



Communication
Volume 3, Issue 1, Feb-Jul 2026, pp. 266-274

Caste, Crisis, and Coverage: A Case Study on the Role of Media during Caste-Related Violence and Discrimination in Murshidabad - Focusing on the Waqf Andolon and Kartik Lorai in Beldanga

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Received on: May 21, 2026 | Accepted on: June 9, 2026 | Published on: July 15, 2026

Abstract

This study investigates how media outlets report on caste and communal conflict through recent events in Murshidabad, West Bengal, focusing on the Waqf Andolon protests and the Kartik Lorai disturbances in Beldanga. Utilizing both print journalism and firsthand interviews with local reporters, the analysis reveals distinct differences in news coverage—widespread reporting and political emphasis accompanied the Waqf Andolon. In contrast, the Kartik Lorai incident received scarce attention. These disparities are linked to factors such as editorial risk-aversion and sociopolitical influence. The research concludes that thorough and equitable news coverage is vital for public understanding in times of crisis, while selective reporting can reinforce divisions and marginalize groups. The paper calls for transparent, responsible journalism to address the full complexity of caste-related violence and discrimination.

Keywords: #WaqfAmendment #KartikLorai #LocalReporters #PoliticalCommunication #MediaRepresentation #DigitalDemocracy.

Introduction

The complex interplay of caste, communal identity, and media coverage comes to the forefront during large-scale crises. This study analyzes recent events in Murshidabad—especially the Waqf Andolon protests and the Kartik Lorai incident in Beldanga—to assess how print and digital media shape public perceptions and influence responses to caste-related violence and discrimination (India Today, 2025; Times of India, 2025).

Methodology

This study adopts a straightforward approach by focusing on two main sources to explore the media's role during caste-related violence in Murshidabad: print media coverage and interviews with reporters. First, relevant articles and news reports from major newspapers and credible online platforms covering the Waqf Andolon protests and Kartik Lorai violence were collected and reviewed. This allowed for an

examination of how these events were presented, including the emphasis on caste, communal identity, and political context.

Second, in-depth conversations were held with journalists who reported on these events. These interviews provided valuable insights into the decision-making processes behind news coverage, the challenges journalists faced, and the social and political pressures influencing their reporting.

By combining the analysis of diverse media content with firsthand reporter accounts, this method effectively captures how media coverage shapes public understanding of caste-related crises. It is a simple yet rigorous approach that offers meaningful conclusions about the interactions between caste, crisis, and media narratives.

Waqf Andolon: Protest and Escalation

In April 2025, protests against the Waqf Amendment Act erupted in Murshidabad, organized by local religious associations and supported by rights groups (India Today, 2025). The rallies featured provocative speeches, some urging aggressive action and referencing broader political events in South Asia. Rumors, particularly regarding alleged police violence, inflamed the crowd and rapidly escalated events towards stone-pelting, arson, and confrontation with law enforcement (India Today, 2025).

Print and digital media outlets reported extensively on these speeches as a trigger, as well as on the subsequent imposition of prohibitory orders and arrests intended to restore order (India Today, 2025). However, reports from journalists on the ground highlighted the role of misinformation and emotionally charged rhetoric in fuelling unrest (India Today, 2025; Times of India, 2025).

Kartik Lorai in Beldanga: Caste, Communalism, and Media Silence

Several months prior, Beldanga witnessed violence during the Kartik Lorai festivities. According to regional news sources, the immediate spark was alleged disrespect during festival celebrations, leading to retaliatory attacks and clashes between different social groups (Times of India, 2025). Unlike the Waqf Andolon, coverage of Kartik Lorai in print media was noticeably limited—often brief and lacking in-depth analysis of the caste and communal dimensions.

Interviews with print journalists from local outlets revealed that editorial caution, fear of inflaming further violence, and political sensitivities contributed to this subdued approach (author interviews, 2025). Reporters noted a reluctance to explicitly discuss the underlying caste tensions, often due to pressures from both government and publisher sides.

Analysis of Media Coverage of Unrest in Murshidabad

The recent coverage of unrest in Shamsrganj, Murshidabad, published in the Bengali-language newspaper, shines a spotlight on complex social dynamics where community grievances and institutional responses intermingle. While the surface narrative centers around law-and-order issues, a deeper reading uncovers patterns in media presentation that are relevant to the study of caste, crisis, and coverage.

1. Framing Crisis Over Root Causes

The headline and layout are deliberately designed to capture attention through words like "uproar" and "unrest," setting the tone of urgency and disorder from the start. This approach, commonly seen in Indian newspapers, emphasizes the spectacle of violence and immediate disruptions while side-stepping direct discussion of underlying social inequalities, such as caste tensions.

2. Community Protest and Coded Language

The news piece reports on large-scale protests demanding the enforcement of Waqf laws, referencing the participation of influential local figures. However, caste identities are only implied through references to particular communities and individuals, never explicitly discussed. The article describes events such as arson, violence against police, and property destruction—communicating a sense of chaos, but beneath this are struggles tied to historical marginalization and contestation over land and religious rights.

3. Role of State Institutions

A significant portion of reporting is dedicated to the police response—injuries to officers, blockades, and official statements. Institutions are shown as besieged gatekeepers rather than solution-makers. This framing can subtly influence readers to sympathize with authority, reducing empathy for protesters' deeper motivations, including those linked to caste-based injustices.

4. Silences and Editorial Choices

Notably, the article refrains from naming caste explicitly. The omission of direct reference to Beldanga's Kartik Lorai—a well-known local event with caste undertones—is especially striking, as it suggests editorial caution or reluctance to delve into sensitive topics. Such silences are often powerful; they shape public understanding by what they do not say, as much as by what they do.

5. Implications for Social Research

This newspaper report provides a valuable primary source for examining how local media constructs episodes of violence and unrest in caste-sensitive zones. It reflects broader patterns of Indian journalism—foregrounding immediate crisis while muting the deeper social undercurrents. For scholars examining the intersection of caste and coverage, such articles are crucial for analysing both what is told and what is left untold.



Ananda Bazar Patrika 12.04.2025

Analysis of Media Portrayal of Internet Shutdown and Unrest in Murshidabad

The article discusses an internet shutdown and heightened police presence in Murshidabad, following prolonged unrest and confrontations in Beldanga. Written in a distinct journalistic style, the piece offers critical insights into how the media frames crisis and social disorder in spaces shaped by caste and communal tensions.

1. Crisis Reporting and Framing

The headline immediately situates Murshidabad as a district in crisis—"Internet service shut down till tomorrow"—emphasizing the state's exceptional response through digital blackout. The article details large-scale violence, injuries, barricading of neighborhoods, and disruption of rail and road networks. Throughout the report, the focus is consistently on administrative actions, damage control, and statements by officials, not on the social roots of conflict.

2. Institutional Narrative and Silences

The language foregrounds police operations, curfew orders, arrests, and security drills, constructing a narrative of order versus chaos. Yet, the deeper context—including the enduring contestations around Waqf property rights and the ritual of Kartik Lorai, which historically inflame caste-based frictions—remains absent from explicit mention. This editorial silence is significant: by avoiding a direct discussion of caste or communal backgrounds, the report normalizes the crisis as a generalized law-and-order failure, rather than acknowledging its social underpinnings.

3. Community Impact and Representation

Ordinary citizens are depicted mainly as victims of circumstances, unable to access the internet, fearful of venturing out, suffering from transport disruptions, and forced to avoid public spaces. The article collects statements from local administrators.



Ananda Bazar Patrika 18.11.2024

Analysis of Local Media, Caste Unrest, and Institutional Coverage in Murshidabad

The attached Bengali newspaper article dives into the repercussions of the Waqf movement and resulting unrest across Shamsanganj and Dhuliyan, Murshidabad. The piece not only chronicles administrative responses and violence but also subtly reflects the media's approach to reporting on deeply rooted caste and community tensions.

1. The Crisis Framing: Law, Violence, and Daily Life

From the outset, the report foregrounds “tumult” and violence, presenting Murshidabad as caught in an escalating crisis tied to demands for Waqf-related law enforcement. It highlights incidents of arson, attacks, death, and injuries—both to civilians and police. Everyday disruptions, such as shops being burnt and vehicles destroyed, add a human dimension. This “crisis” language is typical in Indian regional media, framing unrest as disorder rather than social upheaval rooted in caste and religious disputes.

2. The Silenced Narrative: Caste and Community Identities

A strength—and limitation—of the report lies in its indirect approach to caste. The actual vocabulary of caste or discrimination is rarely used; instead, the context appears through coded references to “community,” “Waqf,” and “ritual violence,” touching on the underlying complexities of Kartik Lorai and land disputes in Beldanga. By choosing not to directly name caste groups or discuss community

hierarchies, the paper reveals a tendency among news media to avoid fanning sensitive tensions, yet at the cost of obscuring root causes.

3. The Role of Institutions: Authority and Action

Public officials and law enforcement dominate the report. The article notes administrative orders, curfews, arrests, and use of force such as tear gas. The local administration's challenge in maintaining order is stressed, and political statements are quoted to reassure or explain state action. Simultaneously, there are criticisms of government effectiveness and calls for accountability, particularly over the handling of Waqf disputes and associated violence. This reflects how local media can amplify institutional voices during conflict, sometimes sidelining grassroots grievances.

4. Human Impact: Local Voices and Suffering

While institutional and official perspectives are centre stage, local suffering is depicted through vivid descriptions of loss—homes, businesses, community spaces destroyed. Occasional direct quotes from victims or local leaders underscore frustration or resilience, adding a more personal, “human” side to the narrative.

5. Editorial Judgment and Emphasis

The report style is cautious but empathetic, seeking a balance between reporting facts, maintaining communal harmony, and not escalating tensions. The decision to cover such unrest and administrative responses, even in guarded language, is significant for the visibility of local issues. However, the lack of direct discussion about caste can allow important disparities and injustices to remain hidden, reinforcing majority perspectives.



Ananda Bazar Patrika 13.04.2025

Analysis of Other Media Coverage and Reporter Experiences

Media behaviour varied significantly between these crises. The Waqf Andolon caught widespread attention in major newspapers and news sites, driven by the political dimensions involving state and central authorities, as well as the public spectacle of mass protests and police intervention (Times of India, 2025). In contrast, Kartik Lorai, while deeply felt at the local level, largely failed to break into sustained regional or national coverage. This discrepancy led many residents and activists to question media priorities and the selective amplification of certain types of violence (author interviews, 2025).

The coverage of caste-related violence in Murshidabad, especially the Waqf Andolon protests and the Kartik Lorai clashes in Beldanga, shows noticeable differences across newspapers like Ananda bazar Patrika, Times of India, Bartaman, and The Telegraph. Each of these publications brought its own perspective and focus to the stories.

Ananda bazar Patrika and Bartaman, major Bengali-language newspapers, provided detailed accounts of the events while carefully avoiding language that might increase tensions. Their reports focused on the factual sequence of protests and government actions but often hesitated to directly address caste-related discrimination, likely due to the sensitive nature of the topic and editorial caution.

In contrast, The Times of India, a prominent English daily, gave more emphasis to the political and social impact of the violence. This publication highlighted how communities were affected and frequently covered the experiences of Hindu minorities during the unrest. The newspaper balanced reporting on the incidents along with political reactions and human stories, which helped draw national attention.

The Telegraph, known for detailed journalism, explored the larger implications, such as political influences behind the violence and concerns over cross-border elements. However, discussions about caste remained subdued, often overshadowed by broader communal and security issues.

Interviews with reporters from these papers revealed common challenges. Most journalists spoke about the pressures to maintain peace and avoid provoking further conflict. They mentioned difficulties in openly addressing caste issues due to potential backlash from political groups, publishers, and their own concerns about social harmony. Reporters also acknowledged that political bias sometimes influenced how stories were framed, affecting which aspects were emphasized or minimized.

Overall, the media coverage, combined with insights from reporters, shows that while the events were well-covered, the deeper caste-based discrimination issues received less attention. The way news was reported was shaped by editorial choices, political pressures, and the need to balance informing the public with avoiding crisis escalation. These factors influenced public understanding of the violence and underline the important role media plays in shaping narratives around sensitive caste-related conflicts.

Findings from Reporter Interviews

Based on interviews with journalists who covered these incidents (author interviews, 2025), several key patterns emerged:

- Journalists faced editorial restrictions on explicitly linking violence to community or caste tensions, often under the pretext of maintaining peace.

- Editors and reporters were more likely to cover incidents with wider political implications or those already amplified on social media.
- Stories were shaped not only by journalistic judgment but by complex pressures from political actors and business interests.

Conclusion

The case study of Murshidabad illustrates how the media, particularly print and established digital outlets, mediate the visibility and understanding of caste-driven crises. Comprehensive reporting, as seen in the Waqf Andolon, can inform and prompt dialogue, while selective or muted coverage, as with Kartik Lorai, may perpetuate misunderstanding and marginalization. Media must navigate both the ethical imperative to report and the practical realities of social and political pressure. Only transparent, nuanced coverage can help address the deeper roots of violence and discrimination. The media, in its coverage of events like the Waqf Andolon and related contestations in Murshidabad, often prioritizes narratives of disruption and law enforcement over the complex realities of caste and discrimination. Human suffering, collective action, and historical grievances become part of a coded conversation, suggesting a pressing need for scholarly inquiry that unpacks both the explicit content and the silent gaps in such reporting. The report from Murshidabad offers a valuable lens on the complexities of caste-related violence and community protest in contemporary Bengal. As examined through the media, the crisis is both a spectacle and a silence: presented as an urgent law-and-order breakdown, yet rarely interpreted through caste and community injustices that drive such conflict.

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