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National Dailies Coverage of Environmental Issues in the Western Ghats

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ABSTRACT

The Western Ghats are extraordinary rich source of plant and animal species. They have a huge diversity of natural, semi-natural and agro ecosystems with less than 6 percent of the land area of India and contain more than 30 percent of all plant, fish, fauna, bird, and mammal species found in India. At present, environmental issues pertaining to degradation aspect of Western Ghats are being debated in the country. Media play a pivotal role in shaping perception and awareness of environmental issues of Western Ghats. The study examines the importance given to the major environmental issues of the Western Ghats in media. The study shows that environmental stories in newspapers constituted only a small percent (0.27) of all news reported. Among them 37.22 percent of the environmental stories were about issues in the Western Ghats. It should be noted that the issues in the Western Ghats received fairly good coverage in the selected dailies. The result illustrates that more environmental news of Western Ghats was published in Kannada newspapers compared to English newspapers.

Key Words: *Western Ghats, environmental issues, Newspapers, Content analysis.*

INTRODUCTION

Western Ghats also known as the Sahyadri hills is one of the world's 25 biodiversity hotspots, which contains more than 30 per cent of India's rich sources of flora, fauna, mammal species and flowing rivers. It directly or indirectly supports the livelihoods of over 200 million people through ecosystem services. There is also home to various medicinal plants and important genetic resources such as the wild relatives of grains fruits and spices.

At present, Western Ghats are being rapidly degraded due to various land use changes that have occurred in the recent past. Apart from the traditional impacts from farming, grazing and fire there are newer changes in land use that are leading to biodiversity losses. This includes deforestation due to mining, roads, dams, townships and industrialization.

At present, environmental issues pertaining to degradation aspect of Western Ghats are being debated in the country. Government took some measures for the protection of Western Ghats, in 2012. The Kasturirangan panel was set to study the Gadgil committee report on the Western Ghats recommended prohibition on developmental activities in 37 percent of natural landscape. It includes low population density areas and protected areas, world heritage sites and a tiger and elephant corridor. It has been identified as Ecologically Sensitive Area. Hence the committee has put restrictions on developmental activities in the area.

MEDIA AND ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

The media have been found to be significant sources of information to the public about environmental issues. Media coverage of the environment issues has a positive connection with audience's personal knowledge [1].

The press is an important component of democracy. Media play a significant role in creating an awareness and mass movement.

A widespread recognition of the environment as an issue by the Western media was noticed in the early 1970s. By the time the UN conference on Human Environment was held in 1972 in Stockholm, there was a considerable rise in press coverage of the environmental issues in the West. Mass media coverage led to the rise in public awareness about the environment. In India very few Indian journalists attended the Stockholm conference. The attitude of the press was in line with Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's defense of development over environment at the conference [2].

Environment and its sustenance began to attract considerable attention by the mid-seventies mainly because of the oil crisis that threatened the base of industrial development that India was striving to attain. Indian environmentalism then took the form of a mass movement, the Chipko agitation, the Silent Valley and the campaign to protect the TajMahal from pollution. The movement had a profound impact through the mass media when a national dialogue about air and water pollution emerged [3].

In the sixties and seventies the environmental movement became a mass movement with a greater number of groups involved on a higher level of participation. Mass Communication was again the key. It is important to note that the environmental movement grew at roughly the same time that newspapers and magazines played the role of agents of social change. The protest movements like the Chipko and the Silent Valley went beyond the object of conservation to address the complex interaction between development and environment [3].

The Bhopal disaster in 1984 lent urgency to the environmental movement. Increased academic research on the one hand and media attention on the other, helped to expand the environmental debate. For the first time, theories of development focused on 'basic needs' and the appropriateness for technological choices came in for critical scrutiny. This was also the period when the economic dimensions of the problems of pollution, deforestation, energy consumption and urbanization became the focus in debates of development [3].

The next land mark, and the most visible protest to date, was the anti-Narmada Movement which once again reiterated the all-important question: whose development and at whose cost? Newspapers devoted a lot of space to the issue and it goes to their credit that they printed pro Narmada articles as well.

By the time of the Earth Summit in 1992, the concept came to be a dominant factor in the environmental debate in India and environmental issues became subjects of the political economy. In recent years, the focus of the environmental debate has changed from environment planning and management to strong protest movements among people who are the victims of ill-planned and badly managed development programmes.

Environmental catastrophes are the lifeline of environmental news coverage. This is despite the fact that both the press and television have limited "carrying capacity" within a time frame and the environment related news wires/items have to compete with other political, economic, crime and social stories.

Environmental fallouts and repercussions often become secondary concerns. Even centered reporting is characteristic of less dramatic and "non-immediate" issues like global warming, ozone depletion and coastal erosion. In order to fit these phenomenon journalists often place them into the 'event' form or as the recent outcome of an event rather than the result of larger developmental issues often ignoring the context within which they occur [3].

Environmental news coverage also suffers because it does not fit easily into the structure of regular news production. The Indian Press is by and large urban-oriented. Newspapers are mostly concentrated in metropolitan cities and cater to the urban population and only nominally to readers in rural areas [3].

When environmental journalism established itself in the early 1970's, the daily newspapers set up an ecology beat. Although the environmental coverage grew, the quality did not always keep pace. A short-term constriction on environmental reporting is the role and influence of news editors [3].

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Most of the studies on environmental issues and media have focused on coverage and agenda setting role.

Das, Bacon and Zaman [4] explored the coverage of environmental issues in the daily newspapers of Bangladesh. It was found that environmental issues were the main agenda of Bangladeshi newspapers rather than social, political and economic issues. The study found that environmental journalists were working on creating awareness among the people about the environmental issues in alliance with non-governmental organizations and the government both in international and local spheres.

Yadav and Rani [5] examined the role of different communication tools such as print media, electronic media, folk media, Interpersonal communication channels, amateur radio, and mobile technology in educating and enlightening the masses. The researchers say that, media played a pivotal role in creating awareness and bringing the positive behavioral change among people in justifying the cause of climate change.

Chan [6] tested the agenda setting hypothesis for the environmental issues in three daily newspapers of Hong Kong from 1983 to 1995. The researcher found that, Water pollution sewage treatment, air pollution, environmental education, solid waste disposal and green group activities were most frequently reported in the press. It was found that the agenda-

setting hypothesis was supported for the early period of five and a half years. In the subsequent period of seven and a half years, despite the increased media coverage of the issues, there was a significant drop in the perceived salience of the environmental problem. This may be due to the dilution of public attention as a result of diversity in the news agenda and reporting of local environmental problems as 'soft' news. It was also found that the environmental issue failed to compete with other prominent issues directly affecting the public. The mass media played a much less important role in keeping the environmental issue on the public agenda at the later stage.

Boykoff [7] found that People abundantly turn to media such as television, newspapers, magazines, radio, and the internet to help make sense of the many complexities relating to environmental science and governance that consciously shape our lives. The study found that multistage factors have shaped media coverage in complex, dynamic, and nonlinear ways. These inquiries are situated in historical context as well as in larger processes of cultural politics and environmental change. The study suggests that reports influence the spectrum of possibilities for different forms of environmental governance.

Sampei and Aoyagi [8] examined the coverage of global warming in the daily newspapers of Japan from January 1998 to July 2007. The study found that a dramatic increase in newspaper coverage of global warming from January 2007 connected with an increase in public concern for the issue. The study suggests that for more effective communication of climate change, strategies aimed at maintaining mass-media coverage of global warming are required.

Williams, I.D Rebecca Moore, R. and Daniel Markewitz, D.[9], This study, evaluates the media coverage of environmental issues. During the 1980's U.S. popular magazines covers the two important environmental issues like acid rain and chlorofluorocarbons. In this study researcher recognized key characteristic of content and presentation. This study estimates the relationship between media coverage of controversial environmental issues, public opinion, and public policy, it is useful to look historically, observing potential patterns of coverage that might be applied or compared to contemporary research on media coverage of climate change. The results suggest magazine does reflect scientific understanding as demonstrated by more divergence in reporting on ecological impacts of acid rain relative to human impacts of CFCs on ozone depletion. But genre strongly impacts what is reported, but in almost all cases, reporting on environmental issues tends to have an environmental tone.

From the literature survey it was found that the environmental issue received less than compared to other issues affecting the public. The studies suggest that the media did not play an active role in creating awareness among the people about environmental issues.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The Western Ghats are extraordinary rich source of plant and animal species. They have a huge diversity of natural, semi-natural and agro ecosystems with less than 6 percent of the land area of India and contain more than 30 percent of all plant, fish, fauna, bird, and mammal species found in India. There is also home to various medicinal plants. Western Ghats face the threats of mining, dam building, urbanization, thermal power plants, drying of rivers, illegal logging, wildlife trade and business that is highly polluting.

There is limited literature regarding coverage of environmental issues related to Western Ghats in the National dailies. There is a need to understand how national dailies cover the environmental issues in Western Ghats. With the Western Gats facing several threats in the recent years.

OBJECTIVES

The general objective of the study is to examine National dailies coverage of environmental issues in the Western Ghats.

Specific Objectives

- The study emphasizes the importance given to environmental issues of the Western Ghats in the national dailies.
- The study attempts to evaluate the problems of covering environmental issues of the Western Ghats.
- The study is to examine, what aspect of the environmental issues of Western Ghats have been covered by the Newspaper.

METHODOLOGY

The content analysis method has been used to collect the data. The Hindu and Deccan Herald English national dailies have been selected for the study. Newspaper issues published during the month of January 2018 to January 2019 has been selected for the study. A representative sample has been drawn for each paper for each month to make generalizations possible.

UNIVERSE OF THE STUDY

The universe of the study was all news items published during the period of January 2014 to January 2015. These dailies were selected because of circulation, geographical location and language. Five categories were divided for the purpose of the coding the units of analysis. They are:

- Deforestation
- Global Warming
- Wildlife
- Dam/nuclear hazards
- Displacement
- Mining
- Environmental in General

DATA COLLECTION METHOD

For the purpose of collecting data records and document were analyzed systematically. For the study purpose the researcher has to take six months issues of newspapers that were that were January 2014 to June 2014. Among them all environmental issues covered newspaper were used for study.

Randomly selected table

Days	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	Jun	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan
Sunday	5	2	2	6	4	1	6	3	7	5	2	7	4
Monday	20	17	10	21	19	9	21	11	15	20	10	15	19
Tuesday	7	4	25	29	6	24	1	26	23	7	25	23	6
Wednesday	8	12	5	2	7	4	2	13	3	8	12	30	14
Thursday	16	20	6	3	15	5	3	14	4	9	13	3	15
Friday	31	28	28	25	30	27	25	29	19	17	28	26	30
Saturday	18	15	1	19	17	21	12	16	27	11	22	13	10

TOTAL NUMBER OF STORIES TABLE

NEWSPAPERS NAME	MONTH-2014-2015	TOTAL NUMBER OF STORIES	ENVIRONMETAL ISSUES
DECCAN HERALD	January	603	04
	February	635	01
	March	563	01
	April	635	01
	May	538	-
	June	589	01
	July	571	1
	August	629	-
	September	566	07
	October	500	01
	November	579	01
	December	571	-

NEWSPAPERS NAME	MONTH-2014-2015	TOTAL NUMBER OF STORIES	ENVIRONMETAL ISSUES
HINDU	January	614	01
	February	581	-
	March	575	01
	April	685	01
	May	562	01
	June	531	04
	July	553	01
	August	588	-
	September	551	11
	October	524	01
	November	546	01

Table-1: Quantity analysis of Newspapers coverage of Environmental issues in Western Ghats

The Hindu			Deccan Herald	
	Quality of News	Percentage	Quality of News	Percentage
General News	6891	99.65 %	6979	99.74%
Environmental News	20	0.28%	24	0.34%
Total	6912	100%	7003	100%

In this table shows quality analysis of two newspapers Hindu and Deccan Herald. as shown in this data table Hindu published 6912 total news stories and Deccan herald published 7003 total news stories, which included photos news also. Among the total news stories The Hindu published 6891 general news stories and Deccan Herald published 6979 news stories. The Hindu published 20(0.28%) environmental news in the selected sample copies of newspaper. Whereas Deccan Herald published 24(0.34%) environmental news. Compared to The Hindu, Deccan Herald published more environmental news 24 (0.34%) this shows that Deccan Herald newspaper gives more importance to environmental issues.

Table-2: Analysis of subject categories of Environmental news of the Western Ghats

The Hindu			Deccan Herald	
Environmental themes	Quality of News	Percentage	Quality of News	Percentage
Deforestation	12	60%	6	25%
Global Warming	-	-	13	54%
Wildlife	02	10%	2	8.33%
Dam/Nuclear Hazards	06	30%	01	4.16%
Displacement	-	-	01	4.16%
Environmental in general	-	-	01	4.16%
Total	20	100%	24	100%

The above table shows the distribution of environmental news under six different subject categories. Among the environmental news stories, deforestation category ranked first in terms of the number of news stories. Then goes to global warming, dam/nuclear hazards, wildlife, displacement, environmental general.

The Hindu gave the first rank to deforestation by publishing 12 news stories (60%) and then gave second rank to dam/nuclear hazards 6 (60%), wildlife 2(10%). The Hindu did not publish any news stories about global warming, displacement, environmental general.

On the other side Deccan Herald gave the first rank to global warming. It published 13(54%), news stories on global warming and then it gave importance to deforestation 6 (25%), wildlife 2(8.33%), dam/nuclear hazards, displacement, environmental general all these are published 1 (4.16%).

As shown in this table, sample national dailies have published more environmental news on global warming, which shows their concern towards global warming. Next goes to deforestation 6 (25%) But they have given same importance to news related to dam/nuclear hazards, displacement, environmental general.

Table 3: COLUMNS AND PICTURE/ GRAPHIC SPACE ANALYSIS

The Hindu					Deccan Herald			
Environmental themes	Columns Space	Percentage	Picture /graphic space	Percentage	Columns Space	percentage	Picture /graphic space	Percentage
Deforestation	3417	62.69%	772	74.51%	1981	31.01%	450	17.13%
Global Warming	-	-	-	-	2767	43.32%	1546	58.88%
Wildlife	832	15.26%	88	8.49%	1110.5	17.38%	581.5	22.15%
Dam/Nuclear Hazards	1201	22.03%	176	16.93%	40	0.62%	-	-
Displacement	-	-	-	-	220.75	3.45%	48	1.8%
Environmental in general	-	-	-	-	267.75	4.19%	-	-

Total	5450	100%	1036	100%	6387	100%	2625.5	100%
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This table shows the allocation of columns space and picture/graphic to different themes in the sample newspaper. Here deforestation gains first rank in the sample newspaper in terms of space of columns and picture/graphic. Second rank goes to global warming, third goes to wildlife, fourth to dam/ nuclear hazards, fifth and sixth goes to displacement and environmental general. In the three categories of sub themes deforestation and global warming, wildlife put together received more than 80% of space.

The Hindu gave 100% space allocation to only three categories like deforestation and dam/nuclear hazards, wildlife. Here sample of newspaper did not give any importance to global warming, displacement and environmental general. While Deccan herald gave 80% space for global warming and deforestation, wildlife. Here other space given to other categories.

Deccan Herald gave more space to all categories of sub themes, but in Hindu only gave importance to three categories.

Table 4: DISTRIBUTION OF NEWS TO ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES BY GEOGRAPHICAL COVERAGE

The Hindu			Deccan Herald	
	Quality of News	Percentage	Quality of News	Percentage
Local news	-		03	12.5%
State news	12	61.90%	13	54.16%
National news	06	38.09%	04	16.66%
International news	02	10%	04	16.66%
Total	20	100%	24	100%

Above table shows that distribution of news on environmental issues by considering their geographical space. The Hindu covers more news on State news 61.90%, and next contributed to national news 38.09%, it did not publish the local news. On the other hand Deccan Herald gave more importance to state news 54.16%, second position given to national and international news 16.66% to equal space, and it gave the less prominence to 12.5% local news.

Table 5: ALLOCATION OF CONTENT ON ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS

The Hindu			Deccan Herald	
	Space	Percentage	space	Percentage
Local /district news	-	-	736.75	8.21%
State news	4897	74.11%	5590.75	62.34%
National news	1235	18.69%	1249	13.92%
International news	475	7.18%	1391	15.51%
Total	6607	100%	8967.5	100%

This table shows the allocation of space to environmental issues by considering their coverage of news stories. Hindu gave more space to state news 74.11% and second gave to national news 18.69%, it gave less to local/district news. On the other hand Deccan Herald devoted to more space to state 62.34%, second gave to international news 15.51%, third space to national news 13.92%, last importance gave to local news 8.21%.

Table 6: CATEGORISATION OF CONTENT OF NEWS ON ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

The Hindu			Deccan Herald	
	Quality of News	Percentage	Quality of News	Percentage
Straight	06	30%	12	50%
Articles/features	14	70%	12	50%
Editorial	-	-	-	-
Profile/interview	-	-	-	-
Total	20	100%	24	100%

The above table shows news stories devoted to environmental issues category by types of news. Over all the two news dailies carried only straight news and articles/features news stories relating to environmental issues category.

The Hindu carried 14 (70%) articles/features news stories, and it also carried 6 (30%) straight news, on contrary Deccan Herald gave the equal importance to 12 (50%) straight and 12 (50%) articles/features.

Table 7: LOCATION OF NEWS IN THE NEWSPAPERS

The Hindu			Deccan Herald	
	Quality of News	Percentage	Quality of News	Percentage
Front page	1	5%	3	12.5%
Inside page	19	95%	21	87.5%
Supplement	-	-	-	-
Total	20	100%	24	100%

This table shows that location of news in the newspaper. The Hindu newspaper covers only one (5%) news published in the front page and 19 (95%) news published in the inside the newspaper. And another newspaper Deccan Herald published only 3(12.5%) news in front page of newspaper, 21(87.5%) news published in the inside the newspaper. Both newspapers did not publish any news in the supplement edition.

MAJOR FINDING

The analysis revealed that the coverage of environmental issues in national dailies was not very significant. It ranged from 3-7 percent of the total number of news stories.

- Compared to The Hindu, Deccan Herald published more environmental news 24 (0.34%) this shows that Deccan Herald newspaper gives more importance to environmental issues.
- As a whole Deccan Herald had published the highest number 24 (0.34%) of environmental issues compared to The Hindu, it published 20(0.28%).
- The coverage of environmental stories in the two newspapers differed- widely in terms of priority given to the sub theme. Deccan Herald gave first rank to Global Warming with 13 (54%) news stories. Hindu gave the first rank to deforestation 12(60%) news stories.
- These two sample dailies show remarkable difference in the coverage of the remaining sub themes. The Deccan Herald gave second rank to deforestation 6 (25%), third and fourth rank goes to wildlife 2(8.33%), dam/nuclear hazards, displacement, environmental general all these are published 1 (4.16%). The Hindu gave second rank to dam/nuclear hazards 6 (60%), wildlife 2(10%). The Hindu did not publish any news stories about global warming, displacement, environmental general.
- The allocation of columns space and picture/graphic to different themes in the sample newspaper. The Hindu gave 100% space allocation to only three categories like deforestation and dam/nuclear hazards, wildlife. Here sample of newspaper did not give any importance to global warming, displacement and environmental general. While Deccan Herald gave 80% space for global warming and deforestation, wildlife. Here other space given to other categories. Deccan Herald gave more space to all categories of sub themes, but in Hindu only gave importance to three categories.
- The distribution of news on environmental issues by considering their geographical space. The Hindu covers more news on state news 61.90%, and next contributed to national news 38.09%, it did not publish the local news. On the other hand Deccan Herald gave more importance to state news 54.16%, second position given to national and international news 16.66% to equal space, and it gave the less prominence to 12.5% local news.
- The allocation of space to environmental issues by considering their coverage of news stories. Hindu gave more space to state news 74.11% and second gave to national news 18.69%, it gave less to local/district news. On the other hand Deccan Herald devoted to more space to state 62.34%, second gave to international news 15.51%, third space to national news 13.92%, last importance gave to 8.21%.
- The news stories devoted to environmental issues category by types of news. Over all the two news dailies carried only straight news and articles/features news stories relating to environmental issues category. The Hindu carried 14 (70%) articles/features news stories, and it also carried 6 (30%) straight news, on contrary Deccan Herald gave the equal importance to 12 (50%) straight and 12 (50%) articles/features.
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SUGGESTION

The present study shows that the environmental news coverage in national dailies is less. Possible reasons may include

1. Keeness of newspaper to cover political, sensational and entertainment oriented news boost circulation.
2. Lack of research or in depth study by journalist on covering environmental issues.
3. Both newspapers have their responsibility to increase development oriented reporting.
4. They should publish follow up stories in environmental issues.
5. They should concentrate more on local environmental news stories.
6. English national dailies should give more importance to environmental news coverage.

CONCLUSION

The two national dailies have mandate to give importance to the issues that affect people more. From the analysis of the findings an attempt is made to draw a conclusion that the two national dailies are not giving sufficient coverage to all the categories of news like deforestation, global warming, wildlife dam/ nuclear hazards, displacement and environmental in general. By neglecting certain areas, people especially the readers will lose the chance of gaining maximum information.

The Hindu has been fair in its approach to environmental issues. Deccan Herald has to be proactive in covering all sorts of environmental news like The Hindu does. By covering various types of news on environment it makes people to keep in touch with nature. Like The Hindu daily Deccan Herald too should be able to cover the news other than when there are natural calamities because nature is constantly changing due to various reasons. Therefore it is concluded that by giving extensive coverage, print media will be able to generate interest and sense of positive attitude towards environment among people.

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