

TRIBUTE TO THE CRUSADER OF ZERO HUNGER INDIA

Dr. M. S. SWAMINATHAN

Dr. V. Rajagopal*

During his visit to the ICAR - Central Plantation Crops Research Institute, Kasaragod, Kerala on 8th February 2002, Dr. M. S. Swaminathan inaugurated the Agriculture Technology Information Center (ATIC) and exhibition of various products by farmers and women self help groups organized by the Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK). In the inaugural address he emphasized need to empower farmers to gain knowledge on latest agricultural technologies to increase crop production and achieve adequate food for all citizens ('Right to food').

In personal conversation Dr. Swaminathan made a specific mention of poverty and hunger as serious problem in the country which need to be tackled with appropriate strategies. He was deeply concerned to eliminate hunger of poor people and emphasized on malnourishment of children below five years. His voice revealed extreme sympathy towards lakhs of marginalized people who do not get square meals for survival, although overall food production is adequate and available but accessibility is inadequate. He then politely said 'Rajagopal, something must be done to address this National problem'. It was a motivational message and advice for me to act upon soon. It was just like a healthy seed sown in fertile soil by an eminent agriculture scientist with fond hope of bountiful harvest. I could grasp his intention and confidence in me to undertake necessary action. I assured him that I would strive hard to fulfill his dream to achieve zero hunger India. I made up my mind then to work towards hunger elimination. I considered it as a divine message for me from the Father of Green Revolution and crusader of zero hunger India. I started gathering information on Global Hunger Index and India's position.

In 2006 after superannuation, at Tirupati native place I started collecting information on food availability and accessibility to poor and constraints that caused chronic hunger among many poor sections of the Society. Another shocking information gathered was wastage of precious food in millions of tons due to various sources and social functions. Thus, my first attempt with permission from Dr. Swaminathan was to create awareness through 'Hunger Elimination and You movement (HEYm) to educate the public to save food for supply to poor and hungry masses. With the help of a few like-minded experts I could organize lectures, prepare posters and demonstration to avoid food wastage. When I informed that the message was prepared as posters in seven languages – English, Hindi, Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam, he was glad to release the Tamil poster in MSSRF and displayed in canteen. When I mentioned about travel to the USA, he immediately suggested to visit the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), Washington to discuss and collect information on Global Hunger Index and India State Hunger Index, which I promptly carried out that was useful to include in my awareness lectures. The discussion with IFPRI scientists helped to understand the parameters used to work out Global Hunger Index to rank the Nations, including India.

Dr. M. S. Swaminathan was extremely pleased when I informed that the Society for Hunger Elimination (SHE) was registered in Tirupati with the main objective of undertaking nutritious food supply to malnourished children and disabled elders. He mentioned that our approach was laudable to serve the poor at grass root level and complimented for twin objectives of creating awareness and food supply. On my request he readily accepted to be the Chief Patron of SHE and guided me for further improvement. When I honored him with a special shawl from Tirupati he accepted with pleasant smile.

I was fortunate that Dr. Swaminathan wrote foreword for my books on hunger including the poems in Tamil written by Padmapriya Rajagopal on 'Hunger – a poetic expression of compassion. The most memorable event was he travelled to Tirupati to release the book on "Hunger: Food security and socio-economic scenario" at the Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidya Peeth (RSVP) in April 2014. His message in his lecture that "Peace will prevail in this world only when hunger of millions of people is eliminated" which was well received by the audience and covered in media. His presidential address to combat malnourishment of children while releasing the book at MSSRF and the one on Food is Brahman with scientific, spiritual and social messages was thought provoking. He emphasized that the message must be spread far and wide among young children and students. He complimented the members of SHE for yeoman service and urged to be a role model for others to replicate.

During one of my visits, when I briefed him that SHE is organizing Annadhanam to abandoned, neglected poor in streets in search of food, he was immensely happy that SHE was implementing his popular appeal 'reach the unreached' which means that we have to satisfy basic needs of food, water to those marginalized people. He conveyed his blessings aptly that SHE like microunits must emerge in different parts of the country to serve poor people in need of essentials like food, water, sanitation and health. SHE is committed to carry out his dream to achieve zero hunger India. The members of SHE felt the association with Dr Swaminathan is a great boon to serve humanity. With humble tribute to the crusader of zero hunger India SHE takes pledge to serve the country to eliminate hunger altogether with the help of Government and a vast section of citizens who loved, respected admired and worked closely with Dr Swaminathan. His legacy will continue with SHE leading as torch bearers to show light to distressed

hungry people that nutritious food will be made available to them as “right to food for all” enshrined in the Food Security Act guided and drafted by Dr Swaminathan. This is the best tribute to the Father of Green Revolution which saved millions of Indians from hunger during most critical periods, with incredible achievement from food shortage to food sufficiency enabled by Dr. Norman Borlaug, the Nobel Peace laureate – the two crusaders of hunger free world.

OM SHANTHI

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