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Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and the Role of Mass Communication in Building National Unity after Independence

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Abstract

One man with different titles - Sardar Vallabhai Patel, also known as the Sardar of Bardoli and the Iron Man of India. Patel never became India's Prime Minister, but we all see him as the father of United India. Patel became the first Minister of Information and Broadcasting. He was also awarded the Bharat Ratna (highest civilian award) in 1991 by Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao. The objective of this paper is to analyse the role of Sardar Patel and mass communication in building national unity after independence.

In the research, we have used a qualitative and exploratory research design (secondary analysis) to gain in-depth knowledge. As the first Minister of Information and Broadcasting, he has played many vital but unacknowledged roles. He established a national information system to ensure that the public is informed about national development. He also strengthened All India Radio (AIR) by broadcasting content in multiple regional languages with the message of promoting peace, unity, and cooperation. Patel believed in a free but responsible press, and with that thought, he initiated various policies to balance press freedom with the need to preserve national harmony. He viewed mass communication as a tool for social stability. To control rumors, propaganda, and communal tension, he used the ministry to appeal for peace from citizens through newspapers and radio. The study encapsulates how Patel's vision shaped mass communication into a strategic tool or instrument for national unity after Indian Independence.

Keywords: Mass Communication, Press Freedom, Sardar Vallabhai Patel, Independence

Introduction

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, better known as the 'Iron Man of India,' is remembered as an extraordinary leader, a freedom fighter, and a true patriot. Patel played an important role in Indian Independence and the consolidation of 500 princely states into one "Bharat." "(Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's Idea of Unity and Unification of States, 2022) In his book 'India after Gandhi,' the historian Ramachandra Guha writes that "throughout the spring of 1947, Patel threw a series of lunch parties," at which he "urged his princely guests to help the Congress in framing a new constitution of India." After serving as the first Home Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, Sardar later became the Minister of Information and Broadcasting of India. This research paper helps to understand the importance of Sardar Patel's efforts to use mass communication as a tool to build national unity post-independence. A self-made man, Sardar's life is a true example of strong will and hard work. Patel scripted his own life, first as a lawyer and later as a great freedom fighter. He became a very popular lawyer and earned thousands every month. But money never distracted him; he always wanted to do something for society and leave a lasting legacy. "No doubt, my practice is flourishing today. I am also doing something big in the Municipality. But, my practice may or may not be there tomorrow. My money will be blown tomorrow, those who inherit my

money will blow it. Let me leave them a better legacy than money, (indiawrites.org) Patel wrote this, which shows how dedicated he is towards the nation."

Sardar Patel, with Gandhi, has participated in and led many Satyagrahas. One of the most successful satyagrahas was in Bardoli, where he opposed the hike in land revenues and levies imposed on the peasants by officers. "(Sardar Patel: An Architect Of Unified India, 2023) This victory can be measured with the fear that was embedded in British officers, as they tagged Vallabhbhai Patel as 'Lenin'. Motilal Nehru, in a letter to Gandhi, described Patel as 'the hero of the hour' (Jawaharlal Nehru, 1958). 'Let us Bardolise the country,' Mrs. Annie Besant declared."

After independence, when the constitution was being formed, Patel led the advisory committee established by the Constituent Assembly. (Ranjan & Singh, 2021, p. 31) "The iron man so dominated the assembly that the Constitution which emerged from it bore his stamp and could be aptly called the Patel Constitution", says Dr. PM Chopra, chief editor of the Collected Works of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Volume XI. Patel also played an essential role in the formation of the All India Service. He visualized these services as "the Steel frame of India." Hence, Patel became the founder of the contemporary All-India Services.

Sardar served as the first Minister of Information and Broadcasting. He understood the power of mass communication as a tool to reach out to the public and create a sense of national identity. Patel communicated the ideals of unity, integrity, and diversity through broadcasts and newspapers to the people of India. And with this, he was able to develop a sense of pride and belongingness among the people.

Literature Review

Kumar (2015) highlights how rapidly the Indian Media developed after independence. The study also focused on the "Role of Media in Enhancing National Integration." The Mass Media played an important role in bringing the entire country together as one nation. Media like newspapers and radio play a constructive role in society and act as a mouthpiece for social issues. When it comes to education and the health sector, the role of the media becomes more crucial, and with the introduction of the internet, it becomes easier. During the struggle for independence, newspapers largely contributed to generating a sense of patriotism and unity amongst the people. Post-independence, Radio and Television made it easy for people to access information. It also acts as a catalyst in developing national identity, its people, and culture. The paper concluded by highlighting the major drawbacks of the media and

suggesting that the media must act as a watchdog of society.

Balasubramanian and Venkatraman (2021), in their research paper, talked about "Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's belief in the principle of Unity in Diversity and how he always stood for India's independence, which made him the Iron Man of India". The paper outlines his big decisions, like stepping down from standing in the elections, and played a key role in integrating several princely states into the Indian federation.

During the Gujarat Political Conference (27-29th August, 1920), Sardar delivered the speech stating, "The Government of India must be run for the people of India," which shows his strong role in mobilising public support. The research paper also highlights his roles during the Bardoli Satyagraha –1928, his contribution to India's independence movement, the Dandi March to 'Quit India', etc. Balasubramanian and Venkatraman (2021), in their research paper, concluded with the statement of Nehru, who, while paying tribute to Sardar, said, "the builder and consolidator of new India."

Shukla and Dwivedi (2023) focused on Patel's never-ending legacy as an Architect of Unified India. The research paper highlighted Patel's role, which laid the way for India's economic growth and independence. Sardar's vision and actions laid the foundation of entrepreneurship in India and led the country to a better future.

He also fought the battle (Patel and Pratt) to ensure youth education, the longest battle registered in the history of India.

Patel, during his fight for Satyagrah, once said, “Non-violence has to be observed in thought, word, and deed. The measure of our non-violence will be the measure of our success”. Additionally, he set up a plant which gave birth to Amul in India while working for milk producers. The paper further highlights Patel’s role in making one nation, i.e., Bharat. “After this, he received a letter from Mountbatten on 19 June 1948, ‘There’s no doubt that by far the most important achievement of the present Government is the unification of the States into the Dominion India. Had you failed in this, the results would have been disastrous.’

These words from the British Viceroy showed the accomplishments of Sardar Patel. This was the first foundation of a developing India as a nation (P.N. Chopra, 2017).”

The paper concluded by highlighting the unveiling of the World’s tallest statue – The Statue of Unity, as a tribute to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, which was made possible only by the vision of Hon’ble Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi.

Pujari and Shastri (2024) explore how Patel's firm, yet diplomatic approach, led to the acceptance of a federal structure of governance in India. The research paper focused on the significance of incorporating princely states into the Indian Union. It includes political

consolidation, nation-building, and strategic imperatives.

The study further highlights the British rule and the transformation that India experienced during this British rule. Focusing on the significance of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the paper talked about how he strove to integrate the princely states into the Indian Union after being appointed as the Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister of independent India. Pujari and Shastri (2024) also discussed the impact of integration, challenges, and conflicts during the integration process, socio-economic development in the integrated states, etc.

Research Objectives

- To analyse the role of Sardar Patel and mass communication in building national unity after independence.
- To study the effectiveness of media initiatives in promoting national unity.
- To understand how Patel’s media strategies influenced India’s democracy over time.
- To identify the policies and principles laid down by Patel for the Indian press and broadcasting system.

Methods

In the research, we have used qualitative and exploratory research to understand the role of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel in utilising mass communication for nation-building. The research method includes a Secondary literature review (academic literature, journal articles, case studies, digital reports, and news portals). These resources helped in providing a broader view regarding the multifaceted role of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and how mass communication served as a tool in promoting national unity.

Data Analysis

Through the secondary research method, the paper brings to light Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's role during and after independence and how he used mass communication as a tool for national unity from different sources (research papers, portals, etc). Let's have a look at it.

(Farhat Basir Khan, 2019) in his research paper "Evolution of Media, Politics & Campaigning in post-independence India," talked about how mass communication has made a significant contribution post-independence during the elections, by providing the freedom of speech and expression to both citizens and the political leaders.

Role of Mass Communication during Elections

In a democratic country like India, the role of the media is not limited to this; in fact, the mass media educates people to vote, creates awareness about election campaigns, monitors the vote count, reports results, and ensures a fair and free election.

During the first general elections (1952), newspapers were used as a tool to convey messages, policies, and any relevant information related to parties because of their credibility. And as a large section of the population belonged to rural areas, the newspaper was not purchased by everyone due to its pricing and illiteracy. So, political parties relied on the radio for direct communication with the rural people. Mass media became a credible source during elections because of the first Information and Broadcasting Minister, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel.

(Subir Sinha, 2019) highlighted the significance of mass communication in corporate industries, education, health, and rural communication in his research paper "Mass Media and Indian Society: An Analytical View of its Significances."

Mass Media and Corporate Industry

Focused on mass media and the corporate industry, the paper showed the functions of the

media and how they help to ease the workflow of the business. Mass media provide information about the products, goods, and services to consumers, along with other relevant information, like the brand name. Advertisement also plays a crucial role in the promotional process of products or services.

Mass Media and Education

Mass Media and Education always go together. They both serve as pillars of the nation. In the research paper, I found out the role of All India Radio and Doordarshan in social development. It further gave the examples of SITE (1975) and KHEDA, which were the early experiments that proved the efficiency of television in education. The paper featured the educational programs broadcast by AIR through its 73 stations in different languages in India.

Mass Media and the Health Sector

The Mass Media also play a crucial role in the health sector. Newspapers, radio, and television communicate health guidelines and precautions to the public. Magazines like 'Health and Nutrition', published by Magna, aimed to feature articles on health and fitness. In this paper, I found a case study of 'Radio Health' of Kerala, which worked on health awareness and health communication, implemented by NRHM, Kerala.

Mass Media and Rural Communication

Mass Media and Rural Communication worked on the prime target of development in rural areas. Newspapers from the pre-independence era played an essential role by bridging the gap between rural people and the government. Radio has always served as a mouthpiece for rural people. One of the major projects India has witnessed is the UNESCO-funded "Radio Farm Forum" project in Bombay in 1956. During 1967, programs like 'Krishi Darshan - Agricultural Program' were also launched on television, which covered villages of UP, Haryana, and Delhi.

(Saumitra Mohan, 2022) in her research paper "Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel: Builder Of India's Steel Frame," talked about the role of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel in the Indian Civil Services.

Patel's Vision Forms the Indian Civil Services Post-independence, it was Sardar Patel who worked on establishing the modern civil services. It is well aware that before stepping into the Indian independence movement, Sardar was a very successful barrister. He also keeps on meeting with British ICS officers during this period. This administrative experience taught him the importance of the Indian Civil Service officers who worked under British control. Independent India needed 'a steel frame to run its civil, military, and administrative bureaucracy,' according to

Patel, who was certain of this. In October 1945, he formed the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) and the Indian Police Service (IPS). He wanted the services to start with a vision of a new India.

Civil Services Day Celebration

My findings further shed light on how Civil Services Day is celebrated. Sardar on April 21, 1947, interacted with the first group of IAS officers and asked them to function without any fear. While reading the research paper, I found the statement of Sardar Patel in which he declared, "Today, my Secretary can write a note opposed to my views. I have given that freedom, to all my secretaries. I have told them, 'If you do not give your honest opinion for fear that it will displease your Minister, please then you better go. I will bring another Secretary... I will never be displeased over a frank expression of opinion.'" From here, 21 April is celebrated as "Civil Services Day."

(Kishan Pratap, 2022) highlighted the most significant contribution, and Patel's vision of Modern India in his research paper "Unity, Cultural Diversity And Nation Building: Sardar Patel's Vision Of Modern India."

Patel's leadership in unifying India

Patel was in charge of incorporating princely states into the Dominion of India. While reading the research paper, I found the

statement of Mountbatten, in his assessment on 27 June 1947, he said: "I am glad to say that Nehru has not been put in charge of the new States Department, which would have wrecked everything. Patel, who is essentially a realist and very sensible, is going to take over in consultation with Pakistan."

Patel's bold steps to unite the nation

After the KHEDA and Satyagrah, Patel emerged as a popular and most reliable figure in the Indian Freedom struggle. Even British officials and Congress considered Sardar for his efforts in incorporating princely states into the Indian Union. Princely states like Hyderabad, Kashmir, and Junagarh also surrendered and were integrated with India in a very short period. It was a very challenging task for Patel, but by 1948, he fulfilled his dream of a United India. Patel also introduced the right of citizens to be free from discrimination based on caste, communal, religion, sex, and colour.

In the research paper, the author highlighted the statement of Gandhi, which he said to Patel, "The problem of the States is so difficult that you alone can solve it."

(Suraj Lakshminarasimhan, 2024) in his dissertation, "The Crisis of Unity: The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and National Identity Construction in Post-

Independence India, 1947-1965," talked about the history and work done by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting post-independence.

MIB: Voice of Government since 1941

My findings show the history and role of MIB. MIB came into existence in October 1941. It started with "the Government of India's responsibility for publicity and broadcasting activities." In the early days, the role of MIB was to spread information and maintain the country's reputation among both international and domestic audiences. In fact, till now, MIB has been trusted for providing government-related information like policies, initiatives, and programs through different channels of mass communication. The middle and upper classes could easily access publications of MIB, which covered the subject of 'national importance.'

MIB's early leadership

The first two MIB Chief Ministers were Diwakar, who served from 1948-1952, and Keskar, who served from 1952-1962. MIB furthermore has dubbed propaganda films in 14 languages, including Assamese, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Malayalam, Marathi, Oriya, Tamil, Telugu, Bengali, English, Gujarati, Punjabi, and Urdu.

Conclusion

The research aims to understand that Sardar Patel was a true patriot, a freedom fighter, a leader, and a successful barrister. His role in achieving national integration was remarkable. His role as Minister of Information and Broadcasting was, till now, unexplored. The research paper concludes:

1. The research is limited to secondary data resources, there is a lack of primary interviews with subject experts. Also, available literature focuses on Patel's role in politics or administration, rather than on his contributions in mass communication.
2. Future studies should focus more on archived materials, such as letters, policy drafts, and cabinet meeting notes during Patel's time as I&B minister.

To sum up, knowing Sardar Patel's media policies and strategies not only honors his work but also gives valuable lessons.

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