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JAMMU AND KASHMIR DURING THE COMMUNICATION BLACKOUT: A TEXTUAL  
ANALYSIS OF INDIAN NEWS COVERAGE

by

AKANSHA SIROHI

Under the Direction of Marian Meyers, PhD

ABSTRACT

This study examines the news coverage of Jammu and Kashmir conflict during the communication blackout of 2019. Using comparative analysis, it explores right-leaning, left-leaning and neutral newspapers to examine how political leanings affected the news coverage and asks whether the coverage challenges the actions by the central government amid limitations of press freedom in Jammu and Kashmir. The findings indicate the ideological leanings of the newspapers affected the news coverage during the communication blackout and the news overwhelmingly supported the central government's nationalist ideologies and relied on government officials for information. However, a few stories, primarily in the left-leaning Hindu newspaper, represented the voices of the residents of Jammu and Kashmir and held the central government accountable. This study concludes that though the communication blackout severely restricted press freedom, it didn't extinguish it entirely as journalists were able to represent diversity and voices of dissent.

INDEX WORDS: Press Freedom, Jammu and Kashmir Conflict, Communication Blackout, Indian News Media, Internet Shutdown, Press Freedom in India

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ANALYSIS OF INDIAN NEWS COVERAGE

by

AKANSHA SIROHI

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2020

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JAMMU AND KASHMIR DURING THE COMMUNICATION BLACKOUT: A TEXTUAL  
ANALYSIS OF INDIAN NEWS COVERAGE

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August 2020

## **DEDICATION**

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my family, especially my brother, for being so supportive of my decision to study abroad and pursue my dreams. Your perseverance and dedication have always inspired me.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to acknowledge Dr. Marian Meyers for her help over the past year. She basically taught me everything I know about qualitative methods and their potential in research. I could not have completed this thesis without your support and guidance. Thank you for everything.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Residents of Jammu and Kashmir woke up on August 5, 2019, to find that Article 370 of the Indian Constitution that granted them autonomy had been abrogated and all communication channels within the state were severed. Amid the chaos and uncertainty that continued for weeks, the residents locked inside their homes would watch as Indian Army trucks rolled in and armed troops patrolled the streets. As the lockdown and communication blackout continued in the state, journalists struggled to report the situation on the ground. Publishing stories online and sharing information with journalists working outside Jammu and Kashmir became next to impossible. Aakash Hassan, who works for *News18.com*, was denied entry into Srinagar's Media Facilitation Centre – the only place in Jammu and Kashmir where journalists could access the Internet during the communication blackout – because he worked for an 'online portal' (Rehbar, 2019). Freelance Journalists were also barred from entering the centre because they didn't have IDs. The Director of Information for Jammu and Kashmir, Sherish Asgar said: "Yes, we have done this following some complaints of misuse." Frustrated due to this press gag, Hassan tweeted, "They stopped me near the entrance and told me I wasn't allowed as I work with an online portal. I asked for two minutes to check my mail. This might be my last tweet, as I am being barred to use Internet in the media centre (Akhzer, 2019)." The restrictions didn't end here. Security officials posted outside the Media Facilitation Centre were instructed to only allow journalists who were accredited with the government of Jammu and Kashmir. Those allowed to enter the centre had to wait outside in queues to access the Internet and were only allowed to use the Internet for half an hour (Akhzer, 2019). The crackdown in Kashmir hints at the declining standards of transparency, diversity and press freedom in India under the current regime. Furthermore, it raises questions about the news media's capacity to challenge government

narratives in a complex and fragile democracy like India. Thus, the situation in Kashmir at that time provides an important case study to examine these issues.

This is not the first time in the history of Indian media that journalists have been restricted in reporting about controversial subjects. Issues of press freedom and media censorship are not exclusive to authoritarian regimes. Although India is a democracy, freedom of expression and freedom of the press have been contested by citizens, governments and The Supreme Court of India alike. Kumar (2017) studied how media laws enabled censorship of sensitive information based on preserving peace, political stability, normalcy, communal harmony and security. Furthermore, journalists who have aimed to investigate corrupt governments, politicians, corporations and oppressive regimes in India have been threatened, attacked, abducted and detained by the police, right-wing groups, religious extremists, politicians, insurgents and criminals, and even killed (Yin, 2011; Reshi 2015). Increasing commercialization and political ownership of the press have adversely affected journalism practices and have rendered journalism incapable of exposing corruption and oppression in India (Press Council of India, 2010; Chadha, 2017; Rao 2018). The impact of these factors on press freedom, transparency and accountability in the news media are likely to be more acute in a zone of conflict where national interests and border security come into play, as in the case with the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

Jammu and Kashmir, the northernmost state of India, has been a conflict zone for over 80 years. Amidst the struggle for freedom, cross-border insurgency and terrorist movements by the neighboring state of Pakistan, separatist religious activism, militancy and oppression by the Indian Armed Forces, the state has become a stage for national and international politics to be played out. Jammu and Kashmir<sup>1</sup>, while being important in its own right, is also a contested

region due to its key position in South Asia. Nuclear states like India, Pakistan, and China claiming parts of Kashmir has implications for peaceful coexistence in South Asia, all the more for India and Pakistan (Luthra, 2016).

Though the state has been through a series of violent movements and civil unrest over the years, bloodshed and activism in Jammu and Kashmir were center stage after the government led by the Hindu nationalist Bhartiya Janta Party's (BJP) and Prime Minister Narendra Modi scrapped Article 370 of the Indian Constitution on August 5, 2019, thereby revoking the special autonomous status of Jammu and Kashmir. The government also bifurcated the state into two Union Territories: Jammu and Kashmir – a Muslim majority region -- and Ladakh – with fairly equal numbers of Muslims and Buddhists. The status of Union Territories<sup>2</sup> allows the Modi government to supersede the state government and take control of the region. Justifying this amendment in the Parliament, Home Minister Amit Shah of BJP said, “Keeping in view the prevailing internal security situation, fuelled by cross-border terrorism in the existing state of Jammu and Kashmir, a separate Union Territory for Jammu and Kashmir is being created (“Article 370: This picture of Amit Shah reveals government agenda,” 2019).” Modi and Shah also said that removing Article 370 would bring business investment and create equal opportunities for people of all communities in Kashmir as the state would have to comply with the central government's reservation scheme<sup>3</sup> like all the other states and Union Territories in India.

These major amendments were made after deploying additional troops in an already military-governed province, putting the state's political leaders and activists under house arrest and forcing the state into a communication blackout by shutting down the Internet, mobile services and landlines. This move of the BJP government, though perceived by many Indian

citizens to be an act of retaliation for the February 2019 Pulwama terror attacks<sup>4</sup> in the state and a rightful move to counter terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir, was part of the party's 2019 general election manifesto. Human rights organizations have reported incidents of mass arrests, torture by the security forces, forced labor by armed personnel and several killings amid protests in Jammu and Kashmir ("Update on human rights violations in Indian-administered Jammu & Kashmir since August 2019," 2019).

Human Rights organizations criticized the Government of India for restricting press freedom after the removal of Article 370 ("Kashmir communications shutdown a 'collective punishment' that must be reversed, say UN experts," 2019; "Update on human rights violations in Indian-administered Jammu & Kashmir since August 2019," 2019). Journalists had to rely on press releases issued by the state without the means to verify these accounts. Local security forces detained journalists who filed stories about mass arrests and communication blackout in the state preventing them from providing extensive reports on the ground ("Update on human rights violations in Indian-administered Jammu & Kashmir since August 2019," 2019). The communication blackout further crippled the local newspapers and broadcasting channels, as they couldn't publish their stories. With no internet, mobile services and telephones, journalists could neither contact the locals for information nor share the information they had with news agencies outside the state. Reporters from various media organizations across India worked at Srinagar's Media Facilitation Centre set up by the government to share events unfolding in the state after the removal of Article 370. However, laws were put in place by the government to prevent local journalists, freelancers and news bloggers from entering the media centre (Rehbar, 2019). These events, though occurring in Kashmir, highlight the compromised state of news media in India and government restrictions on press freedom. However, it is unclear how these

factors affected the transparency and diversity of voices among the sources cited in the news coverage of sensitive issues and conflicts like Kashmir.

Franklin (2006) studied the process of local news making and discussed how local journalists and citizens have an established network that enables access to important information and a different perspective of the events as they are unfolding on the ground (p. 162-172). Since press freedom in Kashmir was severely restricted, assessing the real situation on the ground posed challenges for journalists working in the state. Regardless, Kashmir and the abrogation of Article 370 got extensive coverage in all Indian newspapers. The stories published by the Indian dailies were not just reports but a source of information that Indian citizens relied on in order to understand the situation in the state.

The role of the media in covering the events was crucial to conveying to political leaders and the public just what was happening in the region and what was at stake. Moreover, accurate and truthful news coverage of the Kashmir situation was important to challenge government narratives that justified imposing a clampdown in the state. With a handful of information sources, limited access to internet and press restrictions imposed by the government, how the Indian media covered the situation in Jammu and Kashmir during the communication blackout and the marginalization of the state's residents will contribute to our understanding of the challenges and limitations of journalism in a crisis situation during which the news media and press freedom are under attack. To understand how India's news media outside Jammu and Kashmir covered the situation there, a textual analysis of news articles covering Jammu and Kashmir after the revocation of Article 370 in *The Times of India*, henceforth TOI, *the Hindu* and *the Pioneer* was conducted. The goal was to understand the different media discourses regarding the current Jammu and Kashmir issue and their potential in educating the readers about

the problems faced by both the residents of Jammu and Kashmir and the news media during the communication blackout, including the central government's role in shaping those discourses. More broadly, this study aimed to increase our understanding of the role played by Indian news media in challenging the Hindu nationalist government within an ostensibly democratic system.

In choosing to work with the above media outlets, I have explored how the lack of press freedom, political leanings and national interests in the news media affected the coverage of Jammu and Kashmir crisis during the communication blackout. More specifically, this study compared, through textual analysis, news coverage in different newspapers' representation of Jammu and Kashmir during the communication blackout, exploring right-leaning, left-leaning and neutral newspapers to examine how political leanings may have affected coverage of the conflict.

Lack of access to local sources, government pressures and national interests often result in preferences given to government officials as primary news sources during a conflict (McQueen, 2008; Thomas 2011). This could lead to newspapers serving as the government's mouthpiece, resulting in the underrepresentation of the local population's suffering due to the communication blackout. Therefore, my research questions address how these Indian newspapers from the political right, left and middle cover the Kashmir situation during the media blackout after the revocation of Article 370. More specifically, how did they represent the blackout, the government, protesters and the state of Jammu and Kashmir? Who were the primary news sources and how did they affect the diversity in the news coverage? And what were the patterns and themes within the coverage more broadly concerning the issues covered – or not covered – during a time when India's purported freedom of the press was under attack.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 A Background of Jammu and Kashmir

Jammu and Kashmir was one of the 565 princely states under the British Indian Empire that were given three options after gaining independence: accession to India, accession to Pakistan or independence. The third option existed only theoretically since it was not possible for any independent state to survive politically and economically surrounded by two powerful countries like India and Pakistan that were constantly in disagreement with each other over territory (Singh, 2019). Maharaja Hari Singh, the Hindu ruler of a Muslim majority state, refused to accede to either of the countries. It was not long before Pashtun tribesmen from Pakistan's Northwest Frontier Province began an offensive attack in Kashmir. In need of military assistance to fight forceful occupation of his state, Hari Singh signed a conditional Instrument of Accession<sup>5</sup> of Jammu and Kashmir to India giving the Government of India power over four areas: defense, external affairs, ancillary matters and communication (Luthra, 2016; Singh, 2019).

Part of the conflict is the fact that Jammu and Kashmir is the only Muslim majority state in India with a sizable Hindu, Sikh, and Buddhist minority population (23%). Some of the Muslims in the state want to be a part of Pakistan, others want to be independent, and the minorities in the state lean toward India (Luthra, 2016; Singh, 2019). Upon accession, the people of Kashmir were reassured that once order was restored in the state, they would be given the right to confirm the accession through a plebiscite. This stance was supported by the United Nations in 1948 (Luthra, 2016), and reassurance was repeated by the central government of India and the government of Jammu and Kashmir on various occasions. But no plebiscite was ever



held, creating distrust and bitterness among Kashmiris. Several wars have been fought between India and Pakistan, and Jammu and Kashmir remains a conflicted zone.

Pakistan's occupation of one third of Jammu and Kashmir, also known as Azad Kashmir or Pakistan administered Kashmir, and its continued assault on the state gave the Indian government an alibi to indefinitely postpone a plebiscite. To console the residents of Jammu and Kashmir, the Indian government introduced Article 370 of the Indian constitution. This granted the state the power to have their own property laws that allowed only residents of Kashmir to purchase and own land in the state and no reservation policy for the tribal communities and lower caste groups in state government jobs, education institutions and the Legislative Assembly of Jammu and Kashmir. According to Noorani (2011):

The Article 370 was incorporated into the Indian Constitution, which stipulated that the other articles of the Constitution that gave powers to the Central Government would be applied to Jammu and Kashmir only with the concurrence of the State's constituent assembly. This was a "temporary provision" in that its applicability was intended to last till the formulation and adoption of the State's constitution.

However, neither abrogation nor amendment of Article 370 were recommended as the State's constituent assembly dissolved itself on January 25, 1957. Thus, Article 370 was considered a permanent feature of the Indian constitution (Singh, 2019). However, legal pundits argued that since the provision was not added through a majority in the parliament, it was unconstitutional. Article 370 was challenged in court and was later revoked by a two-third majority of the members of the Indian Parliament on August 5, 2019. Pakistan's continued support for terrorist infiltration in the state, the Indian government's reluctance to remove troops

from the region, active armed resistance by the people of Jammu and Kashmir to Indian rule partly aided by Pakistan, and the revocation of article 370 have further destabilized Kashmir.

Journalists in Jammu and Kashmir have been struggling with the lack of press freedom in the state since the days of Maharaja Hari Singh, the ruler of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir before the independence of British India. Regimes came and went but nothing changed for the journalists working in the state apart from oppression strategies. Reshi (2015) studied the media and human rights violations from 2008 to 2011 and found that 12 journalists were killed in Jammu and Kashmir during this period and more than 55 were harassed and injured in the line of duty. The mobility of journalists in Jammu and Kashmir has been controlled either by local politicians, security forces or militant groups to prevent them from publishing stories that could expose the atrocities taking place in the state (Reshi, 2015). These restrictions faced by the press were heightened after the removal of Article 370 as the state was under complete lockdown and communication blackout (“Update on human rights violations in Indian-administered Jammu & Kashmir since August 2019,” 2019).

## **2.2 Journalistic Practices**

Journalistic practices vary considerably depending on the training and ethics endorsed by media agencies around the world. Objectivity or neutrality is highly valued in the western news media (McQueen, 2008). News sources are a key part of the journalism coverage of international conflicts as they help journalists understand the issues (Kothari, 2010). News production is influenced by how the sources report the event and who these sources are. Neutrality of media outlets can be manipulated by powerful elites and governments because of the reliance of journalists on official sources, mainstream representatives and political experts, according to McQueen (2008).

Several scholars studied practices in western news media and pointed out that journalists' dependence on official sources and experts for information often leads to distorted news. Many studies, according to McQueen (2008), found that this distortion of news often leans towards the viewpoint of ruling interests, as described in the work done by the Glasgow University Media Group in the 1970s and beyond. Opinions and lies can be communicated by sources, especially in the case of international conflicts in which the reporters and audience might not be able to distinguish fact from fiction. Thomas (2011) states that the *Columbia Journalism Review* found bias in the reporting of the Israeli Palestinian conflict by the BBC and ITV. Both failed to provide adequate historical context in their reporting, which led to distorted audience perceptions of the conflict. The review also found that Israelis were interviewed twice as often as Palestinians, which emphasized the Israeli perspective and negatively stereotyped Palestinians. Therefore, it is important to understand who is telling the story, how is it defined and what is being told (Kothari, 2010).

Other scholars highlighted that government pressure on the media often negatively influences journalistic independence and further impacts reporting (McQueen, 2008; Thomas, 2011). Furthermore, this can lead to the mass media playing an integral part in supporting government propaganda in conflicts, especially if the government in question is involved in the conflict (Lee., et. al., 2006). The mass media plays an important part in shaping the context, the audience expectations, the discourse of conflict and the production of symbolic meanings (Bandura, 2009; Scheufele, 1999). The news media's sharing of the government or military's construction of events limits public spaces for debate and dissent (McQueen, 2008, p. 52). Such selective representations privilege social actors and media organizations that sustain institutional interests over oppositional agents (Thomas, 2011, p. 524).

Some scholars also pointed out that news stories can be value-laden depending on who is the journalist and for which organization he or she is writing. Gans (1980) discusses enduring values in the news and argues that social order and ethnocentrism guide foreign news coverage, which is most prevalent in war and conflict coverage. In such coverage, western values are portrayed positively while other countries are portrayed negatively (Gans, 1980). News media often dramatize stories that are personalized to provide a human-interest angle (Boykoff & Rajan, 2007). This is often done to establish relevance of information and provide context for the reader by arranging information in a structure with central ideas, antagonists and victims (Carter, et. al., 2011). Conflicts are more complicated than the way they are portrayed through conflict narratives used by journalists. The binary reporting style of conflict reporting that uses good-and-bad or black-and-white frames have far-reaching consequences as it ignores the subtle shades that often surround the conflict (Carter, et. al. 2011).

There is a plethora of research that focuses on journalism practices in the western democracies. However, there is a gap in literature that point to journalism practices in India, particularly during a crisis. Given the diverse political climate in India, it is important to understand the role of news media in this fragile democratic system. Textual analysis provides important insight into how news stories are produced and reported, who are the sources cited and how conflict may be framed to affect public opinion. In the context of Kashmir as a case study, looking at these factors helped uncover the potential of news media in challenging the government narratives through diverse news sources during a crisis. Furthermore, it helped us understand how diverse the Indian news media is in covering sensitive issues such as the Jammu and Kashmir conflict.

### **2.3 Freedom of Press and Journalism Practices in India**

The Indian Constitution describes India as a sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic, republic granting unbiased freedom of expression (Kumar, 2017). Article 19-22 of the Indian Constitution extends freedom of expressing ideas and thoughts through different forms of media. However, being a democracy doesn't imply unconditional freedom of expression. Scholars have pointed out that freedom of press and media has been challenged by religious and cultural sensibilities in India (Yin, 2011; Kumar, 2017). Instead of providing an opportunity to bridge communal gaps, the cultural diversity in India has strengthened differences. Information is deemed sensitive because of India's religious secularism, multi-level social structure, illiteracy and poverty all of which could give rise to dissonance among particular communities as well as violence and civil unrest if the flow of information was not checked. Kumar (2017) writes that censorship gets a righteous pass through cases like leaked identity of a rape victim through the media that would bring shame on the victim and the fear of being ostracized in a conservative society. Since freedom of expression cannot exist without the ability to offend, the government laid down laws to control it. Scholars have argued that such laws are exploited by governments to prevent journalists from exposing corruption, oppression and spreading awareness among the people (Yin, 2011; Reshi 2015; Kumar, 2017). An example of such a law is the Official Secrets Act that enables the government of India to prosecute journalists who report on critical issues that involve national interests and border security (Yin, 2011). As a result, journalists as well as news corporations have been arrested on criminal defamation legislation and contempt-of-court charges.

Other scholars have primarily emphasized structural problems in the Indian news media and pointed out that accountability in India's media industry are challenged by commercialism,

cross-media ownership and concentrated political and corporate ownership that use news outlets to gather support for their own agendas. There is a substantial body of literature focusing on rising commercialism in the Indian news media and increasing preferences given to advertisement friendly content (Yin, 2011; Chadha, 2017). Media outlets often focus on appeasement of advertisers by censoring or editing content that could upset the latter (Chadha, 2017). They further limit journalists from publishing stories that could expose corruption within corporations and social issues ignored by governments (Chadha & Koliska, 2016; Chadha, 2017; Rao, 2018). Scholars also found that advertorial content isn't always labeled as such in Indian media outlets and is often published as hard news on front pages (Chadha, 2017; Rao, 2018). Past research has uncovered questionable journalism practices during elections and found that news organizations were not only willing to present political advertorials as genuine news for a price but also covertly offered publicity packages to corporate entities, representatives of political parties and candidates contesting elections, calling this phenomenon paid news (Press Council of India, 2010; Chadha, 2017; Rao 2018).

Studies have pointed out that most of the Indian newspapers are family-owned and controlled and are not listed on the stock market (Yin, 2011; Chadha, 2017; "Media Ownership Monitor India," 2019). Out of the 21 leading newspapers in India, 12 have significant business interests outside the news media industry (Jeffrey, 2000; "Media Ownership Monitor India," 2019). Partisan media outlets owned by political parties have always existed in India but Chadha (2017) highlighted that there has been an increase in number of individual politicians, their family members and proxies who have acquired both print and television media outlets. Various regional politicians as well as members of Parliament own broadcast networks and newspapers (Chadha, 2017; "Media Ownership Monitor India," 2019). Political ownership of the news media

not only thwarts transparency but also poses a threat to press freedom due to organizational pressures. Stories are censored or edited by press owners before printing to please the political party or government they support (Yin, 2011). This trend was more common in vernacular newspapers in India published in various regional Indian languages that have a huge audience due to the large number of dialects in the country. Regional newspapers have been known to support their own candidates and political ideologies (Yin, 2011). Alliances are often formed between regional press organizations and local governments for business favors and protection, resulting in the taming of watchdog journalism (Rao, 2010; Yin 2011). This leads to preventive censorship and editing stories such that newspapers act as mouthpieces of the politicians and their respective state governments.

Some scholars have studied organizational pressures and their effects on journalism practices. Chadha & Koliska (2016) found that journalists working for corporate or politically owned media outlets are often required to produce news that aligns with the respective organization's business and political interests. Goel & Gettleman (2020) highlighted such an example of organizational pressures by citing a WhatsApp message sent out by M. K. Anand, managing director of Times Network – a leading right-wing media group in India – that directed his editors to stay firmly with Prime Minister Modi's government instead of finding faults. Rao (2018) argued that growing corporate and political ownership of the Indian news media has given rise to professional insecurity and increased self-censorship, thereby rendering journalism vulnerable. Collectively, these factors have had myriad implications for Indian journalism's capacity to critically analyze business and political developments and challenge the government as sharp criticism could end careers (Yin, 2011; Chadha 2017; Goel & Gettleman, 2020). Independent regional journalists and freelancers have not been oblivious to the corporate and

political influence on media. Scholars argued that unlike journalists working for major national media outlets, freelancers and independent journalists lack adequate training and resources to do their jobs effectively and are also poorly paid (Johari, 2015; Chadha 2017). Working independently also withdraws organizational support; hence, exposing corruption can put regional journalists and freelancers at considerable risk (Chadha 2017) and many have been killed in the line of duty over the years (Yin 2011). However, fewer studies have explored the impact of these factors on diversity in news sources and news coverage in India.

Few scholars have also emphasized the effects of physical violence against journalists on press freedom in India. Watchdog journalism is a dangerous occupation in India, and several journalists have been assassinated in attempts to expose corporate scams, corrupt governments and political murders. Journalists have also been detained and tortured when they have openly opposed political leaders, right-wing groups, religious extremists and criminals (Yin, 2011; Reshi 2015). These factors have made it difficult for journalists to report freely on sensitive issues and in conflicted zones like Kashmir (Goel & Gettleman, 2020).

While past research has focused on the effect of commercialization, political ownership and censorship of news media in India on journalism practices during elections, others have compared the structural issues of the media industry in India to the media in other countries. However, these studies do not examine the impact of ownership, media censorship and lack of press freedom on accountability, transparency and diversity in news coverage of sensitive issues and conflicted zones such as Kashmir. More specifically, past research doesn't highlight news media's capacity to question oppressive government reforms and their contributions to informed citizenship in India. This is the gap that this study seeks to address.



## 2.4 Ideologies in Indian Politics

There are 2,543 registered political parties in India with ideologies varying from left-wing to right-wing (Election Commission of India, 2020). Out of these, nine have been recognized as a national party of India<sup>6</sup> including Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP), Communist Party of India (CPI) and Indian National Congress (INC). Apart from being the oldest national political parties with decades of influence, these three parties are also important to mention because of their ideologies that may have influenced news coverage. BJP's ideologies are rooted in Hindu nationalism aimed to protect what the party's supporters perceive as the original cultural identity of India as a Hindu nation (Gould, 2004). The party is identified as right-wing not only because of its Hindu nationalist ideas but also for its "neo-liberal economic ideas and reforms" (McDonnell, 2018, p. 3). Left-wing political parties, including the INC, have criticized BJP's nationalist ideologies for being communal and the opposite of Gandhi's secular teachings (Iwanek, 2018). The INC is recognized as a center to left-wing political party for its ideologies rooted in secularism and socialism (Gould, 2004; Moscovitch, 2018). The BJP claims that INC is pseudo-secular and blames the latter for vote bank politics<sup>7</sup> of Muslim appeasement (Iwanek, 2018). On the other hand, the CPI calls out INC for neglecting other marginalized groups and low-wage workers such as peasants – a term used to refer to poor farmers in India (Dandekar & Choudhury, 2010).

CPI was founded by INC members who disagreed with the socialist alliance of the middle-class with peasants and is identified as a left-wing party (Dhanagare, 1975). CPI cannot be mentioned without mentioning its far left-wing counterpart, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or the CPI(M), also known as left-wing extremists for their militarization of peasant communities to fight economic injustice. Using arms, the CPI(M) invokes fear among regional

officials and policy makers to ensure that the peasants and lower-caste<sup>8</sup> villagers are not exploited and are given fair wages (Dandekar & Choudhury, 2010). Though formed for the purpose of economic liberation and eliminating socioeconomic disparities, both CPI and CPI(M) have been condemned by the elites for becoming power-hungry political outfits. CPI has been blamed for conspiring to overthrow governments (Dhanagare, 1975) while CPI(M) has been condemned for its attacks on perceived class opponents and for carrying out political assassinations (Dandekar & Choudhury, 2010). Though each party has its own vision and mission, similarities in political ideologies enable parties in forming government coalitions to propose new policies and constitutional amendments in the Parliament of India. In such a diverse political landscape, journalism practices become more complicated as political ownership of the media is increasing and critical analyses of political developments is either absent or skewed (Chadha & Koliska, 2016; Chadha, 2017; Goel & Gettleman, 2020). Hence, this study examines how political leanings in the news media could affect the news coverage.

## **2.5 Media Coverage of the Kashmir Conflict**

The Kashmir conflict started after the freedom and partition of British India in 1947. It continued to stir debates over the years in various public spheres and became a subject of international political debate after India and Pakistan became nuclear states. Though there is a plethora of literature on the social and political climate of Kashmir, fewer studies have explored the conflict from a communication perspective and even fewer focuses on the news coverage of the conflict. Lee, et. al.'s (2006) and Saddiqua & Yousafzai's (2019) study of how Indian and Pakistani newspapers covered the Jammu and Kashmir conflict found that war journalism was the strongest frame used by both countries, with a significantly higher proportion of war journalism frames in Pakistani newspapers. The use of war journalism frames indicates

identification with the home side of the war, an action orientation, military triumphantist language, and a superficial narrative with little context or background (Lee, et. al., 2006).

Mukhopadhyay (2015) focused on the media coverage of the Arms Forces Special Power Act (AFSPA) that was implemented in Kashmir in 1990 and granted special powers to the Indian Armed Forces to maintain law and order in a zone of conflict. Any officer of the Indian Armed Forces could arrest any resident, including the members of the Legislative Assembly of Kashmir without an arrest warrant. This power granted to the Indian Armed Forces resulted in mass detentions, torture, missing people and other human rights violations. She found that understanding the ethnic identities of the people involved in the crisis and sustained coverage of the Kashmir conflict in terms of the laws imposed – or revoked in the case Article 370 – can act as a catalyst to facilitate a comprehensive discussion of all stakeholders effected by the conflict. She examined the meaning of *azadi* (freedom) and its interpretations used by Kashmiri activists and Indian media as carriers of Indian administrative ideology.

Reshi (2015) studied the impact of human rights violation on journalists in Jammu and Kashmir. She found that whenever stone pelting and hostilities between protesters and security forces escalate, the Indian Armed Forces would impose curfews in parts of Jammu and Kashmir. These curfews are stay at home orders that restrict free movement of the residents and journalists, paralyzing the local media. Various reporters have been harassed, tortured and killed in attempts to dig out stories in Jammu and Kashmir (“Update on human rights violations in Indian-administered Jammu & Kashmir since August 2019,” 2019). Press freedom in the state has been low since the time of Maharaja Hari Singh, who put curbs on the press in 1932, followed by Sheikh Abdulla – the chief minister of the state – who imposed severe restrictions on the press in 1951 (Reshi, 2015). The journalists in the state have suffered from two ends.

Besides the administration, journalists in Kashmir faced violence from radical militant groups that attacked their offices and homes and even killed them in order to stop the circulation of newspapers (Reshi, 2015).

Literature on the news coverage of the Jammu and Kashmir conflict has been limited so far. Scholars have compared coverage of the conflict in Indian newspapers to Pakistani newspapers, news coverage of AFSPA and challenges faced by journalists in covering the Jammu and Kashmir conflict. However, these studies don't facilitate an understanding of the news media's coverage of the Jammu and Kashmir conflict during the communication shutdown. The revocation of Article 370 in the state of Jammu & Kashmir is a major chapter in the on-going conflict but it also has much to teach us about how journalism functions under a restrictive government that has facilitated a communication shutdown. The recent decline in the freedom of press and the human rights violations in Jammu and Kashmir raise questions about the major news media discourses on the events unfolding in the state. Studying the news coverage of the conflict is important, as the news is one of the major platforms for circulation of information (Bandura, 2009). Citizens, activists, opinion leaders and governments use the news to form public perceptions about issues and take a stand or act on these perceptions (Scheufele, 1999). Thus, an examination of the news coverage of Jammu and Kashmir provided by major Indian newspapers during the communication shutdown in Kashmir helps in understanding the Indian news media's role in its claimed democracy and its potential in challenging the Hindu nationalist government's narratives. Furthermore, it helps in understanding how the recent developments in Jammu and Kashmir were presented to the citizens of India as well as how journalists navigated the shutdown and any differences in coverage that might have been the result of the press's ideological stance. Therefore, this study investigated media coverage of the Jammu and Kashmir

conflict after the revocation of Article 360, comparing how Indian newspapers from different ideological perspectives covered Jammu and Kashmir during the communication blackout.

### 3 METHOD

As the fourth pillar of democracy, the news media plays an essential role in decentralizing power by maintaining transparency, presenting diverse voices and holding governments accountable. Therefore my research questions are: how did Indian newspapers from the political right, left and middle cover the Kashmir situation during the media blackout after the revocation of Article 370? More specifically, how did they represent the blackout, the government, protesters and the state of Jammu and Kashmir? In answering these questions, this study also looks at who were the primary news sources? And what were the patterns and themes within the coverage more broadly, and whether the news supported or challenged the Hindu nationalist government. This will enable an understanding of how political leanings in the news media could shape the stories told by journalists in the case of sensitive issues and conflicted zones like Jammu and Kashmir. It also uncovers whether newspapers were able to critically analyze the developments in Kashmir and if they were serving as the government's mouthpiece. Articles from three mainstream English-language newspapers -- the Hindu, which is left-leaning, the Pioneer, which is right leaning, and TOI, which is considered more neutral -- were analyzed using the constant comparative method.

The TOI was founded in 1838 by Bennett, Coleman & Co. Ltd., commonly known as The Times Group ("Media Ownership Monitor India," 2019). The Jain family – one of the oldest business groups in India – owns the newspaper, and Indu Jain is the current chairwoman and CEO of Bennett, Coleman & Co. Ltd. ("Media Ownership Monitor India," 2019). TOI is the most-circulated English-language newspaper in the world and has been admired for its journalistic quality and impartiality (O'Brochta, 2019). However, in their study of the media framing of images of Muslims, Narayana & Kapur (2016) found that out of the five newspaper –

including the Hindu, Indian Express, the Statesman and Hindustan Times – TOI ranked third in the number of unfavorable and stereotypical references of Muslims after the Statesman and Hindustan Times. The Hindu had the least number of unfavorable and stereotypical references of Muslims among the five newspapers. TOI was ranked second in the number of progressive and favorable references of Muslims after the Hindu (Narayana & Kapur, 2016).

The Hindu was founded in 1878 by G. Subramania Iyer – a social reformer who participated in Indian Independence along with the Indian National Congress. It is currently owned by the Hindu Group and Kasturi and Sons Ltd. (“Media Ownership Monitor India,” 2019). N. Ram, the chairman of Kasturi and Sons and managing director of the Hindu Group, has a close affiliation to the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and was the vice president of its student chapter (Sridhar, 2000). Though there is no scholarly research that indicates the Hindu’s support of CPI(M) and their ideologies, readers have blamed N. Ram’s CPI(M) bias to be the reason for decline in readership (Thakur, 2013). In addition, Narayana & Kapur’s (2016) findings indicate that the Hindu is a left-wing newspaper.

The Pioneer was started in 1865 by George Allen, an English businessman (Gupta, 1977). The newspaper is now owned by Sanchar Holdings, ICICI Bank, IDBI Bank, Rainbow Productions and Starlink Group (Rathore, 2011). Chandan Mitra, the editor-in-chief and one of the directors of Sanchar Holdings, was an elected Rajya Sabha (Upper House of the Indian Parliament) member from BJP. The Pioneer is considered a right-wing newspaper due to the editor-in-chief’s past political affiliations (Thakur, 2013). Since the Pioneer shareholders are industrialists and corporate banks, their interest in the neoliberal policies of the BJP could influence news coverage of Kashmir.

All three chosen newspapers are leading English-language dailies in India that have a wide appeal, particularly among the educated and the young. They also have the potential to influence the readers and government policies. The average qualifying sales of TOI and the Hindu for the year 2018 were 2,826,164 and 1,397,944 respectively (“Highest Circulated amongst ABC Member Publications across languages,” 2019). Though information regarding the average qualifying sales for the Pioneer was not available, it is published in 8 states and is circulated throughout India (Gupta, 1977). The vast readership of these newspapers not only gives them a pivotal role in democracy, but their ideological slant also makes them diverse and sometimes discrepant sources of information that can fuel disharmony among the readers.

These news sources ensured the availability of sufficient news coverage comprising perspectives, narratives and frames used to examine coverage of the situation in Jammu and Kashmir during the communication shutdown. News articles published from August 5 to August 17, 2019, that focus on the coverage of Jammu and Kashmir after the revocation of Article 370 provided insight into how Jammu and Kashmir was represented by the Indian news media while the communication services in the state were shut down. It also reflected how the marginalized communities of Jammu and Kashmir were represented in a state of conflict. The above time period was selected to focus on the news coverage of Jammu and Kashmir during complete communication shutdown that began on August 5, 2019 and ended on August 17, 2019. Though the Internet and mobile services remained shut in the state, landline phones were restored in several regions of Jammu and Kashmir, allowing limited access to communication services. Articles published in all three newspapers from August 5, 2019 to August 17, 2019, were downloaded from Factiva using the location filter and searching Jammu and Kashmir. In all, 39



articles within the three newspapers included the location Jammu and Kashmir. Of that number, 36 articles were related to the abrogation of Article 370.

The newspaper articles were analyzed using the constant comparative methods (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), and the text was coded for patterns and themes that emerge after repetitive comparison. This analysis helped in uncovering themes and patterns in Indian media coverage of Jammu and Kashmir during the communication blackout. Additionally, it also allowed for the systematic generation of theory as categories emerge. Coding of emerging themes and patterns was done jointly with theoretical sampling of the compiled articles (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). One of the advantages of constant comparative methods is that it enables the generation of multiple categories, properties and arguments about a general problem. Glaser & Strauss (1967) defined the four stages of constant comparative method as: (1) comparing examples of each category, (2) integrating themes and properties, (3) reduction of interrelated themes and properties and (4) writing major themes (pp. 105-113). The purpose of using a deductive approach was to explore themes that emerge from the text rather than relying on predetermined themes.

#### 4 FINDINGS

Stories in the Pioneer during the communication blackout in Jammu and Kashmir were consistent with its right-leaning ideologies and supported the Hindu nationalist central government. However, articles in TOI didn't fall in line with its neutral stance reputation and showed a bias toward the central government. On the other hand, the Hindu, a left-leaning paper, was critical of the central government and its decision to remove Article 370. The Pioneer and TOI focused on the threat to law and order. Their stories seemed to resonate with the central government's security rationale and highlighted that security restrictions have been implemented to save Jammu and Kashmir and India from Pakistan-based terrorist.

The Pioneer and TOI published several stories that explained why a security clampdown in the state was necessary to avoid terrorist attacks and escalation into lawlessness and chaos. Both papers quoted central government sources and official sources to highlight that Jammu and Kashmir was a potential target of terror groups in Pakistan and their separatist agents working in the state. Stories in the Pioneer and TOI also quoted officers of security forces who justified the communication blackout in Jammu and Kashmir and said that telephone lines and mobile services could be used to mislead the youth and ignite violent protests in the state. Similarly, deployment of additional troops, restriction on movement and mass arrests within the state were deemed necessary to prevent protesters from pelting stones at, and otherwise clashing with, the security forces and "disrupting peace."

The Pioneer and TOI projected the central government's enthusiasm for positive change and development in Jammu and Kashmir and supported the central government's narratives, quoting several government sources. Stories in both the newspapers also mentioned that several people in the state were celebrating the abrogation of Article 370. Stories published by the

Pioneer and TOI seemed to echo the government's sentiments and focused on the state returning to normal despite the security clampdown and communication lockdown. Both the newspapers quoted several security officers who said that the situation in the state was peaceful and not major incidents had taken place.

All three newspapers mentioned that the security clampdown has resulted in the displacement of hundreds of migrant laborers who worked in Jammu and Kashmir. TOI and the Hindu highlighted that the situation on the ground has deteriorated in Jammu and Kashmir after the security clampdown and communication blackout. Though TOI was not critical of the central government, it did point out that the residents of Jammu and Kashmir were uncertain and afraid. TOI also quoted a few residents of Jammu and Kashmir but also undercut their views by quoting security officers in their stories. The Hindu was more critical of the central government and highlighted the negative effects of the security clampdown and communication blackout. It covered the situation in Jammu and Kashmir mostly through the perspectives of the residents with considerably fewer government sources as compared to the Pioneer and TOI. Most of the stories told personal accounts of people living in Jammu and Kashmir and what they felt about the abrogation of Article 370 and the effects of the security lockdown on their lives. The sources quoted by the Hindu were also more diverse and balanced out positive views with negative views.

An analysis of the coverage of the situation in Jammu and Kashmir during the communication blackout in the three newspapers found five major themes: threat to law and order; support for central government; reassurances; situation under security clampdown and voices of residents, along with several subthemes, as noted below.

## 4.1 Threat to Law and Order

### *4.1.1 Security Arrangements in the State*

Stories in the Pioneer and TOI placed the threat to law and order within a nationalized context. For example, on August 7, the Pioneer published an article about the compromised external and internal security situation in Jammu and Kashmir, highlighting that the National Security Advisor (NSA), Ajit Doval, had met with the then governor of Jammu and Kashmir, Satya Pal Malik, to discuss the need to ensure “safety of the general public” and that the security forces should remain “alert and prepared” for any unforeseen situation (“Doval meets J&K Governor, discusses security situation,” 2019). The story also highlighted the security arrangements being made to ensure “operational readiness” to deal with contingencies that could adversely affect the security situations in the state.

Stories in the Pioneer cited government sources and official sources who defended the security clampdown and communication blackout in the state. Pointing to the communication blackout, an article quoted Commander in Chief of the Indian army’s Northern Region who said that social media and the internet could be used to misinform people and launch violent campaigns in Kashmir (“Doval meets J&K Governor, discusses security situation,” 2019). The articles emphasized in detail the security arrangements being made in the state to ensure law and order after the Abrogation of Article 370 and communication clampdown in the state. These included details about counter terrorism operations and deploying additional troops in more sensitive areas that are vulnerable to unrest and terrorist attacks:

Giving details of security of the hinterland, it was highlighted that counter terrorism and law & order grids had been strengthened. The security forces are suitably deployed to guard important Vulnerable Points/ Areas, prepared for crowd control, emerging law & order situations, as also to conduct effective counter terrorist operations.

The Pioneer also focused on the Independence Day celebrations and the special security arrangements made to ensure that everything goes smoothly. A story published on August 15, mentioned that security forces have been put on high alert to ensure “peaceful” and “incident-free celebrations” of the 73rd Indian Independence Day in Jammu and Kashmir (“Doval meets J&K Governor, discusses security situation,” 2019). The article emphasized the special Independence Day security measures that were introduced and mentioned extra check points established by the security forces, as well as an advisory issued by the Jammu and Kashmir police that asked people to not hesitate in disclosing their identity if requested by a security personnel and inform police if they see any suspicious individual or activity. There were no stories in the Pioneer that covered the local tenor and reaction of people to additional security restrictions after the abrogation of Article 370 and during the Independence Day celebrations in Jammu and Kashmir.

Like the Pioneer, TOI also emphasized the threat to law and order angle in its news coverage of Jammu and Kashmir from a nationalist perspective. TOI described the security arrangements that were made in the state to prevent disturbances and explained why the security forces were on high alert. Several articles mentioned how Indian intelligence agencies had warned security forces in Jammu and Kashmir about the possibility of terror activities backed by Pakistan to boost the morale of separatists in the state after the abrogation of Article 370 (Pandit, 2019b). Several articles published in the TOI highlighted how the Indian army was ready to deal with any form of strikes by the “enemy” (“Restrictions will be eased after August 15: J&K Governor,” 2019). One of the articles also mentioned that the security forces kept a keen watch on the region through drones (“J&K tense as troops arrive, outstation students asked to leave,” 2019). It further stated that additional troops were deployed in sensitive regions like Kishtwar,

Bhaderwah, Banihal, Doda and Ramban that were more prone to protests and stone pelting. In addition to that, various articles mentioned tightened-security across Indo-Pakistan border regions like Poonch and Rajouri (“J&K tense as troops arrive, outstation students asked to leave,” 2019; Pandit, 2019b).

Like the Pioneer, TOI also quoted central government sources and official sources clarifying, if not defending, why communication channels were blocked within the state. An article dedicated to the promises made by the governor of Jammu and Kashmir, Satya Pal Malik, on Independence Day, quoted the governor saying that telephones and the internet were being used as “weapons to misguide and mobilize the youth” and this instrument should not be given to the “enemy until things settle down” (“Restrictions will be eased after August 15: J&K Governor,” 2019). The article provided no critique either from opposition leaders or the reporting journalist of the governor’s justification of the communication blackout.

#### ***4.1.2 Praises for Security Forces***

Stories in the Pioneer were appreciative of the efforts of the security forces and often quoted officers who would praise the efforts of the Indian army in maintaining peace within the region. General Officer Commanding (GOC) in Chief of the Northern Command, Lieutenant General Ranbir Singh, was quoted saying that the Indian army has given a “befitting response, thwarting Pakistan’s nefarious designs of causing disturbances in our country” (“Doval meets J&K Governor, discusses security situation,” 2019). Another article in the covered Governor Malik’s Independence Day speech in which he stated that the zero-tolerance approach of security personnel towards Kashmiri militants who “attack the security forces at the behest of their handlers across the border” has been effective in dealing with cross-border infiltration from

Pakistan. The articles focused on how these arrangements had borne positive results in maintaining peace. Kandhari, (2019b) from the Pioneer, reported:

The Governor said in the recent months the recruitment of new militants has witnessed a downward trend, while stone-pelting incidents after the Friday prayers have all but ended. The misguided youth are returning to the mainstream.

NSA Doval was also quoted in the Pioneer praising the efforts of the security forces calling the Jammu and Kashmir Police Force “one of the best police forces” that has a special place in India (“Doval visits J&K’s hotbed of terrorism, breaks bread with locals,” 2019; Kandhari, 2019c). He also empathized with the officers as they put themselves at risk for the country and said that he understood the sacrifice as he himself has been part of the security set-up for the past 52 years. There were no comments from local residents and politicians regarding the security arrangements and restrictions in the state.

#### ***4.1.3 Militancy and Terrorism***

The Pioneer also backed the central government’s security rationale and detailed the “prevailing external and internal security situation,” specifying why the security forces were more vigilant in Jammu and Kashmir (“Doval meets J&K Governor, discusses security situation,” 2019; Kandhari, 2019e). The articles noted how Pakistan has intensified its terror crusade by initiating ceasefire violations, activating terrorist launch pads and pushing infiltrators across the Line of Control – a de facto border patrolled by the Indian army and Pakistani army. Security officers were warning the people not to “fall prey to the enemy’s evil design to poison their minds with incessant propaganda” and urged the residents of Kashmir to not spread rumors and stop their acquaintances from participating in rumormongering (“Doval meets J&K Governor, discusses security situation,” 2019). Articles in the Pioneer also highlighted that the Indian army has warned that those who plan to disrupt the peace “will be dealt with firmly”

(“Doval meets J&K Governor, discusses security situation,” 2019). The articles cited numerous sources like the governor, NSA and GOC Northern Command in order to justify the additional deployment of Indian troops and the security clampdown. These official sources mentioned how extremists aided by terrorist groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammad, Hizbul Mujahidden and others could attack Kashmir to create an atmosphere of fear (Kandhari, 2019a). The situation after lockdown and the communication blackout was reported in a dismissal manner in the Pioneer without drawing attention to the effects of these restrictions.

Like the Pioneer, stories in TOI often cited terrorism and a separatist agenda for the sudden increase in the deployment of troops in the state. A report in TOI focused exclusively on the information provided by the “official sources,” stating that a group of seven terrorists associated with Jaiesh-e-Mohammed (JeM) – a terrorist group – have crossed into Jammu and Kashmir to execute a “massive terror attack on Eid or ahead of Independence Day” celebrations (Singh & Dua, 2019a). The story highlighted details of the threat and stated:

Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) has given a go ahead to the banned terror group JeM - headed by globally designated terrorist Masood Azhar - to cause as many casualties as they can, without worrying about the "collateral damage." Security officials suspect that the terror group may attack a mosque so that Pakistan is able to pin the blame on India. The inputs about Pakistan’s sponsored attack have come six days after India reorganized and converted Jammu and Kashmir state into union territory.

Other articles focused on how the presence of the Indian army would preempt the attempts of separatist leaders to cause trouble and prevent infiltrators to cross the border into Kashmir (“J&K tense as troops arrive, outstation students asked to leave,” 2019; Pandit, 2019b).



#### *4.1.4 Detaining Politicians and Separatists*

Stories in the Pioneer were brief and factual about mass arrests and local political leaders who were detained by the central government in order to suppress opposition and protests to abrogation of Article 370. The articles mentioned that former Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti and Kashmir opposition party National Conference's leader Omar Abdullah were taken into preventive custody ("Doval visits J&K's hotbed of terrorism, breaks bread with locals," 2019). However, the news coverage of the detentions of political leaders didn't challenge the central government or the undemocratic ways through which Article 370 was removed.

One of the stories in the Pioneer mentioned that opposition leader Ghulam Nabi Azad had arrived in Srinagar, the former capital of Jammu and Kashmir, to attend a party meeting and was stopped from stepping outside the airport and asked to return to New Delhi (Kandhari, 2019c). The article also mentioned the names of other political leaders from the Indian National Congress and BJP who were detained to "prevent any flare up" but didn't provide further details (Kandhari, 2019c). These incidents were mentioned in passing, without drawing any attention to the lack of freedom of expression and freedom of movement of politicians who represent the people. On the contrary, it focused on security reasons for which these political leaders were detained.

Other stories in the Pioneer that mentioned detention of Kashmiri residents labeled them all as "pro-Pakistan separatists," "terrorists" or "trouble makers" without distinguishing the political leaders who protested against the restrictions and undemocratic abrogation of Article 370 by the central government. Stories in the Pioneer mentioned the transfer of "70 terrorists and hardcore pro-Pakistani separatists" to a jail in Agra, a city in North India (Kandhari, 2019c). The newspaper didn't mention any of the names of those detained or transferred.

Though TOI didn't label those who were detained, like the Pioneer, it also mentioned house arrests of political leaders in passing. One article did vaguely mention that stepping up security could be a political response and stated:

The massive induction of paramilitary troops and stepped-up action against infiltration attempts seem a political and security response ahead of the Article 370 decision (Pandit and Jain, 2019a). However, no further details were provided regarding these speculations. The story in TOI mentioned a Tweet by Omar Abdullah, president of the National Conference party, stating that he was being placed under house arrest. However, the emphasis of the article was on Governor Malik's claims that nothing will happen "secretly", and that the Parliament will be in session to discuss the matter (Pandit & Jain, 2019a).

#### ***4.1.5 Protests***

Several protests erupted in Jammu and Kashmir during the communication blackout and were covered by all three newspapers. However, none of the newspapers provided a detailed account of the protests, who the protesters were, how they were able to gather together with no internet, mobile and telephone services in the state and why they were protesting the abrogation of Article 370. All three newspapers mentioned the protests in passing. All of the sources who shared information about the protests in the stories published by the Pioneer and TOI were either official sources or political leaders. None of the newspapers cited any local resident in their coverage of protests in Jammu and Kashmir.

Stories in the Pioneer mostly focused on the return of normalcy in the state. However, two of the stories briefly mentioned protests that broke out in the Kargil district – now a part of Union Territory Ladakh (Kandhari, 2019c). One story mentioned that a large protest broke out in the region against the abrogation of Article 370. Local residents participated in the protests under

the banner of Joint Action Committee. A member of the Nation Conference Party, Qamar Ali Akhoun, was quoted saying that they want a united state that includes Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh, along with the restoration of Article 370. Other than this brief mention of protests, the Pioneer maintained that the situation in the state remained peaceful. The story ended with the newspaper mentioning that the inspector general of police for Jammu Zone, Mukesh Singh, had visited the border districts in Jammu region to assess the security situation. But no other details were divulged. Another story dedicated to Independence Day celebrations briefly mentioned that “anti-India” protesters were seen shouting slogans in the Poonch area of Jammu region (“Doval meets J&K Governor, discusses security situation,” 2019). The major focus of the story was the efficiency of security forces in dealing with these “anti-India” elements and maintaining law and order. The story also quoted the director general of police who said that there were only small-scale local incidents that were “contained” locally. He added that there had been “no major injuries” but a “few pellet gun injuries,” and the endeavor of the police is to ensure no civil casualty. No other details were shared in the article. Mostly, stories in the Pioneer seemed to dismiss the protests as unimportant and of no real consequence.

The number of stories in TOI that mentioned protests in Jammu and Kashmir was more than in the Pioneer, but they also lacked details about the protests. TOI also highlighted that all protests were dealt with and there were no casualties. Stories in TOI reported that protests broke out ahead of Eid after the Friday prayers, when protestors shouted slogans against India and in favor of Pakistan and also praised the slain Al Qaida leader of the Srinagar region, Zakir Musa (Singh et. al., 2019). There were also reports of a peaceful march that protested against the abrogation of Article 370 but was dispersed when police arrived (Singh & Dua, 2019c). Other protests that led to stone pelting in Srinagar were also mentioned without any further details

(Pandit & Jain, 2019b). One of the major protests was reported by TOI at Soura region, close to Srinagar, where 1,500 people clashed with security forces after Friday prayers (Singh & Dua, 2019d). TOI briefly challenged the official's statements and said that pump action guns were fired to disperse the crowd and stated that police officials denied that any such action was required (Singh & Dua, 2019d). However, most of the stories emphasized that the security forces were able to manage the protests led by "radical separatists" without any casualties and only "minor injuries." None of the stories mentioned any details about the protests or those who were rushed to the hospitals.

Only three stories in the Hindu mentioned protests in Jammu and Kashmir after the abrogation of Article 370. Though the Hindu didn't interview any protesters or specify their reasons for protesting the abrogation of Article 370, it provided more information as compared to the Pioneer and TOI. However, stories in the Hindu didn't focus on the efficiency of security forces in handling the protests. Though there were only a few statements mentioned about the protests, stories in the Hindu highlighted that "emotions were running high" and an angry mob gathered on a bridge in Srinagar and smashed the vehicles and tried to damage the camera of a television channel (Singh, 2019). Another story just mentioned in a brief statement that a protest in the Kargil region of Ladakh broke out after the division of Jammu and Kashmir into two Union Territories (Nath, 2019d). One story in the Hindu contradicted the information published in TOI regarding the protests in the Soura region, close to Srinagar. The story mentioned that close to 4,000 people clashed with security forces for hours (Ashiq, 2019a), while TOI mentioned the number of protesters who clashed with the security forces was 1,500 (Singh & Dua, 2019d). One of the stories in the Hindu also reported that mosques in the region were organizing people and have passed a resolution against the dilution of Article 370 (Ashiq,

2019a). The story mentioned that a policeman was beaten up by the mob in the Srinagar region and that the Indian army has warned the mosques against political sermons. Stories in the Hindu not only provided more information about the protests than the Pioneer and TOI, they also emphasized the emotions of the protesters rather than dismissing them.

## **4.2 Support for Central Government**

### ***4.2.1 Optimistic Future***

Stories in the Pioneer not only supported the government's position of tight security arrangements in the state but also highlighted how the abrogation of Article 370 will benefit the state in the future. The Pioneer devoted a story to Governor Malik's Independence Day speech and wrote:

Governor Satya Pal Malik in his Independence Day address said the changes brought out by the Union Government are not just historic but have opened a new vista of development for the people of Jammu & Kashmir and the people of Ladakh (New challenges will help J&K, Ladakh grow: Guv," 2019).

Quoting the governor, the story mentioned how the people of Jammu and Kashmir have been "distracted" from major issues like economic development, peace and prosperity. The governor also mentioned that after removing Article 370, the focus would be good governance, enhancing job opportunities and creating a sense of oneness and belonging (New challenges will help J&K, Ladakh grow: Guv," 2019). He also promised that the identities of people would not be threatened, and everyone will be allowed to prosper. He mentioned that tribes in the region that were underrepresented due to Article 370 would have proper representation, the "long pending demands of people of Ladakh will also be fulfilled" and their demands will be heard. In another bold statement he promised the return of the Kashmiri Pandits – a native Kashmiri community of Hindu priests who were persecuted and forced to leave by religious extremists and militant

organizations during the ethnic cleansing of Jammu and Kashmir in 1989 and 1990. The celebratory tone of the story not only drives the focus away from the suffering of the people under security lockdown and communication blackout but also allowed the government's perspectives to remain unchallenged with the lack of voices of the opposition party, activists and people of the region. Though the story detailed the promises made by the central government to the people of Jammu and Kashmir after the abrogation of Article 370, it was not the only story that highlighted the sense of victory among those who supported the change.

Another story in the Pioneer focused on the government's prospective business plans for Jammu and Kashmir. The story mentioned that the principal secretary of the Industry & Commerce and Tourism Department, Navin Choudhary, had called a press conference to announce that the state had invited businessmen and big investors for the "Investors' Summit" that was scheduled for October 2019 ("First Investors' Summit in J&K from Oct 12," 2019). Mr. Choudhary was quoted as saying that the summit was an opportunity to attract investment and showcase Jammu and Kashmir as a "favorable investment destination." He also spoke about various sectors that were identified as key business opportunities and would be pitched to investors, including horticulture and post-harvest technologies, IT, film industry, handloom and handicrafts, manufacturing, agro and food processing, education, health and pharmaceuticals. He promised that steps were being taken in New Delhi to ensure huge participation in the summit. The story also boasted that various roadshows were being planned in different Indian states as well as abroad to attract investors for the development of business opportunities in Jammu and Kashmir. In addition to this, the story mentioned that the government had hired Ernst and Young as the knowledge partner and PricewaterhouseCoopers as the media management partner. The story further highlighted the details of the roadshows and stated:

The objective of holding these roadshows is to sensitize the potential investors regarding the opportunities available as well as support and incentives to be provided by the State Government. Though the stories focused a lot on future plans, there were no comments from Kashmiri businessmen who had been working in the state as they appear not to have been invited to the press conference. The story ended by mentioning in detail the delegates in attendance, including security officials and ministers who oversaw trade, commerce and industrial development in Jammu and Kashmir. The lack of representation of local businessmen and use of words like “positive message to big investors,” “opportunities available” and “favorable investment destination” not only signify solidarity with the government and support for their development rationale but also point to the lack of diversity in the press conference. However, the Pioneer doesn’t draw attention to any of these facts.

Like the Pioneer, TOI also wrote about the prospective business development in Jammu and Kashmir after the removal of Article 370. Also, out of the three newspapers, TOI was the only newspaper to dedicate a story to the otherwise ignored Ladakh region of Jammu and Kashmir – now a separate Union Territory. The story highlighted the central government’s promise of developing Ladakh into the mainstream and developing business opportunities in the region. Pandit (2019) wrote:

The Centre’s promise of development in Ladakh in its new status of Union territory separate from the state of Jammu and Kashmir is expected to be showcased at a national festival that will bring together tribal artisans from across 20 states and Union territories to Leh on Saturday.

The story cited Home Minister Shah’s promise of economically strengthening tribal communities through outreach programs that will showcase the skills and specialties of tribal people. It was also stated that appointing the Ministry of Tribal Affairs in Ladakh was the first step in this direction. This story was also described from the point-of-view of the central government and

official sources, like the managing director of the Tribal Marketing Federation, Pravir Krishna. Mr. Krishna said that Ladakh would host a tribal festival to show its potential and will reach out to artisans and brand their handlooms as a “product of Ladakh” that will be sold through E-commerce to buyers across 190 countries. The story was optimistic about the potential of Ladakh and its tribal communities. However, like the celebratory story in the Pioneer, no local businessmen or residents were cited in the article, and government perspectives dominated the story.

#### **4.2.2 Celebration**

The stories in TOI covered the celebrations in parts of Jammu and Kashmir. Like the Pioneer, TOI also relied on government sources and BJP workers for information. Comments from opposition parties in Jammu and Kashmir and local residents were absent. A story in TOI reported that people in Jammu were “jubilant” after the revocation of Article 370 and came out on the streets to celebrate despite curfews and restrictions (Khajuria, 2019c). Reports also mentioned how members of Shiv Sena party and BJP led processions of people dancing to the beat of drums in celebration. The story also highlighted that Kashmiri Pandits across the state have been celebrating. Khajuria (2019c) reported:

Many people from random pockets of the winter capital took to the streets despite restriction of the movement and assembly of people under Section 144 of CrPC, shouting slogans like “Modi-Modi”, “Mota Bhai Zindabad” (Long live Brother Modi).

The story quoted the BJP party president of Jammu region, Mr. Ravinder Raina, who claimed that the abrogation of Article 370 is a historic decision in the interest of the nation. He also said that the people of Jammu are with Prime Minister Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah. However, there was no comment from Kashmiri activists or political leaders of opposition parties that critiqued the celebratory narratives of the central government and BJP.



### 4.3 Reassurances

#### 4.3.1 *Confidence Building*

Stories published by the Pioneer focused on the government's attempts to reassure the residents of Jammu and Kashmir and quoted officials and government sources. One of the articles described NSA Ajit Doval's visit to regions in Kashmir that are "hotbeds of terrorism," such as Shopian, where he is said to have chatted with the residents and broke bread with them ("Doval visits J&K's hotbed of terrorism, breaks bread with locals," 2019). The story drew attention to NSA Doval's bravery and his desire to help as he visited a sensitive zone in Jammu and Kashmir during the time of grave conflict. He was quoted asking the local residents about the situation in their region and promising them that everything will get back to normal. The article also casts the central government in a favorable light as they have sent their chief security advisor to reassure the people of Jammu and Kashmir. The story quoted Doval as he spoke to local residents:

"Everything will be alright. Everyone should live peacefully. Whatever the Almighty does is good. Your safety and security is our responsibility. We are thinking about the growth and welfare of your generations," Doval told the Shopian locals. Doval was seen explaining to the people how the new set-up would ease people's lives by improving health facilities and education. "The Government will make every effort to better the education of the children in the valley. It might not be as good as the private institutes, but you'll definitely see an improvement," he told the people.

The story published in the Pioneer draws attention to the government's efforts to make lives better for those who reside in Jammu and Kashmir. It also mentioned that Doval's interaction with residents was part of a confidence building measure initiated by the government. It is further stated that Doval had also given directions to ensure that the people of Jammu and

Kashmir get essential supplies like food and emergency services so that they don't face any hardship.

However, none of the local residents whom Doval talked to were included in the news coverage, and their responses to Doval's questions were also missing from the story. Instead, the story focuses on the NSA's meetings with the director general of police in Shopian, Dilbag Singh, and the Jammu and Kashmir police to boost their morale and sympathize with the security forces who risk their lives defending the residents of Kashmir ("Doval visits J&K's hotbed of terrorism, breaks bread with locals," 2019).

#### ***4.3.2 Return to Normalcy***

Stories in the Pioneer devoted certain paragraphs to the central government's perspective on the security clampdown and mentioned that the situation in Jammu and Kashmir was returning to normal. Phrases like "no major incidents," "overall situation remained peaceful barring few minor incidents," "peaceful atmosphere amid tight security arrangements" were used to describe the situation on the ground ("Doval meets J&K Governor, discusses security situation," 2019; Kandhari, 2019a; Kandhari, 2019c). Stories in the Pioneer showcased the return of normalcy in the state by pointing out a few restrictions that were eased during Eid, one of the major Muslim festivals, and Independence Day celebrations, including relaxing curfew in order to allow people to gather and pray at mosques, opening shops, unblocking national highways and the Srinagar airport ("Doval meets J&K Governor, discusses security situation," 2019). A lot of coverage was devoted to peaceful Independence Day celebrations, hoisting Tricolors in Srinagar and Governor Malik's speech on the occasion (Kandhari, 2019b). Other stories mentioned that since the state is peaceful, the government has decided to reopen schools and restore landlines within the state in a phased manner after reviewing the threat posed by terrorist organizations to

misuse telephones and mobile connectivity (Kandhari, 2019a). None of the articles in the Pioneer cited local residents to describe the situation on the ground.

Like the Pioneer, TOI also cited official sources and emphasized that the situation in Jammu and Kashmir was getting better. Close to Eid and Independence Day, stories in TOI quoted official sources like the additional director general of police, SJM Gilani, and the director general of police, Dilbag Singh, who stated that things were getting “back to normal” in Jammu and Kashmir and restriction on foot and vehicular movement was being eased (Pandit & Jain, 2019b; Singh & Dua, 2019b; Khajuria, 2019a). Though these articles mentioned that Eid was a little subdued in some parts of the state, one of the articles pointed out that the streets in Srinagar were crowded once again and people were shopping for the festivals, and that the police officers felt optimistic since Eid had not been celebrated in some of the areas since 2016 due to terrorist activities (Singh et. al., 2019). The article also mentioned that the hospitals in Srinagar were functioning efficiently without any complication and reported that patients praised the administration of the hospitals. However, none of the patients were interviewed. The story pointed out that the reopening of schools and availability of the internet in banks starting August 11, was considered a major achievement by the administration of the state (Singh, et. al., 2019). Little attention was given to the fact that the internet, telephone or mobile services remained blocked for citizens.

Though the stories talked about normalcy returning to Jammu and Kashmir, they didn't entirely rely on the government sources. As noted previously some of the stories mentioned in TOI did quote local residents who were unhappy about the removal of Article 370, security lockdown and communication blackout. But the focus of the stories was the peaceful conduct of Eid prayers under the watch of security personnel and the emphasis was on the central

government's return of normalcy perspective. Though two of the stories mentioned that Eid in Srinagar was less eventful than the previous years, they painted an optimistic picture by describing residents of the city shopping for food, ATMs regularly replenished with cash, businessmen selling their goods, "happy little girls in ponytails and long embroidered gowns" who provided distraction from the security personnel, and people smiling at each other after four days of standstill (Singh & Dua, 2019b; Singh & Dua, 2019c; Singh & Dua, 2019d). Both the stories ended with Director General of Police Dilbag Singh's statement that everything was "by and large peaceful on the first Friday after the abrogation of Article 370."

#### **4.4 Situation under Security Clampdown**

##### ***4.4.1 Displacement of Migrant Workers***

All three newspapers wrote stories about the displacement of migrant workers in Jammu and Kashmir due to security restrictions. A story in the Pioneer described the plight of migrant workers who earned their living in Jammu and Kashmir and were asked to leave the state before tensions escalate (Kandhari, 2019e). The story quoted several laborers who had to leave overnight without enough money to even purchase tickets to return home. These migrant workers were afraid for their lives and eager to leave Jammu and Kashmir but had to pay extra fares to make it to the railway stations. Some of them had to stay behind to get payment from their employers and were afraid that they would be stuck due to curfews. The article also mentioned that some of these workers were "exhausted and penniless in the absence of help extended by the state government" (Kandhari, 2019e). This was the only humanitarian story published by the Pioneer.

TOI also dedicated a brief report to the displacement of migrant workers. The story mentioned that migrant workers were forced to leave Jammu and Kashmir by "some elements"

but didn't specify who these elements were (Khajuria, 2019b). The story quoted migrant workers who mentioned that they were asked to leave as soon as possible, and their wages were also denied. One worker, Sukhi Ram, was quoted saying that he had been satisfied working in the rice fields in Kashmir but under the current circumstances he preferred to move out of the state to ensure his family's safety. The article in TOI also stated that the sudden increase in the number of passengers led to inflated tickets prices, and some migrant workers were barely able to buy their way back home after spending all their savings (Khajuria, 2019b).

Like the Pioneer and TOI, the Hindu also covered the problems faced by migrant laborers as a result of the sudden security clampdown in Jammu and Kashmir. Besides mentioning the general plight of migrant laborers, the story also noted that these workers were forced by "the security forces, landlords and employees" to leave (Nath, 2019a). These workers were unsure if they would ever be able to collect their unpaid salaries. Testimonies of the migrant workers were similar to those in TOI and the Pioneer and pointed out the inflation of transportation costs, loss of livelihood and the uncertainty of ever returning to Jammu and Kashmir to find work. Other reports in the Hindu highlighted how residents of Jammu and Kashmir have always discriminated against migrant laborers who came to work in the state from different parts of India. The Hindu quoted some of these workers who said that the removal of Article 370 will make the Kashmiris hate them even more (Nath, 2019a). An article quoted a laborer from Bihar, an east-Indian state, who said that Kashmiris use to hurl insults at them like "come back with a passport," but after the abrogation of Article 370, they were asking them to leave Kashmir and had even beaten up a worker from Bihar (Nath, 2019a).

#### ***4.4.2 Negative Effects of Security Clampdown***

Unlike the Pioneer, stories published in TOI prior during the first four days of the security clampdown were relatively more diverse about the situation on the ground. The details of the lockdown, communication blackout and detentions didn't only mention the central government's perspective but also wrote about the suffering of residents of Jammu and Kashmir. The stories pointed out the sense of fear and uncertainty in the valley as a result of the deployment of additional troops, curfews and shutting down of all communication channels. Stories in TOI also highlighted how these developments disrupted the lives of residents of Jammu and Kashmir. These included descriptions of streets in Jammu and Kashmir where most of the shops were closed and people started stocking up essentials to prepare for "indefinite curfews" (Pandit, 2019b). There were long lines outside of fuel stations where people stood for hours to purchase fuel for their vehicles in case of emergency.

Stories published by TOI during the first four days covered the chaos that resulted due to the sudden notice given by the central government to tourists, students from other states in India who were studying in Kashmir and migrant laborers in the state who were forced to leave for their homes ("J&K tense as troops arrive, outstation students asked to leave valley," 2019). Taxi stands, bus stops, railway stations and the airport were crowded with people trying to find transportation home. The stories also highlighted how the residents of Jammu and Kashmir scrambled to stock up on food and medicine, afraid that they wouldn't be allowed out of their homes indefinitely with troops patrolling the streets. There were long queues outside ATMs and various fuel stations ran dry. Stories also mentioned that rumormongers did not help the situation and panic broke out across the state (Pandit, 2019b). However, most of the stories published

ahead of Eid and Independence Day celebrations supported the central government's normalcy narratives and optimistic outlook.

Stories in the Hindu quoted residents, activists and political leaders who had expressed anger and betrayal at the "undemocratic" removal of Article 370. Unlike the Pioneer and TOI, stories in the Hindu were not celebratory in tone and often challenged the central government's optimistic outlook. The Hindu described how the roads in the state were lifeless due to restrictions imposed on August 5, a few hours prior to abrogation of Article 370 under the pretext of ensuring law and order in the state. Nath (2019d) reported:

A handful of shops in otherwise busy marketplaces opened on Wednesday for the first time since Sunday, while concertina wire lay on crossings controlled by a large number of security personnel. Schools and colleges remained shut.

All stories in the Hindu also pointed out the extreme conditions that people were living in during the security lockdown and communication blackout. Though the other two newspapers chimed in with the government's optimistic outlook regarding Jammu and Kashmir, the Hindu challenged the government and wrote that while few shops reopened and some vehicular movement was allowed, "things were not back to normal,---" mobile and internet services remained suspended and it was uncertain when these curbs would be lifted (Ashiq, 2019b; Nath, 2019c). Unlike the Pioneer and TOI, stories in the Hindu didn't use celebratory tones for the future of Jammu and Kashmir. On the contrary, it pointed out that since the abrogation of Article 370, schools and colleges remained closed, concertina wires was laid on the streets to mark check posts, and communication blackout in the state had cut off the residents of Jammu and Kashmir from the rest of the world.

#### ***4.4.3 Changes in Political Climate***

Another story published by the Hindu questioned the normalcy stance of the government and pointed out the political vacuum that was created in Jammu and Kashmir since all major political leaders from the state were under detention. Nath (2019e) pointed out that it is unclear how the democratic process in the state will unfold:

While the BJP says it is gearing up for the Assembly election, workers of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the National Conference (NC) have been left rudderless as their leaders remain under detention.

The story mentioned that though the promise of Assembly elections has been welcomed in the new Union Territory of Ladakh, other regions were angry over the division of Jammu and Kashmir and were still grappling with the removal of Article 370. Though BJP was ready for the elections, Nath (2019e) mentioned that the People's Democratic Party and National Conference – Kashmir's most influential political parties – had no communication from their leaders since they were detained. The story mentioned that workers of these parties also feared that separatists might try to fill this political vacuum. On the contrary, BJP's president of Jammu region, Mr. Singh, was quoted as saying that the party had been reaching out to the people in different parts of the Jammu and Kashmir and was 100% ready for elections. MLC Sheikh from National Conference said that when you tie a person's hands, gag them, you can't call it democracy. Workers of the People's Democratic Party were also cited in the story and said that they were upset that their leader, Mehbooba Mufti, was labeled a traitor and detained. Though the Hindu quoted BJP leaders as well as opposition leaders in Jammu and Kashmir, the latter's accounts undercut BJP's assessment of the situation in Jammu and Kashmir and normalcy narratives.



## 4.5 Voices of Residents

### 4.5.1 Resident Support for Change

Stories in the Hindu included the voices of residents who supported the abrogation of Article 370 and the central government. Small transportation business owner, Shubham Sharma from the Jammu district had mentioned that his business had taken a hit due from the curfew but the removal of Article 370 is a good thing (Nath, 2019d). Most of the residents of Jammu that the Hindu quoted were hopeful that the removal of Article 370 will bring positive changes in their lives. According to the Hindu, these residents who had been living in the border districts of the state were not allowed to sell their land to escape tank and mortar shelling due to the property and residency restrictions of Article 370 (Nath, 2019b). In the story, Mr. Lal Chand, a resident of Jammu, said that he and his family were afraid that the shelling could start anytime due to rising tensions between India and Pakistan, and they were hopeful that now industries will come to Jammu and Kashmir and their children will be able to find work. The story also reported that Gurditta and his wife, both residents of Jammu border districts, were hit by cross-border shelling in January 2018. They mentioned that the state government has not helped them out and said:

We have not been able to get a fair share under the State government. All the funds go to Kashmir. Now, we think things will improve. The biggest benefit is that the state subject system will end. Aadhaar, voter ID card will be all you need (Nath, 2019d).

Another resident, Avinash Kumar, explained that there were no options or opportunities for those living in the Indo-Pakistan border districts. He described that curfews were a part of their lives and schools would remain closed for days on end even before the removal of Article 370 (Nath, 2019b). Though he thought that the security and safety issues will remain, he believed that after the removal of 370 there was hope to find a job in his town. Another resident Jasbir Singh said that he was feeling relieved after the abrogation of Article 370 and said that now his daughter,

who had moved to the neighboring state of Punjab after marriage and would not have been eligible to inherit her father's land due to Article 370, could now own it in case something happened to him (Nath, 2019b).

#### ***4.5.2 Residents Challenging Normalcy Narratives***

The Hindu mentioned several residents who were not elated with the removal of Article 370. One such resident Umar, who owned a business across the street from Mr. Sharma, felt that removal of Article 370 was a betrayal (Nath, 2019d). Explaining his hardships, he mentioned that he was in Srinagar when the government declared emergency in the state. He had to hurry back to Jammu overnight to avoid stone pelting so that he could contact his relatives since there were no mobile services available due to the communication blackout. The story mentioned that Umar only wanted to be identified with his first name. He had to wait for the roads to open so he could drive back to Srinagar. Expressing his distrust in the government, Umar told the Hindu:

The government has put us at gunpoint. We had an agreement with India, not with Pakistan, when we joined. Now, they have broken the agreement. What relation do we have left with them? Now, anyone can come and claim Kashmir, be it Pakistan or China (Nath, 2019d).

Nazeer Ahmad, a resident of Doda district in Jammu and Kashmir, said that he was stranded in Jammu because the truck he was driving broke down and no shops were open for repairs (Nath, 2019d). He could not contact anyone and was worried about his family, who were staying in his hometown. Another story in the Hindu focused on how the communication blackout is affecting the residents of Jammu and Kashmir. Sajjid, a resident of Baramulla in north Kashmir, said that he had not heard from his mother for a week (Singh, 2019). His distress regarding the uncertainty and fear of not knowing how his mother was pointed to the trauma experienced by the residents. Sajjid even expressed his distrust of the media and central government, and said:

Tell them to restore mobile connectivity for only a minute, I just want to tell Ammi (mother) I am fine. She could be almost dead without hearing from me. They say everything is normal in Kashmir. The last time I read a newspaper was five days ago. I do not trust what the Delhi-based television channels are airing. There is no celebration here, we are not happy (Singh, 2019).

The story also mentioned that Sajjid's sentiments were echoed by many people in Srinagar after the lockdown and communication blackout were implemented.

A story in TOI also quoted residents of Jammu and Kashmir who challenged the government's normalcy narrative. The residents were angry that the central government considered a little relaxation in curfew and some movement in the market "normal" for the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Students who had written entrance exams for jobs were not able check their results to verify if they have been accepted or not (Pandit, 2019a). They travelled to the capital city and institutions to check their results in person. A taxi driver, Ghulam Hasan, denied that things were normal and said, "People are angry and upset politically. But Eid is a day after. That is why people are swarming to the markets. There is no reason for the government to declare victory" (Singh et. al., 2019). The story quoted another resident and activist, Mir Junaid, who said that this little activity should not be misunderstood as normal. Another civilian, whose name was not mentioned, said that people of Jammu and Kashmir don't trust the separatists and politicians and are tired of being used for the latter's career advancement.

#### ***4.5.3 Voices of Resistance***

Stories in the Hindu relied on the residents account to describe the situation in Jammu and Kashmir. In one of the stories, Iltija Javed, daughter of Ex-Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti, defined Kashmir like an open-air prison where the people of the state had been reduced to "second-class citizens" as a result of the undemocratic abrogation of Article 370 (Hebbar, 2019). Discussing the arrest of major political leaders of Jammu and Kashmir, including her mother, she

said that she could relate to what it was like to live in Palestine. Angry at the central government's decision, she said that Kashmiri people don't have low intelligence and can't be deceived into accepting this oppression. She further called out to all political parties in Jammu and Kashmir to present a unified front.

#### ***4.5.4 Fear of Imprisonment and Loss of Lives***

Stories in the Hindu leaned towards a humanitarian perspective rather than a nationalist perspective and highlighted the concerns of the people of Kashmir. A story in the Hindu highlighted that former Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti's daughter Iltija Javed was being detained for talking to the media despite warnings from the security forces. The article mentioned that Iltija Javed had passed on a letter to the Hindu in which she had written that she had been put under surveillance and warned with dire consequences if she tries to contact the media. She also wrote that she felt like she was being treated like a war criminal and feared for her life ("Mehbooba's daughter says she fears for her life," 2019). Though the article is a testimony by a prominent figure, it sheds light on the restrictions of movement and threat of detention faced by the people in Jammu and Kashmir during the communication shutdown.

The articles in the Hindu focused on residents of the state, what they went through as they led their lives in a zone of conflict and how the heightened security in the state had affected them. Stories in the Hindu focused on how citizens residing in the Indo-Pakistan border districts lived with the constant threat of cross-border tensions, mortar shelling and extremist attacks. The articles quoted residents who were worried that the abrogation of Article 370 could lead to intense military action and shelling that could not only damage their homes but also claim lives. Nath (2019b) reported:

While there has been no shelling from across the border in the past year, Lal Chand of Suchetgarh village said he did not expect the lull to last. After the Union government revoked Jammu and Kashmir's special status and decided to divide the State into Union Territories on Monday, he said, the "firing" could start again. While India has maintained that it is an internal matter, Pakistan has responded by downgrading diplomatic ties.

Some of the stories in TOI also stated the concerns and fears of Kashmiri people. The stories of Eid celebrations in TOI mentioned that there was uncertainty among the people of Jammu and Kashmir, and fewer people turned out to celebrate Eid due to heavy surveillance. One of the stories quoted a woman walking to a mosque who said that no one could stop Eid prayers (Singh & Dua, 2019c). However, she was reluctant to comment on the abrogation of Article 370, and her name was not mentioned in the story. It also was not mentioned in the story whether or not the woman refused to reveal her name out of fear of detention. Other people who talked to the reporters mentioned that people were only allowed to visit mosques on foot while security personnel watched them from the balconies of empty buildings (Singh & Dua, 2019c). Saqiba, who was accompanied by her father, who is a government employee, said that Eid did not feel the same, as they were not allowed to share meat with their friends. Another resident, Dr. Suneem Khan, was upset about the loss of lives during the commotion. He said, "The idea of celebration was to be with one's family and loved ones rather than losing someone or seeing someone injured" (Singh & Dua, 2019c). The story also mentioned that residents were concerned about making it home safely after Eid prayers as it was likely that they would encounter stone-pelters on the way.

## 5 DISCUSSION

This study explores Indian news media's coverage of the situation in Kashmir during the communication blackout. This study asked how Indian newspapers from the political right, left and middle covered the Kashmiri crisis after the revocation of Article 370 and their representation of the communication blackout, the government, protests and the state of Jammu and Kashmir. In doing so, this study more specifically looked at who were the primary news sources and what were the patterns and themes within the coverage more broadly, as well as whether the coverage supported the actions by the Hindu nationalist government.

In examining the coverage in the Pioneer, The TOI and the Hindu, five primary themes reflecting different ideological slants were established: threat to law and order, support for central government, reassurances, situation under security clampdown and the voices of residents. Threat to law and order, support for the abrogation of Article 370 and government sources lauding the security forces stood out in the stories published by the Pioneer, its right-wing leanings apparent, during the communication blackout in Jammu and Kashmir. The Hindu – a left-leaning newspaper – focused more on the negative effects of the security clampdown and the suffering of the people of Jammu and Kashmir. Though the stories in the Hindu highlighted both positive and negative responses to the removal of Article 370 and the communication blackout, negative responses undercut the optimism expressed by some of the residents. TOI, though reputed to be more centric and impartial (Narayana & Kapur, 2016; O'Brochta, 2019), wasn't neutral in its coverage of Jammu and Kashmir during the communication blackout and supported the central government. Stories in TOI focused on the threat to law and order, the central government's reassurances that things are returning to normal in the state, and hopes of a promising future. Though some of the articles quoted residents who expressed their anger and

fear after the abrogation of Article 370, government and security sources cited by TOI undercut the account of these residents.

The threat to law and order was the most prominent theme in the Pioneer and TOI. Stories in both newspapers focused on the security arrangements made in the state and relied on security officials for information. Stories in both newspapers quoted officers like the national security advisor, the director general of police, and the commander in chief of the army who said that the security forces would ensure peace in Jammu and Kashmir and were ready to deal with any unpredicted threat. Stories in the Pioneer and TOI also highlighted that additional troops have been stationed in the sensitive areas of the state to maintain law and order.

The Pioneer and TOI also specified why security was stepped up and restrictions were imposed. Both newspapers highlighted the threat of potential terrorist attacks funded by Pakistan that could have been carried out by militants and separatists in Jammu and Kashmir. The Pioneer was more explicit in its support of the security forces and the Hindu nationalist government, and it quoted several Indian army officials who urged people to not fall prey to “enemy’s evil design” as those who broke peace will be “dealt with firmly.” Clearly influenced by its right-leaning ownership, the Pioneer also lauded the security personnel who were stationed in Jammu and Kashmir as they risked their lives in the line of duty. None of the stories in the Pioneer were critical of the central government’s abrogation of Article 370, the security clampdown or communication blackout in Jammu and Kashmir.

The Pioneer and TOI wrote about mass arrests and political leaders of Jammu and Kashmir being put under house arrests in the state during the communication blackout. The Pioneer supported the central government’s agenda and quoted security officials to justify the arrests in the name of maintaining law and order. Besides major political leaders like ex-chief

minister of Jammu and Kashmir Mehbooba Mufti and president of National Conference party Omar Abdullah, the Pioneer didn't mention the names of those who were put under house arrest. Stories in the Pioneer mentioned that "70 terrorists and hardcore pro-Pakistani separatists" were being transferred from one jail to another. Without mentioning any names, the Pioneer branded all those who were arrested by the security forces as terrorists and separatists and quoted army officials who stated that these individuals were arrested to "prevent any flare-up." TOI reported the house arrests of political leaders and didn't attempt to justify these actions, as did the Pioneer. In one story, TOI hinted that the arrests could be a political response "ahead of Article 370 decision" but didn't speculate further. In the news coverage of TOI, the absence of the voices of local politicians who were not detained could either be due to the restrictions imposed through curfews and the lack of communication channels that prevented journalists from speaking to these local leaders, or a national bias.

Unlike the Pioneer, TOI was subtler in its support of the central government and quoted government sources who justified the communication blackout as essential to ensure that telephones and the internet would not be used as "weapons to misguide and mobilize the youth." Though TOI is considered a neutral newspaper, its support of the central government's agenda in Jammu and Kashmir conflict could be due to the fact that the situation in Kashmir and Jammu is a transnational issue involving Pakistan as well as China (Mukhopadhyay, 2015). This could be due to the national influence of its readers' or government pressures on TOI's coverage of a transnational issue like the Jammu and Kashmir conflict. The government's foreign policy concerns, expectation of audience members and national interest can influence news coverage of transnational issues as a result of cultural biases and overreliance on the government's perspectives (Novais, 2007). However, it is beyond the scope of this study to specify whether



TOI's standpoint was due to the loyalty towards the national interests, readers' expectations or the government's pressure and attempt to manage news.

The Pioneer, TOI and the Hindu briefly covered protests during the communication lockdown. None of the three newspapers provided any details about the protesters, however the Hindu did provide more information than the other two newspapers about how the protests were organized during the communication blackout. The Pioneer and TOI relied heavily on the security officials for details regarding the protests and quoted officers stating that "anti-India" protesters had clashed with security personnel but there were "no major injuries" and the situation was "under control" with no loss of life. TOI had also reported that there was a peaceful march in Srinagar, the summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir, after Eid, but the protesters dispersed when the security forces arrived. The Hindu also covered the protests briefly but, unlike the Pioneer and TOI, it didn't rely on security officials for details. The Hindu reported that "emotions were running high" in the valley and an angry mob attacked vehicles, journalists and policemen. Since most of these protests occurred in regions that the security forces deemed sensitive, the lack of details could be due to restrictive access to these regions. The Indian army heavily patrolled these regions and it is highly likely that journalists were not allowed to enter, let alone speak to the protesters. However, the overreliance of the Pioneer and TOI on security officials for information and lack of inclusivity of diverse voices indicates that these newspapers were acting as the central government's mouthpiece.

The Pioneer and TOI didn't challenge the central government's undemocratic scrapping of Article 370. Stories in these newspapers reported the government's narratives of future investment and development in Jammu and Kashmir. Not a single story in the Pioneer critiqued the central government, clearly pointing out its bias towards the Modi's Hindu nationalist

government. Instead, the focus was on the celebrations among BJP party workers and their allies in Jammu and Kashmir after the abrogation of Article. The Pioneer also quoted Governor Malik in several stories who assured that this decision would give the residents of the state rights equal to Indian citizens, promote economic development in the state, reduce militancy, and allow Kashmiri Pandits to return to their homes.

Stories in the Pioneer and TOI were consistent with their neo-liberal right-wing leanings and supported the future development narrative of the central government. Both newspapers quoted ministers of the central government working in the tourism, commerce and agriculture departments of Jammu and Kashmir and specified the government's plans for future development in the state. Both newspapers emphasized the government's plan to focus on the economic development of the region that had been ignored by the previous governments and shared plans for roadshows and summits that will invite multinational companies to invest in Jammu and Kashmir. TOI mentioned the names of the delegates present in the press conference that announced the Jammu and Kashmir Investors Summit. None of the members present at the press conference deciding the future of business and development in the state were local businessmen or representatives of the people. Furthermore, only one article in TOI mentioned the tribal communities of the Ladakh Union Territory and how the removal of Article 370 will help them prosper. Like other stories in TOI, the only source of information in this article was a government representative. Stories in the Pioneer and TOI lacked the representation of local people and their response to the removal of Article 370.

Stories in the Pioneer and TOI also focused on the central government's reassurances that everything will get back to normal in Jammu and Kashmir and that prosperity will follow the abrogation of Article 370. Both newspapers cited government sources and security officials who

claimed that things were getting back to normal. The Pioneer published a story that focused on National Security Advisor Ajit Doval and his confidence building efforts in sensitive regions of the state that were also labeled “hotbeds of terrorism.” The story revolved around Doval and his conversations with the local residents, in which he assured people that everything will be peaceful once again. However, the story presented only one side of the conversation as only Doval was quoted in the article and the voices of the residents that Doval had spoken with were absent. The Pioneer also quoted security officials who claimed that the situation was “returning back to normal,” with “no major incidents,” and “peaceful atmosphere amid tight security arrangements.” None of the stories in the Pioneer mentioned how the residents were faring under the restrictions and communication blackout imposed by the central government.

Similarly, TOI relied heavily on government sources who said that the situation was largely normal barring minor incidents that were resolved by the security forces. TOI also focused on Eid celebrations to point out that people were returning to their regular lives, markets reopened and all the supplies were provided to the people of Jammu and Kashmir. Though TOI talked to a few residents who were upset with the central government and were upset about the restrictions, these accounts were undercut by the security official’s assurances that everything was peaceful and people were getting back to their normal lives. Giving the last word to the security officials implies TOI’s support of the central government as the stories generally ended with the government’s views, and thereby negating the accounts of the residents. TOI used Eid celebrations, the biggest festival for the Muslim community in Jammu and Kashmir, to back up the government’s normalcy narratives during the security clampdown. TOI’s coverage didn’t specify whether the normal atmosphere was a temporary effect of Eid celebrations in a Muslim majority state or a result of the efforts of security forces in maintaining peace. Instead, the

perspectives of the security officials were given preference overpowering, if not masking, the voices of residents of Jammu and Kashmir.

All three newspapers covered the displacement of migrant workers in Jammu and Kashmir and quoted several workers who were forced to leave the state due to the security lockdown imposed by the central government. All the newspapers highlighted the struggles of these workers who couldn't collect their unpaid salaries and had to pay extra transportation fares to buy their way to safety. The struggle of the migrant workers was the only humanitarian account published by the Pioneer during the communication blackout. However, the article didn't critique or question the central government for the displacement of these workers. Instead, they criticized the lack of efficiency of the state government for not arranging proper transportation out of the state for these workers. TOI reported the displacement of migrant workers without much attention to detail. TOI mentioned that the migrant workers were forced to leave by "some elements" but didn't specify further. Few workers were quoted but the article was neither critical of the state government nor the central government for the plight of these workers. In addition to the focus on problems faced by the migrant workers after the security lockdown in Jammu and Kashmir, the Hindu also quoted workers who informed that they were forced to leave the state by "the security forces, landlords and employees" without collecting their salaries. The Hindu also pointed out how the revocation of Article 370 could deteriorate the already stressful relationship between local residents and migrant workers who are not welcome in the state.

Stories in TOI during the first four days of the communication blackout covered the negative effects of the security clampdown. The newspaper highlighted that there was a sense of "fear and uncertainty" in the state as additional troops were deployed and all lines of

communication were severed. Stories in TOI also mentioned that people started stocking up food, fuel and medical supplies to prepare for indefinite curfews. However, these stories too lacked the voices of residents, and the sources quoted were government spokespeople and security officials. This could either be due to lack of access to the internet or mobile services within the state due to the communication blackout or due to the fact that residents feared detention if they spoke to the media. During the first four days of the communication blackout, TOI reported that the streets in Jammu and Kashmir were deserted, schools remained closed and there was no sign of life besides the troops patrolling the streets. However, the coverage from the fifth day of the communication blackout echoed the central government with stories focused on the situation returning to normal. It is beyond the scope of this study to determine whether this sudden change in reporting was due to government pressures, national interest or Eid celebrations that encouraged people to come out of their home to shop for the festival.

In the stories after the fifth day of the communication blackout, TOI quoted few residents who expressed their anger and said that the situation should not be considered normal just because people came out to celebrate Eid. Some of the residents also mentioned that Eid was not the same as in previous years, and they couldn't move freely through their hometowns to share food with their friends due to the restrictions. However, the stories also quoted security officials and government sources who were the major source of information in the news coverage and undercut the concerns of the residents by claiming that the situation was normal. TOI also quoted some residents who didn't want to be named or comment on the abrogation of Article 370. However, the newspaper provided no critique or speculation as to why the residents were afraid to reveal their name or talk to the media.

Stories in the Hindu were critical of the mass arrests of political leaders of Jammu and Kashmir and the security clampdown and communication blackout imposed by the central government in the state. It also highlighted how the state was cut off from the rest of the world under the restrictions and communication blackout. The Hindu also mentioned that there was a political void in the state as all the major political leaders had been put under house arrest. It quoted several citizens who shared both positive and negative views on the abrogation of Article 370. Several stories quoted residents of Jammu's border districts who were hopeful that the abrogation of Article 370 would bring more job opportunities and give them the status of Indian citizens and grant them similar rights under the India Constitution. The stories also mentioned how there was an atmosphere of celebration in Jammu, a region where there are relatively more Hindus as compared to the rest of the state, and people came out on the streets to celebrate amid restrictions. It was also mentioned that several BJP party workers were planning a grand celebration during Independence Day to celebrate the freedom of Jammu and Kashmir from the "clutches" of Article 370. However, the newspaper balanced the positive comments with negative views of the residents and undercut the optimistic outlook of BJP workers.

The Hindu also quoted residents who showed their distrust of the central government and stated that India has betrayed their trust by revoking Article 370. Stories in the Hindu also mentioned that residents were stranded in several parts of the state due to curfews and were unable to contact their family members due to the communication blackout. Some of the residents quoted in the Hindu also expressed distrust of what the Indian broadcast channels were saying. In a story published on August 9, Sajjad, a resident of Kashmir, said that he distrusts the Delhi-based broadcast networks, and the last time he read a newspaper was five days ago, i.e. before the communication blackout. This could either be due to the fact that newspapers were not

able to operate due to curfews and lack of information during the communication blackout or because they couldn't sell copies during the curfews.

The Hindu also quoted several residents who feared imprisonment and loss of life. It quoted residents from Jammu's border districts who feared for their lives as the removal of Article 370 could lead to another Indo-Pakistan conflict and cross border mortar shelling that could claim lives in the border districts. On the third day of the communication blackout, Iltija Javed, daughter of Ex-Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti, was quoted by the Hindu saying that Kashmir has become an open-air prison, and the residents are being treated as "second-class" citizens in their own state. However, on August 17, the Hindu published another story where Iltija Javed stated that she was being placed under house arrest and was being watched by the security forces. The story also mentioned that she managed to send a letter to the newspaper saying that she was not allowed to speak to the media and feared for her life and highlights how a prominent figure like Iltija Javed faced backlash for talking to the media. Another story mentioned how a resident was reluctant to share his last name. Though it was evident in its news coverage that the Hindu is a left-leaning newspaper, it didn't investigate the effects of the communication blackout on the lack of freedom of expression and its effects on freedom of the press within the state.

Unlike the Pioneer, TOI and the Hindu quoted several residents and also mentioned their reluctance to reveal their names. But neither of the newspapers investigated whether this was due to fear of arrests by the security sources or distrust in the media. This limited the ability of these newspapers to question whether the government's restrictions on freedom of expression and freedom of the press was responsible for instilling a fear of detention among the residents. Most of the stories in all three newspapers were focused on the Jammu region. Stories in the Pioneer

and TOI that focused on the Srinagar capital region in the state relied on government sources for information whereas stories in the Hindu that focused on the capital region focused on prominent opposition figures like Iltija Javed. It is unclear whether this was due to ease of access in the less sensitive Jammu region as compared to the rest of the state or due to lack of resources that could investigate the situation on the ground in the capital region. However, the relatively peaceful Ladakh Union Territory region that was originally a part of Jammu and Kashmir was severely underrepresented in all three newspapers. Lack of voices of the people of Ladakh and their response to the abrogation of Article 370 also point to the lack of diverse voices in the news coverage of all three newspapers.

This study indicates that the ideological leanings of the newspapers affected the news coverage of Jammu and Kashmir during the communication blackout. The findings in this study are consistent with previous research that stated that the Indian news media's coverage supports the government's nationalist agenda (Yin, 2011; Rao 2018; Goel & Gettleman, 2020). The most right-leaning coverage was in the Pioneer, which is a nationalist newspaper that supports the Modi government. It relied heavily on government and security sources for information and acted as a mouthpiece of the central government during the communication blackout. Protesters and those who were detained were labeled as separatists and terrorists in the Pioneer. The security clampdown and communication blackout were deemed necessary by the Pioneer to maintain law and order in the state. None of the stories in the Pioneer quoted any residents in its coverage of Jammu and Kashmir during the communication blackout. On the contrary, it emphasized the central government's initiatives to reassure the residents of Jammu and Kashmir when it is clear through voices of the residents in the other two newspapers that there was a sense



of uncertainty, distrust towards the central government and fear for life among the people of Kashmir.

The more centrist TOI, while primarily covering the situation by drawing on government officials for sources so that it appears to support the central government, did, in fact, include a few voices that challenged the dominant narrative. Protests in TOI were covered from the perspective of security forces who stated that communication blackout was necessary to ensure that the internet and mobile service are not misused. They also maintained that the situation was peaceful besides a few minor clashes. TOI did challenge the central government's narrative in some stories and quoted a few residents who highlighted that there was fear and uncertainty during the communication blackout. However, the central government's perspective dominated the news coverage that focused on a return of normalcy and future development in the state.

Journalists' dependence on powerful elites and government officials for information can manipulate the neutrality of media outlets (McQueen, 2008). The objectivity in the stories published by the Pioneer and TOI is questionable as they relied heavily on government and security sources for information. Past literature also suggests that distortion of news often leans towards the viewpoint of ruling interests (McQueen, 2008). This was seen in the news coverage of the Pioneer and TOI that leaned toward the central government's perspectives that claimed removal of Article 370 to be a positive change that would bring prosperity and return the lives of the residents of Jammu and Kashmir back to normal. The mass media play a vital role in supporting government propaganda in conflicts, especially if the government in question is involved in the conflict (Lee., et. al., 2006). The newspapers in this study served as the mouthpiece of the central government and played an integral part in backing the nationalist government's agenda in the Jammu and Kashmir conflicts. Past research indicates that the news

media's sharing of the government or military's construction of events limits public spaces for debate and dissent (McQueen, 2008), and in this case, news coverage could have been responsible for the dismissal of the accounts of residents and the misleading of the readers in India.

Lack of diverse sources in these newspapers may have weakened their ability to represent the complexities of the Jammu and Kashmir conflict and their impact on the lives of the residents and other stakeholders. The binary reporting style of conflict reporting ignores the subtle shades that often surround a conflict (Carter, et. al. 2011), as seen in the coverage of Jammu and Kashmir during the communication blackout. Complex issues like stripping Jammu and Kashmir of its statehood, taking away the decades-old autonomous identity of the state without including its representatives in the decision making process and imprisoning its major political leaders are reduced to mobility restrictions and law and order issues in the Pioneer and TOI. Furthermore, the stories in these newspapers portray the central government and security forces in a positive light. The Pioneer and TOI both wrote about the government's future development plan and also mentioned the vigilance of security forces in preempting any terrorist attack on the state. At the same time, the hardships faced by the residents were ignored and negated in the Pioneer and TOI respectively.

The Hindu, which is a left-leaning newspaper, reflected its ideological position by including the most voices of dissent and more often including the views of residents. Several residents were quoted saying that they felt betrayed by the central government and didn't know who to trust. The Hindu challenged the central government and stated that the people of Jammu and Kashmir were stranded and disconnected from their families and the rest of the world due to the security clampdown and communication blackout. The Hindu, a socialist newspaper, also

provided more information about the protests in the state and their organizing strategies. Though voices that were in support of the central government were also included in the Hindu, the coverage was dominated by the negative views of the abrogation of Article 370, fear and anger among the residents and the political vacuum created in the state after the house arrest of prominent local politicians.

None of the newspapers mentioned the press gag in Jammu and Kashmir or the problems journalists faced while reporting in a conflicted zone. Furthermore, stories in all three newspapers were episodic accounts of what occurred in the state and lacked investigative reporting. Previous research showed that watchdog journalism is a dangerous occupation in India and journalists have often been arrested, tortured and killed by security forces, militants, politicians and terrorists alike (Yin, 2011; Reshi, 2015). The communication blackout and security lockdown in the state may have made it difficult for journalists to practice watchdog journalism in Jammu and Kashmir. However, none of the newspapers mentioned that reporting in Jammu and Kashmir was difficult due to these restrictions or that press freedom was impacted by the communication blackout. The International Federation for Human Rights mentioned in its report that local security forces had arrested journalists who filed stories about mass arrests and the communication blackout (“Update on human rights violations in Indian-administered Jammu & Kashmir since August 2019,” 2019). However, none of the newspapers mention if journalists were arrested, tortured or killed during this period.

This study further indicates that the Indian news media’s capacity for challenging the Hindu nationalist government was restricted during the security clampdown. Curfews, limitation of where journalists could go and lack of access to residents due to the shutdown of the internet, mobile and landline services in Jammu and Kashmir certainly affected press freedom. A

government-mandated communication blackout impeded journalists' access to residents and probably forced even reporters at the most left-leaning newspaper to rely more on official government sources, who were far more accessible than residents under the circumstances. However, diversity in the news coverage as exhibited by the differences in coverage of the three newspapers indicates that a certain amount of press freedom in India remains. This is evident in the differences between the nationalistic leanings of the Pioneer and TOI that supported the central government and the socialistic coverage of the Hindu that challenged the government by including more diverse voices. The fact that The Hindu, while restricted, was able to include more diverse voices and challenge the central government's narrative indicates that press freedom has not been extinguished in India, even when access to communication channels is controlled by the government. Though the Pioneer acted as the mouthpiece of the government, TOI was able to include some voices of dissent that contradicted the central government's normalcy perspective. On the other hand, the Hindu ability to hold the government accountable for mass arrests, disconnecting the state from the rest of the world, and disrupting the lives of people in Kashmir is indicative of a certain amount of press freedom in India. However, the communication blackout most certainly made access to those diverse voices more difficult and does not portend well for the future of Indian press freedom.

The communication blackout certainly was not the only factor that led to the lack of diverse voices and the dominance of the central government's perspectives in the news coverage of Jammu and Kashmir. Past literature suggests that political ownership, organizational pressures, lack of resources and access to information may have affected press freedom and hence the news coverage of a sensitive issue like the Jammu and Kashmir conflict. It is important to understand the factors that may lead newspapers, specifically a more centrist newspaper like

TOI, to rely on government sources for information in a conflicted zone while it is clear that the Hindu was able to access more diverse sources. A future direction could be interviewing journalists and editors working in Jammu and Kashmir to understand how they covered the situation on the ground during the communication blackout.

## 6 NOTES

1. Jammu and Kashmir is also referred to as Kashmir (Saddiqia & Yousafzai, 2019, p. 1) as it was a single state before the abrogation of Article 370. On October 31, 2019, the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganization Act proposed by the government of India was approved by the Parliament, thereby dividing the state into two Union Territories.

2. Union Territories in India are regions governed by the federal government, unlike states that have their own government and legislature (See Know India States and Union Territories, 2012, Retrieved from [https://web.archive.org/web/20131024173954/http://knowindia.gov.in/knowindia/state\\_uts.php](https://web.archive.org/web/20131024173954/http://knowindia.gov.in/knowindia/state_uts.php))

3. The Indian Constitution grants reservation to groups that were historically disadvantaged and faced socio-economic discrimination on the basis of their caste. Only those groups that are designated under the Schedule Caste, Schedule Tribe and Other Backward Classes identities are granted reservation in all Indian educational institutions, government jobs and both upper and lower house of the Indian Parliament. The only exception to this rule was Kashmir before the abrogation of Article 370.

4. Pulwama terror attack took place in the Pulwama district of Jammu and Kashmir of January 14, 2019. A convoy of vehicles carrying the Indian Armed Forces was attacked by a suicide-bomber driving a vehicle, resulting in the death of 40 security personnel and the attacker. The responsibility of the attack was claimed by a Pakistan-based terror outfit that call themselves Jaish-e-Mohammed.

5. Instrument of Accession was a legal document introduced via the Government of India Act 1935. When India became an independent state, this document allowed the Princely states under the British rule to either India or Pakistan (See Singh, 2019, p. 427).

6. According to the Election Commission of India, any political party can become a national party in India after it has fulfilled three conditions: (1) the party should hold 2% of the seats in Lok Sabha (Lower House of the Indian Parliament) from at least three different states; (2) the party must win 6% of the votes in four or more states, in addition to four Lok Sabha seats in the general elections or Legislative Assembly; and (3) the party must be recognized as a state party in at least four states.

7. Vote bank is a group of loyal voters from a particular community who back a candidate or party based on their ideologies and values. The appeasement of such groups for political advantage is called vote bank politics.

8. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines caste as “one of the hereditary social classes in Hinduism that restrict the occupation of their members and their association with the members of other castes (Retrieved from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/caste>).” Then lower-caste people are those whose inherited rank, profession, privilege as perceived in Hinduism results in their socio-economic displacement. It isn't just the Hindu community that follows the caste system. Traces of caste-based discrimination can also be seen in Muslim and Christian communities in India.

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