

MEDIA AND HUMANITARIAN CRISES: A COMPARISON OF BBC'S COVERAGE OF TSUNAMI 2004 AND EELAM WAR IV

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ABSTRACT

In the recent Sri Lankan history, two disasters shook the island state: one natural (2004 Tsunami) and the other man-made (Eelam War IV). Both the events were massive and received enormous attention in the international arena. British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) played a major role in bringing these events to the global audience. The research compares the BBC World News coverage on the Tsunami 2004 and Eelam War IV. These two events were selected keeping in mind the relevance of the crises and mass response to it, during its occurrence. The nature of the events, that is, a natural disaster and a man-made conflict in itself, becomes a subject for comparing the coverage of the two by the channel. The question of whether the coverage of Tsunami 2004 escalated the already existing ethnic tensions in the country is also analysed. The paper focuses on the 'media framing' strategy adopted by BBC in covering the events as a foreign media. Media framing can simply be defined as the perspective from which a story is told. The frame of a story will inherently influence the way it is investigated and reported.

KEYWORDS: *BBC, BBC & Sri Lanka, Media Framing, Media & Humanitarian Crises, Tsunami 2004, Eelam War IV, International Media, Local Media*

INTRODUCTION

During an emergency, information and communication becomes the key tool for saving lives. They help to organise, coordinate and identify sources of support and assistance for the communities in crisis. It is also equally important to give communities a say in the events affecting them in order to express their needs and make suggestions as to how an emergency response can be improved. The role played by media in communications, both in disseminating information and conveying grievances of the affected communities to the outside world is indispensable. As stated by Article 3 of the UNESCO Declaration 1978, the mass media have 'an important contribution to make to the strengthening of peace and international understanding and in countering racialism, apartheid and incitement to war' (UNESCO, 1978).

There are various theories that define the new distinctive forms of mass communication. One such is that of Matheson and Allan, whose studies point towards the change in the traditional journalism model incorporating social, new and alternate media platforms (Matheson & Allan, 2010). Newman refers to this phenomenon as "symbiosis" between the various media platforms (Newman, 2011). According to Verbitsky, the age of new media means the 'broadening of journalism model.' She

demands a shift from the 'orthodox model' of objectivity that dominates the mainstream media in covering peace and conflict issues. 'For me, the old model is fine for the period in which it came into being, but for the 21st century it is too simplistic, too commercial,' she says (Aslam, 2016).

There are other academicians like Galtung, Lynch &McGoldrick and Hackett, who repeatedly showed the shortcomings of existing journalism when compared with the stated ideal of objectivity. For Hackett, objectivity is a paradigm or regime, a metaphor that calls attention to the interlinkage of practices, norms, epistemology and structures in journalism (Hackett, 2011). Lynch and McGoldrick are critical of the journalists' defence of objectivity. "Journalists cannot be wholly objective- they only see a fraction of the action especially in battle, they do not know the whole picture" (Lynch &McGoldrick, 2005). For them, objectivity is about making choices in terms of 'what to report and how to report.' For Galtung, objectivity is not the issue, 'selection is the issue, the criteria applied and the codes and the context in which the event is placed and interpreted' (Galtung, 2010).

Along with these theories, certain new concepts in journalism arose like the notions of 'citizen journalism' (Allan, 2007), 'reliable journalism' (Howard, 2003), 'development journalism' (Dixit, 2010), 'critically deliberative journalism' (Robie, 2013), 'conflict sensitive journalism' (Howard, 2003) and 'peace journalism' (Galtung&Ruge, 1965). These terms stress the social responsibility of the media and their role in resolving conflicts and maintaining peace. There are other terms too, as mentioned by Shinar (2007) that include 'victim journalism' (Hume, 1997); 'justice journalism' (Mess-man, 2001) and 'engaging' journalism (Lynch, 2003).

KrishanJayashankaSiriwardhana in his thesis paper on the Media Framing of Sri Lankan Civil Warsays, the number of studies we have at present on examining news framing strategies of civil wars and other humanitarian conflicts have been dominated by the analysis of international news presentations (Siriwardhana, 2017). He quotes the example of the Rwandan Civil War as one of the few civil wars in which, a number of scholars look at the framing of domestic coverage (e.g., Kellow and Steeves, 1998; Melvern, 2004).Siriwardhana quotes Melvern in his thesis who states that "pro-government media supplied listeners with ideas that pushed them to simultaneously fear, hate and dehumanise members of the minority group and thus conditioned, facilitated and legitimised violence and served as an instrument of mobilisation for genocide."

Gamson and Modigliani (1989) argued that "media discourses can be conceived of as a set of interpretive packages that give meaning to an issue. A package has an internal structure. At its core is a central organizing idea, or frame, for making sense of relevant events, suggesting what is at issue. They referred to this as "media packages" and identified five framing devices which come under such media packages including metaphors, exemplars, catchphrases, depictions, and visual images (Gamson& Modigliani, 1989). Both of them derived the sense of news frames in a constructivist approach and argued that news stories are reconstructed or deconstructed with particular intentions.

With this backdrop, the paper compares the BBC World News coverage on the Tsunami 2004and Eelam War IV.Sri Lankan civil war represents one of Asia's most violent, destructive and most obstinate conflicts in the recent history. Media coverage of ethnic conflicts has generally been a matter of great sensitivity and of strong polarization (Neumann and Shahira, 2012), which is also similar for the case of the gigantic Asian Tsunami of 26 December 2004. These two events were selected keeping in mind the relevance and mass response to the crisis during its occurrence.The nature of the events, that is, a natural

disaster and a man-made conflict, in itself becomes a subject for comparing the coverage of the two by the channel. The question of whether the coverage of Tsunami 2004 escalated the already existing ethnic tensions in the country will also be analysed.

BBC was chosen to specifically study the role of media in the above humanitarian crisis considering factors like the availability of resources and mass coverage of the issues by the channel. The paper will focus on the 'media framing' strategy adopted by BBC in covering the events as a foreign media. Media framing can simply be defined as the perspective from which a story is told. The frame of a story will inherently influence the way it is investigated and reported. The basis of framing theory is that a particular media organization on giving attention to a specific subject or case will consciously or unconsciously give a certain meaning to it. It basically means to say how something presented by media organizations, is influencing the way people think about a specific subject or case (Goffman, 1974).

MEDIA AND HUMANITARIAN CRISES

Humanitarian crises – natural and man-made – are becoming more prevalent today. Media plays a significant role in reporting these crises. To put it in context, any meaningful response to humanitarian crises requires two things: resources and political will. Neither of this can happen without proper media coverage, which is considered as one of the principal obligations of the media. In Nordenstreng's opinion, the social obligations of journalism calls for initiatives 'to systematically monitor what the media tell about the world with a view to improving media performance and contributing to media ethics'(Nordenstreng, 2001).

Some call this as "Peace Journalism". For Lynch and Galtung, "peace journalism" is widely associated with media reporting on humanitarian crises and is a serious, inquisitive concept, a professional reporting making a conflict more transparent. They hold that peace or conflict reporting is an opportunity to bring out the whole truth; the truth of an event brought together by the journalistic "supply of cues and clues, to alert readers and audiences" (Lynch, 2013). It also gives a choice to the editors and reporters on what to report and how to report which in turn creates opportunities for the audiences to find non-violent responses in society (Lynch &McGoldrick, 2005).

The responses to humanitarian crises and emergency takes place in different contexts. It can vary from media rich locations to those with limited media and communication infrastructures which include poor societies and rich ones or capital cities and isolated rural areas. With such vast range of crowd giving different perspectives, the information and communication needs from one emergency to another will vary widely and so will the skills and support needs required for media.

The roles played by international media and local media in reporting humanitarian crises are seen to overlap in some areas. But, for the most part they are radically different. To Dimitra(2015), "Local media covers events that fall within a local context and are relevant to a small, locally defined and constrained audience and are determined by specific localities and geographical boundaries."

These outlets are known and trusted by the communities they serve, and thus they play a critical role in bringing information to communities affected by disasters or man-made conflicts. Local audiences, the people who have been affected by the emergency, including neighbouring communities are the ones to which, the local media should meet the obligation of

communicating immediate information. If this role is performed effectively, they can save lives and trigger local recovery from emergencies much faster. This role of the media is ensured by the local journalists. They ensure that community voices are raised on critical concerns. They know where to go and who to talk to find out what is going on because they represent and understand their own communities. However, during an emergency like a natural disaster, the reporting by the local media organisations and journalists goes apart from being an ordinary coverage. This is because, they themselves may well be affected by the disaster, looking for relatives and friends and seeking help.

It is also important to look at the relationship between humanitarian aid organisations and local media. This may vary in different scenarios. In rare situations, both bodies may form close collaboration on shared mandates. But, most likely they reflect mutual ignorance or misunderstanding of each other's work. Their relationship may also turn to that of outright hostility and suspicion, particularly in locations where disasters take place within a political conflict.

International media goes beyond national boundaries and also transcends the differences between different cultures and societies. It is guided by the 'universal' principles of international consumer culture. It serves the role of providing awareness on an event to global audience as well as to the local ones on what has happened and what the impact has been on the local population. They can seek attention of the aid organisations through their coverage, which in turn, will raise the profile of the crisis and will help in response efforts. There are many studies on how well or how poorly international media fulfils this role. Especially, in the case of terrorist conflicts, media framing studies has more focused on international media reporting of the events. For instance, Satti examined the framing of Islamic State (ISIS) by Al Jazeera and BBC English. The study found that both the media organisations framed ISIS as an aggressive entity with fundamentalist tendencies whose main agenda was to fight against those who stand in its way. This represents how international media by reporting such crimes against humanity showcases the desire for peace and religious tolerance that are often lacking during wartime. Sattisays that, for the above issue, the coalition forces were also framed as having an aggressive nature by the media houses. But, this aggressiveness was justified stating they were 'the forces of good fighting against evil' (Satti, 2015).

Another example on the trends of the international media coverage of events was given by Papacharissi, Maria and Oliveria. They examined the frames used by several newspapers with their origins in the United States and the United Kingdom in reporting the shooting down of the Iran Air 655 as a terrorist event. The study found that "U.S. papers engaged in more episodic coverage and the U.K. papers in more thematic coverage of terrorism and terrorism-related events" (Papacharissi, Maria and Oliveria, 2008).

BBC AND SRILANKA

Enjoying its historical legacy from the days of the Empire, BBC World Service Television, now known as BBC World, was launched in 1991 and it forms part of the Corporation's commercial entity BBC Worldwide. It is the world's leading public service broadcaster, funded by the British Government through a direct grant from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). The five public purposes of the broadcaster are set by the Royal Charter and Agreement, which is the constitutional basis for the channel and they are as follows:

- To provide impartial news and information to help people understand and engage with the world around them.
- To support learning for people of all ages.
- To show the most creative, highest quality and distinctive output and services.
- To reflect, represent and serve the diverse communities of all of the United Kingdom's nations and regions and, in doing so, support the creative economy across the United Kingdom.
- To reflect the United Kingdom, its culture and values to the world.

According to Helen Boaden, former Director of BBC News, "impartiality is in our DNA – it is part of BBC's genetic makeup" (BBC, 2010). This also outlines the values that the BBC holds striving to achieve its mission to inform, educate and entertain.

The BBC has a major presence in Sri Lanka's media platforms and has also been a critical reporter on its long standing ethnic conflict. Its coverage on the Tsunami 2004 was phenomenal. The influence of BBC could be gleaned by one of the Listener's letters: "At times when we fear we are doomed, forgotten and uncared for, there is a distant voice that assures it is aware of our misery and that it will stand by us and sting the conscience of the world, that voice is the BBC" (BBC Tamil Service, 1986). The listener sees the BBC as a global voice that stands by us. According to Sharika, BBC is 'Sri Lankan' for Sri Lankans. For many, it is the most recognised broadcaster in the island. The regional language services, the BBC Tamil and Sinhala, have played a major role being a mirror reflecting on a community, dialectically, to the outside world. The BBC Tamil (Tamizhosai) started in 1941 broadcasts across the Tamil National boundaries in both South India and Sri Lanka. BBC Sinhala service started in 1942 discontinued in 1976 and then was re-established in 1990. These two BBC services which were initially routes to social mobility became entangled with the ethnically fractured landscape of Sri Lanka. The understanding of the two language services and the attachment to it were ethnicised as the channel was broadcasting to two linguistically and ethnically different audiences. These different publics and their relationships can only be understood through the specificities of how language, ethnicity and social mobility were and are intertwined in colonial and postcolonial Sri Lanka. "The BBC's services underwent two different kinds of phases: first the BBC assuming the role of a media service for aspirational listeners; in the second, it was seen as a guardian of impartial reporting about civil war and suffering. The move between the two were produced by an interaction between Sri Lanka's shifting political climate and the BBC's own imagination of Sri Lanka from "model British colony" to war racked island" (Thiranagama, 2010).

TSUNAMI 2004 AND EELAM WAR IV

In the recent Sri Lankan history, two disasters shook the island state: one natural (2004 Tsunami) and the other man-made (Eelam War IV). Both the events were massive and received enormous attention in the international arena. BBC played a major role in bringing these events to the global audience.

The Tsunami 2004 on 26 December occurred in the Indian Ocean caused by an earthquake measuring more than magnitude-9 and the seafloor uplifted, displacing the seawater above. A series of massive scale tidal waves sped across the Indian Ocean, killing more than 220,000 people in twelve countries spanning South East Asia, South Asia and East Africa

and displaced more than 1.6 million people in addition to the damages caused to property and infrastructure. In Sri Lanka, over a million of its people were affected with ninety per cent of those killed being from the fishing community and those belonging to the lower socio economic class (Frerks and Klem 2005). Killinochchi, Jaffna and Mullaitivu districts in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka were affected by the Tsunami (Somasundaram, 2014).

The Sri Lankans has only experienced a few large scale natural disasters before except for the occasional flooding of rivers. Thus, even the public health system of the country was not occupied enough to respond to a disaster of this magnitude, and even the existing disaster plans could not be located or immediately implemented. The Sri Lankan government struggled to respond to the needs of the affected areas as even they were alarmed on facing a humanitarian crisis in an unprecedented scale on a post Christmas weekend. The state lacked a formal Incident Command System (ICS) even though the Sri Lankan military is familiarized enough to handle emergencies through their command structures. However, within the first 24 hours of the tsunami, the government established a Centre for National Operations (CNO) under the direct authority of the prime minister to coordinate both national and international relief operations. The CNO, working under the direct authority of the president, linked between concerned government ministries, local authorities, the military, and the inter-national assistance community. With the ethnic tensions prevailing in the country, the delivery of relief goods and services in the immediate post-tsunami period surpassed the barriers of the war. "Many relief workers, including Buddhist priests from the predominantly Sinhala-speaking South, travelled to the Tamil speaking community in Northeast to provide aid. Persons residing in ethnically mixed camps in the South reported a culture of collaboration and unity among residents throughout the post-tsunami period. However, three months after the tsunami, with the slow pace of reconstruction, Tamils in refugee camps in the Northeast began to blame the government for withholding or not providing enough aid" (Amada, Gunatilake, Gunatilake & Fernando, 2006).

The disaster period also witnessed hundreds of new agencies arriving in Sri Lanka and existing agencies experiencing extensive growth resulted from a sudden surge of funding. This challenged the coordination among the central government, the districts, and realities in the field. As an aftermath of the disaster, many of those who responded to the emergency as well as many of the survivors were affected by Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), a long term psychological consequence. Women and children were more vulnerable to the social disruptions caused by Tsunami. They had to deal with issues pertaining to security and safety, feminine hygiene and legal representation in addition to being deprived of their basic needs. There have been scattered reports of rape in the refugee camps, and some women became victims of the sex industry, particularly in the setting of devastation superimposed on pre-existing poverty (Amada, Gunatilake, Gunatilake, & Fernando, 2006). There have also been reports of children who became vulnerable to sexual and physical abuse and involuntary/illegal adoption by persons from abroad (Amada, Gunatilake, Gunatilake, & Fernando, 2006). Sri Lanka was able to prevent the outbreaks of diseases as an immediate aftermath of the tsunami. However, the long term recovery and reconstruction processes have been slow.

Eelam War IV is the fourth phase of armed conflict between the Sri Lankan military and the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. The renewed hostilities during this phase began on the 26 July 2006, when Sri Lanka Air Force fighter jets bombed several LTTE camps. Eelam War IV ended on 18 May 2009 with the Sri Lankan Army gaining control over the

last bit of territory held by the LTTE and with the death of the LTTE leader VelupillaiPrabhakaran. The final few days of the war near Nandikadal Lagoon in the north east of the island witnessed heavy fighting and it eventually led to the Sri Lankan forces being accused of war crimes, which were denied by the government. Many of the Tamil civilians who were trapped inside the war zone were caught in the crossfire during the final phase of the war. Mahinda Rajapaksa, the president of Sri Lanka declared on 19 May 2009 that the conflict between the government and the LTTE was over and that the government has overcome the challenges posed by the rebels. The president himself and his advisers had “mounted their own ‘home-grown’ brand of no-hold-barred counter-insurgency campaign to defeat the LTTE in 2007-09, setting a model for rest of the world” (Somasundaram, 2014). LTTE was defeated militarily and its leadership eliminated with the advances since the beginning of 2008.

Both the Sri Lankan state and military received considerable support from foreign countries in terms of training, military hardware, equipment and vital information regarding the movement of LTTE. Apart from United Kingdom, India, China, Pakistan, Iran and Israel, the United States have continued to support the Sri Lankan military through heavy financial aid, agreements, equipment and training (Arulanantham, 2007).

When the war was going on, the situation and its essence gradually infused into all aspects of daily life, family and community processes in the country. The war brought all economic development in the north and east to a complete halt. It also led to destruction of land, buildings, institutions, resources and property. The LTTE's armed struggle, along with having exposed people under its control to the violence of the state, has given the state an excuse to go ahead with its colonization schemes with extra vigour and with the protection of the army as well. On the other hand, one could also observe that the LTTE was slowly establishing a parallel government during the period. A government of its own with police, army, navy, air force, legal codes, courts, prisons, taxes, customs, immigration, administration, local government, planning, development programmes, social services, NGOs, financial systems, trades, shops, commercial ventures, medical services, educational services- all trappings of a counter state in the government termed ‘uncleared areas’ (Somasundaram, 2014). The uncleared areas referred to those areas, which were not under state control. The rebels had control over the local Tamil population in the state controlled areas as well as among the Tamil Diasporas in abroad through sympathy, terror and infiltration of various institutions and organizations. Both the parties were accused of war crimes and for the high humanitarian cost of the rebellion. Implementing political and constitutional reforms which give autonomy to both north and east, where Tamils are in the majority is essential to sustain peace in the region.

BBC'S COVERAGE OF TSUNAMI 2004 AND EELAMWAR IV

BBC described Sri Lanka as one of the “most dangerous places in the world” for journalists especially when the country was at the height of civil war. With the existing difficulties in reporting Sri Lanka, the independent journalists say, a lot of the worst things that happen go on well away from their eyes. During these circumstances, when they cannot be sure of themselves on who has done what, all they can do is report what people say has happened. “In Sri Lanka that often means this: A group of people are killed, quite possibly civilians. The government and the Tigers accuse each other of the killings” (BBC, 2006).

Sinhala community was not certainly happy with the Tamil reflections on BBC. It is evident with the number of charges on them by the Sinhala government. The BBC was accused for exaggerating the numerical data on the numbers of people fleeing and civilian death during both the crises in the country. The reporting was called immature and falling for the Tamil Tiger Propaganda. In 2006 Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) held protest in London blaming BBC was biased in its reporting. The Sinhalese protestors outside Bush House handed over a petition to BBC and waved banners reading 'Biased Broadcasting Corporation' and 'BBC stop supporting terrorism in Sri Lanka' (BBC, 2006). The broadcasters were accused for their dominant frame of being sympathetic towards Tamil Terrorists.

It cannot be said that BBC was never criticised by this militants. For instance, the broadcaster faced protests as a part of a campaign by certain pro Tamil Tiger Website, who protested against a cartoon that portrayed BBC trying to cover Tamil Militants. "A cartoon on our office wall shows the BBC crouching low to paint whitewash on the backside of a tiger, representing of course, Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger rebels. It appeared recently in a Sinhala language newspaper at the same time as a number of other cartoons and columns vilifying the BBC's coverage of the rising violence on the island" (BBC, 2006).

The civil war in Sri Lanka and its nature as a humanitarian crisis generates certain journalistic dilemmas. For instance, while reporting on assassinations and the bodies recovered naming the killers is often avoided even when it is accurately known. The dangerous consequences of naming them lie on one side. Apart from that, for news services such as BBC which holds strict rules about authenticating sources and rules of impartiality naming, was viewed as a biased act and a taboo. The solution for this was to come with codes to refer to ambiguous perpetrators, using well known phrases that civilians used to refer to different kind of perpetrators. For instance, in pro-LTTE media all killings by the security forces are identified while those by the LTTE were named as 'unidentified gunmen' (Thiranagama, 2011). This was building up a complex code of communication between the broadcaster and its listeners.

The Tsunami 2004 coverage mostly addressed the grievances of civilians but, the footages again fell on to giving prominence to LTTE controlled areas. The story covered was mostly in the form of graphic representations of what happened on the day the island was hit by Tsunami. The individual narratives supporting the coverage were always in the context of what has happened to the family, and where the person was, and what they were doing when the Tsunami was struck. The coverage became a reason for the massive aid poured in. Individuals and organizations, both national and international started to respond with all manner of help, support and personnel. 'Over 500 aid agencies participated in the relief and recovery operations in Sri Lanka and many of these had no prior experience in long term social recovery after a large scale disaster' (Shaw, Mulligan, Nadarajah, Mercer and Ahmed, 2010). Their contributions were acknowledged to be beneficial and helped to fill in the gaps due to the tardy and lack of organized response by the state in north-east (Goodhand, 2005). However, there was considerable and unhealthy competition between them 'with a rat race for victims' (Frerks and Klem, 2005) and pressure to show results to their donors back home (Goodhand, 2005).

On reporting the effects of the Tsunami on the governments, the BBC said, 'History teaches that disasters can make or break governments and shift international alliances' (BBC, 2005). The channel reported saying, the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil Tigers have to an extent cooperated in the relief provisions, an effort to bring neutrality in the coverage. But yet, they focused back to the representations of Tamil militants at the end by quoting a Tamil Tiger spokesman, who indicated

that the government has not done enough to gain the Tamil's trust. The channel portrayed the fear of Tamil communities were they felt that they are being cheated by the Sri Lankan government during the post Tsunami period. The international aids received and rehabilitation plans announced were not reportedly discussed with the rebels. These were based on the accounts of SP Thamilselvan, spokesman of Tamil Tigers (BBC, 2004).

BBC, following moral values does always make it a point to bring out their analysis with justifications through 'assignment' (as the broadcaster calls it) for issues and events across the world. This normally includes interviews with authorities and other people involved in the scene. One such broadcast was let out by BBC World Service through their radio broadcast in 12 January 2005, a retrospect on the Asian Tsunami after three weeks of its impact. The coverage tried to reflect on how the state government could have had a mechanism for warning its citizens prior to the disaster and at the same time the channel tried to place the picture of Sri Lanka as a poor country incapable of having such mechanisms. The difficulty in sharing all the aids received equally in this divided island was portrayed as a crucial task. They had in hand statements from Tamil Diasporas, which shows how even a natural disaster of this kind cannot end twenty years of enmity between the two ethnic groups. "We are not for war, but if government impose war upon us we are ready" said Naga Narendran (BBC, 2005) who was a part of Tsunami relief efforts for Tamil Rehabilitation Organisation (TRO). This would mean a delicate step towards establishing peace is necessary.

The larger post-tsunami politics aggravated the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka rather than helping to resolve it. This led to a resumption of hostilities and eventually "an all out war to the finish, leaving people reeling from the double blow" (Somasundaram, 2014). The channel concluded that the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government forces were both responsible for hundreds of civilian deaths due to heavy shelling in the final battle, the broadcasts summarises that the chance of political solutions are even more difficult with suspicions deepening between both the groups.

All the international media and aid workers were eroded from the warzone by the Sri Lankan government just as the fighting escalated in 2009. Francis Harrison of BBC Radio World Service said it was "a war without independent observers" (BBC, 2015). One could find that the state media's framed the western intervention as an "enemy" on reporting the alleged human rights violations in the country. This was visibly because of the BBC's report against the state government. In 2009, BBC reported there were eyewitnesses of a shooting done by the government forces on a group of LTTE cadres, who were pleading to surrender to the government.

The leading newspapers of the nation like The Island and the Daily Mirror portrayed LTTE and the international community as enemies. The analytical studies on the Sri Lankan press reveal that they support the dominant Sinhala Buddhist ideology which demanded the eradication of LTTE from Sri Lankan soil. Based on the analysis, it could be argued that the papers' framing of the conflict had an impact on getting public support to the war, which eventually led to the defeat of the LTTE.

People turned to BBC when censorship on Medias by both LTTE and Sri Lankan government increased. The importance of BBC as an arbiter of 'independent' news coverage turned listeners to them revealing news on the happenings across all demographics and ethnicities. The need of the broadcaster in the island also meant a shift in the focus of its regional language service BBC Tamil to the Sri Lankan state predominantly. This resulted in the fall of its south Indian listeners. The

BBC Tamil service is informally acknowledged as the only real radio service operating into the LTTE controlled areas in the north and east. The service was uncensored by the LTTE and state, because of which, they were able to secure and broadcast interviews with Tamil politicians, LTTE leaders, and even Tamil Dissidents. It functioned as the last vestige of an uncensored public sphere (Thiranagama, 2011).

The BBC's authority within Sri Lanka was also linked to an elite culture where the British and their language, English, remained central. The Sri Lankan political elites predominantly used English which casted a veil over the Sinhalese language. Independence of Sri Lanka was a polite handover to 'brown sahibs' (Spencer, 1990) and Anglophone elite culture remained. Under colonial rule 9.4% of the population five years of age and above were literate in English (Kearney, 1978). The BBC's regional language services and the BBC World Service were thus always placed in invisible reference to the colonial past and English and Britishness as a mark of elite culture (Thiranagama, 2011). Thiranagama (2011) in her paper points out that one of the major reasons for the rise in BBC listenership in the last decade in Sri Lanka has been what is called "crisis listening." Such a change in the trend of listenership was portrayed through one of the surveys conducted by the BBC in 1996 from the Lanka Market Research Bureau (LMRB) and the survey was carried among people in selected areas in Southern Sri Lanka. The respondents showed an overwhelming feeling and need of being in touch with news as an indispensable part of their life. 'If you live in this country, you better listen to the news, you don't know when something will happen' (LMRB, 1996) said Kalutara, a young woman among the interviewees. The research showed that during some upheaval or instability in the country, such as bomb blasts the frequency of listening was greater.

Being keen crisis listeners, the consumers also started emphasizing on the trust worthiness of the news they received. This also meant the growth of a general distrust towards the Sri Lankan media for the polarized nature visible in them. Since 2004 the re-escalation of civil war and the Tsunami hitting the island has seen the state enjoin journalists to consider patriotism and national interest as the pre-eminent values of a 'good media', with Tamil journalists in particular being targeted (Thiranagama, 2011).

With the crisis listening market increasing, BBC started representing itself as a 'political need' for countries in crisis. The BBC World Service as "the best estimate of truth is being offered to you; often in regimes where that is in very short supply" (Nigel Chapman^[1]). It sought itself as a news provider highly essential in a country like Sri Lanka where the things are getting worsened and news media's are being censored.

The campaigns against the BBC from the opposing ends of Sri Lanka's political spectrum illustrate two things. Firstly, people really care about what the BBC says about Sri Lanka. That is the very reason why it remains as the only permanent international broadcaster in Sri Lanka. The amount of coverage given by the broadcaster in Sri Lanka in English Language through online, TV and radio reports and through the Sinhala and Tamil Language services is vast when compared to their competitors. Secondly, no matter how much the channel strives to maintain the guidelines of impartiality and accuracy, there will always be people on either side convinced that BBC is biased against them.

The broadcaster's interaction between the ethnically polarized audiences and the political situation in Sri Lanka animated their distinct practices of impartiality. This helps us to understand the BBC World Service not just as a powerful voice and carrier of values but as a constantly re-negotiated hybrid.

CONCLUSIONS

Defining the impartiality factor of a news provider is based on the assumptions made on the obligations shared between listeners and broadcasters. There were differences in the way the BBC and the local services in Sri Lanka understood and reported the same news about the same actors and incidents. Even when the events reported were being re attributed among listeners, both the parties agreed on the value of impartial reporting. However, BBC's position as a strong global brand with a long powerful imperial and post-imperial history within Sri Lanka makes it a powerful actor through which issues around events like natural disasters and ethnic tensions can be projected and evaluated. "TheBBC far from providing a window onto the global world, becomes potent for its locallisteners by representing possibilities about how the global world may 'know' Sri Lanka,a mirror to ourselves of how and who 'we' Tamils and Sinhalese are" (Thiranagama,2011).

It can be observed that, BBC, having strong ties with its public service roots, is measured in tone. "As such, market-oriented journalism relies on the increasing use of emotionally-intense narrative styles in an effort to involve news consumers and to secure greater advertising revenue by attracting larger audiences (Eveland, Seo&Marton, 2002), whereas public service journalism prefers fact based objectivism to show detachment."Richard Porter of BBC World Network in contrary to the notion of placing audience interests as primary says that, "Presumably, you cannot just treat that [the audience as a driver] in isolation- that's all we are doing, we are doing it for the audience. I can think of two immediate reasons why that is not a good thing: one, you might not be able to necessarily provide just what the audience wants and secondly it might not be very desirable to give the audience always just what they want."

There are journalists who risk their life to get a story, but are often limited by their own organisations and even general public. The BBC correspondent Bell sharing his experience of covering the Bosnian ethnic conflict cleansing in 1994-95 criticised the BBC's guidelines for reporters to be objective and dispassionate. He argues, 'I am no longer sure what 'objective' means: I see nothing object-like in the relationship between the reporter and the event, but rather a human and dynamic interaction between them. As for 'dispassionate', it is not only impossible but inappropriate to be thus neutralised—I would say even neutered—at the scene of an atrocity or massacre, or most man-made calamities' (Bell,1998).

There are three categories of conflict that a state government can face. Firstly, the one where states vital interests are involved. Secondly, those were important but not vital interests are at stake and the last one, which is of humanitarian interest alone. Media has an important role in determining which category a crisis falls in. There can be hundreds of such conflicts going around at a time. In such a circumstance the way they are reported determines whether there will be any response to them. A situation of this kind will pressurize a journalist to be objective rather than being neutral. Balancing competing perspectives can sound as a way of producing a good copy. For a broadcaster a regulator may also demand impartiality, as much as possible. But, paradoxically in most of the instances promoting a particular perspective over others might be a requirement of the job. For example, there is no way, were the merits of caring for environment can be equally balanced against those of harming it. Differences in the coverage of a story can be simply because of the ease of access and nature of the story. The differences can also arise when simply facts of an event is contested. For instance, in Rwandan crisis, US government official reported that there were 10,000-20,000 displaced Rwandans, while advocacy group insisted that the number was 600,000.

The concept of humanitarianism is seen as representing principles of neutrality, independence and impartiality, the basic principles that a broadcaster holds as well. However, these concepts are getting eroded now. This is especially true in an environment, where insurgents view any outside face as that of an enemy. According to Verbitsky, one of the reasons why people get pessimistic about a news is because of the orthodox model of reporting employed by media's, "it's all gloom and doom on conflicts and no prospect of anything other than conflict continuing on indefinitely", he says. But, the journalists can often take it as an opportunity to help people in connecting with each other by viewing conflicts in terms of "human relationships."

As the lines between the mainstream traditional media and social media are getting blurred, other scholars and journalists have welcomed the 'freedom' and 'flexibility' that it can offer to journalists who engage in peace building (Hawkins & Mogeckwu, 2011)

NOTE:

[1]Chapman in interview with Robert Hanks, 'Why the World Service still matters' The Independent (UK) 9th July. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/media/why-the-worldservice-still-matters-456551.html>.

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