



# Operation Sindoor : A Portrayal of Indian Media Representation Against Terrorism

**Sudip Kumar Das**

Junior Research Fellow (JRF) , West Bengal State University

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## Abstract

Operation Sindoor was a key counter-terrorism effort by the Indian Armed Forces following the Pahalgam terrorist attack, which targeted civilians and raised internal tensions throughout India. The operation focused on the Pakistani terrorist groups Laskar-e-Taiba and Hizbul Mujahideen, with the Indian military taking a proactive approach against terrorism. This paper focuses on how media coverage of Operation Sindoor highlights India's strong defence system and expresses gratitude for the tireless efforts of the Indian Armed Forces in ensuring national security. It also fostered a spirit of nationalism and patriotic values in media coverage. The operation helped to build public trust and faith in the Indian military. Notably, the media underscored the contributions of women in the operation, especially Colonel Sophia Qureshi and Wing Commander Vomika Singh. This operation emphasised women's empowerment and nationalistic efforts. The operation was delivered as an opposite narrative to the ongoing anti-Muslim narratives after the Pahalgam attacks. The study examines the media's role in forming public opinion on Operation Sindoor, highlighting India's commitment to combating terrorism while promoting a non-religious perspective. It conveyed a strong message to the world about India's determination to combat terrorism with a zero-tolerance policy. The Indian media reports that Operation Sindoor is not designed to violate any country's sovereignty or to attack civilians. Its true goal was a response to the terrorist attack on India and a vow to fight terrorism together.

**Keyword – Operation Sindoor, Media Representation, Sophia Qureshi, Women Empowerment, Indian Armed Force.**

## Introduction -

Operation Sindoor, a counter terrorism operation carried out by the Indian Armed Forces in response to a terrorist attack at Pahalgam on 22 April 2025. The attack was committed against tourists in the Kashmir valley by five armed terrorists; as a consequence, 26 civilians were reported dead. The attack was carefully pre planned and executed by the Pakistani terrorist organisation Laskar-e-Taiba and Hizbul Mujahideen. In the aftermath of the terrorist attack, fear and panic became widespread throughout the nation. The assault targeted not only Indian civilians, but also affected the Kashmir valley and destabilised the territory. Provoking communal tensions in India was another purpose of aggression. India responded strategically, launching "Operation Sindoor", a diplomatic countermeasure aimed at addressing the situation. India strikes 9 terrorist infrastructures in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Jammu-Kashmir, from where the attack was planned and executed.



A notable aspect of the operation, led by two daring women, Cornell Sophia Qureshi and Wing Commander Vomika Singh, highlights the crucial role of women in leadership. Through extensive coverage, the media showcased the operation's achievements, reinforcing the nation's stance against terrorism and emphasising India's commitment to national security. Indian mainstream media extensively covered and positively portrayed the successful execution of the operation, emphasising its efficacy and strategic significance. Media leveraged patriotic narratives, bravery, sacrifice and emotionally framed to earn public support with nationalistic rhetoric.

### **Literature Review -**

Stuart Hall's theory of representation explains how we make sense of the world around us through language, Images, and symbols. He defines how meaning is created and shared in society. He argued that representation, in simple terms, is using language, signs and pictures to stand for or depict things. Media representation refers to how media such as newspapers, Television, and Film represent individuals, social norms, and cultural identity, and shape public perception and societal norms.

Bashir and Shahid (2025) point out that in the recent Indo-Pak war, a range of media highlighted extensive coverage, shaping public perception and criticism. Two major military operations, Operation Sindoor by India and Operation Bunyan al-Marsus by Pakistan. Both the Indian and Pakistani media portrayed from their point of view that the Indian media claimed war was needed to defend against terrorism. That war is the ultimate answer to terrorism. On the other hand, Pakistani media declared it was a self-defence for the nation. Tried to engage international support and sympathy. The media is perceived as a vehicle for political propaganda in both countries rather than merely reporting the news.

Kumari and Kumar (2025) highlighted in their study the role of women in the Indian Armed Forces. Two brave women, Col. Sophia Qureshi and Wing Commander Vomika Singh, led from the front. Their valiant endeavours serve as a testament to the empowerment of women. In the sphere of defence, Indian women are unbeatable as well. They stated in the research report that this action not only marked the suppression of terrorism, but also highlighted the unique position of women in the country. The operation is recognised as one of the greatest instances of women's empowerment in the nation and among the best in India's defence history.

Global media covered the operation Sindoor stance of retaliation as a result of the Pahalgam attack. Global newspapers like The New York Times published the article with the headline "India Launches Missile Strikes Inside Pakistan After Kashmir Attack". The report emphasised the ongoing severe escalation between the two countries, India and Pakistan. The article claims that before reacting to this, India followed US counsel. The report of CNN spotted India's advanced weaponry systems, like Rafael fighter jets and SCLAP cruise missiles. CNN featured India's counterattacks, which were aimed at terrorist camps; it didn't affect military camps, strengthening India's position.

### **Aims and objectives –**

The study examines Media's role in shaping public perception in Operation Sindoor. The main objectives are to

- I. To analyse Media's coverage in Operation Sindoor.
- II. To examine how Media represents women empowerment and their efforts in counter terrorism operation.
- III. To analyse how Media portrayed narratives against terrorism.
- IV. To understand how mainstream media glorified Patriotic narratives during wartime.

### **Methodology –**

The study has followed descriptive and content analysis method. The secondary data has taken from Newspaper, Article, Blogs, Academic journals and Press Release.



### **Key Findings –**

- It was the first Counter- terrorism operation led by Indian women armed forces.
- Indian Media revealed this operation to the global audiences against terrorism.
- The Indian media condemned terrorism as a malady of contemporary society and characterised Pakistan .
- Global media perspective on India’s exceptional initiatives to combat terrorism.
- The Indian media depicted narratives of patriotic nationalism throughout warfare to reinforce national unity.
- The media commended the Indian Army’s courageous endeavours and sacrifices for the nation.

### **Media Representation –**

Media Representation refers in a way media represent idea, belief, culture, social norms to the people. Media Representation shapes the idea of how we consume the world. The media portrays us how they perceive us. We are constantly considering what the media emphasises. Media’s messages are not often truthful or accurate according to the real world because media have their own biasness by which direction the narrative is framed.

### **Media Capture –**

Media capture is phenomenon where media ownership and control owned by government and corporate organisation. Government manipulates the media content in their favour, offer their own interest and propaganda according to needs. Here, the state truly holds the power; it determines what information the public will be aware of and what they won’t. Media play a role of Political instrument and Mouthpiece of the government.

### **Framing -**

News framing is a process that the way news present or framed to the audience. Media decide what information or idea in which way is to be presented. it can elaborate small issue in bigger scale or big issue in small way. Media interpret messages by their own biasness. News organisations highlight certain issues while avoiding other issues for their own interest.

### **Addressing Terrorism –**

The Pakistani media endeavoured to garner international sympathy and sway global opinion by portraying the operation as an act of Indian aggression, thereby framing India as an antagonistic entity. This strategic narrative aimed to influence international perceptions, casting Pakistan as a victim and India as an aggressor, while simultaneously shaping diplomatic discourse and public opinion. This media strategy underscores the role of narrative construction in international relations, where media representations can significantly impact geopolitical dynamics and bilateral relations. The media’s framing of the Pahalgam attack highlights the devastating impact of terrorism on human well-being and societal stability. The Indian media depicted ‘Operation Sindoor’ as a momentous action undertaken by India in response to acts of terrorism. Conversely, the Pakistani media endeavoured to demonstrate to the global community that this operation was orchestrated by the Indian military with the intent to assault the Pakistani civilians.

By portraying the attack’s brutality, the media underscores terrorism's destructive nature. Terrorism poses a profound threat to human civilisation. The Indian media coverage of the Pahalgam attack exemplifies a nuanced approach to reporting on terrorism. By prioritising sensitivity, the media outlets demonstrated an understanding of the complexities. Anti terrorism campaign by the media deeply impacted public perception, eliciting negative reactions towards terrorism while unequivocally conveying India’s stance against terrorism.



### **Symbolises Women's Empowerment –**

In Indian society, women have often been seen merely as household entities and perceived as weaker than men, requiring protection from them. However, this stereotype not only affects women but also enables them to take on significant responsibilities. The impact of Operation Sindoor exerted a substantial influence on societal norms. It profoundly transformed public perceptions of women's roles in leadership and the defence industry. It was the first instance where Indian women played a pivotal role in leading a successful retaliation, achieving their objectives without incurring any casualties. The successful execution of Operation Sindoor under the leadership of Cornell Sophia Qureshi and Wing Commander Vomika Singh underscores the importance of women's participation in high-stakes operations. The two women were prominently featured in media interviews, where they played leading roles in articulating the details and objectives of the operation. Their visibility and authoritative presence in these interviews underscore the significance of their involvement and the strategic importance of the operation. The media's coverage effectively highlighted their dedication, strategic expertise and bravery, showcasing the crucial role in national security efforts. The mainstream media, as well as Social media, feature the role of women's strength and capabilities. It was a message to all women that they are not left behind in any way. Women play a crucial role in protecting national security and perform equally next to men. Their participation in various capacities, including the armed forces, law enforcement and defence organisations, reinforces their dedication.

### **Digital Nationalism-**

The advent of digitalisation facilitated the rapid dissemination of information globally, enabling widespread reach and engagement. Operation Sindoor leveraged this digital landscape to cultivate a spirit of nationalism across the nation. Operation Sindoor is digitally represented through diverse content formats. Social media influencers and celebrity personalities played a pivotal role in crafting and disseminating patriotic narratives in support of the Indian Armed Forces. They created and disseminated digital content, including photos, videos, stories and reels focused on the Indian Army, highlighting their dedication and bravery towards the nation. Information about Operation Sindoor was shared on social media, reaching everyone from the general public to young people. This creates an image of patriotism across the country. It was promoted from both a national and a political viewpoint. People, and especially youth, shared images, videos, shots, and stories by using patriotic songs and themes on social media platforms on the gallant efforts, bravery, and courage of the Indian Armed Forces. This evokes feelings of national pride and admiration. It also fosters a sense of unity and shared identity. At the same time, social media sites were crowded with fake news and AI-generated content. People shared information without checking the facts. This created a challenge for the government to control fake news.

### **Defence Capabilities -**

Any country becomes strong when its defence system is strong. India's defence system has improved significantly over the last few decades. The country has widely used its own technology, becoming more self-reliant in the defence sector. During Operation Sindoor, the world witnessed India's military strength. India's modern military system shows that the country is leading in defence capabilities. Widespread coverage in the media, including social media, helps the people of India trust this military power. The media highlights the impressive performance of the Russian S-400 air defence system during the operation.

Pakistani drones and missiles were successfully destroyed, and Pakistan witnessed India's potent defence capabilities. The Indian military system is not only patriarchal, but women are equally dominant. Coll Sophia Qureshi and Wing Commander Vomika Singh play a significant role and symbolise India's women's empowerment in the defence sector. This operation led by women proves that India's defence system is not only led by men, but women are equally advanced. India's significant military strength, demonstrated worldwide during Operation Sindoor, makes any nation think twice before starting conflicts with India.



### **National Unity -**

Unity is the supreme strength for any powerful nation. The media has a special role in strengthening the national unity of the country. Whether it is creating awareness among the people or keeping them alert in any adverse situation, the media creates national bonds among the people through propaganda. The biggest responsibility of the media in a wartime situation is to protect the country's sovereignty and raise awareness of nationalism. Since India is a country of many languages, religions, and ethnicities, the state needs to maintain national harmony here. The anxiety and panic that prevailed across the country after the Pahalgam attack. Operation Sindoor helped to establish nationalist unity within the country. This was possible due to the extensive media coverage and spontaneous participation of people on social media. The media influenced patriotic sentiments and a nationalistic approach that built a strong bond of national identity against terrorism.

### **Multinational Coverage –**

Operation Sindoor wreaked havoc not only on India and Pakistan but on the entire world, as both countries were nuclear powers. Global media representation has predominantly depicted India's activities positively. The New York Times, CNN, and the BBC were among the international newspapers that emphasised the importance of the operation in support of India. According to The Wall Street Journal, Operation Sindoor was launched in response to a deadly militant attack on tourists in Kashmir, which has exacerbated tensions between the nuclear-armed neighbours.

The Asian media pays close attention to the tensions between the two countries. The economic and regional conditions continue to deteriorate. The South China Morning Post, a Hong Kong newspaper, said that Pakistani J-10C fighters destroyed three Indian Rafale fighter jets. The BBC reported that India's assault was characterised as a reaction to the Pahalgam terrorist incident. The National of the United Arab Emirates reported the suffering of civilians on the Indian side due to Pakistani shelling. Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed urged India and Pakistan to "exercise restraint, de-escalate tensions, and avoid further escalation that could be a threat to regional and international peace."

### **Conclusion –**

The Media's coverage of Operation Sindoor illustrates the blurred lines between factual reporting and sensationalism. While the operation's achievements were notable, the Media's pursuit of TRP-driven narratives led to distortions and exaggerations. Social media platforms further exacerbated this issue, with fake images and videos spreading rapidly and eroding the credibility of genuine reports.

The dichotomy between responsible journalism and sensationalised reporting. While the Operation's success was indeed newsworthy, many media outlets prioritised personal propaganda and political agendas over objective reporting, thereby compromising the quality of journalism.



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