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Journal of Corpus Linguistics

journal homepage: <https://journals.au.edu.pk/ojsrcr/index.php/crc>

Religious Framing in Media Discourse: A Corpus-Based Study of Pakistan-India Conflict 2025

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Cognitive Framing Theory, Corpus-Based Discourse Analysis, Ideological Square, Media discourse, Pakistan-India Conflict, Religious framing

ABSTRACT

This study highlights the role of religious framing in shaping public discourse during the 2025 Pakistan-India conflict, drawing on comparative corpus-based research of 50 editorials (25 from The Times of India and 25 from Dawn News). Based on the Cognitive Framing Theory by George Lakoff and Teun van Dijk and his Ideological Square, the study examines how metaphors, religious symbols, and ideological discourses are used in the national construction of identities, moral standing, and justifications for a conflict. The study identifies meaningful lexical patterns, collocations, and semantic frames in both corpora using advanced corpus tools, including LancsBox, Sketch Engine, and the CLAWS-USAS Tagger. The religious terms were common when referring to major religious figures in the promotion of political action, such as Sindoor, Bunyanum Marsoos, Quran, martyr, holy, and Hindu/Muslim. Hindu metaphors such as Sindoor were also very evident in the Indian corpus (20,312 tokens: MTLTD = 148.29) to present the action of retaliation as a sacrosanct duty and feminine honour, and the Islamic metaphors such as Bunyanum Marsoos were populating in the Pakistani corpus (25,805 tokens; MTLTD = 123.68) to present a war as a Quranic obligation. The analysis revealed that religion was not simply the focus of the media discourse and was strategically deployed to develop moral binaries with the in-groups appearing as righteous, rational, and peace-seeking and out-groups as extremist, violent and dishonorable. According to the findings, religious framing in South Asian media during times of conflict has the potential to increase polarization, desensitize the public, and justify violence under moral pretexts.

1. Introduction

Religion has long served as both a source of unity and division in the socio-political histories of South Asia, particularly between India and Pakistan (Entman, 2004). Since the partition of British India in 1947, religious identity has not only underpinned national boundaries but also shaped the contours of the Indian state. Still, it has also been central to the narratives of

Contributions:

- ^{1*} Methodology, Data Curation, Analysis, Visualization
- ² Conceptualization, Supervision
- ³ Writing – Draft, Writing – Review

Available online 31 December 2025

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conflict, victimhood, and legitimacy espoused by both states (Reese, 2007). As Nussbaum (2007) argues, “Religion becomes a tool of politics when it is used to define loyalty to the nation” (p. 134), and nowhere is this more evident than in Indo-Pakistani relations. Media discourse plays a pivotal role in this dynamic, functioning as both a reflector and a constructor of ideological frames that reinforce or challenge religiously driven nationalism (Fairclough, 2013; Van Dijk, 1998). The rivalry between India and Pakistan, especially in South Asia, has lasted longer and is more complex than that of many other post-colonial rivals, partly because the media supports propaganda from both governments (Ahmed, 2019). However, the primary goal of this research is to investigate how religion is used as a framing mechanism in news coverage of the 2025 Indo-Pakistan conflict.

1.1 Research Problem

Regardless of diplomatic work in South Asia, the way the media in each country portrays nationalism and religion often controls public opinion between India and Pakistan. Although there are research studies on how stories about war and terrorism can be biased, there is little academic work that analyzes how religion is portrayed using language in comparative national narratives. Also, most studies on framing have emphasized Western media or non-religious perspectives, thereby missing how religious concepts from the Quran and the Bible are used in discussions of regional conflicts. The 2025 conflict offers a chance to examine the links between language, religion, and conflict journalism at a vital moment.

1.2 Research Aims and Objectives

The primary goal of this research is to investigate how religion is used as a framing mechanism in news coverage of the 2025 Indo-Pakistan conflict. Specifically, it aims to:

- Identify and compare the religious frames employed by Dawn and The Times of India in their editorial coverage of the 2025 Indo-Pakistan conflict.
- Analyze the linguistic and semantic patterns used to construct in-group (self) and out-group (other) representations through religion-based narratives.

1.3 Research Questions

1. How is religion framed in the editorial discourse of Dawn and The Times of India during the 2025 Indo-Pakistan conflict?
2. What linguistic and semantic patterns are employed to construct moral binaries and in-group/out-group identities across both corpora?

1.4 Scope and Delimitation

This work analyses only online English-language editorials, opinion pieces and reports from The Times of India and Dawn News that were released during the peak of the conflict between Jan 2025 and May 2025. Only articles with passages specifically mentioning religious elements (Quran, Hinduism, moral terms used in religion) are chosen for the corpus. Only textual analysis was used, and media sources such as television, social media and political speeches were included if they were quoted in articles.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The research advances critical discourse analysis (CDA) in the study of religious conflict, primarily by examining Indo-Pakistani media stories through a comparative lens. It also contributes to cognitive linguistics by showing that war propaganda draws on metaphors from common religious traditions to shape people’s thinking and feelings during war. It chiefly focuses on the fact that religion sometimes creates division and sometimes brings people together, as seen in stories about the world today, showing the range of faith’s influence.

2. Literature Review

This conflict between Pakistan and India in 2025, which was caused by cross-border attacks and retaliation with operations such as Operation Sindoor and Operation Bunyanum Marsoos, made a significant contribution to the way conflicts in the region are talked about. Besides military activities, the fight was carried out in mainstream content using language, symbols and religious terms. Those newspapers used spiritual writings, religious comparisons, and the emotions of Indians and Pakistanis to shape their country’s national narratives. In particular, talking about the war with Islamic and Hindu images in both countries made the

reporting about the war into a spiritual fight (Ahmed, 2019). The India-Pakistan conflict of 2025 is a crucial point in the development of bilateral relations, not only because of the revival of cross-border violence but also because of its ideological, communicative, and symbolic character. Stirred by militant actions in Indian-controlled Kashmir and preceded by retaliatory military actions dubbed Operation Sindoor by India and Operation Bunyanum Marsoos by Pakistan, the war was a transition to more traditionally characterized security rhetoric of explicitly moral and religious justification (Smith et al., 2023). The 2025 conflict was marked by the systematic use of religious symbolism, scriptural allusions, and religious metaphors by political and mainstream media leaders in both nations, unlike previous crises such as the 2016 Uri or 2019 Pulwama episodes. Such symbolic decisions transformed a territorial or strategic conflict into a moralised fight based on civilisation and religious background (Shahzad et al., 2024).

The 2025 violence is important in the context of the overall development of India-Pakistan relations, as media discussion has become an increasingly obvious battleground, where the validity of national identity, the righteousness of violent actions, and public approval of violence are formed (Thussu, 2021). When the two nuclear-armed states are under intense international inspection, the apprehension of the religious framing in elite media narratives is particularly potent in creating the perception among the population, reducing the chance of diplomatic interactions, and empowering militarised emotions. Based on this, the study of this conflict offers a timely insight into the mobilisation of religious language to reinforce polarisation, in-group bonding, and the naturalisation of hostility in South Asian media discourse (Shahid et al., 2023).

Studies indicate that religion influences people's perspectives on the world and provides terms and ideas for discussion (Lakoff, 2004; Wodak, 2001). Lakoff points out that with cognitive framing, metaphors inspired can shape how people think and vote by emphasising their core values and ethical beliefs. Religious frames carrying out violence and supporting the group seem right, discourage people from working with outsiders and paint an unfair picture of the enemy (Lakoff, 2004). Although a lot of research work has been done on framing war and terrorism in the media (Entman, 2004; Reese, 2007), only a few studies have concentrated on religious framing in South Asian media. Most research on Indo-Pak media bias explores nationalism, the perpetuation of information, and who controls what is said (Nawaz, 2020; Thussu, 2021), but little attention is given to how religion is discussed during conflict. It aims to bridge that gap by examining how sacred symbols, religious terms, and metaphysical ideas are used in Indian and Pakistani news coverage of the 2025 conflict. Since the people in the region are highly sensitive, the ways in which such matters are publicly discussed can affect government decisions, how people feel and react, and the relationships between various religions (Ali, 2020). For this reason, there is a need to investigate how religious meanings and expressions are used to *moralise* and *nationalise* the talk about war in the subcontinent.

An increasing body of literature points to the selective coverage of mainstream media on conflicts to advance dominant political ideologies at the expense of other views. The present research is greatly similar to the study conducted by Barari & Yacoub (2024) on Israeli media reporting on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. By conducting a critical discourse analysis of Israeli newspapers, the authors can illustrate how media sources legitimize militarized state reaction, deny Palestinians their humanity and support one-sided nationalist projects. They find that they pursue systematic omission, emotive framing, and polarising strategies, all of which, rather than leading to political reconciliation, make political intransigence.

This tendency mirrors the dynamics of Indo-Pakistani media, as elite newspapers often follow the state discourse during times of crisis. Media discourse in South Asia resembles the Israeli situation in that it can be viewed as an ideological warfare being spread, which presents violence, defensive, and morally right action without involving the voices of dialogue or humanitarian restraint. The article by Barari & Yacoub (2024) therefore provides a solid argument for why media bias in conflict is not incidental but systemic in nationalist and ideological modes of reporting. Further, othering and moral essentialism have been used to analyze the role of religion in media framing critically. The examination of The Times of India's news reports on the Punjab crisis, provided by Mann (2025), helps demonstrate how religious communities can be discursively produced as violent and pre-modern. Based on the analysis presented by William Cavanaugh (2011) on the myth of religious violence, Mann posits that media framing misleads by applying the label of violence to the state of religion and makes the state invisible in the production and legitization of coercion.

The theoretical intervention is especially applicable in the 2025 conflict between India and Pakistan, in which Hindu and Islamic markers are used to justify, moralize and explain military actions and uses. Through the representation of violence as a religion-based or God-approved act of violence, media rhetoric shifts the blame to political decision-makers and reinvents state violence as righteousness. The current research builds on Mann's (2025) argument by demonstrating how religious metaphors like Sindoor and Bunyanum Marsoos function not only as descriptions but also as ideological frames that sacrifice nationalism and inure audiences to human suffering.

Similarly, the studies of Islamophobia and the portrayal of Muslims in the Western media also shed more light on the selective creation of religious identities in conflicts. The huge scope of the international print media analysis by Latif (2024) shows how Muslims are constantly linked to terrorism, irrationality, and aggression by using repetitive rhetorical patterns. These

depictions are based on choices of emphasis, omission of Muslim voices, and stereotyping morally, and they lead to racial profiling and popular fear. Though mostly Western in perspective, Latif's (2024) findings are very close to the South Asian media trends, especially in the Indian English-language newspapers, where Islam has been subjected to a security threat in a very regular manner. In its turn, the Pakistani media tend to react by promoting Muslim martyrhood and victimhood, which strengthens a counter-discourse. Collectively, the research papers highlight the critical role of religious identity as a venue for ideological conflict in coverage of conflicts that shape popular emotion and political loyalty.

Additionally, the synthesis of Digital Religion Studies by Ergen (2023) reveals that the meanings of religions are influenced by mediatization, hypermediation, and identity formation. These theories describe how religious accounts spread quickly across platforms and how they affirm emotional frames and communal identities. The editorials with a religious background are also not limited to newspapers in the 2025 conflict and are enhanced through digital circulation, political speech, and social media discourse. This media environment of polarization leads to even greater normalization of sacred violence, pointing to the increased possibilities of the religious framing beyond the conventional print journalism.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The work in this study is based on two complementary models: Cognitive Framing Theory, by George Lakoff, and the Ideological Square, introduced by Van Dijk, an influential idea in critical discourse analysis. Combining these ideas allows us to see how religious terminology, significant symbols and opposing value systems are present in media reports about the 2025 India–Pakistan war and its depiction of self and other.

2.1.1 Cognitive Framing Theory (Lakoff)

Lakoff (2004) argues that mental frames and metaphors shape people's political and moral thought. He believes that frames are mental images as well as words; they are activated when we use language with a purpose. He states that, when facts do not suit the frame, the frame stays and the facts are ignored (p. 17). Usually in wartime reporting, ideas are formed that separate heroes from villains, victims from attackers and put justice at odds with evil. The action is known as Operation Sindoor, which connects the mission to the importance of Hindu womanhood and argues that taking revenge on those who hurt India is a duty that must be carried out. Likewise, Pakistani politicians often talk about Bunyanun Marsoos (the Qur'an describes it as a united army) to turn war into something godly. Accordingly, such language explains things in ways that alter the way the public thinks about politics and accepts certain actions.

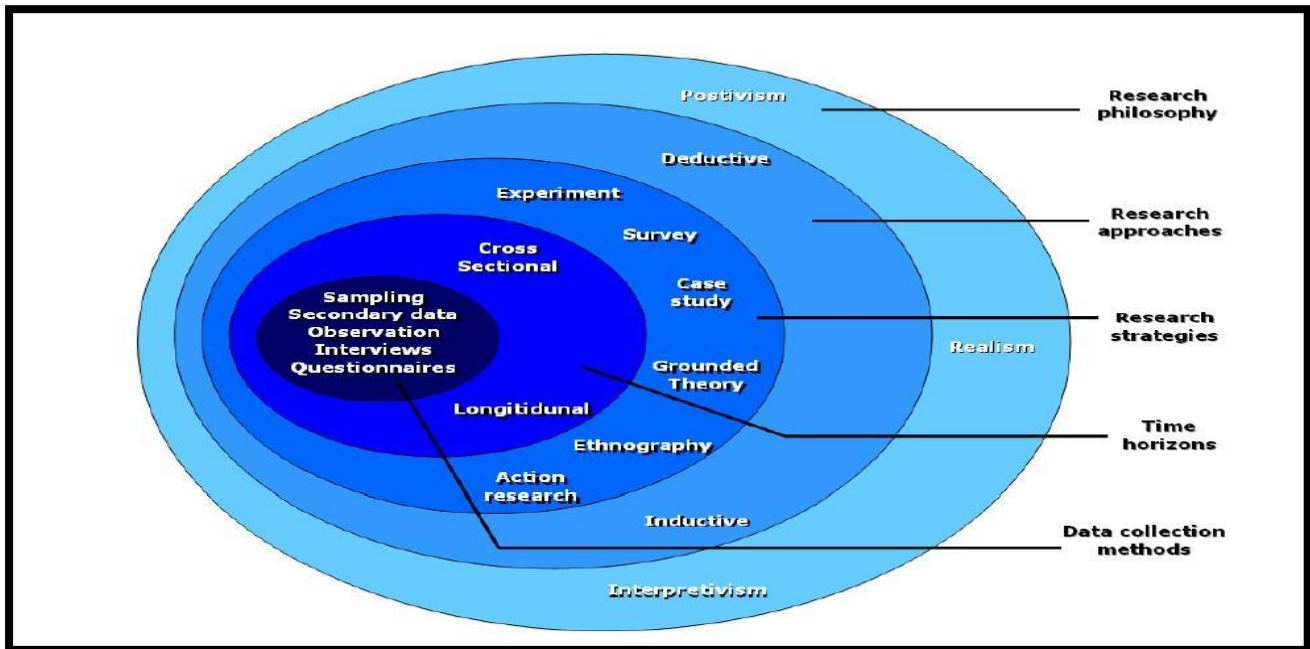
2.1.2 Van Dijk's Ideological Square

Another model to consider, related to Lakoff, is Van Dijk's Ideological Square, which is central to critical discourse analysis (CDA). Van Dijk (1998) claims that group identities are formed in ways that make members see themselves positively while representing the other negatively. The ideological square tries to make us feel good about ourselves by: (1) mentioning our strengths, (2) lessening talk about our weaknesses, (3) pointing out their weaknesses, and (4) lessening talk about their strengths. In this study, analysing in-group and out-group actors through religious lines depends heavily on Van Dijk's model. For example, Dawn News regularly mentions Pakistan's role in religion, put emphasises martyrdom and Quran verses and shows the sacrifices of soldiers and criticises any actions by India as insults to Islam.

Meanwhile, The Times of India portrays Pakistan as an extremist country run by clerics, while it positions India as having proper and advanced reactions to terrorism. Van Dijk's model helps us see how language sustains groups that share the same nationalist or communal ideas. As a result, they enable the study to both spot references to religion and analyse how they work in people's minds and beliefs. Lakoff demonstrates that public morality and emotions are organised by language itself. Still, Van Dijk argues that this language encourages people to see things simply as "us" versus "them," making conflict seem expected and uncomplicated.

3. Methodology

This section describes the methodology used to analyse the religiously focused news coverage of the 2025 conflict in India and Pakistan. The Research Onion Model, as shown in Figure 1 and suggested by Saunders et al. (2019), guides the research process by helping select the philosophical framework, the approach to be followed, the research design, and the tools used for analysis. The sensitive nature of the subject means this study takes a critical-qualitative direction and uses corpus linguistic methods to analyse religious news items in two leading English newspapers from Pakistan (Dawn) and India (The Times of India).

Figure 1*Research Onion Model (Saunders et al., 2019)*

The research used an interpretivist philosophy, which means that people and meanings shape reality through their unique experiences and accounts. This approach suits discourse research, as it helps us recognise the underlying meanings, traditions, and feelings behind what is said. By centring on religious metaphors, sacred symbols, and their uses in the mind and culture, the research emphasises how the media organises and explains meanings during times of national tension. It also applies constructivist theory, which claims that knowledge is made through how events are discussed and experienced in society, particularly when discussing moral ideas, personal identities, or feelings during times of war. Moreover, the approach is deductive, starting with important theories: Lakoff's Cognitive Framing Theory and Van Dijk's Ideological Square and then using them to analyse the media texts. Based on these theories, one can recognise and interpret sentences that reflect religion, ethics, and ideas about who is excluded. A deductive approach means the study did not lose touch with its theories and allowed the results to adjust or expand them.

The hybrid model is suited for a study aiming for both a broad and detailed understanding of the qualitative comparative discourse analysis framework and supports it with methods from corpus-based studies. While tools help identify how words and terms are used across many articles, in-depth or qualitative analysis can further clarify the results. This aids the systematic study of sacred language in narratives about nations and understanding its connections to conflict, identity and morality.

This study relies on 50 editorials and opinion articles, with each newspaper accounting for approximately half of the total. All articles were published between January and May 2025, analysing events that occurred as part of Operation Sindoor and Operation Bunyanum Marsoos. Second, the articles picked for this analysis included content on the Quran, Hindu rituals, martyrdom or religious identity. In addition, all the selected texts were from the editorial or opinion genre because these styles require and demonstrate interpretive and ideological tendencies. After removing anything non-linguistic, these texts were sorted into two corpora to make a comparison between the media in Pakistan and India possible. The three main tools used in the study for processing and analysing corpora were: to examine keywords, identify collocations, and produce related sentences for review. It provided information on how words are connected and how often they appear, offering important insights into religious and ideological motives. LancsBox, an advanced corpus tool, was used to examine how religious terms were connected to words outside their immediate context. Secondly, the Sketch Engine was also used to achieve more effective results. Finally, CLAWS Tagger with the UCREL Semantic Analysis System (USAS) was used for semantic tagging. This tagging classified lexical items into semantic categories such as Religion, Conflict, Emotion, and Morality, to map religious framing onto broader thematic domains.

A series of stages was developed to ensure the approach was consistent and provided the necessary theoretical foundation for the analysis. The first thing to do was to normalise the case, correct punctuation, and remove extra content from the texts. Next, the construction and purification of two corpora were completed, and these were loaded into Sketch Engine and LancsBox. A keyword analysis was conducted after setting up each corpus to identify religious and ideological keywords specific to that corpus, compared with a general English corpus. Some of the keywords were sindoor, martyr, enemy, widow, Quran, holy and Bunyanum

Marsoos. LogDice and Mutual Information (MI) values were next used in collocation analysis to look for strong ties between religious words and other words. This phase was important in establishing how the sacred language was used in the sacred texts. The 10 most common and politically charged terms were then analysed to see their usage throughout the text. The analysis was based on how concordance patterns reflected the ideas of Cognitive Framing Theory and Van Dijk's Ideological Square, which allowed me to assess how metaphors and judgments influenced storytelling and how different groups were depicted through religious meanings in the news.

All the online data is freely available, and no people were involved in the study. Topics such as religion, violence, and nationalism were discussed; every effort was made to remain neutral in the analysis and interpretation of the data.

4. Data Analysis

4.1 Corpus Metrics Comparison

Figure 2

Corpus Metrics Comparison (LancsBox X 5.0.3)

Name	Tokens	MATTR ₅₀	MTLD
The Dawn News Corpus (Jan-May).docx	25,805	0.84	123.68
Corpus of Times of India (Jan-May).docx	20,312	0.85	148.29

As shown in Figure 2, the corpora include editorials from January to May 2025 from The Dawn and The Times of India and serve as the basis for this discourse comparison of religious framing during the Pakistan-India conflict. According to the LancsBox overview, the Indian corpus (Times of India) contains about 20,312 tokens, while the Pakistani corpus (Dawn) contains 25,805 tokens. Indian editorials use more types of words (MTLD = 148.29) than Pakistani editorials (MTLD = 123.68) when looking at lexical diversity. This suggests that the editorials in the Times of India employ a wide range of vocabulary, which may be linked to their broader approach or to the intentional use of rich religious and nationalistic terminology to explain the conflict.

4.2 Frequency List (Times of India)

Table 1

Frequency List (Times of India)

Rank	Word	Frequency
43	india's	59
44	Kashmir	59
45	Pahalgam	56
47	Sindoor	53
143	Attacks	18
144	Security	18
145	Victims	18
146	Ceasefire	18
147	Strategic	18
148	Tensions	17
149	Many	17
150	Why	17
159	Women	17
160	Strike	17
202	Religion	13
233	Religious	11
246	Muslims	11
195	Hindus	14
250	lashkar-e-taiba	10

The frequency data pulled from the Times of India corpus demonstrates that the narrative favours themes of war, who people are as a nation, and spiritual or religious demonstrations. Words like Kashmir (59), Pahalgam (56), attack (18), strike (17), ceasefire (18), and security (18) appear most frequently, making it clear that the news often centres on conflict. Because such words are usually linked to strategic tensions, they suggest that people often see India as taking defensive measures through calculated military steps. It aligns with Lakoff's Cognitive Framing Theory, as it describes these retaliatory acts as naturally correct and justified rather than merely political or military moves.

It becomes very clear that religion is frequently discussed, as words like Sindoor (53), religion (13), religious (11), Hindus (14), and Muslims (11) are used so regularly. Sindoor, which usually symbolizes a Hindu woman's sacred identity, is adopted as the name for the operation and to describe purity, protection, and righteous anger. Religious and gendered language is chosen here to turn the military reaction into something that's seen as both proper and deserved by society. Giving the operation the name Operation Sindoor associates it with protecting religious values and seeking justice for Hindu honeymoon couples being attacked. So, using sindoor in marriage brings up a moral idea grounded in Hindu traditions, which Lakoff's theory would outline as the activation of a key morality principle, the need to look after the sacred.

The divide between Hindus and Muslims in Van Dijk's analysis also demonstrates how he uses his Ideological Square to separate the good (India) from the bad (any group connected to Pakistan). Words like Lashkar-e-Taiba and terrorist frequently appear alongside mentions of Pakistan, reinforcing the negative other-representation. This ideological separation reinforces perceptions of India's moral superiority and paints the conflict in black-and-white terms, a characteristic of polarized media discourse. The repeated mention of victims (18) and women (17) also supports a gendered religious framing. The portrayal of women as both symbolic bearers of honor and actual victims of violence adds emotional depth and moral weight to the conflict narrative. The operation itself is referred to as a form of widow's retribution, embedding the military strike in a culturally resonant context of sacred vengeance. Furthermore, the inclusive mention of both Hindu and Muslim women delivering official military briefings aims to present a unified, pluralistic national identity, further strengthening in-group cohesion.

4.3 Frequency List (The Dawn News)

Table 2

Frequency List (The Dawn News)

Word	Frequency	Relevance Category
Religious	54	Religion general
Muslims	19	Religious identity
Hindu	18	Religious identity
Allah	9	Theological reference (Islam)
Holy	9	Religious framing
Temple	9	Hindu religious space
Bunyanum	13	Religious/military framing
bunyan-um-marsoos	12	Quranic phrase/military code
Martyred	9	Martyrdom narrative
Quran	7	Sacred text (Islam)
Narrative	12	Framing language
Ideology	12	Political/religious ideation
Rhetoric	12	Discourse framing
Unity	12	In-group identity
Nationalism	12	Ideological alignment
Peace	40	Moral alternative (contrast)
Victims	18	Human cost, moral frame
Conflict	33	Thematic centrality
War	48	Military discourse
Aggression	26	Ideological label (out-group)
Terrorism	45	Religious framing (enemy)
attack(s)	24–53	Justification trigger
Ceasefire	28	Resolution framing

The Dawn News corpus frequency list reveals religiously tinted framing of the 2025 India–Pakistan conflict. The high frequency of the word 'religious' (54) underscores that religion is a significant topic in journalism. What's more, Muslims (19), Hindus (18) and Allah (9) demonstrate that religious identity is actively chosen to describe those affected and used to point out differences in ideologies. When these terms are used, such as temple, holy and Quran, they strengthen the spiritual and moral weight behind decisions in politics and warfare. At the same time, these words are not used without reason. Rather, they focus on a deeper identity issue, which is also connected to the religious side of the rivalry.

The words Bunyanum (13), Bunyan-um-Marsoos (12) and martyred (9) demonstrate that Islamic military imagery plays a big role in Pakistani media. This term comes from the Qur'an (in Surah As-Saff 61:4) and refers to a disciplined group under divine guidance, united to fight. That the military counter-offensive is labelled Operation Anfal implies an aim to portray retaliation as a unifying, faith-centred act. This style demonstrates Cognitive Framing Theory, portraying war as morally right rather than a decision made by politicians. At the same time, framing events in religious terms can exaggerate the conflict and deepen polarisation, making it harder for peace-seeking narratives to gain attention.

Terms such as peace (40) and ceasefire (28) suggest that peace and calm are presented as opposites to violence. Here, it is suggested that even though religious wars are promoted, people from civil society in Dawn are working to restore a moral focus on peaceful values. Peace narratives more often include words such as victims (18), unity (12), and human (14), highlighting the effects of the war on civilians and opposing the idea that victory belongs to a single country. In Pakistan, military leaders talk about protecting peace and refer to military defence as holy, yet this leads to unusual contradictions.

It is noticed through Van Dijk's Ideological Square that two polar ends are formed. Pakistani society is shown to view itself as pure, united and ready to face confrontation; key words like unity, freedom, and martyred express a clear perception of good intentions. Also, India is often seen as the antagonist due to remarks about aggression (26), attacks (24+) and Hindu attacks appearing many times in the text. Significantly, terrorism is mentioned many times (45), so the language in these official texts mixes action by the army with violence against Muslims. Consistent with ideological polarisation, this could also make state-level actions appear too simple and direct, risking essentialism.

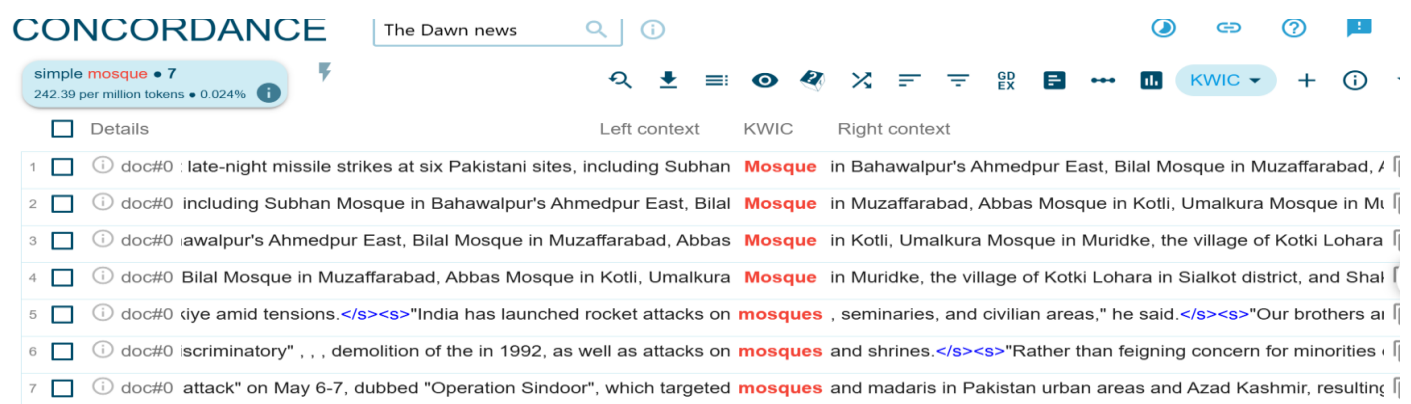
It is especially significant to note that narrative (12), rhetoric (12), and ideology (12) appear frequently, demonstrating that Dawn is conscious of its language use. The media reflects on the frames it communicates, which means that diverse ideas are being discussed. Such self-awareness frequently struggles for importance because binary thinking about religion is much stronger, especially when the conflict is at its highest.

4.4 Concordances

4.4.1 The Dawn News

Figure 3

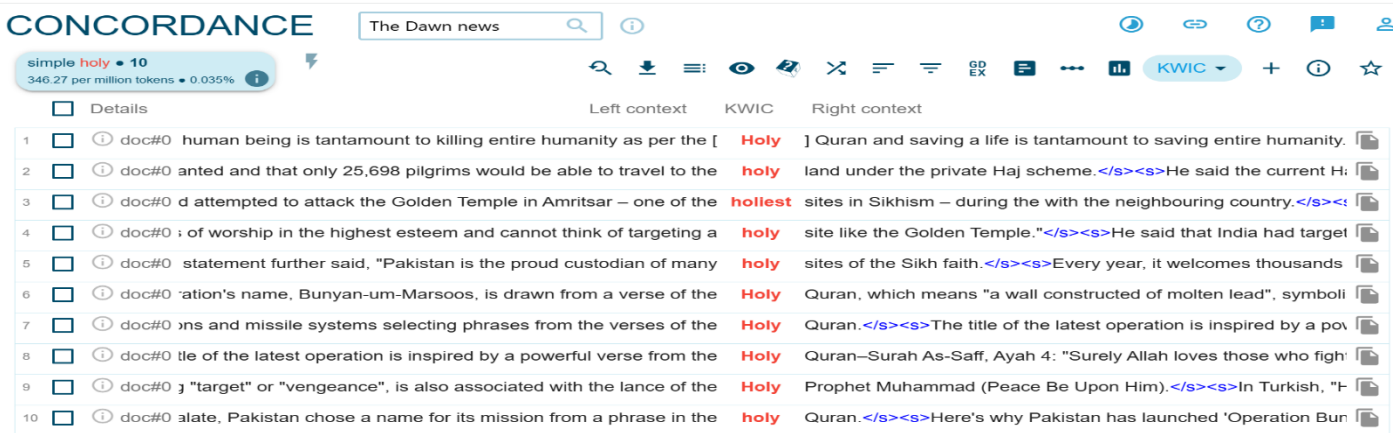
Concordances of Mosque



The concordance in Figure 3 above, which analyses various religious and ideological keywords in the Dawn News corpus, reveals a highly structured use of religious language to frame the 2025 India–Pakistan conflict. Lines 1–4 show that the attack targeted cities and specific mosques (Bahawalpur, Muzaffarabad, Kotli, Muridke), and that the mosques now stand for the whole Muslim community, which aligns with Van Dijk's discussion of negative Othering. In these lines, mosques are mentioned together with seminaries and general civilian areas (Line 5), and madaris (Line 7), which implies that religious spaces lose their specialness and civilians become as vulnerable as people in mosques. Line 6 mentions the Babri demolition, which shows that the violence shown now is expected from Hindu extremists. Giving the attack the name Operation Sindoor (related to Hindu marriage) sets it apart from the targeted Islamic sites, making it appear to be a fight based on religion rather than land. In Line 5, using the term 'our

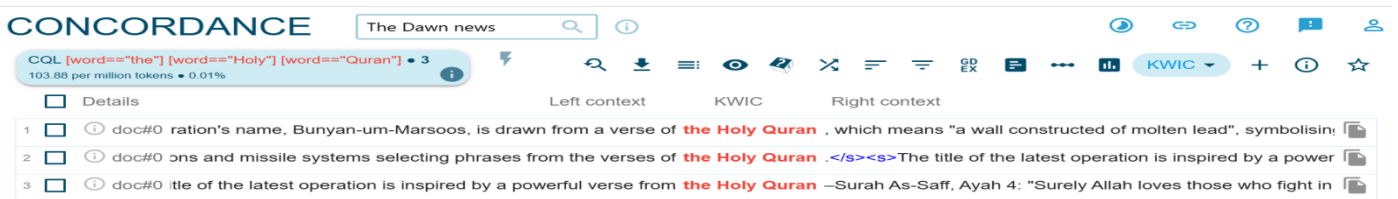
brothers' creates a division between victims and perpetrators, encouraging those in the group to feel united. Lexical repetition of mosque and references to history paint Pakistan as a protector of Muslim values and suggest that future attacks are expected.

Figure 4
Concordances of holy



In Figure 4, words such as Quran, land, and site are set apart as holy, further demonstrating the use of sacralized language. Such phrases perform many different functions in our minds. Referring to the Quran and the Prophet as leaders makes military decisions in Pakistan feel justified and part of an ethical and spiritual call to act. At the same time, referring to Pakistan as a keeper of holy sites improves its own image of guarding Islam’s important places. By implication, this declares India guilty of harming that sanctity and acting as the aggressor who is willing to attack what is sacred. In other words, Lakoff’s approach explains that Pakistan’s military steps are regarded as both tactically smart and spiritually acceptable.

Figure 5
Concordances of Holy Quran



In Figure 5, the open statement from Surah As-Saff (61:4) – “Allah loves those who fight in His cause”- makes Operation Bunyan-um-Marsoos more significant to the Islamic movement. By calling for warfare as a godly act, the reference changes the role of soldiering into something viewed as both a duty and a guidance from God. Choosing to give weapons such Qur’anic names as *Al-Fatiha* and *Al-Raad* fuses religious and technical elements, presenting war as something approved by God. Sticking to metaphors and scripture is consistent with Lakoff’s conceptual metaphor theory, which presents war as a basic Christian duty. It mirrors Van Dijk’s perspective, calling Pakistan’s military *those who fight in His cause* against an unrighteous opponent.

Figure 6
Concordances of Muslims

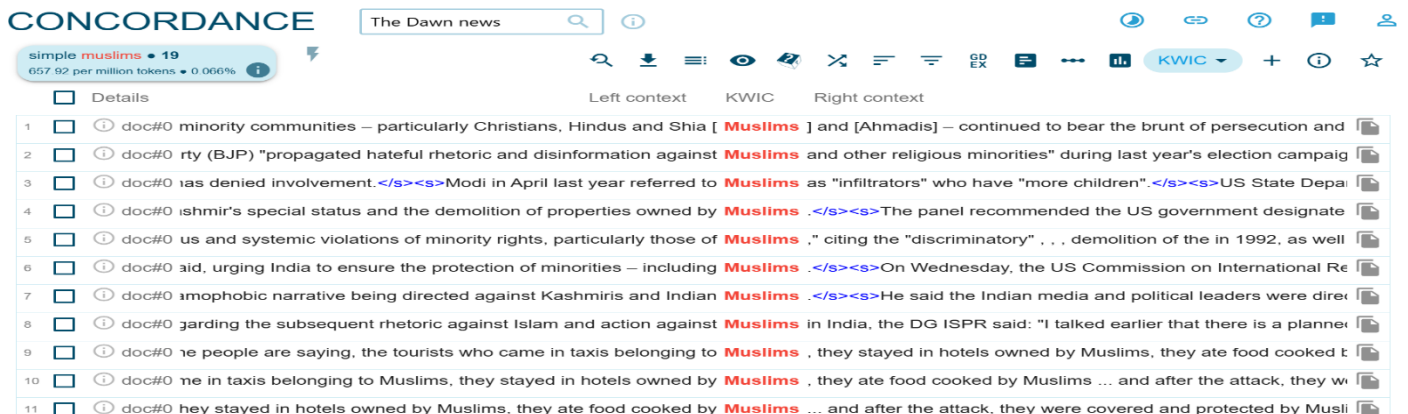
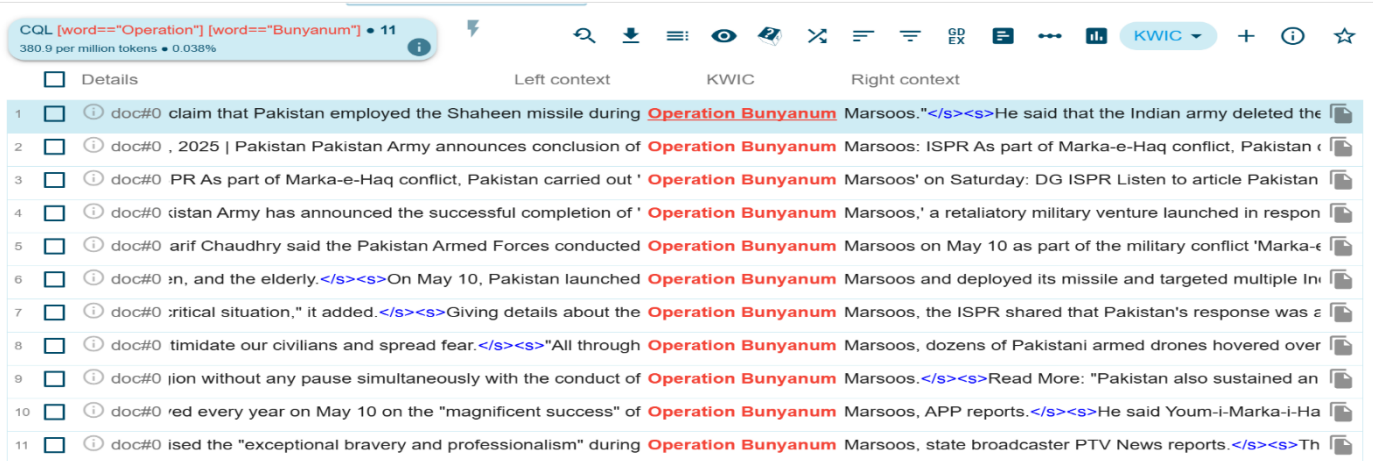


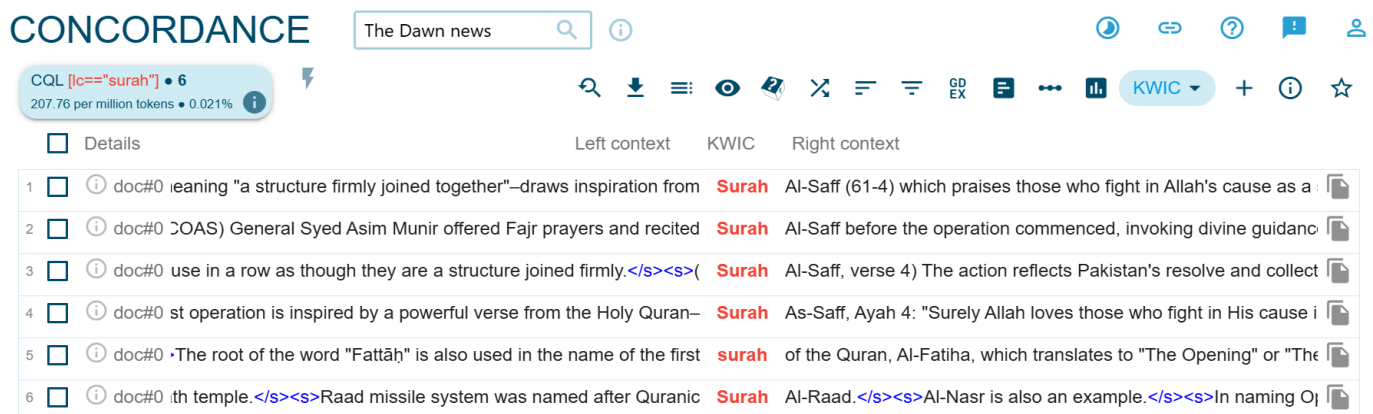
Figure 6 above shows how religious identity is articulated in terms of defence and protection, with a particular focus on Muslim representation. The way Indian Muslims are portrayed as victims, as *infiltrators*, *outsiders*, or subject to *systemic persecution* creates a strong sense of in-group solidarity around a common religion. At the same time, it portrays the Indian government as an oppressive religious force. Van Dijk's marginalisation tactics, which use both victimisation and elevation of the Muslim identity to unite the readership and demonise the opposition power, are exactly in line with this dual framing. This type of framing links current acts to long-standing religious and cultural problems by drawing on historical grievances and communal memory.

Figure 7
Concordances of *Bunyanum-Marsoos*



The concordances surrounding *Bunyan um Marsoos* in figure 6 provide insight into the metaphorical use of sacred texts and buildings. By removing secular or neutral interpretations, prepositional and adjectival patterns like those in the *Quran* and the *Holy Quran* establish the text as both a source and an authority. By making *holy* the default modifier, all allusions to scripture are automatically elevated. As demonstrated in the words above, the architectural metaphor of Bunyan's *solid structure*, *bricks*, and *iron wall* frames the military as a God-designed creature as well as a defensive unit. This type of theological engineering exalts discipline and unity while bolstering Pakistan's reputation as being divinely guided.

Figure 8
Concordances of *Surah*



In Figure 8, it is seen that warfare is viewed as an act blessed by God using verses from Surah Al-Saff (61:4). By including the saying Surely Allah loves those who fight in His cause in official statements, Pakistan's reaction to India is made divine (shape of moral frame), and Al-Saff at Fajr connects it to spiritual powers. Naming weapon systems after Quranic terms (Al-Fatiha and Al-Raad) imbues war technology with religious connotations, suggesting heavenly might. Architectural metaphors paint a picture of Pakistan's military being God-like, contrasted with India's secular attitudes in war. Here, Dawn uses patterns like verse citation, ritual incorporation and religious terms for weapons to make Pakistan's side part of a cosmic conflict story. Thus, its military accomplishments are taken to mean that gods are on its side and make Pakistan's actions righteous, making India's stance seem wrong from a religious perspective.

4.4.2 Times of India

Figure 9

Concordance of Sindoor

File	Left	Node	Right
Corpus of Time:	needed, war." Facebook Twitter Operation	Sindoor:	Stanford student's powerful op-ed slamming '
The Dawn New:	Bunyan-un-Marsoos: Pakistan counters India's Operation	Sindoor:	A look at Pakistan's key
The Dawn New:	delayed response to India's 'Operation	Sindoor'	and aggressively asked for a
Corpus of Time:	responded with strategic resolve. Operation	Sindoor,	the first of its kind
Corpus of Time:	after the launch of Operation	Sindoor	on May 7, India halted
The Dawn New:	and missiles after India's Operation	Sindoor.	According to a News18 report
The Dawn New:	series of strikes under 'Operation	Sindoor'	soon after the Pahalgam tragedy
Corpus of Time:	its military response, dubbed Operation	Sindoor.	It used a mix of
Corpus of Time:	From Uri to Balakot to	Sindoor	Over the past decade, India
Corpus of Time:	war or nuclear retaliation. Operation	Sindoor	took that evolution further. India
Corpus of Time:	a radical departure, in Operation	Sindoor,	air- and ground-launched stand-off weapons
Corpus of Time:	easier to calibrate — as Operation	Sindoor	showed, successive waves of sorties
Corpus of Time:	evolution of recent crises, Operation	Sindoor	triggered a conspicuously larger cycle
Corpus of Time:	marked turning point with Operation	Sindoor	TOI News Desk / TIMESOFINDIA.COM / Updated:
Corpus of Time:	terror infrastructure. Shah highlighted Operation	Sindoor	as a response to the
Corpus of Time:	be appropriate," Shah noted. "Operation	Sindoor	is that response," he added.

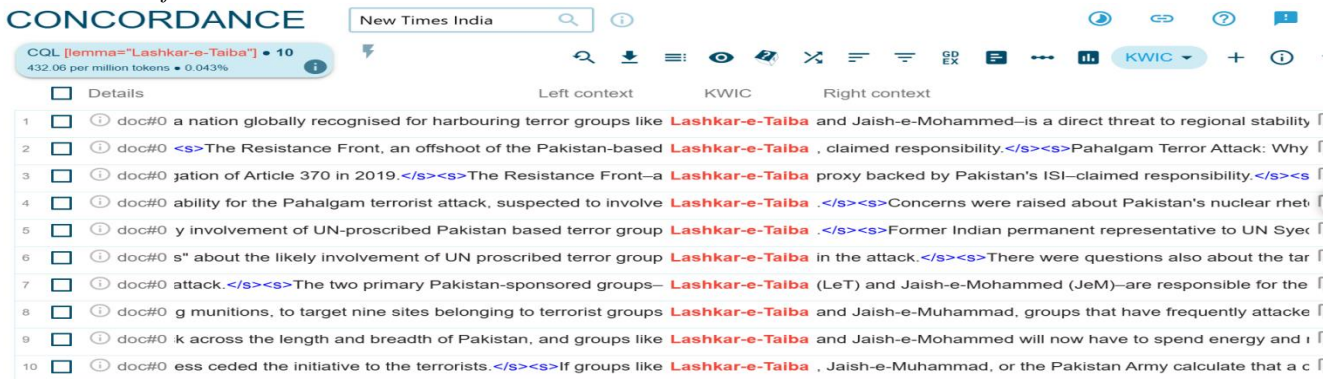
In Figure 9, the word *Sindoor* appears 65 times in both texts (collected from Indian and Pakistani editorials). Analysing the use of the term '*Sindoor*' in Indian materials reveals how conflict reporting often mixes religious expressions. The word *Sindoor* has usually been used to mean the red mark a married Hindu woman puts on her forehead as a sign of her dedication to her marriage. Labelling the campaign *Operation Sindoor* allows the Indian media to associate military action with religious and cultural identity. Choosing this name involves the sense of duty, purity and lasting honour. When this is done, it makes the violence acceptable by linking it to familiar images and positive words. India is characterised not only as striking back, but also as standing by its national and religious integrity. Lakoff (2004) claims that metaphors and values-based thinking influence people's understanding of public issues. The Indian media portrays the war as the right step taken in defence. The use of the phrases *strategic resolve*, *submission*, and *grieved nation* change the story from attacking to exercising justice. Hindustan uses religious and emotional language to portray India as having suffered and also as taking the high ground by acting morally. This form of language intensifies the emotional impact of the story and turns India's actions from simple military choices into ones readers believe are right and required. Van Dijk's Ideological Square makes it easier to analyse how Indian editorials create divisions among groups. Special mention of targeted Hindu men frequently portrays the victimisation of Hindus, which highlights the in-group's pain as well as blames the out-group for aggressive acts. This aligns with the principles of the square: focusing on what is best for the in-group (India) and what is most harmful to the out-group (Pakistan and militant groups, including Lashkar-e-Taiba). Characterising India's response as both *calibrated* and precise *conveys* discipline and reason, thereby improving how Indians see themselves as a group. So, by highlighting Pakistan as a place where terrorism forms, little focus is given to Pakistan's feelings or challenges, which again highlights negative pictures of those outside the group. Using religious terms like *Sindoor* in Indian editorials is a way language can express a particular ideology.

In addition, in the Times of India, the sacred Hindu marker of sindoor (vermilion) is turned into a call for nationalism. It is used to create a conflict narrative centred on culture. Modi's declaration *Not blood, but sindoor flows through my veins* (Lines 3–4), initiates the process of semantic change. Here, the metaphor shows the connection between following religion and being part of a fighting force, making Hindu identity symbolise opposition to others. The event, symbolised by the sindoor turning into gunpowder (Lines 5–6), combines previously feminine actions with today's violence and reimagines family worship as a battle strategy. It aligns with Lakoff's idea that symbols related to care and maintenance of community are given a different use to justify attacking others, supporting the shift toward nationalism focused on war.

Alridge uses gendered vengeance to represent the obligation of fighting for the nation's honour. The narrative of Operation Sindoor centres on punishing the widows of murdered Hindu men, and phrases like *wiping out sindoor* (Line 7) serve to validate the actions of those who take revenge, as it means undoing their marital lives. Female trauma is used to support arguments rather than being properly mounted. By organising the Sindoor Yatra (Lines 14–16), the BJP places women at the centre of Hindu nationhood as living cultural emblems, rather than as active political forces who ask the government to defend their mother's sacred markings. As a result, women are treated as lesser than male nationalists, being seen as representations of borders rather than people with their own goals.

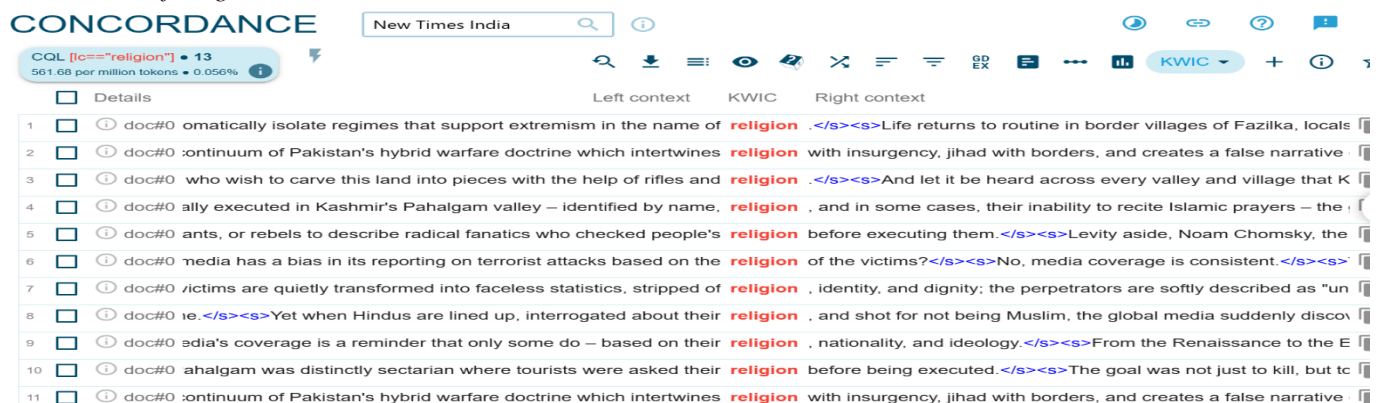
The same perspective becomes even clearer visually, shown through propaganda images that compare sindoor smeared on an opponent’s forehead with blood on the ground (Lines 19–20) to turn trauma into a political performance. Feminist studies (line 7) underline how the sacred symbol of the cow has been tied to Hindutva-based masculinity, showing that women’s lives are reduced to rich symbols for nationalist groups. Muslims who have suffered in wars are not included in this economy, which shows a blindness to their pain and makes only Hindu sorrow notable. There are important symbolic and ethical problems with these manoeuvres. Initially, symbolic hollowing occurs because sindoor’s meaningful connection to marriage and female strength is taken away, leaving only an empty, simplified tribute. Likewise, by referencing Hindu religious rites when naming operations, the government confirms that Muslims make up an *outside* group, despite the secular and pluralistic aims of the Indian Constitution. Third, *moral absolutism* emerges in statements like Modi’s applause line: *Those out to wipe out sindoor were reduced to dust* (Line 7), which sacralizes *extrajudicial violence* through a fatalistic moral logic, framing vengeance not as policy but as divine justice.

Figure 10
Concordances of Lashkar –e Tiaba



In Figure 10, the wording in The Times of India makes Pakistan look responsible for supporting terrorism by frequently mentioning it together with terrorism-related terms. This is clear in sentences like *Pakistan-based terror groups* (Line 1,5), *Pakistan-sponsored groups* (Line 7), and *guided by Pakistan’s ISI* (Line 3), which closely link Pakistan’s officials with terror activities. This way of using words shows Van Dijk’s institutional guilt frame, making Pakistan look illegitimate and lawless. The proxy war context is shown by referring to The Resistance Front as a Lashkar-e-Taiba proxy (Line 3) and describing many attacks in Kashmir (Lines 2, 4, 6), making it appear like Pakistan runs these operations. In addition, the text highlights Pakistan by using expressions like *Pakistan’s nuclear rhetoric* (Line 4) and *regional stability* (Line 1), which make it appear more threatening because of their alarmist tone. Language elements like *harbouring terror*, *proxy*, and *UN-proscribed*, from these lexical chains, trigger Van Dijk’s negative other representation, showing Pakistan as a bad actor and supporting its seclusion. These patterns allow The Times of India to show Indian defence measures as valid, while placing Pakistan in a continuing role of breaking rules. Such words link Pakistan with risky politics and radical beliefs, and they make India’s actions look like a necessary defence and an ethical choice. So, The Times of India achieves this by merging the idea of security and the separation of religious groups, thus presenting the conflict as part of a larger civilizational landscape.

Figure 11
Concordances of religion



As shown in Figure 11 above, *The Times of India* often uses blaming Pakistan for religious violence to make it appear that

Pakistan is dedicated to a sectarian, violent way of thinking. The statement of *the hybrid warfare doctrine in Pakistan links religion to insurgency* (Lines 2, 11), conveys that Islam is being used to support political turmoil. The example presents Pakistani religiosity as a planned conspiracy, arguing that militancy and religion are being combined to disrupt the region. This narrative is also made harsher by describing the Kashmir attacks in great detail, mentioning tourists being targeted because of their religious identity and executed because they were not Muslim (Lines 4 and 8). They are more than descriptive; they add religious labels to Hindus to present them as victims of pinpointed religious violence.

An important element here is how the author highlights a supposed media trend: denying the religious belief of Hindu victims by what it says, yet stressing the faith of the Muslims taking part in the violence (Line 5). This way of explaining things builds sympathy toward Hindus in the world's eyes, raises questions of moral injustice and promotes India's interests. The reference to *rifles and religion* (line 3) shows how Lakoff portrays the opponent's religion (in this case, Islam) as inextricably tied to violence and a lack of reason. As a result, this implicitly shows that India's secular attitude is better and more respectful of legal standards.

As a result, this approach matches Van Dijk's way of portraying Pakistan and Muslims as not just political competitors but extremist forces. Using Lakoff's moral framework, it makes Islam out to be the source of danger and makes Hinduism a marker of being attacked. This intensifies the civilizational binary already in place within the media discourse, justifying retaliation and reinforcing nationalist sentiment under the guise of religious self-defence.

Figure 12

Concordances of Women

5	doc#0	Bhattacharya said: "It is a powerful and heartfelt tribute from the women of the nation to our armed forces. was the weapon for Indian arm
6	doc#0	ind pride of the country's daughters and sisters."</s><s>Kolkata: Women turned out in large numbers as BJP's women's wing held a 'Sind
7	doc#0	illion powder, is a traditional marker of the marital status of Hindu women .</s><s>Credit...</s><s>Manish Swarup/Associated Press By Pr
8	doc#0	illion powder, is a traditional marker of the marital status of Hindu women .</s><s>Married women wear it either in the parting of their hair c
9	doc#0	nal marker of the marital status of Hindu women.</s><s>Married women wear it either in the parting of their hair or on their foreheads, and
10	doc#0	come widowed.</s><s>During the April 22 terrorist attack, many women lost their husbands, who were targeted because they were Hindu
11	doc#0	Operation Sindoor signaled its intention to avenge the widowed women .</s><s>On social media, the Indian Army with a stark image tha
12	doc#0	nist historian who writes about gender, caste and class.</s><s>" Women figure in it as objects to be protected or as mother figures goadin
13	doc#0	urists, most were Hindu men, according to local reports.</s><s> Women and children were spared, and some survivors reported that the e
14	doc#0	- 25 tourists and a local pony rider – after segregating them from women .</s><s>India has for years blamed Pakistan for supporting, armi
15	doc#0	the Hindi word for vermilion, a red pigment which married Hindu women often apply to their forehead.</s><s>The name of India's military
16	doc#0	have detailed how the gunmen segregated male tourists from the women , and then pointedly identified those who were non-Muslim before
17	doc#0	"Sindoor"—a customary marital adornment among married Hindu women —in response to male members of honeymoon couples slaughter

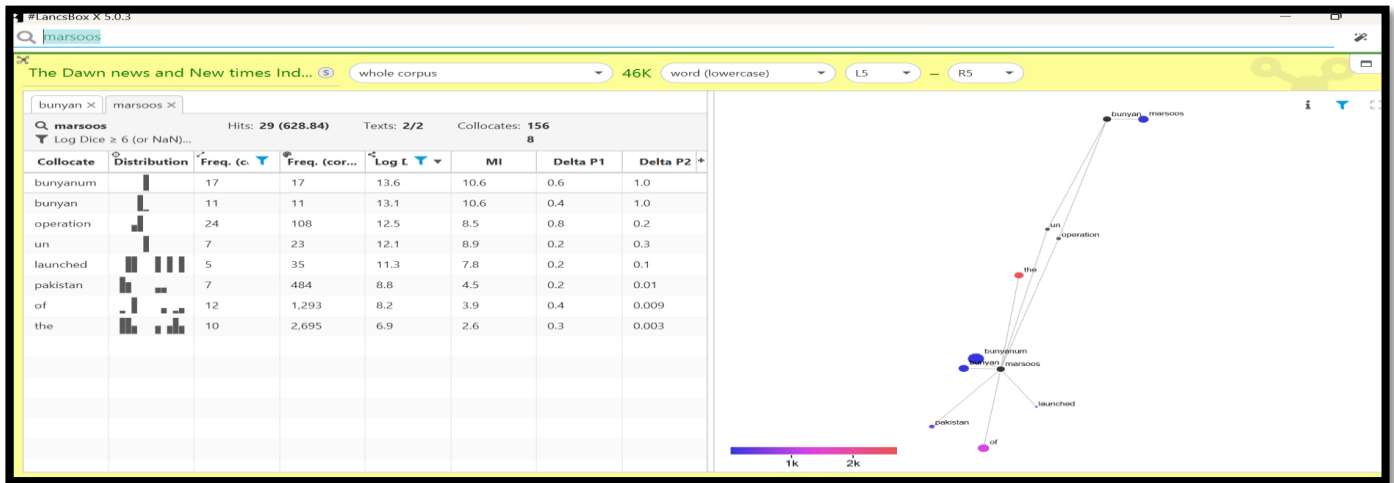
Figure 12 demonstrates that *The Times of India* makes use of nationalist arguments that highlight Hindu women's roles to promote and glorify warlike reactions, especially when talking about Operation Sindoor. The beginning focuses on how widows are made into symbols by saying *women lost... targeted as they were Hindu* (Lines 10–11, 17), rather than fully highlighting their grief or suffering. In the military operation *Operation Sindoor*, the meaning of sindoor, an important part of a Hindu wedding, is altered and amplified to justify war. By hijacking language in this way, using Lakoff's theory, such remarks turn women's problems into a reason for men to get revenge, making retaliation seem like a required and honorable act.

Similar to location-bound latency, the comic shifts between who it victimizes and who it erases patriarchal roles. It mentions that *women and children were protected* (Line 13), implying a sense of chivalry in the community, but leaves out any mention of Muslim women involved in the conflict. It gives priority to Hindu women and makes Muslim women less visible, hiding the conflict's interaction of different faiths. By stressing protection (Line 12), the poem seduces men, reinforces male authority and doesn't show the women as individuals, as if they don't have their own stories. Van Dijk's ideological square is echoed here, as the in-group (India/Hindus) stands for noble protectors. At the same time, the out-group (terrorists/Pakistan) is described as committing acts of violence out of religious reasons, even though the article says nothing about the violence taken against Muslim women by India.

Also, the political narrative is centered on a Hindu worldview, making cultural symbols appear universal. By presenting sindoor as a *customary adornment among married Hindu women* (Line 17), the discourse reduces India's vast religious diversity to a *monolithic Hindu identity*, further deepening communal polarization. Women's bodies become *sites of religious nationalism*, where their suffering is not mourned for its human tragedy but *commodified to sanctify militarism*. The glorification of women's *tribute to armed forces* (Line 5) conceals how their actual voices are marginalized, celebrating them only when they serve the nationalist script. However, this discussion demonstrates how gendered pain is repurposed to create a moral dichotomy consistent with Van Dijk's framework: the adversary is shown as a savage abuser of the sacred feminine, while India is portrayed as the masculine guardian of that sanctity. But women's agency and narrative complexity are sacrificed for this rhetorical defence. The outcome is a seriously faulty framing that obliterates the complex and agonizing realities of all women engaged in battle, widens rifts within communities, and uses cultural symbols for militaristic legitimacy.

4.5 Collocates

Figure 13
Collocates of Bunyan-um-Marsoos



In Figure 13, both Dawn News and News Time India show that Bunyanum Marsoos relates warfare to sacred language and images. Because the terms *bunyanum* (LogDice 13.6) and *bunyan* (13.1) are extremely unique, with a Delta P2 score of 1.0, they appear only in religious-military contexts when describing Quranic inspiration. Having God’s name and spiritual unity spoken in the same language is meaningful, indicating the message that God chooses the union. The phrase ‘operation’ is often found alongside other military terms (LogDice 12.5), underlining Lakoff’s position that the military prepares for war as a sacred ritual rather than developing strategies.

In addition, the poor collocation scores for *Pakistan* (LogDice 8.8) and the word *the* (6.9) imply that the phrase lacks broader meaning and appears only in religious writings. By describing the conflict as a religious task, Dawn removes the role of state decision-making and assigns responsibility to God instead. Most importantly, using no such collocates as *civilian*, *casualty*, or *family* eliminates human suffering and portrays war mainly as an abstract landscape. Dawn presents *Bunyan* as a structure set up by God, thereby ignoring the effects of all the demolition.

Figure 14
Collocates of Sindoor

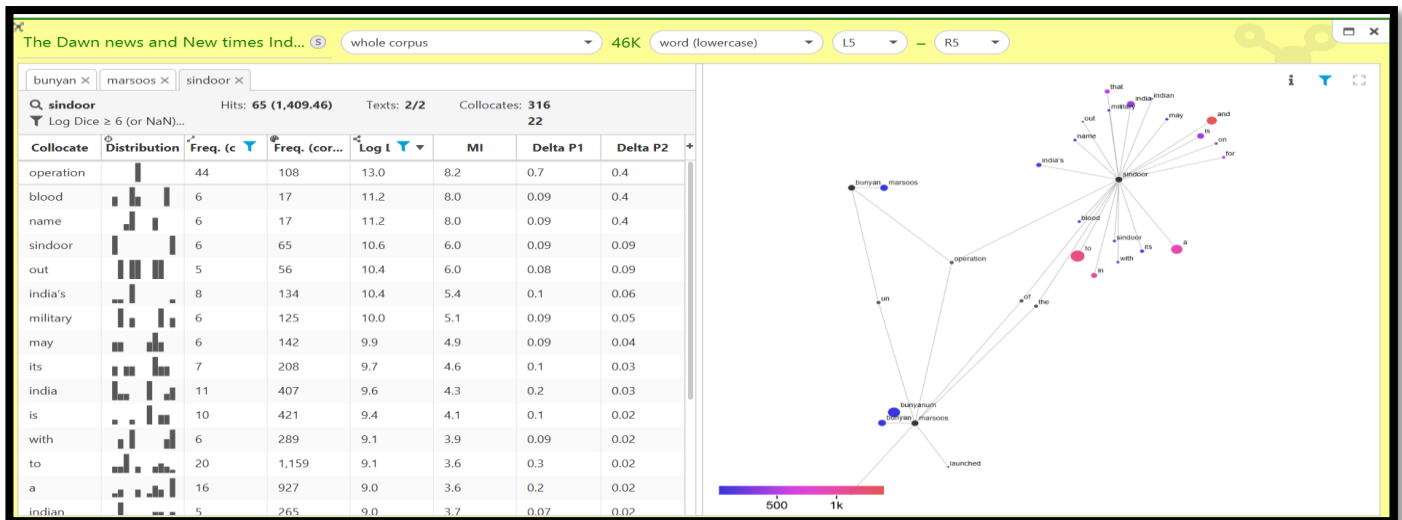
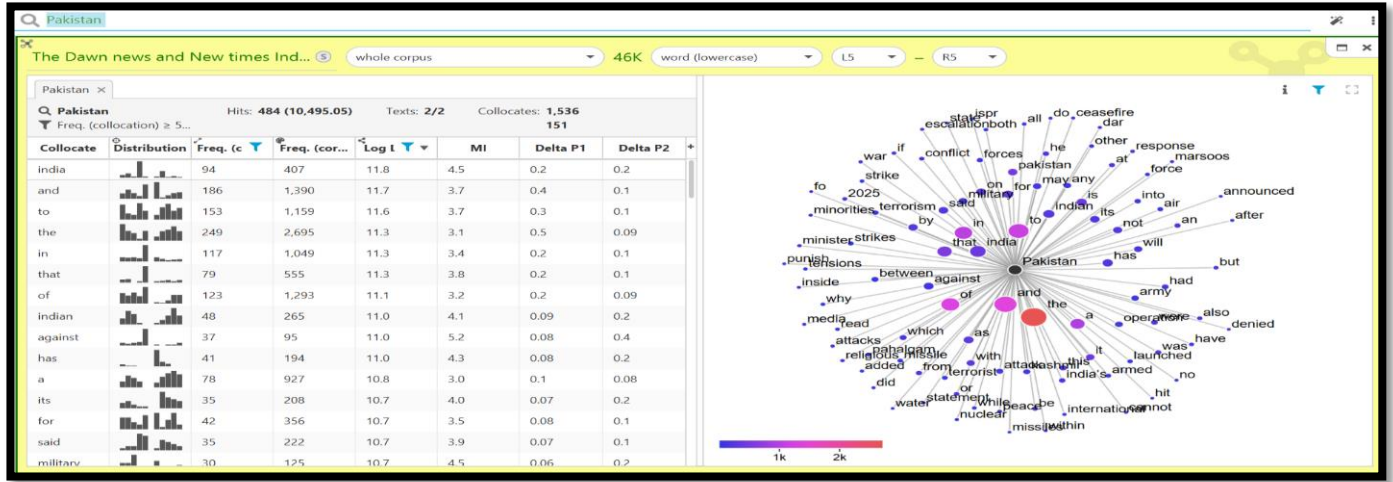


Figure 14 shows that, within The Times of India, *sindoor* is mentioned in ways where it represents India’s drive for vengeance against Pakistan. The most important term, *operation* (LogDice 13.0), indicates that ancient rituals were transformed into state-sanctioned militant actions. This metamorphosis is also highlighted by the presence of *blood* (11.2) and *name* (11.2), which underline that the sight of *spilled sindoor* is meant to represent the deeper suffering of the Hindu community. The term gets placed next to *India’s military* (MI 10.4, 10.0), showing that religious culture is being used to support the nation.

Significantly, a Delta P1 score of 0.7 for *operation* shows that *Sindoor* uses militaristic terms, not the other way around. This

shows that ToI uses a specific way of talking to normalize the idea of revenge against widowed women as important for Hindu women. But since Modi's speeches mention *gunpowder* or *explosion* far more than this document indicates, parts of the speech may have been removed. Using less violent language preserves the text's respectfulness and masks its more militaristic nationalism.

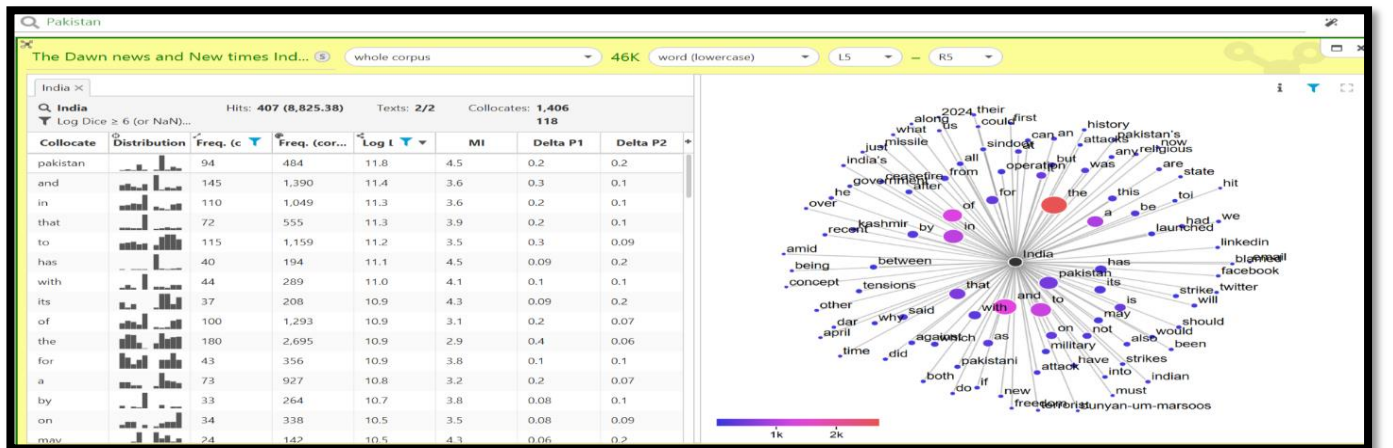
Figure 15
Collocates of Pakistan



In Figure 15, Pakistan appears 484 times in the corpus, and the most common words associated with it are India (LogDice 11.8) and to and in. Despite these, more serious semantic collocates such as against, military, terrorism and religious (present in the graph) link Pakistan to talk about security issues. Predictably, Indian politics appears frequently in the same context, but the repeated references against, during attacks and actions by terrorists prove that propaganda uses the US vs THEM structure (Van Dijk, 1998). The phrase "*nation with terror in its ideological DNA*" relies on the metaphor that immoral systems threaten because of their values, which aligns with Lakoff's (2004) point that moral framing turns policies from choices to imperatives.

The network graph shows that the topics of punishment, terrorism, ministers, and ceasefire are connected to the graph's core, suggesting that state agents may play a role in these issues. Yet, since words like *peace*, *dialogue*, or *negotiation* are not significant here, Pakistan is almost always placed in the category of being an enemy that needs to be blocked or isolated. It confirms what Van Dijk sees: that moral values often evaluate people because negative ideas about others are often tied to religion or patriotism. In addition, the use of operation, air, missile and strike (LogDice > 9) suggests that Pakistan is often linked to topics related to war. Being so high (~0.3), the Delta P1 scores for these words point to a bigger relationship with *Pakistan* than with all other nouns, which suggests that *Pakistan* activates such frames by itself rather than receiving them passively. This shows that Lakoff's idea is valid and that rooted metaphors like WAR IS MORAL DEFENSE lead people's thinking in politics.

Figure 16
Collocates of India



Conversely, as shown in Figure 16 above, *India* is mentioned 407 times, and the main words associated with it are Pakistan, to, with, has, and military. Even though *Pakistan* and *Pakistani* are similarly spelled in English, the words surrounding them

convey different meanings. For instance, freedom, strike, sindoor, and operation all describe India as part of a narrative in which the country is an active defender. As Van Dijk (1998) explains, *positive self-representation* is at work in this case: The language used for *India* does not suggest it instigated anything.

Sindoor (with religious and cultural meanings), bunyam-un-marsoos, and attack are among the words that reveal how the corpus is connected to culture, religion, and conflict. Sindoor is used to suggest that Indian retaliation is guided by culture rather than solely by military methods. It follows Lakoff's *nation-as-family* idea, which makes the idea of putting our mothers' well-being on a pedestal and rallying around it, as we do the nation itself. Similarly, words such as freedom, first, and history help portray India as a proud victim fighting in defence of what is right. The phrase node freedom changes how India is seen, helping overcome aggressor accusations and turning it into a nation of liberators, hinting at the colonial and post-partition identity it holds. Basically, it means *we give fair judgments, but they just bring violence*. In both graphs, humans and their concerns, such as children, peace or dialogue, are noticeably absent because both media outlets tend to portray conflict as a collection of abstract ideas. This is also what Van Dijk means when he says that conflict reporting that lacks empathetic language can make the conflict worse by encouraging further division (Van Dijk, 2006).

4.6 Semantic Tagging

4.6.1 The Dawn News

Table 3

The Dawn News

Theme	Example phrase	USAS Tags
Religious extremism as enemy	Religious extremism... real enemy of both India and Pakistan	S9 (Religion), G1.2 (Politics), S1.2.1- (Negative personality traits)
Call for peace	Speakers... urged both... to work for lasting peace	E3+ (Peace), T2++ (Continuity), Q2.2 (Speech acts)
Militarism criticized	The only reasonable statement came from the military... war... stupidity	G3 (Warfare), S1.2.6- (Irrationality), Q2.1 (Reporting speech)
Women/children as victims	Biggest victims... were civilians... especially women and children	S2.1f, S2mf/T3- (Females, children), G3- (War victims)
Exclusion of Kashmiris	Voices... remained excluded from decision-making	A1.8- (Exclusion), X6+ (Deciding), S2mfc (People)
Commercial war interests	War is profitable for arms manufacturers	I2.1, G3, I1.1 (Business, weapons, affluence)
Media role in escalation	Media... fanning hostilities	Q4 (Media), S1.2.1- (Hostility)
Human suffering ignored	No one was highlighting the human miseries	E4.1- (Sadness), S2mfc (People), Q2.2 (Speech)

Table 4

Ideological Square (Van Dijk)

Us (Peace activists / People)	Them (Extremists / War-mongers)
Reasonable, peace-loving, inclusive	Fanatic, irrational, exclusive
Victims of militarism	Beneficiaries of war economy
Defenders of women's and children's rights	Ignorers of civilian suffering
Seekers of justice, interfaith cooperation	Promoters of religious hatred and escalation

- Strong in-group solidarity frames: *civilians, peace activists, Kashmiris*
- Sharp out-group markers: *militant organisations, media fanning hostilities, masculine pride*

Table 5

Key Semantic Patterns

Semantic Code	Observed Meaning	Contribution to Framing
S9	Religion	Core framing around religious extremism
G3	War and defense	Used in critical tone , militarism questioned
E4.1-	Sadness	Evoking empathy , human cost
S2mf	People (men, women, children)	Personalizes war's impact, humanizes victims

Semantic Code	Observed Meaning	Contribution to Framing
Q2 . 2	Speech acts	Shows active public opposition , proposals
A11 . 1+	Importance	Peace and civilian safety framed as priority

The above tables show that religious framing functions in different, sometimes opposing, manners. Both India and Pakistan strongly oppose all forms of religious extremism, which they consider a common danger. Also, the way peace and coexistence are supported often includes spiritual and moral themes in the language. Apart from seeing peace as important for politics, many leaders address it as a matter of ethics, faith and values, often by mentioning justice, humility and the need for unity. On the one hand, religious discourse is used to condemn aggressive images and stories from religions, but on the other hand, it is used to find ways for people to reconcile with each other.

Another major point is that peace is presented as the ethical choice. It places peace activists, civil society members and ordinary people—mainly women and children—as honourable members of a group. On the other hand, these studies depict warmongers, militants and some media actors as people who agitate for ideas that support continuing the conflict. It aligns with Van Dijk’s model, which distinguishes between positive views of oneself (peace seekers) and negative views of others (those who encourage or defend violence). Peace-builders’ emphasis on morals opposes the glamorization of war and offers a new way to view national pride, grounded in helping others rather than violence.

What is clear in the data is that militarism is treated as less sacred, especially in the representation of Operations Bunyanun Marsus and other major conflicts. Instead of presenting these activities as righteous or inspired by God, the discussion brings down that idea by labelling war as an act driven by male pride and patriarchy. This is very different from the typical language used in traditional media, especially in nationalist subjects, where spiritual reasons usually justify war. This rejection of heroes fighting and dying for causes and of divine involvement in warfare shows a critical spirit, almost like a post-heroic viewpoint, aimed at fighting against both religious extremism and dangerous nationalism.

4.6.2 Semantic and Linguistic Analysis (*Times New India*)

Table 6

Semantic & Linguistic pattern analysis (USA tags)

Theme / Frame	Key Terms / Phrases	Semantic Tags
Warfare & Retaliation	Operation Sindoor, reprisal, drone strikes, stand-off weapons, destruction, escalation	G3, E3-, A2 . 2, A1 . 1 . 2
National Identity & Legitimacy	Indian military, Modi, parliament, nationalist fervor, sovereignty	G1 . 1, S5+, A11 . 1
Religion & Symbolism	Sindoor (sacred marital symbol), retaliation named after religious marker, targeting Hindu men	S9, S2 . 1f, A5 . 4+, S2 . 2m
Ideological Polarization	Terrorists, Jaish-e-Mohammad, Lashkar-e-Taiba, Pakistan-sponsored groups, retaliation, martyrdom	G2 . 1-, S5+, E5-, S7 . 3
Diplomatic Relations	US, Israel, Saudi Arabia, ceasefire, alliance, intervention	G1 . 1c, S5+c, S8+, A6 . 1+
Economic & Strategic Framing	Indo-Mediterranean trade, IMF loan, indigenous arsenal, defense partnerships	I2 . 2, I1 . 2, G3, S8+
Masculine Framing	Retaliation for attacks on <i>honeymoon couples</i> , <i>widows’ revenge</i> , military leadership	S2mf, S2 . 1f, G3, L1
Escalation vs. Resolution	Ceasefire, tit-for-tat, diplomatic intervention, threat vs cost paradigm	A6 . 1-, G3, S8+, X4 . 2

By choosing *Operation Sindoor* as the title, which in Hinduism represents marriage and a married woman’s honour, the mission is transformed into a sacred task. This operation is a form of revenge against widows, which is why it is called *Operation Widow’s Retribution*. It goes beyond mentioning revenge; by revolving around collective mourning, identity questions and supposed just judgment from a higher power, it turns violence into a sacred act. He points out that when we feel emotionally invested in our moral values, we may support potentially unethical policies. So, in these people, grief is changed mentally into a justification for revenge.

Lakoff’s nation-as-family metaphor lies at the heart of the second main structure in ideology, the Nationalist Identity Frame. The description of *a billion Indians caught up in nationalist fervour* paints India as a nation, not as a group of offices, because the nation acts like a family in collective emotions. This makes the group more united by using emotional expressions in the

metaphor. Making Muslim and Hindu women lead in the military and speak in both languages (Hindi and English) in the film represents how India can remain united, despite its religious diversity. The plot demonstrates that India's national security relies on religious and gender diversity, suggesting that the country is ideologically united and not prone to extremism, a claim that contrasts with the ally's beliefs.

Just War is the third main frame, in which military responses to terrorism are carried out with care, not escalating into a conflict. This follows Lakoff's notion of the *just response schema*, in which moral actors are seen as reluctantly taking up arms to defend higher values such as safety, justice, or honor. The strikes are described using technical and detached language, *calibrated*, *measured*, technological, which sanitises the violence and distances it from emotional extremism. In doing so, the cognitive frame shifts from retaliatory violence to moral enforcement, reinforcing the idea that war, in this case, is not waged out of hatred but necessity.

Table 7

Ideological Square Analysis (Van Dijk)

In-Group (India)	Out-Group (Pakistan / Terrorists)
Rational, strategic, victims of provocation	Irrational, sponsors of terror, aggressors
Women-led military briefings = inclusivity	Male-dominated, patriarchal, oppressive
Moral, just, restrained	Violent, deceptive, dangerous
Modernized (missiles, diplomacy, alliances)	Dependent on China, backward, terrorist harborers

Despite the lack of explicit scripture references (such as the Quran or Hadith), this stark dichotomy.

5. Conclusion

This study examined how religious ideas were presented in news media discourse during the 2025 Indo-Pakistan conflict, analyzing 50 editorials (25 from Dawn News and 25 from The Times of India). To gain insight into the topic, the study combined George Lakoff's approach and Teun van Dijk's Ideological Square, examining the impact of religious talk, strong moral analogies, and national-minded rhetoric on both perspectives on war and on how groups see themselves as part of the discussion. With reference first research question, the use of Sketch Engine, LancsBox and CLAWS showed that the media outlets had very different themes in their writing. The Dawn corpus had 25,805 tokens, and The Times of India had 20,312. There was a wider range of words used in the Indian texts than in Dawn, as seen by the MTLF figures: 148.29 versus 123.68. Keywords such as Sindoor, religious, Hindus, Muslims, and Quran appeared many times, indicating that faith played a central role in the narrative of the conflict. Using words such as Bunyanum (13), Bunyan-um-Marsoos (12), Holy Quran (9), and martyred (9), the text focused on the sanctity of war and linked martyrdom to the identity of both the nation and the faith.

These results show that Lakoff's views on moral metaphors and value-based decision-making are correct. In Dawn's writings, Dawn quoted 61:4 from Surah As-Saff, which presented Pakistani efforts as an action supported by God. Through metaphors of a firm structure or an iron wall, military action was likened to the activities of God's soldiers in battle. The Times of India portrayed Operation Sindoor as a sacred act. With this metaphor, Modi combined Hindi references for women with patriotic images for men. Sixty-five references to sindoor showed how it moved from a symbol of marriage to one of seeking revenge. This matched Lakoff's moral retribution frame, in which violence is not merely accepted but required to restore moral balance. Moreover, with reference to the second research question, the model built by Van Dijk highlighted that the groups preferred their own and opposed the other. Dawn reinforced Pakistan as being peaceful, just and guided by faith and yet portrayed India as someone who violates Muslim holy places, oppresses their followers and draws its legacy from the demolition of the Babri mosque. Muslims were portrayed as the targets of the Hindu radical element, and words like martyrdom and unity were chosen to strengthen people's patriotism.

On the other hand, The Times of India argued that Pakistan supports terrorist activities by indicating Pakistan's ISI, the militant group Lashkar-e-Taiba, and calling Pakistan a state-sponsor of terrorist groups. Extremism in Islam was presented as a well-developed military strategy, as shown in the phrase Pakistan's hybrid warfare doctrine mixes religion with insurgency. Muslims in India were commonly shown as victims of what Pakistan had done, while Hindu women became icons for why India carried out Operation Widow's Retribution.

Semantic tagging revealed that peace was presented as both a moral and a religious substitute. The word peace was linked to 40 articles and specifically to women and children, Kashmiris, and other civilians. In contrast, militarism was labelled as stupidity and masculine pride, which revealed that even anti-jingoists criticised it in their writing. Mainly, The Times of India described the leaders by emphasizing legitimacy, sovereignty, and special honour, using Hindu female symbols. Words such as widow, revenge, honour and sindoor were arranged to convey strong emotions and gender ties related to nationalism. Muslims did not get

mentioned as suffering victims, and everyone was made to share a Hindu identity, suggesting the absence of real empathy and marking Muslims as chequered out.

Additionally, collocation analysis shows that the word *Bunyanum Marsoos* is almost always linked to Quranic or other religious terms, as evidenced by its LogDice score of 13.6. That none of these words appear anywhere else in the Dawn corpus reinforces the exclusivity of this phrase, and thus it gives military actions a spiritual element in the text. Besides thinking of warfare in such a way, Muslims also see it as based on the religion's holy texts and encouraged with religious phrases, all underlining its importance for the group. However, the word *Sindoor* in the Times of India corpus is mostly associated with terms such as blood, operation, India, and military, yielding a LogDice value of 13.0. This shows that *sindoor*, which represents a woman's marital life and religious beliefs, became a symbol of nationalistic rage and army-like spirit. Mixing domestic events with the unusual rhetoric of war shows that culture is being used as a justification for violence by the state. These collocations reveal how the meanings of sacred symbols were changed to justify any fighting in India and Pakistan as the right and holy thing to do.

The research results have serious implications for media literacy campaigns and conflict management processes, especially in politically unstable, religiously diverse societies such as South Asia. The discussion shows that the elite media sources are not only covering the conflict but also constructing moral perception with the use of religious encoding, metaphoric expressions, and ideological extremism. Media literacy should therefore go beyond the simple ability to check facts to include the critical awareness of framing mechanisms, particularly those based on religious symbolism and moral logos.

In media literacy terms, the strategic mobilization of religious terms like *Sindoor* and *Bunyanum Marsoos* indicates the need to educate readers, students, and journalists to be sensitive to the deployment of religious terms to justify violence and naturalise state aggression, and to foster empathy toward in-groups. Critical discourse analysis tools should therefore be included in educational programs so that the audience can recognize metaphorical framing, omissions, and us-versus-them constructions. This training would help citizens be more resistant to emotionally charged narratives and moral absolutism, and to differentiate between faith-based values and their political instrumentalization.

The results also indicate the role of marginalization of civilian sufferings and lack of peace-based rhetoric in the desensitization of the population and the development of hardened nationalism. For conflict resolution practitioners, this highlights the importance of involving media institutions as key peacebuilding stakeholders. Media players should be encouraged to adopt conflict-sensitive journalism that anticipates humanitarian ingenuity, incorporates other religious viewpoints, and avoids sacrificing military intervention. Symbolic violence may be mitigated through the integration of ethical reporting guidelines that discourage religious othering and the creation of discursive space for dialogue.

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