

Kolkata Purashree : A Relentless Vernacular Organ for Municipal Public Relations

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Abstract:

Public Relations (PR) is a mechanism to promote positive and favourable image of individual or institution or organization in public life. In the field of Municipal services such image building exercise is known as Municipal Public Relations (MPR). PR is a persuasive form of communication which needs several tools for its successful execution. House Journal is one of such important tools which has been used from a long time to connect the internal audience of the organization as well as the external audience simultaneously. It acts as a sustainable bridge between the organization and its stake holders. Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC), a premier municipal body is publishing its vernacular mouthpiece for four decades. It has been a steadfast example of how municipal journal can portray the image of the municipal body embedding the image of the city.

Keywords: Public Relations, Government Public Relations, Municipal Public Relations, image, House Journal, Kolkata Purashree

Abbreviations used: PR = Public Relations, KMC = Kolkata Municipal Corporation, GPR = Government Public Relations, MPR = Municipal Public Relations, CMG = Calcutta Municipal Gazette, CMC = Calcutta Municipal Corporation

1. Introduction:

In the field of communication new forms and avenues of exchanging information have emerged with time. The main purpose of communication has been to inform, educate, entertain and persuade. These purposes have culminated by expanding the horizon of the persons taking part in the process of communication. Public Relations as a persuasive communication in nature is being adopted by several organizations, sometimes by persons also to improve their image in a way as they want them to be perceived by their target audience. The art of this special form of communication is becoming popular which simultaneously suggests its worth. The various probable tools of PR give option to increase the visibility of the organization which opts for image management but the skill of using the appropriate tool/s to achieve the communication goal is the key factor of success.

2. Objective of the Study:

PR has been an interesting and creative discipline with a challenge to achieve the desired communication goals and it needs masterly application of the effective persuasive tools. In that

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In that respect KMC's vernacular organ is a unique study which has been operational since last four decades with appreciable visibility. KMC has not only been a premier municipal body but it carries legacy of nationalist alternative interventions in the municipal governance and its role has been unique and exemplary in using municipal organ. KMC has launched its first organ which was in English and first of its kind not only in India but Asia when the concept of articulated PR was taking shape. The rich heritage of using municipal organ by KMC has, therefore, been self-explanatory. Its use of vernacular organ was initiated with an intention of connecting people of the city in their own language. Study of that would reveal its impact and utility in MPR, which can unfold the significant journey of the organ in-depth.

3. Public Relations and its various Tools :

3.1 Public Relations:

Public Relation's principal aim is "to promote positive and favourable images of people or firms in public life, without actually appearing to do so." (Watson-&-Hill,-1996)¹ It can further be termed as 'deliberate, planned and sustained' (Black-1996)² effort to record favourable image of a person or organization or institution among its stake holders. The mechanism of persuasion, therefore, can be termed as how the organization or the person wants to be viewed by its audience. That is not only the purpose of the persuasion but that also is the starting point of managing own image. The process, thus, can also be called as image management. To make the process successful the connecting point between the organization and its audience has to be closely knit. PR aims at converging the organization and its audience with strong bonding.

3.2 Various tools of Public Relations:

As PR is persuasive communication and essentially a process in itself to its objective obtained, it has many conventional and creative tools to pursue its objective. There are various accepted tools of PR – starting from media relations to publishing an organ or journal along with exhibition, fairs, using different forms of mass media, advertising, holding conference and even hospitality etc. are known for effective tools of PR. Municipal Public Relations (MPR) is a specialized form of PR which is dedicated for image management of the municipal bodies. It aims at to inform and educate the citizens on the operations and functioning of the municipal body. The major operational sphere, tools and mechanism of operation along with the broad understanding in MPR owes its genesis from the principal genre PR itself.

¹ Watson, J. and Hill, A. (1996). *A Dictionary of Communication and Media Studies*, Universal Book Stall, New Delhi, P.141)

² Black, S. (1996). *Practical Public Relations* (Fourth edition) New Delhi: Universal Book Stall, p. 56

4. Organ: An effective Tool for Persuasion:

A printed organ of any organization aims at meeting three purposes – improving employee morale, fostering a favourable climate for the working of the company or the organization and promoting goodwill (ABCI-1968)³. It is an essential tool of PR to extend consolidated and sustained campaign to attain the PR goals. “The Public Relations periodical, also called company magazine, house organ, or industrial publication, is a major medium of communication used by business and non-profit organizations in communicating with employees, shareholder, suppliers, dealers, customers and the general public (Moore-&Kalupa,-1987)⁴. The organ carries the image of the organization, fosters a feeling of harmony between the organization and its stakeholders. As it disseminates the official version it minimizes the scope of spreading rumours about the organization. “House Journals vary in size, style and type so greatly that it is usual to classify them by their readership. They are either published for internal consumption, for external distribution, or for a combination of the two.” (Black,-1996)⁵

5. Kolkata Purashree: A relentless journey of four decades:

5.1 Launching of the Municipal organ

Kolkata Municipal Corporation’s (Calcutta Municipal Corporation as it was known then) English organ ‘Calcutta-Municipal-Gazette’-(CMG)⁶ was unique municipal organ. It was first such initiative not only in India but Asia. From 1924 it started its journey and marked huge impact and visibility. CMG cannot be called as conscious effort of articulated PR initiative but it definitely contributed in shaping the image of the municipal body.

5.2 Launching of the Vernacular Organ :

The popularity of CMG paved the way of a vernacular organ of KMC. In 1961, when the birth centenary of great poet Rabindranath Tagore was celebrated CMG came out with a special number with valuable Bengali articles. In 1970 CMG published three more special numbers in Bengali. In 1976 another special number in Bengali was published. In 1977, another special number entitled ‘Calcutta Calcutta’ was published in Bengali. In the foreword of that issue the then Administrator Sibaprasad Samadder mentioned in his original Bengali write up – from 1924 to 1977 this period of more than half a century has witnessed many changes in the country. Calcutta Municipal Gazette has long been devoted to the service of the people. ... Recently we are trying to establish a new slogan – Corporation in the life of Calcutta. ... In the name ‘Calcutta

³ A Directory of House Journals in India (1968), Association of Business Communicators of India, Mumbai

⁴ Moore, H. Frazier and Kalupa Frank B (1987), *Public Relations, Principles, Cases and Problems*, Surjeet Publications, Delhi, p. 255

⁵ Black, S. (1996). *Practical Public Relations* (Fourth edition) New Delhi: Universal Book Stall, p. 56

⁶ The Calcutta Municipal Gazette Silver Jubilee Number (February 1950), Kolkata: The Calcutta Municipal Corporation

Calcutta' the echoing words has been used with an intention to bridge the city and the Corporation. The editor of that issue Samaresh Chattopadhyay also mentioned in his note that the special number 'Calcutta Calcutta' is the future planning with an intention that the organ of the municipal body reaches the citizens as true representative of the Corporation.

In May 1978 special number on Rabindranath Tagore was published. Prasanta Sur, Municipal Affairs Minister of that time, who previously was also the Mayor of KMC, mentioned in his message that a monthly journal in the name of 'Purashree' (which means Beauty of Municipality) is on the verge of publication with an intention to strengthen the relationship between the city and the Corporation. 'Purashree', he wrote, would be the philosophy of the city. One should not overlook that the historic announcement of the birth of the Bengali organ of KMC came out on a special occasion of celebrating Rabindranath Tagore's birthday which has a special appeal on the cultural heritage of Bengalis. 'Purashree', therefore, can be termed as a continuation of the service of CMG.

5.3 Early days of the Vernacular Organ:

The name 'Purashree' was visualized from the emblem of the Calcutta Municipal Corporation. In the emblem of the municipal body 'Purashree Bibordhon' (means Increasing Beauty of the Municipality) has been written and from there the word 'Purashree' was finalized as the title of the Bengali organ of the Calcutta Municipal Corporation. The first issue of 'Purashree' was published on 26th August of 1978 as the fortnightly published Bengali organ of CMC.

Samaresh Chattopadhyay took charge as the editor and the price was 50 paise. The first editorial reflected the vision of the journal vividly. It said that the journal has been published in the close proximity of birth anniversary of poet Sukanta Bhattacharya and death anniversary of Kaji Najrul Islam and it connects the eternal *revolutionary-spirit-of-Bengal*⁷. It admired the role of CMG in the nationalist movement and freedom struggle and expressed hope that 'Purashree', with all its limitation, would be able to play such meaningful role in the democratic and socialist movement in the independent India. It mentioned unequivocally that 'Purashree' would be the organ of the people of the great city. The journal would be the platform for manifesting hope, desire and un-fulfillment of the citizens of Calcutta. 'Purashree' would be exclusively deal with total reflection of the city life for the people of the city. It stated clearly that the discussing problems of the daily city life or finding out their solutions would not be the sole initiative of 'Purashree' but it would, additionally, always support healthy progressive intellectual exercise so that citizens could represent the healthy and bold cultural conscience. It expressed that beside elaborate

⁷ Kolkata Purashree (New series Vol 8, No 10) (October 2008), Kolkata: The Calcutta Municipal Corporation (in Bengali)

presentation of the contemporary picture of the city 'Purashree' would try to introspect different aspects of its past time. It respectfully invited all the people who love the city to be associated with 'Purashree'. It concluded in an optimistic note that the citizens of Calcutta would meet the soul of the great city through 'Purashree'.

5.4 Content handled in the Vernacular Organ :

To start with 'Purashree' preferred to deal with content related to history of the city of Calcutta, socio-economic aspects of the city, different aspects of the city life along with the functions of the Corporation. In the special *puja* numbers stories, novels and poetries were published, numerous established and progressive writers used to contribute and it was accepted by the people of the city known for their cultural affinity and it was successful in recording positive reviews from the press fraternity. In fact, 'Purashree' prioritized and regularly published *puja* numbers during great festival of worshiping goddess Durga generally in October and special numbers on Rabindranath Tagore's birthday in the month of May were regularly published by.

The first *puja* number of 'Purashree' was published on 7th October, 1978. In 1978, West Bengal experienced devastating flood. The first issue was published overcoming that barrier of natural calamity. In the first year the publication was regular. In the second and third year some numbers had to be jointly published. In the fourth year, initiatives were taken to get the registration number of the journal. The name 'Purashree', was not accepted as the registered name of the journal, and in the further appeal 'Kolkata Purashree' was accepted as the registered name and registration number was obtained. As the name 'Purashree' already became popular 'Kolkata' was placed in smaller font before 'Purashree' in the lay out. Since then 'Kolkata Purashree' has become the Bengali organ. A group of researchers, professors started contributing in 'Kolkata Purashree' and the first editor spearheaded the task of consolidation with a team which dedicated them out of sheer love for the city and its municipal organ. Haripada Bhaumik, in his article published in the commemorative volume celebrating thirty years of the journal published on 20th October, 2008 detailed that untold story. In fact, he claimed in that article that he himself wrote 121 articles in 'Purashree' in first five years, many of which were in his own name and some of even in pen names. The sole intention was to keep the journal running. One association of Purashree lovers was formed and it organized gathering in different social occasions. Some new sections were introduced in 'Purashree', one of such was letter section to record the feedback. Introduction of cartoons was in active consideration. In fact, cartoonist Satadal Bhattacharya drew some cartoons for the municipal organ ([Kolkata-Purashree,-New-series-Vol-8,-No-10;-2008](#))⁸.

⁸ Kolkata Purashree (New series Vol.- 8, No 10) (October 2008), Kolkata: The Calcutta Municipal Corporation (in Bengali)

5.5 Hurdles and how the vernacular organ overcame those:

The publication of 'Kolkata Purashree' became somewhat irregular from the fourth year. From the Puja number of 1985 Barindragopal Roy, a senior officer took charge of the editorship and Milan Gangopadhyay became the deputy editor. From 1985 the periodicity of the journal became monthly from fortnightly. From January 1986 Milan Gangopadhyay took charge of the editorship. It started publishing special numbers on matters related to immediate priority or historical incidents. Some notable special issues were on commemoration of Bengali New Year as 'noboborsho' special issue; malaria special number to raise awareness on the regular mosquito borne disease during rainy season and special issues on Rabindranath Tagore specially to commemorate his birthday. 'Purashree' tried to move on the path which was created by CMG in its long journey and CMG was also known for publishing special issues regularly. In fact, the list published in the special issue of 'Purashree' on [Rabindranath-Tagore's-birthday-published-on-20th-May,-2011⁹](#) showed 152 articles were published in 'Purashree' only on the great poet during the period of 1978 to 2011. 'Kolkata Purashree' kept on publishing special numbers on different personalities attached to the socio-political-cultural heritage of the great city Kolkata on a regular basis.

The journal has published special-numbers on 50th anniversary of Indian independence, birth centenary of Subhas Chandra Bose, renowned thespian Sambhu Mitra, Acharya Prafulla Chandra Roy, Surendranath Banerjia, Fajlul Haque, revolutionary poet Kaji Nazrul Islam, Amartya Sen after receiving Nobel Prize, Sister Nivedita, mystic poet Jibananda Das, famous Bengali litterateur Banaful, former Mayor of Calcutta Municipal Corporation Dr. Bidhanchandra Roy, who also became the Chief Minister of West Bengal. Special issue on Book Fair was published to link the International Book Fair of Kolkata, and special issue on Star Theater, the auditorium with rich heritage, was also published. In 2001 [Registrar-of-Newspaper-issued-Registration-Number¹⁰](#) WBBEN/2001/04446 to the journal, and as per their direction it had to write 1st year of its publication, so the Bengali word 'noboporjay' meaning new series was added to the title to emphasize on the continuity. After that special numbers on Swami Vivekananda, famous litterateur Annadashankar Roy, legendary film personality Pramathesh Barua, well known writer Premendra Mitra, nationalist hero and then spiritual personality Aurobindo Ghosh were published.

'Kolkata Purashree' published its new policy of advertisement in 2005 and the intention behind it was to make the journal survive without subsidy. The journal used to maintain its own list of

⁹ Kolkata Purashree (New series Vol.- 11, No 5) (May 2011), Kolkata: The Calcutta Municipal Corporation (in Bengali)

¹⁰ Kolkata Purashree (New series Vol.- 8, No 10) (October 2008), Kolkata: The Calcutta Municipal Corporation (in Bengali)

well-known personalities of the city, different media houses and libraries and arranged to send the journal to them as a gesture of connecting the community with the municipal body.

5.6 Achievements of the Vernacular Organ:

The journal has regularly dealt with short and brief reporting of municipal happenings of the city along with photographs of important events among those, it has published numbers of research-based articles on socio-political-cultural journey of Kolkata. To meet with demand of the municipal organ, it has tried to expand its angle to bridge it with greater spectrum of the entire city. It has initiated a series to highlight the important and remarkable dates of city of Kolkata and Kolkata Municipal Corporation as well. 'Kolkata Purashree' has consistently and regularly attempted to portray history and genesis of different streets, buildings, parks, prayer places, other important places and significant or off-beat associations of the city. The inherent attempt has been to correlate the citizens of the city with its long heritage and converge that sense of pride with their link with the municipal body.

'Kolkata Purashree' has not only been confined with its role as the organ of Kolkata Municipal Corporation, surpassing its statutory role it turned into a positive catalyst in the cultivation of different shades of the city of Kolkata. As a true successor of the famous 'Calcutta Municipal Gazette' it became inseparable with cultivation of urbanization focusing on past, present and future of the city in the lights of history, heritage, service, culture and most importantly the direction of the entire process of urbanization. It has been encouraging the culture of excavating and cultivating different and multiple shades of the great city of Kolkata in Bengali language.

This journal has become inseparable from the heritage of the historic local body. It has also published write-ups of galaxy of Bengali intelligentsia in its long journey. Their versions on the city based on their experiences have become evident source of looking back to the old days of the city on one hand and attraction to the citizens to subscribe the municipal organ on other hand. 'Kolkata Purashree', therefore, has been a true representative of the cultural capital of the country as the organ the municipality which played historic role in the nationalist intervention during the freedom movement. It has carried the image of the KMC for a long period of time, of course not as a part of any articulated PR campaign but certainly it played the role of an unparallel vehicle of image management which ultimate is the motto of Public Relations.

'Kolkata Purashree', as the vernacular organ of the Kolkata Municipal Corporation, followed the steps 'Calcutta Municipal Gazette' left behind. It was initiated to bridge the gap of absence of any vernacular organ of the KMC. It has tried to represent the socio-cultural ethos of Kolkata to be a true representative of the municipal organization. The spirit can very well be identified from the name of the journal. The beauty (shree) of municipal services (pura) and participation of the

people of Kolkata, portrayal of the pride of heritage of the city were identified as key areas when the journal started its journey.

Initially 'Purashree' identified content mainly from the issues like history of the city, socio-economic aspects, city life and functions of the Corporation. During publication of special puja numbers, the journal used to publish stories, novels and poetries and they were collected from the progressive writers. The puja numbers became popular among the people and managed to get positive review in the press. In fact, puja numbers are published during great festival of worshipping goddess Durga generally in October which also is the most popular socio-cultural meet of Bengal. Publishing puja numbers connect to that festivity and express municipal body's participation in the festival. It further helped the journal to touch the cultural periphery of the cultural capital of India. Along with that its venture of publishing special numbers on maestros of the city who have made the citizens proud has been a mark of acknowledgement and respectful gesture on behalf of the municipal organization.

'Kolkata Purashree' has not only been the organ of Kolkata Municipal Corporation, widening its role it tried to capture different moods and shades of the city of Kolkata within its covers. It has focused on the process of urbanization along with the entire canvas of the city including history, heritage, service, culture and most importantly the direction of municipal development. In addition, it has sincerely tried to excavate and cultivate different shades of Kolkata in Bengali language. In that respect 'Kolkata Purashree' has been a true follower of the tradition left by that iconic municipal journal 'Calcutta Municipal Gazette'. This journal has become inseparable with the heritage of the historic local body. It has published write-ups of galaxy of Bengali intelligentsia which has become authentic source of looking back to the old days of the city. It, therefore, has been a true representative of the cultural capital of the country. It has carried the image of the KMC for a long period of time which also has definite role played in the genre of Public Relations. The soft copies of 'Kolkata Purashree' have also been preserved since April 2009 along with puja numbers and few other campaign documents on developmental works of KMC. It is a welcome move to popularize the Bengali organ.

6. Conclusion:

'Kolkata Purashree' has been a unique vernacular organ which has been able to carry forward the great legacy of its previous historic English organ of KMC along with the magnanimity of the organization itself. Kolkata Corporation has its own identity in the history of India which is of much higher dimension than being a mere municipal body. Its intervention in the nationalist movement and participation of nationalist leaders of subjugated India in the management of Kolkata Corporation has made this municipal body unique in the history in many dimensions. The organ of such an organization of institutional value needs to carry the resonance of that rich

heritage. Another well-known aspect about the city of Kolkata is that culture and creative instinct dwells in its heart. The organ of the municipal body of that city cannot overlook that and 'Kolkata Purashree' has done justice to that for a long period. Beside managing the image of the municipal body, disseminating information 'Kolkata Purashree' has consistently bolster up the unique feature of the city and that has made it special among the organs of the municipal body.

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