

Shri G. Muniratnam

Recipient of Jamnalal Bajaj Award for Application of Science and Technology for Rural Development-1995

Shri Muniratnam who was born on 6th January 1936, organized when he was 15 years old a chain of children's clubs known as Balananda Sanghams for the integrated development of poor children in rural areas. He also established a large number of maternity care centres in the rural areas of Chittoor District. He was associated with the youth welfare activities of the Bharat Sevak Samaj between 1960 and 1966. He made a careful study of the drought prone areas of the Rayalseema region of Andhra Pradesh and with a view to organizing activities for the improvement and relief of these areas he established Rayalaseema Seva Samiti.

The main thrust of Shri Munirathnam's variegated activities for the improvement of the drought prone areas is by the application of science and technology for rural development through the Krishi Vigyan Kendra established by him under the auspices of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research. The all round development of the people living in these areas has been his principal aim and the development has, therefore, extended to all spheres of human activity such as agriculture, health, education, scientific development, empowerment of women, social forestry, rehabilitation of mentally, and physically handicapped, special programme for the disabled, etc. etc.

The various departmental and social welfare activities of RASS in more than 2500 villages spread in 4 districts of the backward Rayalseema region of Andhra Pradesh are carefully coordinated and monitored by Shri Muniratnam. Hundreds of Mahila Mandals have been organized for women and child activities. Over 60 voluntary organizations have been assisted for preparation of schemes for rural development and for enabling them for obtaining financial assistance from Govt. and other funding agencies. The total population covered by these activities is nearly a lakh and a half people.

As mentioned above, the basis thrust of Shri Muniratnam's activities is the application of science and technology to various aspects of rural development. Improvement of productivity of land in dry areas through introduction of high yielding varieties of food crops, pulses and oilseeds, multiple cropping by providing well irrigation have resulted in weaning away the area from drought and develop the agricultural potential of these areas. In addition, sericulture, horticulture, agro-forestry, animal husbandry and dairying particularly among small and marginal farmers have also been started by Shri Muniratnam.

These programmes have helped to generate gainful employment in the villages and reduced migration to the urban areas. A demonstration and training farm has been attached to the Krishi Vigyan Kendra where farmers both men and women receive training in various agricultural pursuits. The training is imparted on the principal of learning by doing.

Simultaneously, by the application of scientific methods Shri Muniratnam has undertaken the development of wasteland through Agro-Social forestry and horticulture programmes. These programmes include free supply of saplings of fruit, fuelwood, fodder and timber trees. Nursery has been set up through which 5,98,00 saplings and 23,200 grafts of fruit trees were distributed for planting. The school children and involved in a big way in this programme of training, demonstration and promotion of green belt in the villages.

Raising of energy plantation on a 75 acre piece of land granted by Govt. of Andhra Pradesh is another outstanding contribution to rural development through the application of science and technology. Apart from relieving the problem of drudgery of rural women bringing firewood from long distances, it also results in the scientific development of the forests. Similarly, a programme has been started for the efficient use of rural energy, 3400 smokeless chulhas (improved stoves) have been constructed and 240 women workers have been trained to go from house to house and impart knowledge about the use of improved chulhas to the rural women.

Since employment opportunities for women in rural areas are scanty, Shri Muniratnam established training-cum-production units in Tirupathi and Pichatur for training women in garments making, embroidery, television and radio assembling, toy making, biscuit making, glass beads and typewriting. The income generated from these units is disbursed among the trainees who are also given financial and other forms of assistance for setting up independent units after the training is over. Many of them are also employed on regular basis in large scale commercial units. Over 2000 women are annually benefited by this programme.

In the sphere of public health, 750-low cost sanitary latrines have been constructed. Arrangements for the channelisation of waste water and its utilization for the irrigation of fruit trees like mangoes, coconuts and vegetable trees like drumstick are provided. This is an excellent example of the recycling of water for production purposes. Two mobile clinics have been established to take medical aid to the doorstep of the poor in the remote villages. The services provided include medical checkup, immunization, community health, family planning services, personal hygiene and environmental sanitation by the community. A Nurses Training Centre has also been functioning since 1986.

In the sphere of education and literacy, he established in 1992-93 creches and 600 early Childhood Education Centre which have benefited 30,000 children. He has also established 1100 centres to provide Non-formal Education to 32,000 children in Chittoor and Cuddapah Districts, 166 centres are exclusively for girls and 227 centres for SC/ST children.

All the development of programmes of the Samithi are carried on through active people's participation including women and children with village level committees being established to help in implementation of these programmes and to assist in people's participation, The association of the local communities has also resulted in the mobilization of resources from various agencies as well with labour construction by the village people. There are 13 full-fledged community centres in the area of operation of the Samithi.

Shri Munirathnam has been a source of inspiration for many non-governmental organizations that have, following his example, started various programmes such as ICDs, non-formal education, community based rehabilitation of mentally and physically handicapped children, income generation programmes, establishment of self-help group, etc.

All RASS programmes have long term commitment from Government institutions and funding partners. As such the continuity of existing programmes is well assured. RASS has been sanctioned recently Krishi Vigyan Kendra by Indian Council of Agriculture Research.

Shri G. Muniratnam has a number of plans for the future. He has already floated "SAHAY BHARATHI" which is going to be an All India Organisation for rehabilitating the physically handicapped and mentally retarded children, a proportion of these children will be provided institutional care with the help of destitute women.

He is also planning to gradually withdraw from older villages so as to enable him to take up new villages for development work. Realising his potential, Government is also initiating RASS into new areas, the recent one being Watershed Management.

AWARDS/PRIZES RECEIVED EARLIER : Shri Muniratnam has been the recipient of several Awards and Prizes, the most important of which are : 1. The National Award given to RASS for valuable services to the community in the field of child welfare in 1985. 2. The Indian Merchants' Chamber Jamnalal Bajaj Endowment Award for the year 1987 was given to the RAS for outstanding work in the field of rural development, and 3. The Indira Gandhi National Unity Award was conferred on Shri Muniratnam for outstanding achievement in social work in 1989.

