, and that police, Army and Central Reserve Police Force personnel took part. The Indian Express reports the ordering of area domination and zero-terror plans and the direction to deploy the full spectrum of counter-terror capabilities. Three linguistic features carry this representation. The first is an institutional lexicon of coordination and capability. The second is nominalisation, since expressions such as area domination and zero-terror plans convert activity into settled objects that require no agent and admit of no alternative. The third is the density of official titles, which supplies the report with an institutional architecture. Taking these features presents the response not as a set of decisions that might have been taken differently but as the operation of a system working as it should.

Sourcing and the Use of Authoritative Voices

At the level of discursive practice, the most consistent feature of the corpus is the near-exclusive reliance on institutional sources. The voices quoted are those of the Prime Minister, the Union Home Minister and the Senior Superintendent of Police for Reasi. No survivor is quoted directly in the three reports analysed, no relative of a victim is quoted, and no independent expert or opposition figure appears. This is a matter of news production rather than of authorial intention. Hard news convention privileges attributable statement from accountable office holders, and official statements are readily available and quotable, whereas survivor testimony requires access and time. The consequence, however, is that official statement is recontextualised as news narrative, and the distinction between what the state said and what happened becomes difficult to maintain within the text. One quotation runs against this pattern and is worth noting for that reason. The Senior Superintendent of Police is reported as saying that no specific intelligence input preceded the attack. The admission complicates the account of institutional competence and indicates that the reliance on official voices does not produce uniform endorsement, since official voices may also concede failure.

Transitivity and Agency

Transitivity analysis brings out a pattern that lexical analysis alone does not reach. Two clauses describe the central sequence of the attack, and they distribute agency differently.

Table 2. Transitivity analysis of the two clauses describing the attack

Clause	Actor	Process	Goal	Effect on agency
Terrorists opened fire on the bus	terrorists	opened fire (material)	the bus and its passengers	Agency explicit; responsibility assigned
The bus plunged into a deep gorge	the bus (grammatical subject)	plunged (material)	none specified	Human agency absence; the outcome is narrated as an occurrence

In the first clause the attackers occupy the Actor position in a material process, and the bus and its passengers occupy the Goal position. Agency is explicit and responsibility is clear. In the second clause the bus occupies the subject position of a process for which no external Actor is specified. The attackers are grammatically absent from the clause that describes the deaths, even though the causal chain reported elsewhere runs from the shooting of the driver to the loss of control of the vehicle. The severest consequence of the attack is thus narrated in a construction from which the

agents of the attack have been backgrounded. It should be said plainly that this is a common construction in reporting of road incidents and need not be deliberate. Its effect, nevertheless, is that the moment of greatest harm is rendered as something that happened rather than as something that was done, and this is precisely the kind of distribution that transitivity analysis exists to make visible.

Framing of National Security

At the level of sociocultural practice, the reports locate the attack within a continuing condition rather than presenting it as a discrete event. Reference to a wider pattern of attacks in the Jammu region, to heightened alerts among security agencies, and to a continuing escalation of militant activity places the incident within a series. The Indian Express frames the government response as belonging to a phase of a longer campaign, and the language of area domination and of a decisive phase in the fight against terrorism carries the same implication. Three features of this framing bear noting. First, it is securitising in the technical sense, since it presents the event as belonging to a domain of exceptional threat within which extraordinary measures are appropriate and expected. Second, it draws upon a nationalist register, in which the state stands as protector of a religious community identified as belonging to the national community. The identification of the victims as pilgrims and the response as the deployment of the full spectrum of counter-terror capabilities are connected: the first establishes who is to be protected and the second establishes the scale of protection owed. Third, the framing normalises the security measures it reports. Area domination and zero-terror plans appear in the reports as routine administrative categories rather than as extraordinary interventions in a contested territory, and it is this quality of routineness, rather than any explicit advocacy, that makes framing effective.

Comparative Analysis of the Three Newspapers

The three newspapers converge more than they differ, and it is important to record the convergence before turning to the differences. All three categorise the event as terrorism in the headline or the opening sentence. All three rely on institutional sources to the exclusion of others. All three give more textual space to the response than to the incident. All three individuate victims and leave attackers as a collective. All three use passive or agentless construction at the point where the deaths are described. The differences are matters of emphasis and are set out in Table 4. The Hindu is weighted towards administrative procedure and inter-agency coordination, and its report is organised around the meeting and the transfer of the case. The Times of India is weighted towards the individual suspect and towards the scale of the investigation, and its report is organised around an arrest. The Indian Express is weighted towards political authority at the highest level, and its report gives most prominence to the Prime Minister. These differences follow the news hook each report was built upon, and they are differences of emphasis within a shared frame rather than differences of position.

Table 3. Comparative summary of the three newspapers

Feature	The Hindu	The Times of India	The Indian Express
Event category in headline	Terror attack	Terror attack	Ambush by terrorists
Organising news hook	Transfer of case to the NIA	Arrest of a suspect	Political response and counter-terror orders
Principal official voice	Union Home Minister	Senior Superintendent of Police	Prime Minister
Representation of attackers	Collective, unnamed	One individual named and characterised	Collective, described through actions
Representation of victims	Pilgrims, states of origin given	Casualty figure in headline	Civilians harmed in an ambush
Dominant emphasis	Administrative procedure	Investigative reach	Political authority
Non-official voices	None	None	None
Casualty figure reported	Nine	Ten	Nine

Discussion

The findings support a reading of the corpus in which victimhood, terrorism and state capacity operate as a single connected discourse rather than as three separate themes. The personalisation of the victims establishes a moral claim, the categorisation of the event as terrorism identifies the source of harm, and the extended reporting of institutional response supplies the answer. Each element requires the others to complete the account, and it is the connection between them, rather than any of them alone, that constitutes the ideological work of the reporting. Read against Fairclough (1992, 1995), the corpus illustrates the relation between the three dimensions with some clarity. At the textual level, transitivity distributes agency unevenly and nominalisation converts contested policy into settled objects. At the level of discursive practice, source selection determines which voices may enter the account, and the routines of hard news reporting make institutional voices the readily available ones. At the sociocultural level, the resulting text participates in a securitised construction of Kashmir in which extraordinary measures appear ordinary. The three levels are not independent, since the textual features are made possible by the production routines and are given their significance by the political setting. The findings are consistent with the direction of previous research while differing from it in one respect. Siddiqua and Iqbal (2023), Arif et al. (2025) and Zaheer (2016) all report that Kashmir coverage is patterned by national position, and their studies establish this through comparison between Indian and Pakistani outlets. The present study looks within a single national press and finds patterning of a different order, in which three newspapers of differing editorial characters converge on a common frame. This suggests that the alignment observed in cross-national studies may be produced as much by shared professional routine, particularly by dependence upon official sourcing, as by editorial position. The point is offered as a reading of a small corpus rather than as a general claim, and the following section states the limits within which it should be held.

Conclusion and Implications

This study examined how three Indian English-language newspapers constructed the Reasi attack of June 2024. The analysis found that the reports do not present the attack as an isolated security incident. Through lexical categorisation, the selective distribution of detail between victims and attackers, near-exclusive reliance on institutional sources, and the grammatical backgrounding of agency at the point of greatest harm, they locate the event within a connected discourse of terrorism, national security and state capacity, in which dramatic description of civilian suffering sits

alongside the routine legitimization of official action. The contribution is twofold. Empirically, the study provides a close linguistic account of a specific event that has not previously been examined in these terms. Analytically, it indicates that convergence within a national press may arise from shared production routines rather than from shared editorial position, which is a proposition that cross-national comparison is not well placed to test.

Two implications follow. For discourse analysis, the study indicates the value of applying transitivity analysis to reports of violent events, since the distribution of agency across clauses was found to carry meaning that lexical analysis alone did not reach. For journalism practice, the finding that no survivor or relative was quoted in any of the three reports raises a question about sourcing that is answerable within newsrooms, since the balance between institutional and civilian voice is a matter of editorial choice rather than of necessity.

Limitations and Future Research

The limitations of the study should be stated plainly. The corpus consists of three reports from three newspapers, which is sufficient for close qualitative reading but not for claims about the Indian press as a whole. Only English-language publications were examined, and vernacular coverage in Hindi, Urdu and Dogri may differ. Only hard news reports were included, so editorials and opinion columns, where evaluative language is less constrained, fall outside the account. The analysis is qualitative and interpretive, and although every claim is tied to a quoted extract, a second analyst might weigh those extracts differently. No corpus-assisted or computational analysis was undertaken, so claims about frequency are impressionistic rather than measured. No Pakistani material was analysed, so no cross-national comparison is offered. No audience data were collected, and nothing in this study bears upon how readers actually understood the coverage.

Several directions follow. A comparative study of Indian and Pakistani coverage of the same incident would test whether the convergence reported here holds across national frames. A comparison of English and vernacular reporting would establish whether the patterns described are properties of the English-language press specifically. A corpus-assisted analysis of a larger dataset would allow the lexical claims made here to be tested by frequency. Headlines might usefully be analysed separately from full reports, since they operate under different constraints. Visual discourse, including photographs, captions and infographics, remains unexamined and would extend the account. Social media discourse surrounding the attack would show how the press framing was taken up or contested. Audience reception research would address the question this study explicitly does not. Finally, a longitudinal comparison of coverage of the Reasi, Pulwama and Pahalgam attacks would establish whether the frame identified here is stable across incidents or particular to this one.

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