

## **Shri Prembhai**

### **Recipient of Jamnalal Bajaj Award for Application of Science and Technology for Rural Development-1982**

Prembhai was born in 1935 at Meerut in Uttar Pradesh. Immediately after obtaining a post-graduate degree in Sociology, he joined the Bhoodan movement; travelling mostly on foot in rural areas, he covered over 12,500 kms in 3 years. He worked in Khadigram for some time and later in Sevagram in the field of agriculture. He also spent two years doing famine relief work in Bihar and U.P.

The most significant and enduring of Prembhai's work is the rural development projects initiated and developed by him through the Banwasi Sewa Ashram and the Agrindus Institute set up under its auspices.

The Banwasi Sewa Ashram was established in 1954 on 250 acres of forest land in Govindpur in the district of Mirzapur in Uttar Pradesh, deep inside the Kaimur tract of the Vindhyachal ranges with the object of ameliorating the living conditions of the people. The land in the region was rocky, highly undulating and full of ravines, with hardly any irrigation facilities. The area was inhabited by 3 lakh people predominantly Tribals and Harijans, illiterate and ignorant and living in abject poverty.

In 1967, Prembhai joined the Banwasi Sewa Ashram as its Secretary. In the same year, the Ashram established the Agrindus Institute with Prembhai as its Resident Director. Under Prembhai's direction a comprehensive and integrated agro-industrial and socio-economic plan was formulated and is being implemented by developing and applying appropriate technologies for utilizing local natural resources and man-power for the overall benefit of the community.

As a first step, a ravine reclamation programme was taken on hand by providing food-for-work to the local people. The next step was to implement the watershed plan under which minor earthen dams were constructed by the villagers themselves to impound rain water and distribute it through a simple system of irrigation.

Over the years more than 6000 acres of land have been reclaimed and made cultivable and 1000 minor earthen dams constructed. The fertility of the soil has been improved with a balanced use of green manures, compost and fertilizers. On lands once considered barren a variety of crops of cereals and fruits are now grown. Over 2500 families of tribal farmers have been benefited by these projects.

Training is being provided to hundreds of rural youth in servicing and maintenance of agricultural implements, improving cropping patterns and village extension work. Job-oriented training is given to artisans to improve their skills. Several traditional cottage industries which were languishing have been revived and rejuvenated.

In all this work emphasis is placed on developing simple technologies suited to the genius of the local people and which are within their means. Equal importance is given to building up an appropriate system to carry the technologies to the very doors of the people in remote areas with the help of hundreds of technicians trained in the Ashram.

To educate the people and mobilize those for joint action, talks, seminars and training camps are organized and demonstrations are often held on the Central farm of the Ashram as well as on the farmers' own fields.

Prembhai is the moving and guiding spirit behind the Agrindus projects in which social sciences like sociology and economics are integrated with the physical sciences and their technologies for evolving new patterns of rural development and for utilizing the natural resources and manpower of the region for the overall benefit of the people.

