

Dr. Manibhai Bhimbhai Desai

Recipient of Jamnalal Bajaj Award for Application of Science and Technology for Rural Development-1983

Dr. Manibhai Bhimbhai Desai has distinguished himself in his chosen field of rural development based on modern and scientific lines. He was born in 1920. He actively participated in the Quit India Movement of 1942 and underwent imprisonment for one year. In 1946, as instructed by Mahatma Gandhi, he moved to the Nature Cure Ashram at Urulikanchan situated near Pune in Maharashtra. The Ashram had been set up by Gandhiji with the objective of fighting the rural problems of poverty, illiteracy, ill-health and disease. Ever since joining the Ashram, Manibhai has stuck faithfully to his task, with a life-long commitment. His association with Gandhiji was the most important single event in Manibhai's life, as it gave direction to his work, moulded his thought and has been a source of perennial inspiration to him.

It was Manibhai's conviction that India's rural problems can be solved only if modern scientific knowledge and professional competence are harnessed alongwith individual commitment to task. He adopted the approach of integrated development, which blended together elements like improvement in agriculture, upgrading of cattle, setting up of agro-industries and achieving better health standards.

Manibhai carried out a number of innovative and pioneering projects and experiments. These were in the fields of breeding and cross-breeding of cattle, development of barren lands, better utilization of scarce water resources, application of new techniques and new seed materials in farming, horticulture and fodder development.

Dr Desai promoted a number of institutions and organizations for the benefit of rural people. The water distribution systems in drought prone areas in Haveli Taluka in Pune District, a cooperative sugar factory at Theur, a rural school at Urulikanchan with emphasis on vocational training, cooperative joint farming society near Uruli-Kanchan deserve special mention.

The Bharatiya Agro Industries Foundation (BAIF) established in 1967, was the culmination of Manibhai's institution-building activity. He is the Director of BAIF since its inception. BAIF presently reaches out to over 6000 villages, rendering services in the field of cattle development, cattle health, fodder development, etc., to over 300,000 rural families. The Foundation has established some of the finest laboratories to carry on applied research in the fields of cattle breeding, cattle feeding, production of veterinary bio-medicals, better and intensive farming, bio-energy, soil and water conservation, etc.

The Nature Cure Ashram, which provided the base for many of Manibhai's experiments, continues to play its role in giving valuable services in proper health through naturopathy, consisting of advice and practice of appropriate diet, sanitation and physical exercise.

Dr Manibhai Desai is a recipient of several honours in the past. He was awarded the Padma Shree by the Government of India and Doctorate (honoris causa) degree by the Mahatma Phule Agricultural University, Rahuri, Maharashtra and South Gujarat University, Gujarat. In 1982, he won international recognition by receiving the coveted Ramon Magsaysay Award for distinguished public service and the Watumul Memorial Award for dedicated devotion to the principles of Gandhi in rural development.

