Research And Teaching In Political Communication: Ideological Asymmetries Determining Media Discourse In India

Keerthiraj[1] , Suresh Kumar Golle[2] , Raja Ambethkar[3] , Devaiah N G[4]

[1]Assistant Professor (Political Science), School of Liberal Arts, Alliance University, Bengaluru & Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, Kuvempu University.

[2]Assistant Professor (Journalism and Mass Communication), Birla School of Communication, Birla Global University, Bhubaneshwar.

[3]Associate Professor (English), Koneru Lakshmaiah Education Foundation, Guntur.

[4]Assistant Professor (Law), School of Law, Alliance University, Bengaluru.

ABSTRACT

The paper intends to demonstrate how teaching and research of political communication have some inherent flaws in India. There is a huge amount of research literature available in the field of political communication in relation to communication campaigns, alternative strategies, populism, public relations, etc. But on the other hand, there is also a research gap in this literature cornering the ideological asymmetries, which makes media debates in India very complex and contradictory at the same time. Within the broad discussion about media debates and political communication, this paper confines its scope to the inquiry of political debates in print, visual and social media. Inconsistencies and irregularities in the comparison of political behavior in India, in relation to the general description of political communication are explicit in the existing research. This gives space to the formulation of research problem in teaching/research of political communication in the Indian context. The paper will investigate the questions that emerge out of the formulated research problem.

Keywords: Teaching, Research, Communication, Media, Ideology

INTRODUCTION

Political Communication occupies central importance in all political systems including democratic and dictatorial political processes. Political communication becomes important in democracies from the perspective of political participation of citizens n the form of voting, public opinion, etc. On the other hand, non-democratic authoritarian regimes also go through a sort of political

communication, which allows the system to continue with its authoritarian setup. Political communication in a particular society is not just dependent on the political culture of that society, but in turn, it also shapes the political culture actively. In this context understanding, this phenomenon is quite important from the viewpoint of understanding political communication. Teaching and research in Political communication become crucial to this understanding. The teaching-learning process can also give us crucial insights regarding the current understanding of political communication. The study attempts to go beyond the definitional question of this issue and explores the inherent issues with teaching and research of Political communication in India.

Literature Review

The research considers some of the relevant existing literature on research and teaching in Political communication to formulate the research problems and research questions.

- Gastil, J. in his book **'Political Communication and Deliberation'** (Gastil, 2008) aims to reach a choice or judgment that is based not only on facts and statistics, but also on values, emotions, and other non-technical factors. Gastil approaches fundamental concepts and studies through the perspective of deliberative democratic theory and argues that communication is essential to democratic self-governance, owing to its ability to enable public debate. It provides a fresh viewpoint on familiar issues for political communication teachers and researchers, as well as students with practical theory and practice in public communication.

- **'Enough Said: What's gone wrong with the language of politics?'** by Mark Thompson (Thompson, 2016) deals with the question of political communication while raising the important question of erosion of language. Thompson points at the crisis of political confidence, increasingly enraged public, erosion of public trust in the west. The book provides a picture of change in western public discourse with an attitude of anti-political approach.

- Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky in **'Manufacturing Consent The Political Economy of the Mass Media'** (Herman & Chomsky, 1989) illustrate how the news is primarily structured by an underlying elite agreement. Rather than confronting entrenched authority, the media works hard to uncover and reflect it. The book concludes that the modern mass media is best understood via the lens of a 'propaganda model'. Media, including news and entertainment industries, embrace the state's and private power's ruling assumptions.

- '**Changing Structures of Contemporary Political Communication: A Review of Literature Related to Social Networking Sites in the Indian Political Context'** by Darshan B.M & Kalyani Suresh (Darshan & Kalyani, 2017) explores the role of social media in Indian politics with an extensive literature survey. It analyses the use of social

media to educate the general public, particularly the youth, about a political party's intents, plans, and purpose has become a basic requirement of the hour. This study also argues that social media provides individual voters with better awareness and analysis of Indian events, as well as boosting their knowledge of Indian politics, allowing them to make an informed decision when choosing a party or party member.

- UNESCO's edited volume, '**Media and gender a scholarly agenda for the global alliance on media and gender**.' (Vega Montiel, 2014) provides a larger perspective on Violence of gender, media, and information, Women's access to media, Gender media policy and strategies, Gender, education and media and information literacy, etc. with a variety of contributions from different scholars.

- '**Social Media as a Platform for Incessant Political Communication: A Case Study of Modi's "Clean India" Campaign**' by U M Rodrigues (Rodrigues, 2017) looks at the efficiency of social media as a venue for continuous citizen dialogue in modern politics, as well as the consequences for India's major news media. It outlines the findings of an empirical study that includes a social network analysis to profile Modi's Twitter followers and the main influencers in the Clean India campaign, using the theoretical framework of agenda building in the digital era.

- The book '**Political Communication and Mobilisation: The Hindi Media in India**' (Neyazi, 2018) has been reviewed by H. Taneja (Taneja, 2020). This review treats Neyazi's monograph as a vital addition to the field of political communication studies. Because the reviewer considers this book has done a unique contribution of expanding its scope of political communication studies outside Western democracies.

Research Problem & Research Question

Based on the existing literature, the current study makes some qualified assumptions and formulates the following research problem. Teaching and research in Political communication is an important process to understand the working of any political setting. In addition to this, existing research also identifies the potential of political communication tools to bring changes in a given context. On the other hand, Existing experiences also show doubts and suspicion towards the effectiveness of research and teaching of Political Communication in the nation-states like India. In this background, the current research focuses on the research question, "**What factors are responsible for the inconsistency in research and teaching to understand political communication in India?**"

Hypothesis

The absence of qualified discrimination towards different cultural settings is the major reason for the inconsistency of political communication studies in India.

Objectives of the Study

- To understand the nature of Political communication teaching and research in India

- To investigate the reasons behind the inconsistency in research and teaching to understand political communication in India

- To design possible policy choices to tackle the existing inconsistencies of Political communication.

Scope of the Study

Even though, the research deals with the larger question of political communication, the study is limited to teaching research practices in communication with a special focus on the Indian context. This limited scope serves as a positive platform to make the research objective and precise and to avoid random generalizations.

Methodology

This research paper will make efforts to explore the research problem by testing the hypothesis and to achieve the objectives of the study through different methods. The proposed study will adopt a theoretical, historical, descriptive, and analytical study design. The study depends on secondary sources of data, information, and literature.

DISCUSSION

The discussion part of this paper is organized into four parts to address the research problem and to verify the hypothesis offered by this paper. The first part titled 'Political Communication as a Discipline' deals with the basic details of Political Communication as an academic discipline with available theories within the subject. The second part, 'Teaching and Research of Political Communication in India' inquires the actual condition of the subject in India and available critical viewpoints towards communication. The third part, 'Ideological Asymmetries in Media and Political Communication in India' explores the reasons behind the inconsistencies in relation to the research question. The final part, 'Absence of Qualified Discrimination of Political Culture and Inconsistencies in Political Communication Studies' attempts to build alternative choices to address the research problem in relation to political communication.

Political Communication as a Discipline

Political communication, as a discipline, focuses on the effects of media on political communication processes. The media and political socialization, political campaigning, elections, public opinion, lobbying, political marketing, governance, policy, political engagement, interactions with interest groups, and political parties are all given special consideration within the

study of Political communication. The scope of this discipline has expanded enormously with the emergence of new media.

Teaching and research in Political Communication deals with the questions like, what characteristics and impacts do interactions between (non-)government actors, politicians, journalists, and citizens have? What consequences on public opinion and political action can be observed? What role does the media play in citizens' self-education? Etc. Political communication uses various theories and tools.

Jay G. Blumler in his paper Core Theories of 'Political Communication: Foundational and Freshly Minted' (Blumler, 2015) mentions the following theories of political communication:

- Agenda-setting theory - The link between the most often-covered problems in the media and what the audience considers important. This sets the agenda for the receiver.

- Priming theory - Reciever will evaluate political parties and leaders on the basis of their prior performance records or current positions on the issues at hand. This will go with more popular media issues.

- Framing theory - Media interpretations of issues by providing perceptions to the receiver.

- Mediatization of politics theory - The long-term transition process in which the media's unique perspectives on the world are considered to be gaining greater political importance. media become a legitimate source of information about politics.

Other than the abovementioned theories, Political communication theorists and thinkers developed a number of useful theoretical models including The Hyperlinked Society, spill-over effects, The Hybrid Media System, etc. These theories have seen tremendous success in analyzing the political behavior of different actors which resulted out of a particular process of political communication.

Teaching and Research of Political Communication in India

Political communication in India is not a well-established academic discipline in India comparison with developed western democracies. Without any doubt, Political Communication is the most important factor in any democratic system and Indian democracy is no exception to this fact. (Keerthiraj & Devaiah, 2022) But the ground reality in India cannot be compared with its western counterparts. The following issues are important among the many raised against the situation of Political Communication in India:

- Political Communication as an academic discipline is not well recognized in India.

- Indians don't have a sense of formal political communication.

- The process of political socialization and political behavior in India are not ideal for Political Communication studies.

- Theories of political communication are inconsistent with the Indian political setting.

- Indian democratic practices are themselves inconsistent and this leads to inconsistency in Political communication

Even though the reliability of data/evidence for the above-listed claims/complaints are yet to be verified, these complaints are worth noting. In other words, the above-mentioned list of complaints against political communication in India becomes a matter of significance for the current research despite whether those complaints are objective reality or subjective bias. (Keerthiraj, 2016, 2018) The above list is only a representative list and it represents the broader concerns over Political Communication in India. To sum up the above argument, there is a common-sense belief that Research and teaching in Political Communication are facing a serious issue in India. This situation raises two important questions for the research.

1. If the above-mentioned list of complaints is true about India's Political Communication, what will be the solution for this problem?

    - This question becomes redundant as many techniques and methods were already suggested by many scholars in Political Communication. These methods tried to use the existing political communication theories religiously, only to get the result of inconsistency. This reality brings us to the second question.

2. If the above-mentioned complaints are not true about India's Political Communication, what explains the inconsistency of Political Communication teaching and research practices in India?

    - Even though the above-mentioned complaints are not true, the second question remains and becomes more significant as the inconsistency persists. If the above-mentioned complaints are not true in the case of India, this situation pushes the researcher to find the background of the complaints raised above. It also necessitates an understanding of the uniqueness of Indian society and its political culture with its western counterpart.

Ideological Asymmetries in Media and Political Communication in India

Political culture plays an important role in Political Communication. Political culture is made up of widely held, fundamental beliefs with political implications. Individuals and society's political behavior and reactions are influenced by political culture. Culture is something that can be learned. It differs from one society or social group to the next. (Paletz & Lipinski, 1994) As a result, the media's actual and potential influence differs from one culture to another culture. The language used in one culture might completely fail to understand the phenomenon in a different culture. This is not really the linguistic or translation problem. The problem lies in the cultural context of the language.

This problem is very evident when the case study of colonial victim societies. European colonial power shapes a particular kind of language to talk about these colonial societies in the course of their interaction with these colonies. Edward Said in his book 'Orientalism' (Said, 1978) investigates Western portrayals of Middle Eastern societies and cultures The complex links between the act of writing and cultural politics, language, and power are key to Said's explanation of western narratives on the east. He tries to explain how Western journalists, novelists, and academics contributed to the widespread and unfavorable perception of Eastern cultures as inferior, stagnant, and degenerate. Said also tries to demonstrate how pervasive these portrayals are in Western culture to the extent that these narrations can be used by the West to legitimize its imperialist activities in the Middle East. Said's account serves as a sharp way to look at how this European narration of Indian society can be inquired to settle the problems of political communication in India.

Media reporting looks problematic in India in most of the scenarios because of these ideological asymmetries. Media reporting on the COVID-19 crisis, caste system, communal violence, CAA, demonetization, and other policy issues bring a lot of space for conflict in the Indian scenario. The major reason for this inconsistency is the cultural mislocation and ideological asymmetries caused by them. (Keerthiraj, 2019)

Absence of Qualified Discrimination of Political Culture and Inconsistencies in Political Communication Studies

The close observation of political culture and its role in ideological asymmetries lead us to an important point. Political communication in India is borrowed from the west in its letter and spirit without making any qualified discrimination of political culture. Failure to make qualified educated discrimination among different political cultures and the way political behavior is shaped in different settings become the core reason for inconsistencies in media and communication studies in India.

If teaching and research can make this qualified discrimination among political cultures and the way they act, most of the inconsistencies in political communication would have been rectified. Practical case studies should be taken to test the existing theories. New theories can be built-in reaction to Indian political communication, as this process is getting importance in disciplines like sociology, anthropology, public administration, etc. (Devaiah & Keerthiraj, 2021) Many research attempts were successfully done in relation to understanding the political culture in Latin America, Asia, and Africa in the above-mentioned disciplines. If that approach can bring new understandings in those subjects, political communication can also try to reap the most benefit out of it.

CONCLUSION

The research concludes that the teaching and research should take these inconsistencies in political commination in India with serious academic rigor. The questions raised in the paper regarding ideological asymmetries influencing media discourses can lead to some of the important facets of media and communication studies in relation to politics. Ideological asymmetries, differences in political culture, and inconsistencies in political communication should be studied in order to get a better understanding of the media and political communication process in India.

REFERENCES

Blumler, J. G. (2015). Core Theories of Political Communication: Foundational and Freshly Minted: Core Theories of Political Communication. Communication Theory, 25(4), 426–438. https://doi.org/10.1111/comt.12077

Darshan, B. M., & Kalyani, S. (2017). Changing Structures of Contemporary Political Communication: A Review of Literature Related to Social Networking Sites in the Indian Political Context. International Journal of Scientific & Engineering Research.

Devaiah, N. G., & Keerthiraj. (2021). E-Governance in India: Challenges and Strategies. Orange Books Publication.

Gastil, J. (2008). Political Communication and Deliberation. SAGE.

Herman, E. S., & Chomsky, N. (1989). Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media. (Vol. 18). http://www.jstor.org/stable/2074220?origin=crossref

Keerthiraj. (2019). Isms in Politics: Political Ideologies Ruling the World. Evincepub Publishing.

Keerthiraj. & Devaiah N. G., (2022). Quintessence Of International Politics: Theoretical And Conceptual Foundations. Blue Hill Publications.

Keerthiraj. (2016). Clash of Civilizations Thesis: Some Reflections. Third Concept: An International Journal of Ideas, 30(354).

Keerthiraj. (2018). Media Debates, Asymmetrical Argumentation, and the Nature Of Violence In Indian Politics. International Journal of Law And Social Sciences, 4(1).

Neyazi, T. A. (2018). Political Communication and Mobilisation: The Hindi Media in India. Cambridge University Press.

Paletz, D. L., & Lipinski, D. (1994). Political Culture and Political Communication. 17.

Rodrigues, U. M. (2017). Social Media as a Platform for Incessant Political Communication: A Case Study of Modi's "Clean India" Campaign. 23.

Said, E. W. (1978). Orientalism. Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Prashanth S. P. (2020). Feminist Response To Nationalism. Sambodhi, 43 (4)

Taneja, H. (2020). Book Review: Political Communication and Mobilisation: The Hindi Media in India. The International Journal of Press/Politics, 25(1), 158–159. https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161219878406

Thompson, M. (2016). Enough Said: What's gone wrong with the language of politics? Random House.

Vega Montiel, A., Unesco. (2014). Media and gender a scholarly agenda for the global alliance on media and gender. United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization.