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Inaugural Speech

By

M Manik Rao
Prof. Ram Reddy, Dr. Krishna Rao, Prof. Sinha, Prof. Malhan and delegates to the Asian Regional Seminar,

At the outset, let me thank the distinguished sponsors of the Asian Seminar on Rural Communication for giving me an opportunity to associate myself with this endeavour and inaugurate the seminar today. In particular, I would like to warmly congratulate the Southern Regional Centre of the ICSSR, Department of Communication and Journalism of Osmania University and the Asian Mass Communication, Research and Information Centre, Singapore, for convening the Seminar at the right time when we are talking about the themes like "Public Relations in the Eighties".

The need and importance of Rural Communication to a developing country is readily recognised everywhere. The developing country is always engaged in an endless crusade of conceiving and fostering development activities to re-shape her future. To make this national adventure a success, there is always the need to educate the people -- the classes as well as the masses -- on the vast developmental activities going on in the country. In other words, we have to capture the imagination of the people. No developmental activities cannot succeed unless and until the people participate in it in a willing and wholehearted manner. To bring about this, people must be told about the activity and should be enthused about the whole venture. They should be enthused in such a way that their involvement becomes real, lasting and complete.

Democracy implies response to public opinion, in a positive way. Public Relations is the effective link between the Government and the public in the State. Today there is a wide choice of media of communication, the spoken word, the Print Word and the Graphic Arts. These media have their own advantages as well as disadvantages or limitations and the communicator has to choose according to the target audience and the requirements of a given situation.

When I say "Limitations" of the Communication media, I have in mind the audience environment in this country. As is well-known, India's percentage of literacy is low. Moreover, nearly 30% of the country's population live in rural areas. These factors pose a challenge to the communicator in India who wants to establish an effective link with the rural parts. I would venture to think that this position is more or less identical in developing
Rural India presents a most difficult target audience to persuade and to influence. Rural masses are unlettered, steeped in ignorance, and superstition. They love the old order. However, they are today less resistant to change than yesterday. Perhaps, the element of gradualism plays a vital role in this slow transition. It is here that the art of public relations could make its presence felt and hasten the process of change. This I think can be accomplished only by a specially trained cadre of Public Relations men. We will have to think of a new cadre of barefoot Public Relations men, as the current coin goes, who could rub shoulders with the rural masses, live with them, think with them, and carry them forward to new horizons.

I am happy to note that the Seminar will have about four sessions. I venture to express my personal views on this subject. The Print Word has limitations in India and the reasons are clear. Coming to the TV, the Radio and the Film, the Communicator has before him very effective weapons. The appeal of the Film to the rural masses is quite unlimited, and this is perhaps the reason why it is known as the "hottest medium". In India, AIR clains to cover more than two-thirds of our population today. Its potentialities are vast and as a medium of entertainment and education, it could be exploited to the maximum extent by the communicator who wants to reach the target audience in rural areas.

Here may I draw your attention to the happy position prevailing in our State of Andhra Pradesh? There are today 19,740 Community Radio Sets in our Villages. Out of the 16,011 Panchayats in the State, as many as 14,804 Panchayats are provided with at least one community Radio Set. 4,120 additional Sets are working in the hamlets, Harijanawadas and backward areas in the Panchayats. As many as 816 Community Radio sets are working in other institutions like schools, labour welfare centres, etc. There are only 1207 Panchayats which are yet to be provided with at least one Community Radio Set. We can therefore look upon the coverage of rural Andhra as quite satisfactory.
Now let me turn to T.V. As you may be aware, 400 T.V. sets are being installed by Doordarshan Kendra, Hyderabad in the villages within the service area of the Hyderabad T.V. transmitter. The future belongs to the TV, and the communicator will naturally approach this medium with great expectations. As I said at the outset, these two media are no doubt very effective media and for the full coverage of India's far-fled villages by these media requires financial outlay of Himalayan proportions. We are no doubt, able to identify the effective media for rural communication but the real bottleneck is I think financial considerations. The problem of finance is no ordinary problem and I am sure that the seminar will give attention to this aspect also.

Gentlemen, I have great pleasure to inaugurate the proceedings of the Asian Regional Seminar on "Rural Communication". I wish your deliberations all success.

THANK YOU.

M.Manik Rao,
Minister for Information & Broadcasting,
& Public Relations.
Govt. of Andhra Pradesh.