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From Plantation to Protection: Media Framing of Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam and the Making of Ecological Citizenship in India

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ABSTRACT

India's Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam campaign asks citizens to plant a tree in honour of their mothers, and official figures now count its saplings at more than a hundred crore. Whether such planting turns into lasting ecological practice depends in part on how the news media present it. This study examines how two national English-language dailies, The Hindu and The Indian Express, covered the campaign and the wider environmental field over one year, from October 2025 to September 2026. Every page of 681 issues, 14,558 pages in all, was converted to searchable text, divided into articles and screened for environmental content, yielding 2,565 environment- related articles. Each item naming the campaign was then read in full and coded for genre, voice and frame, using five frames: numerical achievement, emotional and cultural appeal, political ceremony, participatory mobilisation, and accountability and ecological outcome. The campaign appeared in only 20 items, none on a front page and none with its name in a headline. Political and ceremonial framing led, followed by numerical achievement and participatory mobilisation, and government voices dominated half the items. Only two items made ecological outcome their central concern, and only one asked whether saplings would survive. Across the year the two papers carried 107 articles that mentioned tree planting and 68 that reported felling, transplanting or forest diversion, yet just six discussed the survival or monitoring of planted trees. The press recorded the act of planting far more readily than its aftermath. When it is read through the theory of ecological citizenship, this pattern engages only with a single gesture and the continuing obligation of care, on which the campaign's ecological promise rests, are left unexamined. The study makes the case for survival centered reporting as a practical task for environmental journalism.

Keywords: Ek Ped Maa ke Naam, Media framing, Ecological Citizenship, Environmental Journalism, Tree Plantation, The Hindu, Indian Express

INTRODUCTION

Public understanding remains uneven in india, though it talks about climate change more than it once did. Yale Program on Climate Change Communication and CVoter Foundation (2026) reported that about four in every 10 indians know a little or nothing about the global warming, and about 91 percent of those who know about it expressed concern and support for policy action(Yale Program on Climate Change Communication [YPCCC] & CVoter Foundation, 2026).

The Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam campaign, launched by the Prime Minister on World Environment Day, 5 June 2024 (Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 2025), invites every citizen to plant a tree in honour of his or her mother. It joins two kinds of care, filial and ecological, and its official record is one of rapid growth; by August 2026 the government was reporting some 140 crore saplings planted since the launch ("Losing forest for trees," 2026). The organisers of this seminar caution, however, that the worth of the initiative cannot be judged by the number of trees planted. It rests on sustained communication and on the long- term protection of the trees themselves (Department of Journalism, Delhi College of Arts & Commerce, 2026).

That caution defines the problem taken up here. Planting is an event, while a tree is a process that runs for decades. News organisations report events well; Cao (2015) describes the news media as "event-centred, image-oriented" and

bound to the daily cycle (Cao, 2015). They are less suited to following a sapling after the photograph has been taken. It is a difficult problem. The plantation system of india lack real time tracking of saplin survival and field level verification, reported by a recent audit report of the Green India Mission (Comptroller and Auditor General of India [CAG], 2026). A campaign built on care, if the press reports the planting and forgets the tree, risks becoming a calender of ceremonies.

This paper analyse The Hindu and The Indian Express reports and asks how have they reported the campaign over one year, and have their wider coverage of climate moved from plantation to protection. The paper examines every page of 681 issues, instead of sampling a few dozen stories. It is argumented that both newspapers presents the campaign more of as ceremony, count and mobilisation, and ignore the question of survival except a few opinion pieces and official notices. This is a consequential silence for a campaign that aspires to ecological citizenship.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Framing as Selection and Omission

Framing research starts from Goffman's observation that people rely on interpretive frameworks to "locate, perceive, identify, and label" the occurrences they meet (Goffman, 1974/1986). Entman gave the idea its working form for communication research: to frame is "to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text" so as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation or remedy (Entman, 1993). Two parts of his account guide this study. Frames reside in identifiable textual features such as keywords, stock phrases and sources, and "most frames are defined by what they omit as well as include" (Entman, 1993). Absence, on this reading, counts as evidence. Nisbet (2009) carried the concept into climate communication, treating frames as storylines that tell audiences why an issue matters, who is responsible and what ought to be done (Nisbet, 2009). His typology includes morality ethics and public accountability. It suits a campaign that speaks the language of mother and duty of a state.

Ecological Citizenship and the Duration of Obligation

Dobson (2003) popularised the term Ecological Citizenship. He sets it against liberal citizenship, grounded in the rights and contracts, and civic republican citizenship, grounded in public duty. It is not bounded by territory, it operates in public as well as private life, and it's obligations are non contractual. Justice, a fir distribution of ecological space, is it's first virtue, which is practised by the dispositions such as care and compassion (Dobson, 2003).

He treats private realm as the genuine site of citizenship because he argues that private acts have public consequences (Dobson, 2003). So a tree planted for one's mother comes close to this account. It is a private act of care with a public ecological effect. The theory adds a demand that the campaign's language should focus more on obligations than the act.

Contributors to Dobson and Bell's edited volume press the point further. Paehlke (2008), reviewing it, notes John Barry's warning against reducing environmental citizenship to "mere support for state-based environmental initiatives" (p. 359). Cao (2015) observes that tree planting has become a popular expression of environmental citizenship and recalls that Kenya's Green Belt Movement began in 1977 with seven trees planted to honour women environmental leaders before widening into a struggle for community, justice and women's rights (Cao, 2015). He also warns that programmes which govern "through citizens" can make citizens instruments of an agenda they do not control (Cao, 2015). Commemorative planting can open onto citizenship or close into compliance, and the narration matters.

Indian News Media and the Environment

Studies of the Indian press bear out this concern. Keller et al. (2020), applying automated content analysis to about 18,000 articles from two leading dailies over two decades, found climate coverage to be episodic and driven by events. Unnithan (2026), examining front-page environmental stories in *The Times of India* and the *Hindustan Times* in the first half of 2023, found that government officials supplied 59 per cent of sources against 16 per cent for scientists, that 81 per cent of stories rested on routine sources and that only 21 per cent used data journalism. By these routines a state campaign reaches the page.

Plantation and the Survival Gap

The ecological case for watching survival is strong. The CAG (2026) audit of the Green India Mission, covering 2015–16 to 2024–25, reported a 91.87 per cent shortfall against its target for improving forest quality, a 97.57 per cent shortfall against its target for expanding forest cover, and no noticeable change attributable to the mission at 70 per cent of sampled sites.

The audit concerns a different programme, and its findings are not transferred to the campaign here. The point is narrower: the monitoring apparatus the auditor found wanting is the one on which large plantation drives depend. No peer-reviewed study of press framing of Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam was found, and that is the gap this paper addresses.

OBJECTIVES

The study set out (a) to map the environmental coverage of *The Hindu* and *The Indian Express* over one year and locate the campaign within it; (b) to identify the genres, voices and frames through which the two papers presented the campaign; (c) to assess how far tree-related coverage attended to survival, protection and monitoring rather than to the act of planting; and (d) to interpret the pattern through the theory of ecological citizenship.

Research Questions

RQ1: How prominent was the campaign within the environmental coverage of the two papers.
RQ2: which frames and voices dominated the campaign?
RQ3: How far did the coverage moved from plantation to protection?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study combines quantitative, content analysis, as well as qualitative, framing analysis, methods. The number of counts of news articles along with the close reading was done to show how it is presented.

Sample and Period

The analysis is carried out on two national english language dailies, The Hindu and The Indian Express, over a period of one year, from 1 October 2025 to 30 Sept 2026. The corpus comprised 681 issues, 339 of The Indian Express and 342 of the Hindu. All are Delhi editions except only 6 issues belonged to the mumbai or ahmedabad editions.

Text Preparation and Screening

Text is drawn from the text layer of each digital edition. Each article is screened against a dictionary of environmental terms grouped into nine themes. An article is kept if these terms are frequent and dense enough to show sustained engagement. The article then is assigned to the theme with the greatest weight and marked as treating the environment either as it's primary subject or a secondary concern.

Coding of Campaign Items

A separate search is made for all references to the campaign, including spelling variations and the english rendering " A tree in the name of mather". Every hit is read in full and checked against the image on page. The personal notices that merely mention another's name is set aside. Twenty items shortlisted, each is coded for genre, page, dominant voice and frames. The frame scheme, derived from Entman (1993) and Nisbet (2009) and refined after a first reading, has five categories: F1 numerical achievement (targets, counts, records); F2 emotional and cultural appeal (mother, memory, sacred trees, Mother Earth); F3 political and ceremonial framing (leaders, launches, diplomacy, party rivalry); F4 participatory mobilisation (schools, firms, welfare beneficiaries, residents); and F5 accountability and ecological outcome (survival, protection, felling, forest quality, allegations of misuse). Each item received one dominant and up to two secondary frames.

Measures of Plantation and Protection

To place the campaign within the wider discourse on trees, the 2,565 environment-related articles were searched for three families of expressions: planting language; reports of felling, transplanting or forest diversion; and references to the survival or monitoring of planted trees. Each survival hit was read by hand to remove false positives, such as geotagged inspections of pollution sites. A single researcher did all the coding, and the counts are descriptive.

RESULTS/FINDINGS

The Environmental Agenda of the Two Dailies

Over the year the two newspapers carried 2,565 environment-related articles, 1,401 in *The Indian Express* and 1,164 in *The Hindu*; in 1,723 of them the environment was the main subject (Table 1). Air pollution dominated with 699 articles, followed by climate change and by wildlife, with 452 each (Table 2). Trees, forests and plantation accounted for 197 articles, under eight per cent of the total.

Table 1

Corpus and Environmental Coverage by Newspaper, October 2025 to September 2026

Newspaper	Issues	Pages	Environment-related articles	Main subject	Campaign items
The Hindu	342	7,160	1,164	827	7
The Indian Express	339	7,398	1,401	896	13
Total	**681**	**14,558**	**2,565**	**1,723**	**20**

Source: Author's analysis of the digital editions of *The Hindu* and *The Indian Express*, 1 October 2025 to 30 September 2026.

Table 2

Environment-Related Articles by Theme and Newspaper

Theme	*The Hindu*	*The Indian Express*	Total	Share (%)
Air pollution and air quality	222	477	699	27.3
Climate change and climate policy	234	218	452	17.6
Wildlife and biodiversity	227	225	452	17.6
Extreme weather and disasters	166	174	340	13.3
Trees, forests and plantation	100	97	197	7.7
Rivers, water and wetlands	83	67	150	5.8
Environmental law and governance	70	74	144	5.6
Waste and plastics	45	46	91	3.5
Clean energy and transition	17	23	40	1.6
Total	**1,164**	**1,401**	**2,565**	**100.0**

Note. Each article is assigned to the theme carrying the greatest weight in its text.

Source: Author's analysis of the digital editions of *The Hindu* and *The Indian Express*, 1 October 2025 to 30 September 2026.

Coverage followed the seasons (Figure 1). The Indian Express tally climbs steeply through the winter session, peaking 197 articles in December 2025, while the Hindu holds steadier. Number of articles rises again, in both the newspapers, in August 2026, when cloudbursts, landslides and monsoon floods filled their pages.

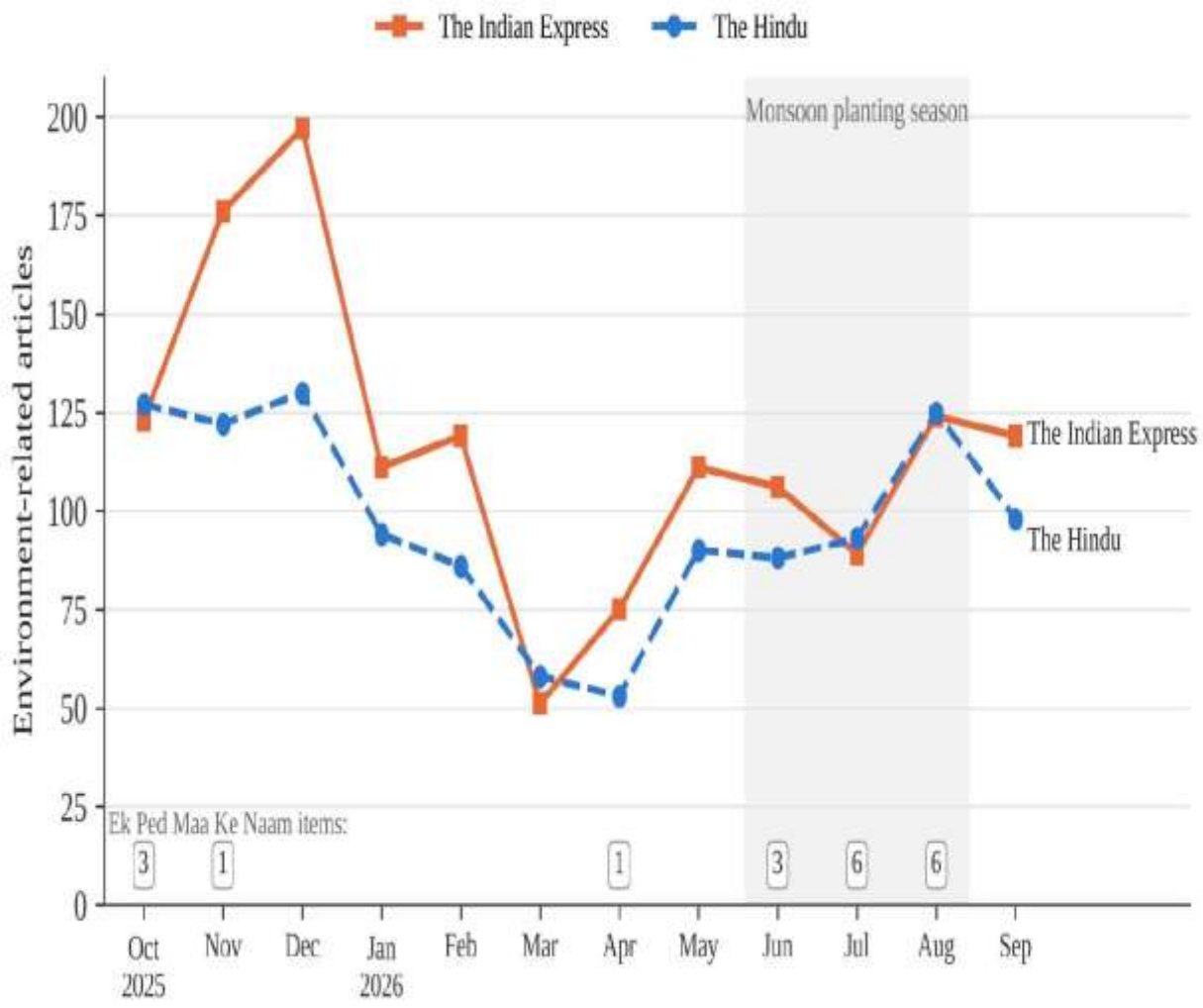


Figure 1 ***Monthly Environment-Related Articles, With the Number of Items Naming the Campaign***
Source: Author's analysis of the digital editions of *The Hindu* and *The Indian Express*, 1 October 2025 to 30 September 2026.

A Campaign at the Margins of the Page

Against this volume the campaign was barely visible. It appeared in 20 items, 13 in *The Indian Express* and 7 in *The Hindu*, or 0.8 per cent of all environmental articles. None ran on a front page and not one headline carried the campaign's name; it surfaced inside stories about launches, diplomacy, schemes and corporate events. Fifteen of the 20 items appeared between June and August 2026. There were 11 news reports, four opinion or editorial pieces, three corporate or institutional notices and two government advertisements. Government voices dominated ten items, citizens and civil society four, corporate bodies and institutions three, political parties two, and the newspaper's own editorial voice one.

Ceremony, Count and Mobilisation

Table 3 sets out the coding and Figure 2 summarises it. Political and ceremonial framing led, dominating six items. Several were diplomatic: the visiting Mongolian President planting a banyan tree in honour of his late mother (Roy, 2025), and the Prime Minister planting a tree with the Uzbek President in Tashkent ("PM pays tribute," 2026). Others reported launches by senior leaders or rivalry between parties, as when the Samajwadi Party announced a plantation drive on its president's birthday, presented as an answer to the ruling party's campaign ("Plantation drive on birthday," 2026).

Numerical achievement dominated five items. The Delhi drive was announced through its target of 70 lakh saplings ("Govt. to plant 70 lakh saplings," 2026), the Ridge through one crore ("Ridge to get 1 crore saplings," 2026) and Uttar Pradesh through 35 crore, reported as surpassed ("U.P. CM launches mega plantation drive," 2026). Participatory mobilisation dominated five more, mostly short notices of schools, banks and public-sector firms planting under the campaign. Emotional and cultural appeal dominated only two items but appeared in eight, usually as a phrase about mothers or Mother Earth inside a story governed by another frame.

Table 3

Coding of the 20 Items Naming Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam

No.	Date	Paper	Page	Genre	Dominant voice	Dominant frame	Secondary frames	Survival or protection raised
1	13 Oct 2025	IE	9	News report	Citizens	F2	F5	Protection of a felled tree
2	15 Oct 2025	IE	5	News report	Government	F3	F2	No
3	26 Oct 2025	TH	5	Advertisement	Government	F1	F3	No
4	1 Nov 2025	IE	6	News report	Civil society	F4	F5	No
5	16 Apr 2026	IE (A)	12	News report	Government	F2	F3	No
6	11 Jun 2026	IE	9	Opinion	Political party	F3	F2	No
7	16 Jun 2026	TH	2	News report	Government	F1	F4	No (photo at planting)
8	22 Jun 2026	IE	6	News report	Political party	F3	F2	No
9	8 Jul 2026	IE	4	News report	Government	F3	F1	No
10	8 Jul 2026	TH	2	News report	Government	F1	F3, F5	Felling and transplanting
11	13 Jul 2026	TH	5	News report	Government	F1	F5, F2	No (misuse alleged)
12	16 Jul 2026	IE	15	Notice	Institution	F4		No
13	21 Jul 2026	IE	19	Notice	Corporate	F4		No
14	24 Jul 2026	IE	11	Opinion	Civil society	F5	F2	Survival and felling
15	2 Aug 2026	TH	9	Advertisement	Government	F1	F2	No
16	11 Aug 2026	IE	4	News report	Citizens	F4		No
17	18 Aug 2026	TH	6	Editorial	Editorial	F5	F1	Forest quality
18	20 Aug 2026	IE	13	Opinion	Government	F3	F4	No
19	20 Aug 2026	IE	20	Notice	Corporate	F4		No
20	31 Aug 2026	TH	10	News report	Government	F3		No

Note. TH = *The Hindu*; IE = *The Indian Express*; (A) = Ahmedabad edition. F1 = numerical achievement; F2 = emotional and cultural appeal; F3 = political and ceremonial; F4 = participatory mobilisation; F5 = accountability and ecological outcome. Pages are printed page numbers where legible, otherwise the page position in the digital edition.

Source: Author's analysis of the digital editions of *The Hindu* and *The Indian Express*, 1 October 2025 to 30 September 2026.

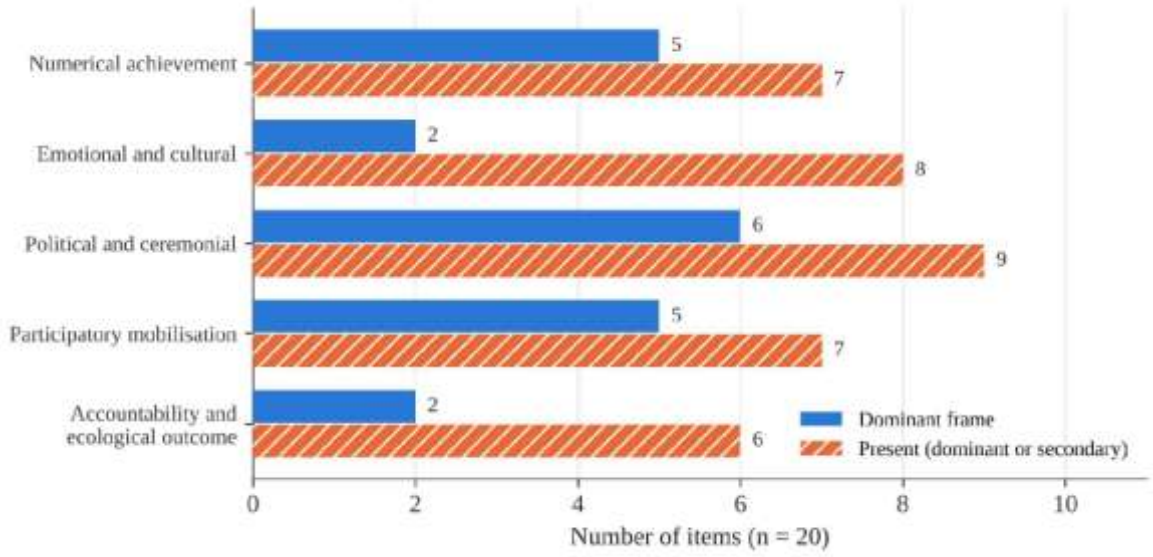


Figure 2 ***Dominant and Secondary Frames in the 20 Campaign Items***

Source: Author's analysis of the digital editions of *The Hindu* and *The Indian Express*, 1 October 2025 to 30 September 2026.

From Plantation to Protection

Accountability and ecological outcomes are dominated only in two items, and both are on opinion pages. An editorial in The Hindu conclude that India is "planting more and foresting less", and a column in The Indian Express set the campaign besides a plan to cut 4000 trees for a road near Rishikesh, asking how the replacement saplings will survive. The column is the only item to pose the survival question directly. A verification step that reached to the news, concerns only the act, not the outcome: participants in delhi were to upload a geotagged photograph of the planted sapling and receive a certificate.

This contrast is sharpened by the wider coverage (Table 4, Figure 3). There are 107 articles, on the two newspapers, with planting language and 68 with the report on cutting, transplanting or diversion often on a large scale on mines, roads and housing. There are only 6 articles which discussed the survival/monitoring of planted and transplanted trees, and five of them are in The Hindu. Two appeared in early August 2026, after the planting peak, and both reported official initiatives in Delhi: the Lieutenant-Governor's instruction that every site have a nodal officer to ensure survival ("L-G leads plantation drive," 2026) and a digital system to track 23 lakh saplings ("DDA to digitally track survival," 2026). Neither named the campaign.

Table 4

Planting, Felling and Survival in Environment-Related Coverage

Measure	*The Hindu*	*The Indian Express*	Total
Articles using planting language	55	52	107
Articles reporting felling, transplanting or forest diversion	35	33	68
Articles using both kinds of language	6	16	22
Articles discussing survival or monitoring of planted or transplanted trees	5	1	6
Campaign items raising survival, protection or felling	2	2	4

Note. Counts of articles among the 2,565 environment-related articles; an article may appear in more than one row. Survival matches were checked manually.

Source: Author's analysis of the digital editions of *The Hindu* and *The Indian Express*, 1 October 2025 to 30 September 2026.

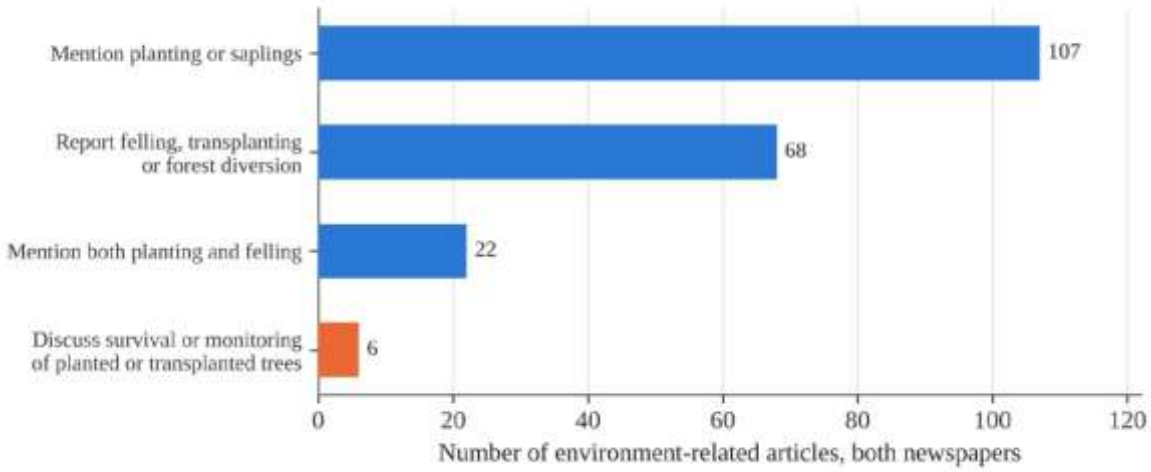


Figure 3 ***Planting, Felling and Survival in Environment-Related Coverage, Both Newspapers***

Source: Author's analysis of the digital editions of *The Hindu* and *The Indian Express*, 1 October 2025 to 30 September 2026.

DISCUSSION

The answers to the research questions are fairly clear. The campaign occupied a small corner of a large environmental agenda (RQ1). It was framed chiefly through ceremony, numbers and mobilisation and voiced mostly by government (RQ2). And the move from plantation to protection did not occur in reporting, but it took place in columns and official notices (RQ3).

Entman's emphasis on omission is the key to these results. Survival was omitted. It was not the claim papers weighted and rejected, but it hardly appeared. Therefore a figure, such as 35 crore saplings, stood at the measure of success with no further data to share on the saplings alive a year later, against which to judge it. The event centered news account of Cao's (2015) fits closely. The event of a launch, a visiting head of state, a record breaking day arrives with a photograph, a date and a press release but a saplings next season arrives with none of it.

The consequences are real for ecological citizenship. On paper, Dobson's theory is friendly to the campaign. It counts private acts, gives care and compassion a working role and recognise obligation without owing in exchange for anything. A tree planted for one's mother is close to that idea. The coverage, however, ends the story by converting the private act into a public ritual. Citizens appear as participants to be counted, certified and thanked. This phenomena reflects "mere support for state based environmental initiatives" that Barry warned against (Paehlke, 2008). The Duration of duty is disappeared. The watering and guarding, the choice of plant species for the soil, and the willingness to object when the older trees are cut are long lost discussions. The success of the Green Belt Movement lies in the fact that it grew into citizenship as planting was tied to community and continued work (Cao, 2015), and that link is rarely made by the coverage.

It is not to prove a case against the campaign. The conclusion is that the campaign's own stated ambition requires a kind of journalism the two paper rarely practised in their pages. The Indian Express column and The Hindu's editorial shows that the capacity exists. Moving it into reporting would mean returning to planting sites, asking for survival data, and setting a city's planting figures beside its felling approvals.

LIMITATIONS

The study covers one year instead of the three cycles first planned, and two English-language dailies, almost entirely in their Delhi editions, so its findings do not extend to the Hindi and regional press, television or social media. Environmental screening was automated and dictionary based, so some articles may be misclassified. The study examines coverage rather than audiences. The campaign items are without a test of inter coder reliability because the campaign items are checked by hand and coded by a single researcher.

These limits points to several directions for further research. First, a longitudinal study covering 2024, 2025 and 2026 with the same frame scheme. It would show whether survival frames grow, or stay confined, as the campaign matures. Second, an analysis can be conducted for hindi newspaper dailies such as Dainik Bhaskar, Dainik Jagran and Amar Ujala, since they posses a far greater reach than The Hindu and The Indian Express, the campaigns' cultural idiom can

travel further. Whether language changes frames can also be a test subject matter. Third, the coverage can be set against the ground truth by revisiting the planting sites named in the newspaper, whether in person or through satellite imagery, to compare what grew with what was reported. At last, it is suggested to conduct survey experiments to test whether the survival based stories strengthen reader's intention to care for a tree more than the count framed stories do. It would turn the normative argument of this paper into a testable claim.

CONCLUSION

Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam has reached a vast public. It is loaded with a familiar act of devotion to an urgent ecological needs. Yet, in the duration of examination, The Hindu and The Indian Express reported it mostly as a moment. The papers reported it as a launch, a count, a ceremony and a notice of participation. Among two and a half thousand environmental articles, the campaign appeared in twenty items, never on a front page and never in a headline, nad the question of survival appeared only at the edges. For ecological citizenship to rest on the obligations that last, media's task is to report the lasting part. A sapling planted in a mother's name begins a story rather than ending it, and journalism that goes back to see what survived would serve the campaign's promise better than another record of numbers.

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