



Case Study

Framing a social movement by the Indian print: Case study of Kisan Long March

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Abstract

Thousands of farmers marched 180 km from Nashik to Mumbai in six days, reverberating their problems experienced in a two-decade-long, policy driven agrarian crisis. The 'Kisan Long March' captured national attention, and symbolized the act of desperation. Many landless peasants couldn't afford shoes, and walked barefoot. The main objective of the protest led by the Left affiliated All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) was towards land rights from Forest Rights Act (2006) and improper implementation of Swaminathan Commission recommendations. In the past two decades, India has witnessed numerous protests by farmers but the situation remains same, and their struggle continues. Often, it is debated that the Indian press does not give proper coverage to social movements. Such protests are neglected, biased or framed as per journalistic conveniences. Thus, the main objective of the study is to understand the treatment of the movement by the Indian print. News stories pertaining to 'Kisan Long March' will be analyzed. Each story will be categorized under five frames – journalistic objectivity, human interest, apprehension, political, and remedial frame. Content analysis will be performed on every news story.

Keywords: Social movements, Kisan Long March, framing, newspapers.

Introduction

Representing a wide spectrum of agrarian crises, Maharashtra's 'Kisan Long March' took place in the blazing sun and barefoot from March 6, 2018 to March 12, 2018 by the tribal farmers of the state. They walked 180km from Nashik to Mumbai with central demands – the right over their forestland and implementation of Swaminathan Commission recommendations.

India has witnessed agrarian crisis/catastrophe since time immemorial. Vulnerable climatic conditions, falling market price, land acquisition and poor implementation of government welfare policies have added to the problem. Specially, in India's dry land areas, farmer suicides have become rampant.

In 2016, demonetization was implemented. This destroyed Indian rural markets. And what followed as Goods and Services Tax, added to their penury, by increasing cultivation costs. Maharashtra, in the following year (2017-18), witnessed failed monsoons. The continuous three years of agrarian crises took toll on the livelihood of farmers.

Media, the fourth estate, plays an important role in representing social movements. It is often said that the relationship of media and social movements is complicated. Media is believed to be the principle source through which information regarding any movement is communicated. Infact, they are considered to be

more than carriers of information. The issues framed by the media, be it print or television, are chiefly structured by journalistic ethos. Once said, the frames rendered by the media influence the formation of a social movement.

News framing, either in print or television, raises public consciousness, mobilize public opinion, and resonate public reaction. Framing is beyond agenda setting, where it persuades not just what to think about, but also in which way to think about an issue. Framing harvests the concept of meaning production. It is mainly done through internal structures and mechanisms via text / content. Framing is directly influenced by cultural factors. "Frames are patterns of interpretation rooted in culture and articulated by the individual"¹.

Thus, the present study is an attempt to understand the coverage of Kisan Long March by the Indian elite English newspapers. The study analyzes the treatment, frame usage, popular frame, and the comparative analysis of framing news stories among four popular newspapers.

Kisan Long March: Since 1990s Maharashtra is forefront in addressing agrarian distress, and has taken a leading position towards the implementation of Forest Rights Act, 2006. Yet, disparities are witnessed, and innumerable beneficiaries haven't received anything promised by the Maharashtra government. For them, the struggle continues.

The recent protest 'Kisan Long March' called by the left-affiliated Akhil Bharatiya Kisan Sabha (ABKS) from March 6 to 12, 2018. About 50,000 tribal farmers in red caps and flags marched 180 km barefoot from Nashik to Mumbai. An average of 35 km was covered daily, as the farmers walked only at nights to avoid any inconvenience to commuters and examinees. Media termed this a 'Gandhian method to achieve a goal'. Thane, Palghar, Nashik and Nandurbar regions were covered.

Despite abundant rainfall in 2016-17, farmers found it difficult to sell their produce due to the aftermath of demonetization implemented in late 2016. Followed by this, the failed monsoons in 2017-18 in Maharashtra, considerably affected productivity, multiplying farmer's distress.

In 2017, the government declared 'loan waiver scheme' of Rs. 30,000 crore to alleviate agrarian distress and prevent farmer suicides. Maharashtra had reported 1293 farmer suicides in 2015. But the improper implementation of the scheme has taken toll on agrarian sector of the state.

Thousands of farmers who walked in the 'long march' never got a bank loan, had little or no access to credit, and still marched with the hope that government would transfer small forest plots, which they tilled since pre-independence times, into their names under the rights of National Commission on Farmers. That is, the Forest Rights Act, 2006 (FRA).

Demands of Kisan Long March: i. Land rights under FRA, 2006, ii. Immediate implementation of Swaminathan Commission recommendations to protect the interests of small farmers, including minimum support price of 1.5 times the input cost on every agriculture produce, iii. Unconditional waiver of loans and electricity bills, iv. Pension scheme for farmers, v. Compensation for crop losses due to unseasonal rain, hailstorm and attack by worms.

Swaminathan Commission Recommendations: The National Commission on Farmers (NCF) was formed on 18 November, 2004. Prof MS Swaminathan was the chairman of NCF. The aim of NCF was to tackle the serious issue of nationwide farmers' suicides in India. Recommendations to provide a more inclusive and a speedier solution were foreseen and the 11th Five Year Plan named MS Swaminathan report on farmers was framed. Some recommendations include⁶: i. A strategy for the security of food and nutrition to be formed, ii. To enhance produce, profit, stability and sustainability of farming systems, iii. Collaborate technology and public policy, iv. Attract and restore educated young people in farming, v. Agri-research and rural credit for farmers to be enhanced, v. Dry land farming to get special attention, vi. Quality or the competent cost of farm produce to be enhanced.

Forest Rights Act, 2006: This Act was passed in 2006. According to FRA, any person who lives in forest, or are completely forest dependent for their means of support, come

under the eligibility list of FRA. Also, claimant can be Scheduled Tribe or should be living in the forest for 75 years. The FRA includes rights of ownership, usage, forest management, rehabilitation, relief and development of forest.

The protest (Kisan Long March) was called off on March 12th after Maharashtra chief minister Devendra Fadnavis government promised to meet most demands made by the farmers under the Forest Rights Act within six months, and waive loans taken by farmers till June 2017.

The farmer's march received extensive support from locals and political parties. It included Congress, Nationalist Congress Party, Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (Raj Thackeray) and Shiv Sena.

Media Framing: Media is the principle source through which information regarding any movement is communicated. The present study uses framing theory to understand the coverage of Kisan Long March. The concept of framing was introduced by Erving Goffman in 1974 who said, "I assume that definitions of a situation are built up in accordance with principles of organization which govern events – at least social ones – and our subjective involvement in them; frame is the word I use to refer to such of these basic elements as I am able to identify."

Framing was further conceptualized by Iyengar in 1991⁷. He showed the path in which media frames issues. According to Iyengar, episodic and thematic framing of news is where either concrete or general issue are depicted.

In the study '*Power in Movement*', media is said to be equal, if not higher in meaning construction when compared to social actors or the state². According to the study, media frames built through a scripted word, visuals like photos, maps, or graphics select only a few aspects of the truth and make them more significant than others. Framing is execution of power through the media¹⁰. The complex association of power and politics is also explained by McQuail in his media-society theory¹².

Explaining different connotations of framing, "to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation"¹. Further, "frames as semi-structured elements of discourse which people use to make sense of information they encounter"³. Framing has the capacity in either building or destroying an image of any situation or an issue⁸.

Framing implies prejudiced engrossment in any situation. "News frames are embodied in key words, metaphors, concepts, symbols and visual images emphasized in a news narrative"¹. Often, to frame is referred as persistence⁹. They act as 'links' between media and public¹¹.

Thus, the present study is an attempt to understand the news frames of Kisan Long March in the prevalent Indian English dailies. The study analyzes the treatment, frame usage, popular frame, and the comparative analysis of framing news stories among four newspapers.

Objectives of the study: i. Study the number of news stories covered by each newspaper on Kisan Long March, ii. Understand the types of news frames used in covering Kisan Long March, iii. Analyze of the most popular news frame, iv. Analyze the most commonly used news frame within each newspaper.

Methodology

For the purpose of this study, news stories pertaining to Kisan Long March from March 6, 2018 to March 16, 2018 were taken. The march started on March 6, 2018 evening and ended on March 12, 2018 morning. According to Indian Readership Survey (IRS) 2017, the top ranking English dailies in India are the Times of India, The Hindu, Mumbai Mirror and the Indian Express. These papers were selected for the study.

The present study uses *content analysis* primarily. The quantitative findings are further analysed by qualitative study of selected newspaper articles.

Unit of analysis: News stories and their headlines are selected as the unit of analysis. Accompanied visuals, cartoons or any illustrations were excluded to minimize bias.

Primary data collection: The method of census was adopted in selection of news stories (primary data). In this method, all the news stories and their headlines were included. There was no inclusion of any judgment in the selection of news in the specified data-collection period. The census method was adopted to eliminate bias from the researcher's point of view and to include objectivity in the selection of primary data.

Method of data analysis: After a thorough analysis of the content in news stories, they were divided into five frames using the concept of framing theory.

The frames: Analysing Kisan Long March in particular, and coverage of social movements in general, following five frames are developed. These frames allow the researcher to understand how Indian popular newspapers treat agrarian issues and frame the plight of farmers. i. Journalistic objectivity frame, ii. Human-Interest frame, iii. Apprehension frame, iv. Political frame, v. Remedial frame.

Frame definitions: The five frames used to analyse the selected newspaper stories are *Journalistic objectivity frame*¹ that says, even though 'objectivity' forms a thumb rule in journalistic reporting, yet there are instances in which dominant framing is conveyed to the viewers. Since there is lack of proper

understanding about media frames, journalists purposefully employ competent media manipulators to enforce their ideas. Invariably, such frames create imbalance in viewer's minds in terms of judgments and correctness of the news consumed. News stories that report just the facts and do not take a biased view are categorized under this frame. The *Human-interest frame*⁵ explains that framing a story 'emotionally' to capture viewers' attention come under the ambit of human-interest frame. It is believed that the Indians succumb to heart more than the mind, and hence, human-interest stories are the food for higher TRPs. Such framing brings an emotional angle to an issue. News stories that are clutched in emotional knots are classified under this frame. The *Apprehension frame* is where panic, anxiety and a sense of fear among its readers are created. Any news story that is bound to sensationalize an issue is included in this frame. The *Political frame* portrays a news story in such a way that it has some inclination towards political scenario of the time. Such news stories often link upcoming elections, support of politicians, party affiliations etc. political frame is frequently used in analyzing voter trends, election result or to incline readers mind towards a particular political party. It should be noted that every newspaper has a political affiliation, and their reports showcase the bias. Lastly, the *Remedial frame*¹ in which news stories that provide solution to a problem, or any kind of remedial action to a situation are categorized.

Results and Discussion

Kisan Long March has received significant coverage in four elite newspapers chosen for analysis (The Times of India, The Hindu, Mumbai Mirror, and The Indian Express). Out of 57 news stories published between March 6, 2018 and March 16, 2018, the Hindu has published 17 stories, the Indian Express has published 16 stories, the Times of India has published 15 stories, and Mumbai Mirror has published 9 stories.

Table-1: Number of stories covered by four newspapers.

Newspaper Name	Number of stories	Percentage
The Times of India	15	26.3%
The Hindu	17	29.8%
Mumbai Mirror	9	15.7%
The Indian Express	16	28.07%
Total number of stories	57	

As can be seen in Table-1, the highest number of stories was carried in the Hindu with 29.8%, followed by the Indian Express with 28.07%, then the Times of India with 26.3%, and finally Mumbai Mirror with 15.7%.

Table-2: Analysis of the most popular frame

Frame Name	No. of stories	Percentage
Journalistic Objectivity	20	35.08%
Human Interest	15	26.31%
Apprehension	9	15.78%
Remedial	5	8.77%
Political	8	14.03%

Among the five frames devised for the purpose of content analysis, journalistic objectivity frame dominate the coverage. As seen in Table- 2, 35.08% stories used journalistic objectivity frame, followed by 26.31% with human interest frame, then 15.78% with apprehension frame, 14.03% with political frame, and 8.77% with remedial frame.

A news story published on March 12 in the Mumbai Mirror showcased a thorough implementation of journalistic objectivity frame: “A protest march by 30000 farmers against the failure of the BJP-led government to address agrarian distress reached Azad Maidan at 5 am today. The march, led by All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) – a peasant’s front of the communist Party of India (Marxist) was launched from Nashik. The protestors, who have camped at the KJ Somaiya Ground Sunday evening, started walking towards South Mumbai shortly after midnight.”

Simple statement of facts like the number of farmers protesting, affiliation towards a political party, space, time, and route taken by the farmers are described. The story doesn’t show any kind of opinion or suggestion by the reporter. Another news coverage dated on March 10 in the Indian Express displayed similar treatment:

“The farmers’ “Long March” has been called by Akhil Bharatiya Kisan Sabha (ABKS), which is affiliated to the CPI (M), and the farmers are expected to reach Mumbai on Sunday. On Friday, the farmers reached Bhatsa River in Thane district where over 5000 people from Palghar district joined the march. The farmers had started their march on Tuesday from the CBS Chowk in Nashik, the location of the March 2016 demonstration where close to one lakh farmers had gathered for two days. The farmers will cover 35 kilometers daily, on an average.”

Route taken by the farmers - Thane, Palghar and Nashik is explained with a distance of 35km covered, signifying an inverted pyramid style of reportage. Referring to human-interest frame, the report published on March 12 in the Times of India titled:

“Blazing sun, blisters on feet didn’t deter debt-hit farmers, tillers to march 180km”.

Here, the headline itself brings a human angle to the story. Using words such as blazing, or blisters, or deter and debt-hit creates sympathy among readers, exhibiting an emotional perspective in the farmer’s issue. These stories are mainly features, that eliminate the aspects of hard news reportage. Another extract from the news story dated March 12 in the Times of India stated:

“Distressed farmers seemed to have earned the empathy of urban residents. A few residents from Mulund showered flowers on the marching residents. We are humbled by the love showered on us, we are happy that those living in the city have understand the plight of poor families living in villages.”

Usage of phrases such as distressed, empathy, showered flowers, love, happy, plight and poor families in the report are in the context of human-interest frame. The purpose of this frame is to gain reader’s support or their involvement in the issue. Signifying apprehension frame, an extract from the news story dated March 14 in the Times of India titled “Round 2 of agitation soon to keep up pressure”, said:

“A day after the state government agreed to the demands of adivasi farmers who staged 180km march from Nashik to Mumbai, the steering committee of farmer groups chalked out a protest plan to keep up the pressure. This includes hunger strike on March 19 and a jail bhara andolan on April 30. Farmers continue to agitate for a full loan waiver and better prices for crops and milk.”

Succinctly alerting about round 2 of protest, the news story tries to build stress by asserting words like pressure, jail bhara andolan, agitate, and hunger strike. The apprehension frame, which is commonly used in Indian newspapers, is known for sensationalizing an issue thereby, panicking its readers. Similar report on March 8 in the Times of India endeavors apprehension frame with the title – “Farmers raise red flag”. A news story published on March 15 in The Hindu stated:

“The alacrity with which the State government responded is possibly due to the fact that a failed monsoon has led to projections of a negative growth in the farm sector (contraction by 8.3% in agriculture and allied activities) in the State’s Economic Survey this year. With Assembly elections not far away, the Bharatiya Janata Party-led government is keen that rural distress does not lead to voter anger.”

The above report displays political frame by linking agrarian distress and upcoming assembly elections in Maharashtra. “Rural distress does not lead to voter anger” talks about the newspaper’s opinion. Words like Bhartiya Janata Party- led government, voter anger, and alacrity etc. talks about assumed political opportunities. Another story published on March 11 in The Indian Express with the title:

“Maharashtra: Shiv Sena, MNS, AAP support farmers’ long march”

Mentioned all the political parties that participated in the protest and explained their stand in resolving the crisis. Also, news report on March 14 in The Hindu read :

“The BJP-led government at the Centre, which has been promising doubling of farm incomes and higher prices, and is to seek re-election a year from now, would do well to take note too. The Gujarat election...”

Linking farmer’s protest with elections by using words such as re-election, Gujarat election, voting patterns, election result etc., the report showcases possible political associations of the Kisan Long March. Such assumptions are commonly reported in news stories, and thereby, create frames of biased opinions. Finally, analyzing remedial frame, a news report on March 14 in The Hindu titled “Maharashtra kisan rally: A model protest” said:

“While this should perhaps serve as a model for protestors and administrators across India, there is also a lesson to be learnt about how to deal with unrest of this nature, which other States such as Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan have had to contend with.”

Above report claimed that the Kisan Long March was an ideal protest. The report also gives a remedy by stating - following the way of Kisan Long March by other protests serves better results. Such news stories that focus on solutions or remedies to a particular problem are categorized under remedial frame. Extract from news story published on March 14 in The Hindu stated:

“However, having announced a waiver scheme, the State should ensure that small farmers don’t get left out.”

Here, the word ‘ensure’ provides a remedy/solution. Thus, remedial frame is often associated with reporter’s opinion.

After a thorough analysis of each news story, affiliation of each of the four newspapers towards a particular frame can be comprehended. The following table describes the maximum number of frames used by each newspaper in covering Kisan Long March.

Table-3: Frame affiliation of each newspaper.

Newspaper Name	Frame	Percentage
The Times of India	Apprehension	26.6%
The Hindu	Journalistic Objectivity	47.05%
Mumbai Mirror	Human-Interest/Political	22.2%
The Indian Express	Remedial	31.25%

As seen in Table-3, pertaining to ‘Kisan Long March’, the Times of India has used apprehension frame with 26.6% in most of its news stories, the Hindu has used journalistic objectivity frame with 47.05%, Mumbai Mirror has used human-interest and political frames with 22.2%, respectively, and the Indian Express has used remedial frame with 31.25%.

Conclusion

Framing theory has grown enormously since its inception. It was introduced by Erving Goffman in 1974. Today, framing as a theory has grown phenomenally by positioning an issue in various patterns as required.

The present study which analysis the news coverage of Kisan Long March in popular English dailies of India categorizes frames under five categories – Journalistic objectivity, human interest, apprehension, political, and remedial frames. Evidently, each frame has its prominence based on the objective in which the news story was reported.

As for the four objectives stated in the present study, it can be concluded as - First, the popular English dailies (Times of India, Hindu, Mumbai Mirror and Indian Express) taken for content analysis have treated farmer’s protest with utmost importance, with prominent coverage in front and city pages of each newspaper. Findings show a total of 57 news stories based on Kisan Long March, excluding photo/picture stories.

Second, to understand the types of news frames used by newspapers in covering the issue, it can be said that after the primary data collection, five frames were devised to categorize each story. The five frames included journalistic objectivity, human interest, apprehension, political, and remedial frames. Each frame used exclusive words that served as unit of analysis for categorization.

Third, journalistic objectivity frame was founded to be the most popular frame with 15 stories based on it. Thus, it can be stated that Kisan Long March was covered with proper journalistic objectives in place. Since framing is known to create bias and influence public opinion, the coverage had its facts stated in appropriate measures of sincerity and journalistic perseverance.

Fourth, the comparative analysis of commonly used news frame in each newspaper showcased newspaper’s affiliation towards covering the issue of Kisan Long March. The Times of India covered 26.6% of its stories under apprehension frame. Certainly, apprehension frame is to create panic and sensationalize an issue. The Hindu covered 47.05% of its news stories under journalistic objectivity frame. Ensuring that proper objectives are met, and facts are conveyed to public, the Hindu’s stand on covering news stories under this frame showcased its credibility. Mumbai Mirror covered 22.2% of its stories under political frame; thereby linking assumed political opportunities to basic facts of the issue. Finally, the Indian Express covered

31.25% of its news stories under remedial frame. Defend, justify or to provide a solution are the basics of remedial frame which the Indian Express has followed. Positively, the Indian Express includes more of feature stories than hard news.

Limitations of the study: This study has certain limitations, which are bound to create motivating opportunities for future research. i. News reporting includes print, electronic and new media. Future studies can include analysis of primetime television reports and online stories in covering the issue. ii. Frames are believed to differ with each news media. Thus, future studies can perform a comparative analysis of mainstream and alternative media frames for a deeper framing research. iii. Reader's opinion can enrich framing analysis. Future studies can include surveys of readers to learn the impact of news frames.

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