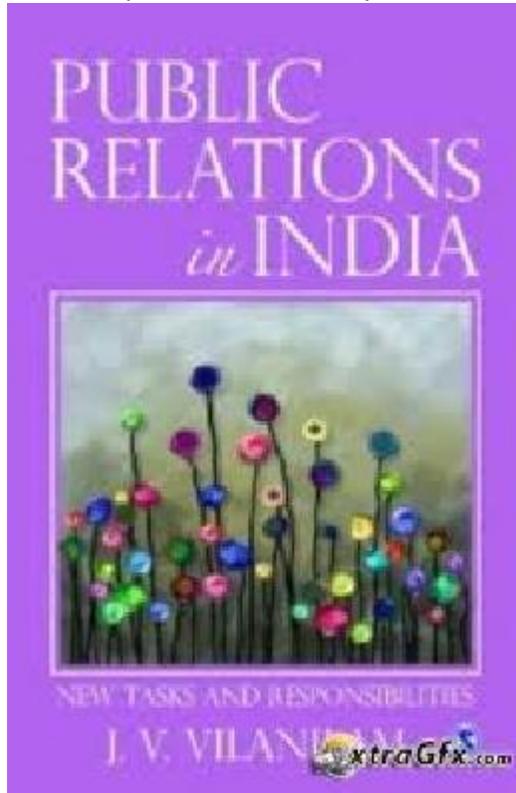


THE HOOT

PR as a welfare tool

The author argues that PR should be used as a medium for socio-economic progress of the under-privileged. It's a useful reference for students, PR persons, and general readers, says INDIRA AKOIJAM

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Public Relations in India: New Tasks and Responsibilities

By J.V. Vilanilam

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J. V. Vilanilam, former Vice Chancellor of the University of Kerala, in his book, *Public Relations in India: New Tasks And Responsibilities*, reviews the history of public relations (PR) and their importance in developing countries, particularly in India. He feels that India has a PR problem and public relations need not be limited to business management and corporate environment but should be used as a medium to fulfil social

responsibilities. This book focuses on how public relations could be of significant contribution to political, socio-economic, and cultural life of people in a country such as India.

The author argues that business corporations have to maintain a close relationship with the local, regional, and national governments of the country and formulate policies according to the needs of the people. Professor Vilanilam looks into the key aspects of PR: social responsibility, effective communication and active management skills.

Management guru Peter F. Drucker has said: “Managers...have become the leaders in every developed country and most developing countries as well...They command resources of society. It is only logical that they take up the leadership role and take responsibility for major social problems and social issues.” The book thus, presents case studies that relate and state how public relations management could be useful in solving problems in a developing country such as India.

Professor Vilanilam argues that PR must be viewed as a development tool geared towards socio-economic progress. He discusses how post-industrialisation development cannot be applicable to Indian society until the masses on its fringes benefit from them. More than 50 per cent of the people in urban areas and nearly 65 per cent in rural areas live in poverty but the national policy on business and industry does not take serious note of this issue. A case in point is the study of MGNREGS (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) that shows the inadequacy of the much-touted government scheme in reaching out effectively to the villagers in providing wages on time.

Private corporations have a responsibility towards the welfare of society in which they operate. Educated people go out of the country despite jobs being available in rural areas and many schemes for providing employment to the rural jobless are inadequate because of corrupt local officials. Almost 70 per cent of the Indian people earn less than Rs. 20 a day. The chapter on growth and development of public relations clearly brings out the lack of accountability in schemes such as MGNREGA and Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM).

The author lays down the importance of making public relations as a tool for social development by looking at it as a “citizen centric” function. With the changing world, it is said that PR needs to be supported by specialists

who deal with specific issues such as health, environment, displacement of people for development activities, and illegal occupation of land and forests, among others. A PR person must be adept in handling the communication process that will allow the above issues to be discussed or tackled through press conferences, training of internal public, and handling of human relations. Public relations should also help make communication process transparent to allow meaningful two-way interactions. With the Right to Information Act coming into force, the communication process has become more effective and transparent.

Another aspect that the book deals with is lobbying with vested interests in order to protect the interests of business and industry. This unethical lobbying has been interfering with the working of democracy.

The author is of the view that the corporate world, which is keen on building its image, is seldom concerned about the basic needs of the people, while the media, which have become the mouthpieces of political parties, are no longer sensitive to the problems of the under-privileged. Big corporations, in the name of generating employment in rural areas by establishing their business in villages, ignore the fact that they have failed to create those promised jobs and people continue to live in poverty. PR should work towards the uplift of that part of society where the corporates function.

The theoretical and philosophical aspects of management and public relations discussed in this book talk about the basic concept of leadership. PR is a process that is symbolic of human relations. The Hawthorne Experiment demonstrates this relation in the context of work performance of employees. It was studied by the Hawthorn Works in relation to the employees of Western Electric Company after 30,000 employees complained against the company. It was found that when the working conditions were improved, the productivity of not only the workers but of those at the management level also increased. It was also discovered that a worker's performance did not improve because of pay incentives but because of the change in their attitude towards work by motivational concepts of the management.

It is necessary for public relations to seriously look into cross-cultural communications as Indian companies establish themselves in foreign countries. And it applies to any environment. Hence in communication, the four components: sender, receiver, message, and channel or medium are

factors that determine the communication process. At times, many communication messages sent by the government are not disseminated as the communicator and the receiver are at different levels of literacy and education. Though India is approaching the status of a developed nation, it is still evident from the dismal literacy and poverty figures that there is a great divide between the rural and the urban India. PR need to play an important role in instilling into the elite, the ordinary business people, and the common people alike that India needs to be rebuilt with new priorities.

The book is a good reference for readers, students, and PR professionals as it places both the practice and the study of public relations in a larger context. By emphasising the role of public relations, the author has recognised the increasing importance of public relations in a developing society and has suggested a way as to how large companies can bring about changes through effective public relations.