

# Coverage of Themes in News Stories related to Mullai Periyar-Interstate water Conflicts published in Regional newspapers of Tamil Nadu

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**Abstract:** *In the scenario of Mullai Periyar Dam conflict between Tamil Nadu and Kerala, Media has played an important role in the portrayal of this conflict from the first stage. The review of the literature collected to analyze the different opinions discussed in the news stories published in the regional newspapers. For the studying about the media influence on people, news stories related to Mullai Periyar Dam conflict published in four major regional newspapers from Tamil Nadu were collected. In particular, the study focuses on the media's role in the coverage of the dispute. In the study, 'Nature and Intensity' of the news stories related to the Mullai Periyar Water Dispute in the newspaper was analyzed in this study. To understand the themes and the flow of opinions related to the conflict, news stories published in the newspapers for over 15 years of time from 1998 to 2012 were collected and subjected to analysis.*

**Key Words:** *Themes, Mullai Periyar, Interstate water Conflict, Coverage, print media, newspapers.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

Water is an essential, limited, and non-substitutable resource for survival. Today, water is considered as the heart of an economy of any country and it is the primary source for social well-being. It provides countless benefits – such as drinking water, irrigation, electricity, and even for transportation. Rivers have a significant historical important role in India, first ever civilization happened on the banks of Indus River. At the same time, issues like climate change, population growth, and urbanization have dramatically increasing demand for freshwater around the world. While the world's human population keeps on increasing, demand for fresh water will also increase by 30 percent across the globe. Many parts of the world are already undergoing the short of water supply and it has been estimated that half of the world's population will be living in high water stress areas by 2030 (Mason & Blank, 2013).

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

### Role and responsibility of Media in the society

Mass media plays an important role in people's day-to-day life. Primarily, media's role can receive two different approaches in the society. Either the media takes part of the conflict and has responsibility for increasing hostility, or stays out of the conflict, contribute to the resolution of conflict. Media becomes an integral part of people's life in terms of reflecting the situation which prevails in the society. The responsibility of media is not to create any confusion in the society structure and not to fool around with the emotions of the people.

Pillay (2004) emphasize that, "the mass media in liberal democracies is often seen as a conduit of information and ideas that empowers ordinary citizens". However, the media does not always do this successfully to its audience. Access to information is vital for any democracy; because it ensures its targeted audience in understanding about well-informed decisions through its news stories. For any democratic nation, the media is an important establishment that provides diversity in the news and information (Pillay, 2004).

### Water conflict in the world

The Nile – the world's longest river, which passes through ten countries and currently, serves over 300 million people living in the Nile River basin (Kung, 2003). Over the years, there have been tensions among the Nile River basin countries in acquiring an essential resource-water. It all began from the 1929 and 1959 Nile water agreements respectively between Britain and Egypt and Sudan and Egypt. Despite the fact, Ethiopia contributes roughly 86% of Nile water but it consumes merely about 1% of Nile discharge. Today, Egypt utilizes 65% of Nile flow and Sudan gets significant amount of flow (Waterbury, 2002). An agreement for the utilization of Nile waters between Egypt and Sudan in 1959 left out other riparian's of the Nile and it prohibits them from using the flow or constructs any projects over Nile. In 1992, the effects were taken for a basin-wide water development cooperative framework. The Nile Basin Initiative (NBI), an attempt by the World Bank, the United Nations Development Program, and other donors to promote

cooperative and equitable allocation of the Nile’s waters, was formed in 2002, aims at helping the riparian states in achieving reasonable solution NBI, 2008. However, 12 years after the NBI was established, a treaty involving all the riparian's is still to be agreed upon.

**Water conflict in India**

India is a water-stressed country. Increasing shortages are experienced at local levels which can spread to the regional level as the population continues to grow. The stress on water resources is increasing rapidly due to rising demands for the agricultural and industrial needs. Most of the major rivers of India transcend multiple states, constructing efficient and equitable mechanisms for allocating river flows have been an important legal and constitutional issue. Numerous inter-state river-water disputes have erupted since independence. When several states are equally dependent on the same river system, disputes among the states regarding allocation and utilization of river waters are natural phenomena in democratic country where large areas are relatively dry. These disputes occur when upstream a state, through their water projects, affects the quantity and quality of the water flow in the basin and restrict the use of downstream states (Shiva, 1991).

**Water conflict in Tamil Nadu**

The Mullai Periyar Dam was constructed by the British during 1887-1895 across Periyar River and located in the Idukki district of Kerala. The dam, with full reservoir level of 152 ft. provides irrigation benefit southern Tamil Nadu. MullaiPeriyar Dam issue is one of the sensational water dispute issues between the state of Tamil Nadu and Kerala in India. The coverage of Mullai Periyar dispute has received wider attention from both the regional and the national media. This research attempts to study about the role played by the media in correspondence to news stories about the Mullai Periyar Dam issue in popular Tamil newspapers.

**3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:**

In this section, the research tends to study the nature of the coverage of Mullai Periyar interstate water conflict. For this, the research work has been focused on ‘Themes’ in the popular Tamil newspapers of Tamil Nadu.

- *To Study the Nature of the Coverage of Mullai Periyar Interstate water Conflict news stories in the popular Tamil newspapers of Tamil Nadu.*

**4. METHODOLOGY:**

**Quantitative Content Analysis**

This study employs a quantitative method of content analysis and operates on the concept of case study.

**5. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS:**

**Nature and Intensity**

In order to study the ‘Nature and Intensity’ of the coverage of the conflict, the researcher attempted to study the ‘Themes in the news stories’ along with the stories that accommodated in the newspaper during the Mullai Periyar Water Dispute. The above mentioned parameters are considered important to assess the nature and intensity of the coverage. Hence, the percentage distribution of ‘Themes’ were observed according to the variables in correspondence to the news stories published in the newspapers during the conflict. The obtained results are tabulated and presented below.

**Themes in the News Stories**

In this section, ‘Themes in the stories’ has been taken to study the association between the news stories and the conflict. The study focuses on ‘Themes in the stories’ from the central area of operation of the stories viz., the main element that is in focus. This has been analyzed based on the variables like ‘Political’, ‘Government’, ‘Violence’, ‘Police/ Crime’, ‘Law/ Order’, ‘Court/ legal’ ‘Others’ and the results were analyzed and discussed.

**NEWSPAPER WISE PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF THE THEMES IN THE STORY**

Table 1

*Newspaper wise percentage distribution of Themes in the news stories*

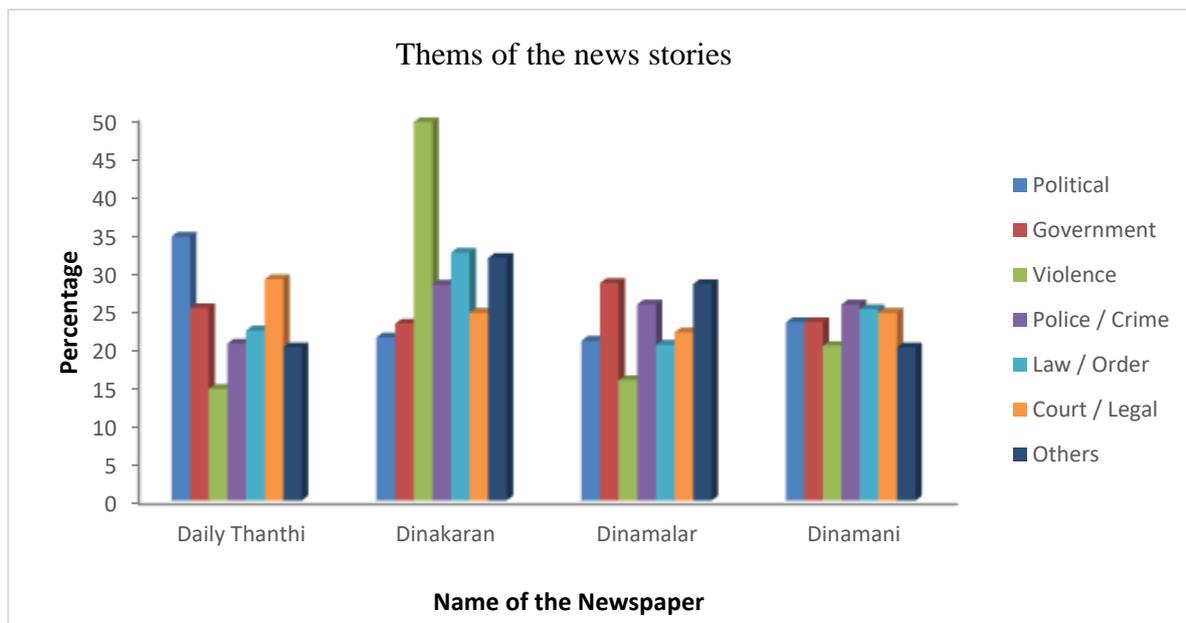
Themes in the News Stories	Name of the newspaper								Total	%
	Daily Thanthi		Dinakaran		Dinamalar		Dinamani			
	N	%	n	%	n	%	N	%		

Political	228	34.49	141	21.33	138	20.88	154	23.30	661	34.42
Government	137	25.13	126	23.11	155	28.44	127	23.30	545	28.38
Violence	13	14.60	44	49.43	14	15.73	18	20.22	89	4.63
Police / Crime	8	20.51	11	28.20	10	25.64	10	25.64	39	2.03
Law / Order	24	22.22	35	32.40	22	20.37	27	25.00	108	5.62
Court / Legal	79	28.93	67	24.54	60	21.97	67	24.54	273	14.21
Others	41	20.00	65	31.70	58	28.29	41	20.00	205	10.67
Total	530	27.60	489	25.46	457	23.80	444	23.12	1920	
$\chi^2$										69.57**

Note: \*\*= $p < 0.01$ ; Sources=Primary Data

Percentage wise distribution of the ‘Themes in the news stories’ among the newspapers reveals that more importance was given to ‘Political’ which is about 34.42% when compared to the other news stories. A very lesser representation of 2.03% was given for Police/Crime. A proportion of 28.38%, 4.63%, 5.62%, 14.21% and 10.67% were given for Government, Violence, Law/Order, Court/Legal and others respectively. The distribution of Political news across the newspapers seems to be 34.49% in *Daily Thanthi*, 21.33% in *Dinakaran*, 20.88% in *Dinamalar* and 23.3% in *Dinamani*.

The second high importance was given to ‘Government’ news stories 28.38% with a total of 545 stories in the overall distribution. A proportion of ‘Government’ news stories were 25.13% in *Daily Thanthi*, 28.44% in *Dinamalar*, 23.30% in *Dinamani* and 23.11% in *Dinakaran*.



Regarding the theme ‘Court/Legal’, *Daily Thanthi* exhibits 28.93%, *Dinakaran* exhibits 24.54%, *Dinamalar* exhibits 21.97% and *Dinamani* exhibits 24.54%. Among ‘Violence’ news stories, *Daily Thanthi* exhibits 14.60%, *Dinakaran* exhibits 49.43%, *Dinamalar* exhibits 15.73% and *Dinamani* exhibits 20.22%. In correspondence to ‘Law/Order’ news stories, *Daily Thanthi* shows 22.22%, *Dinakaran* 32.4%, *Dinamalar* 20.37% and *Dinamani* 25.00%. Overall calculated chi-square value 69.57 ( $p < 0.001$ ) showed that the distribution of news stories were statistically associated among the categorized newspapers.

### Year wise distribution of the newspapers on Political news



Year	Political news stories												Total	%
	Daily Thanthi			Dinakaran			Dinamalar			Dinamani				
	n <sub>1</sub>	%	% Inc/Dec	n <sub>2</sub>	%	% Inc/Dec	n <sub>3</sub>	%	% Inc/Dec	n <sub>4</sub>	%	% Inc/Dec		
1998	0	0.00		0	0.00		1	100.00		0	0.00		1	0.15
1999	1	50.00		0	0.00		1	50.00	0.00	0	0.00		2	0.30
2000	1	16.67	0.00	1	16.67		2	33.33	100.00	2	33.33		6	0.90
2001	1	9.09	0.00	4	36.36	300.00	3	27.27	50.00	3	27.27	50.00	11	1.66
2002	1	8.33	0.00	3	25.00	-25.00	6	50.00	100.00	2	16.67	-33.33	12	1.81
2003	3	23.08	200.00	7	53.85	133.33	0	0.00	-100.00	3	23.08	50.00	13	1.96
2004	9	33.33	200.00	1	3.70	-85.71	5	18.52		12	44.44	300.00	27	4.08
2005	15	40.54	66.67	5	13.51	400.00	12	32.43	140.00	5	13.51	-58.33	37	5.59
2006	74	53.62	393.33	22	15.94	340.00	29	21.01	141.67	13	9.42	160.00	138	20.08
2007	16	21.05	-78.38	16	21.05	-27.27	15	19.74	-48.28	29	38.16	123.08	76	11.49
2008	34	42.50	112.50	14	17.50	-12.50	15	18.75	0.00	17	21.25	-41.38	80	12.10
2009	53	38.41	55.88	18	13.04	28.57	38	27.54	153.33	29	21.01	70.59	138	20.08
2010	20	29.41	-62.26	18	26.47	0.00	11	16.18	-71.05	19	27.94	-34.48	68	10.28
2011	0	0.00	-100.00	23	57.50	27.78	0	0.00	-100.00	17	42.50	-10.53	40	6.05
2012	0	0.00		9	75.00	-60.87	0	0.00		3	25.00	-82.35	12	1.81
<b>Total</b>	<b>228</b>			<b>141</b>			<b>138</b>			<b>154</b>			<b>661</b>	
<b>Mean</b>	<b>15.2</b>			<b>9.4</b>			<b>9.2</b>			<b>10.27</b>				
<b>SD</b>	<b>22.28</b>			<b>8.32</b>			<b>11.36</b>			<b>10.05</b>				
<b>CV</b>	<b>146.59</b>			<b>88.53</b>			<b>123.47</b>			<b>97.85</b>				
<b>AAGR</b>	<b>65.64</b>			<b>84.86</b>			<b>30.47</b>			<b>41.10</b>				
<b>LGR</b>	<b>11.44</b>			<b>18.50</b>			<b>18.90</b>			<b>16.94</b>				
<b>F</b>														<b>0.529</b> NS

Note: NS=Not Significant; Sources=Primary Data; CV= coefficient of variation; AAGR=Average Annual Growth Rate; LGR= Linear Growth Rate. □

Year wise distribution of the newspapers on “Political news” was shown in the above table for 15 years from 1998 to 2012. Of the total news observed on the political news, 34.49% of the news stories observed in *Daily Thanthi*, 21.33% in *Dinakaran*, 20.08% in *Dinamalar* and 23.3 % in *Dinamani*. The highest number of political news with 20.08% in equal measures were recovered in the year 2006 and 2009 respectively. The total of 33.89% political news was recorded during the year 2007, 2008 and 2010. The remaining 10 years accounted the proportion of other news stories reported. Mean (SD) news reported on the “Political theme” in *Daily Thanthi*, *Dinakaran*, *Dinamalar* and *Dinamani* were 15(22.28), 9.4(8.32), 9.2(11.36) and 10.27(10.05) respectively over 15 years. In the year of 2006, high increment in the number of news reported was observed in all the newspaper. In the year of 2009, percentage increase was high in *Dinamalar* on political theme. Percentage increase from 2002 to 2003 and 2003 to 2004 were 200%.

**Average Annual Growth Rate (AAGR)** was calculated to study the growth at which the parameter values increase or decrease using the formula:

$$AAGR = [(X_t - X_{t-1}) / X_{t-1} * 100] / n \text{ where } t = \text{time period}$$

**Linear Growth Rate** was calculated using the following formula:

$Y = a + bt$ , where  $t = \text{time}$ ,  $a = \text{constant}$ ,  $b = \text{the regression coefficient}$ , which represents the rate of change that occurs in  $Y$  when time varies. The average growth is found out by dividing the coefficient ‘ $b$ ’ by the ‘Mean’ of series .i.e., ‘Linear Growth Rate’ =  $b / Y * 100$ .

**Compound Growth Rate (CGR)** was calculated using the following formula

$Y = a bt$ , where  $t = \text{time}$ ,  $a = \text{constant}$ ,  $b = \text{growth coefficient}$ . From which the CGR is computed as follows.

$CGR = (b - 1) * 100$ , which represents the ‘Growth Rate’ of the series computed over a period.

One-way ANOVA test was used to analyze the significant difference between the newspapers over the 15 years. F-value of 0.529 with p-value 0.913 in the above table shows there is no significant difference between the newspapers on “Political Theme” appeared in the newspapers.

## 6. CONCLUSION:

Water is one of the most basic and essential needs of people, the species that share life on earth with humanity, and the environment. Quantity, quality, and many users with diverse interests create competition over this limited resource. Water problems involve diverse issues, including: agriculture, health of populations, quality of the environment, power production, navigation on rivers, and fisheries – all issues that determine the fate of this and future

generations. The scarcity of water in an arid and semi-arid environment leads to intense political pressures, often referred to as 'water stress', a term coined by Falkenmark (1989). Specifically disproportionate political power by special interest and a general neglect for environmental concerns are major problems that water resources faced by now.

**The following are some of the finding.**

Political news was predominantly occupying more space in the studied newspapers.

**7. RECOMMENDATIONS:**

Media coverage of Mullai Periyar interstate water dispute plays a critical role in informing the public on the subject. Tamil newspapers effort to engage its audiences on the issue are therefore weaken when biased information dominates the content. It is not clear whether Tamil newspapers have any policy on Mullai Periyar coverage. Nonetheless, as influential participants in democratic society, newspapers have an obligation to improve its representations of Mullai Periyar water dispute.

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