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THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN PROMOTING NATIONAL UNITY

RECOMMENDATIONS

The group began by affirming the utter necessity for the promotion of national unity in the context of the various fragmenting forces that are attacking the fabric of a united India today.

After examining the various aspects like the definition of national unity, the efforts already being made by the media to promote it and the reach of the different forms of media together with some of the drawbacks in present-day media policies, the group came up with the following recommendations.

* Electronic Media: Radio and Television: The media should look deeper into the underlying economic causes that in most cases trigger off fissiparous tendencies in the different regions of the country. (It was felt that this holds good for the print media as well.) There should be more programmes and features that focus on these economic issues—e.g., unemployment among the youth, and the consequent frustration resulting from it.

* While there are occasional programmes on the national network that feature the works of creative writers from the different states and languages, these are available only in Hindi. At the local Kendra level on the other hand, all programmes tend to be about local issues. An effort should be made therefore to produce features of this kind (e.g., Kathasagar, Kayar) in the local languages for telecast over the local network. This will make available to the audience insights into the rhythms of life in other parts of the country in the language of the people.

* Very often programmes like panel discussions on issues of national interest telecast over the national network tend to draw its resource persons from the same institutions of the Capital lending to these programmes a Delhi-centric flavour. Since the technology of teleconferencing is already well-established (e.g., election coverage) these programmes can be put into this mould so as to enable participation from all over the country thus giving a powerfully visual impetus to the unity of the nation.

* More works of literature that promote national unity stemming from the regional language should be telecast.

* Since Radio has a wider reach, it can be used very effectively for this cause. It is suggested that programmes like "Know Your India", "India's Cultural Heritage", etc. in innovative formats (e.g., Quiz) be aired. There is also the need for greater professionalism to ensure that these programmes are both stimulating and enjoyable.
The electronic media very often in its zeal to make programmes emphasizing national unity, tends to create naive stereotypes (e.g., stereotypes in dress).

The relative proportion of coverage given to global, national and local issues in the News Bulletins should be arrived at, keeping in view the relative importance and significance of each vis-a-vis the needs of the audience in various parts of the country.

There should be a greater role for people from other walks of life to have a say in the decision-making bodies of the government media so that a broader pool of talent could be tapped.

Programmes that are modelled on the BBC pattern known familiarly as "Network U.K." emphasizing regional achievements in different parts of the country could be quite relevant in the context of promoting national unity.

Print Media: Features like the photo-essays on the India Today pattern are known to have a great emotional impact on people all over India. More features promoting national unity in this format will to a large extent, remedy the facelessness, anonymity and abstractness that characterise most present-day features promoting national unity.

There is a need for more national content in regional papers as well as a more careful handling of sensitive material especially those likely to inflame anti-national passions.

More statutory power must be invested in bodies like the Press Council of India so that they can effectively censure national unity. The Press Council should have offices all over India so that it can operate more effectively on the national scene.

There is also a greater need for cooperation between the English language press and the vernacular presses so that innovations in each of them can be mutually beneficial.

Schools of journalism should be involved in fora promoting national unity through the media with the aim of persuading them to include a component of this nature in their courses. Representatives of the vernacular press should be more often invited to fora like this.

There should be greater coverage to initiatives made by lesser known people especially in rural India towards promotion of national unity.
Exploiting Traditional Media forms: Since it is universally acknowledged that folk media such as Yakshagana, Street Theatre, Puppetry, etc. are much attended by a rural populations, an effort must be made in the direction of collaboration between them and the modern means of communication, to more effectively conscientize the rural masses on this issue. There is also the possibility of using print media forms like House Journals of various industrial houses to more effectively present issues promoting national unity.

On the whole it is felt that an open-minded attitude to various possibilities of deploying human potential both conventional and non-conventional, formal and non-formal is an important basis for any progress in the direction of promoting national unity through the media.

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THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT POLICIES IN PROMOTING NATIONAL UNITY

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Group was apprehensive of the power of the Government policies on the mass media to bring about national unity. They can only play a limited role as there are several other important factors that need to be taken account of.

The Group realised that in the complex situation in our country today, the recommendations should be in the context of the present media scene and also in the context of the imminent privatisation of broadcasting media.

Government Policies are not explicitly stated though many of the documents like 5-year Plans argue for the important role of the media in Development Communications.

The Group discussed many aspects of national life in relation to the question of unity and made the following recommendations:

* The Government should make its policies known to the public. Policy documents and Committee Reports should be made easily available.

* Great care should be taken in the portrayal of religious communities and their festivals in the media, especially on television. Stereotypes should be avoided. Some guidelines need to be drawn up for this.

* The Group believed that national unity should be promoted right from school age. As a policy children need to be taught to respect the National Flag and understand the significance of their National Symbol. They need to be encouraged to study the culture of other regions and states.

* Attempts should be made to make space for programmes for the national network of AIR / Doordarshan in Indian languages in addition to Hindi. These programmes should be sub-titled or dubbed.

* The use of Hindi as a language of communication, for broadcasting, should be rationalised so as to facilitate easy comprehension by the majority of the people.

* Promotion of tourism within the country for the less affluent segments of the population should be promoted as a matter of Policy. Inter-state sports and cultural events should be encouraged. These should be designed to enable participants to understand the different cultures of the country.
The Group expressed its concern at the divergence between policy and practice in the use of media for national integration. Care should be exercised in the use of consumer-style advertising for the promotion of national unity.

The Group felt strongly that the media should not be dominated by urban culture or even "Hindi Culture".

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