

About Asian Agri-History Foundation

Secunderabad-500009, AP

Introduction

The region the South and Southeast Asia had generally provided food security to its population for several millennia, with only occasional famines in a few limited pockets due primarily to drought. Farmers in the region had evolved some of the most sustainable agricultural management technologies suitable for different agro-eco-regions. In recent years, however, South and Southeast Asia have often been projected as food-deficient regions where mass-scale starvation could occur in the future despite the fact that modern technologies have been adopted over large areas. Ironically, in the past few years, the sustainability of agriculture by following modern technologies have been questioned, and with good reason. How can we make the agriculture in South and Southeast Asia sustainable? The Asian Agri-History Foundation (AAHF), a non-profit Trust, was therefore established and registered in 1994 to facilitate dissemination of information on agricultural heritage; to promote research on sustainable agriculture in South and Southeast Asia region; to learn from the traditional wisdom and the indigenous, time-tested technologies, which would provide clues for (i) understanding how farmers adjusted to changing environment in the past, and (ii) developing appropriate technologies leading to prosperous, sustainable agriculture. The major objectives of the Foundation are: (i) to disseminate information on the history and heritage of agriculture in the South and Southeast Asia region, and (ii) to stimulate interest in research on the history and heritage of agriculture in Asia with a special focus on South and Southeast Asia.

A function to formally inaugurate the AAHF was held on 19 November (Tuesday at 17:00) 1996 at the Indian International Centre, New Delhi in conjunction with the International Crop Science Congress. The Chief Guest at the function was Dr RS Paroda, then Director General, Indian Council of Agricultural Research, Dr RL Paliwal then Director of Maize program at CIMMYT in Mexico and Trustee of AAHF chaired the

function. More than 150 persons including six of the eleven trustees, several donors and advisors attended the function. Dr YL Nene, Chairman of AAHF welcomed the guests and introduced the trustees, advisors, editors, and donors who were present at the function. This was followed by the formal release of the Foundation's first publication a Bulletin titled "**Surapala's Vrikshayurveda**" (The Science of Plant Life by Surapala).

1. AAHF

(a) Foundation Office:

The activities of AAHF are being carried out from an annex to the residence of Dr Nene i.e., 47, ICIRSAT Colony-I, Brig. Sayeed Road, Secunderabad 500 009, Andhra Pradesh, India. This spacious room is properly equipped with all the modern office facilities. At present there are (Ms Sheila Vijayakumar, Ms Lalitha Annapoorna, Ms Salai Muthu, Mr Surya Prakash) as staff members. This office also accommodates the AAHF library.

(b) AAHF Trust:

The AAHF Trust was established and registered in 1994 vide Trust Deed no 1695 dated 30 December 1994 by Dr Nene and a group of agricultural scientists including S N Nigam, P M Tamboli, R L Paliwal, S P S Beniwal and Sheila Vijayakumar. The first formal meeting of the AAHF was held on 7 January 1995 at Dr Y L Nene's residence (47, ICRISAT Colony, Secunderabad). Periodic meetings are being held since then.

(c) Trustees:

Dr Nene was the first trustee of the AAHF. Now there are eleven trustees with Dr Nene as the Chairman of the Trust. The other trustees are B L Agarwal, K Anand Kumar, S P Beniwal, Gajendra Singh, S N Nigam, R L Paliwal, Purnima Raste, M C Saxena, M V K Sivakumar, and P M Tamboli. The trustees have set a target of 10 million for the corpus fund, so that the foundation has a sound financial base. The Chairman of the Trust Dr Nene has contributed an initial amount of Rs 15, 00,000/- on 30 December 1994 and each trustee an amount of Rs 1 lakh towards the corpus fund.

The AAHF also has "donors" and each donor has made liberal contributions. **Corporate donors:** Maharashtra Hybrid Seeds Company Limited (MAHYCO), S M Sehgal

Foundation (Gurgaon), Sipani Krishi Anusandhan Farm, Monsanto India Limited, Gokulkumari Ghanshyamdas Charitable Trust, Genset Engineers, and Unicon Distributors Pvt. Ltd. In addition 40 Individual donors have contributed Rs 30,000 to 50,000 each.

(d) Website:

We have hired Niha Communications, Hyderabad, to develop and maintain a website of the Foundation (www.agri-history.org). This website of the Foundation is being visited by a large number of Internet browsers from India and many other countries.

(e) Activities:

The major activities of the Foundation include (i) publishing an International quarterly journal called **Asian Agri-History**; (ii) publishing translations of old manuscripts/papers into English; (iii) encouraging and supporting research in universities and other institutions; (iv) promoting inclusion on Agri-History in the curriculum of agricultural universities; (v) organizing seminars, conferences, workshops, and lectures to promote exchange of information and collaboration among interested scholars and (vi) establishing a database library dealing with publications on the history of Asian Agriculture. So far, 9 workshops and seminars have been held at different places in India.

(f) Publication of a journal – Asian Agri-History (AAH)

Asian Agri-History (AAH), an International Journal of History of Asian Agriculture including environment, is being published in English by the AAHF to promote understanding of all historical aspects of the development of agriculture in South and Southeast Asia from the earliest known records until the modern (20th century) times. Contributions to the journal are research based, observational or theoretical and concern terrestrial or aquatic and managed or natural agro ecosystems. The journal also considers publication of contributions based on original research, both full-length papers, and short communications. Thus the journal includes the history of agricultural engineering, agroastronomy, agroclimatology, agroforestry, agrogeography, animal husbandry, crop diversification, crops (field, horticultural, etc.), cultivation practices, harvesting,

threshing, processing, intercropping, irrigation, plant protection, seed, sowing, soil sustainable agricultural system, useful plants, women, etc.

The journal is published regularly and on time every quarter. The four issues No. 1 (January–March), No. 2 (April–June), No. 3 (July–September), No. 4 (October–December) are normally dispatched in January, April, July, and October, respectively. The first issue of the journal appeared in March 1997. So far 12 volumes have been published.

2. Publishing Translation of old manuscript into English

Since the literature pertaining to agricultural heritage of India is available mostly in Sanskrit or Persian language. It was, therefore, considered essential to translate these as Agri-History Bulletins in English so that the present generation could have access to this rare literature that has not been available so far. In this direction Dr Nene first initiated activities by procuring a rare manuscript, Surapala's Vrikshayurveda from Bodleian Library at Oxford in UK in 1994. So far seven bulletins and one book have been translated into English.

Bulletins

- (a) Surapala's Vrikshayurveda (Sanskrit) (The Science of Plant Life) (also in Hindi, Marathi, Telugu, Kannada)
- (b) Krishi-Parashara (Sanskrit) (Agriculture by Parashara) (also in Hindi)
- (c) Nuskha Dar Fanni-Falahat (Persian) (The Art of Agriculture)
- (d) Kashyapiyakrishisukti (Sanskrit) (A Treatise on Agriculture by Kashyapa)
- (e) Vishvavallabha (Sanskrit) (Dear to the World: The Science of Plant Life) (also in Hindi)
- (f) Lokopakara (Old Kannada) (For the Benefit of People)
- (g) Krishi Gita (Malayalam) (Agricultural Verses)

Book

Mriga.pakshi.sashtra (Sanskrit) (The Science of Animals and Birds)

Resource Book

Glimpses of the Agricultural Heritage of India

3. Research Support:

To encourage experiment on Vedic concepts in agriculture and find out technologies for the benefit of the farmers and the society as a whole the AAHF has provided financial assistance and technical know-how to a number of scientists. However, still there is a tremendous scope for experimentation with details to be taken up by different crop improvement coordinated projects of the ICAR. This is one way of encouraging young scientist to take up lead in this direction. Financial assistance has been provided by the foundation to Mr Manoj K Tiwari, National Council of Development Communications, Varanasi for his Ph. D. thesis on cattle management practices in ancient India and its rationality in modern context a critical study. Because of the financial crunch, we have not been able to support research trials in universities.

4. Organizing Seminars, Conferences, Field day, Lectures to promote heritage of Indian Agriculture

The Foundation has been very active in spreading the message of agricultural heritage of India through organizing Seminars, Conferences, and delivering lectures since initiation of the activities of the Foundation. The proceedings of the above meetings have been published to serve as references. These conferences, etc are listed below:

- (a) Summer school on ancient and medieval history of Indian agriculture and its relevance to sustainable agriculture in the 21st century from 28 May to 17 June 1999 at Rajasthan College of Agriculture, Udaipur
- (b) Seminar on Vedic Agriculture on August 10 2001 at Agricultural Research Station, Durgapura, Jaipur
- (c) National Conference on Agricultural heritage of India from 10 to 13, February 2002 at the Rajasthan College of Agriculture, Maharana Pratap University of Agriculture and Technology (MPUT) Udaipur.
- (d) National Seminar on Cow in Agriculture and Human Health on December 16, 2003 at Agricultural Research Station, MPUAT, Ummadganj, Kota.
- (e) International Conference on Agricultural Heritage of Asia from 6-8 December 2004 at ANGR Agricultural University, Rajendranagar, Hyderabad.

- (f) National Conference on Bridging Gap between Ancient and Modern Technologies to Increase Agricultural Productivity from 16-18 December 2005 at Central Arid Zone Research Institute, Jodhpur, Rajasthan.
- (g) National Conference on Traditional Agricultural Practices with Potential for Growing Plantation Crops from 22-24 February 2007 at Assam Agricultural University, Jorhat, Assam.
- (h) National Conference on Increasing Production and Productivity of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants through Traditional Practices from 18-20 September 2008 at GB Pant University of Agriculture & Technology, Pantnagar, Uttarakhand.
- (i) National Seminar on Improving Productivity and Quality of Tea through Traditional Agricultural Practices from 15-16 November 2008 at University of North Bengal, Siliguri, Darjeeling, West Bengal.

5. Establishment of Chapters

The AAHF has a provision to establish regional chapters. These are established in those states of India and other countries, where a substantial number of scientists are interested in Agri-heritage studies. In December 2000, the first Chapter, the Rajasthan Chapter was established in Udaipur with extra-ordinary efforts on the part of Dr SL Choudhary. The Chapter has been very active in organizing national conferences and seminars. The second Chapter, the Uttarakhand Chapter was established in September 2008 at Pantnagar with active leadership of Dr Jatinder Kumar. Yet another Chapter, the West Bengal Chapter was inaugurated on 14 November 2008 at Siliguri under the Patronage of Sri Ashok Lohia and with active participation of Messers RS Tiwari, VS Parmar, and Rajesh Pareek.

6. Promoting inclusion of Agri-History in the curriculum of agricultural universities

Since the initiation of the activities of AAHF, attempts have been made by Dr Nene to promote inclusion of Agri-History in the curriculum of agricultural universities. During lectures delivered by Dr Nene, he even offered his services to teach for one semester (gratis). To further emphasize its implementation, Dr Nene presented his views on introducing this course during the agricultural universities vice-chancellors' conference

held on April 1, 2003 at New Delhi. Dr Mangala Rai, Director General, ICAR was the Chairman of the session and during this conference the inclusion of “Agricultural Heritage of India” was approved as a subject in the curriculum of agricultural universities (vide letter no F.No.20-1/2003/EPD dated 3 June 2003) with effect from 2004 for undergraduate students. An orientation workshop was held at the National Academy of Agricultural Research Management (NAARM) on December 1–2, 2003 for the prospective teachers of the course on agri-heritage. Twenty-eight teachers from 18 agricultural universities/institutions attended this workshop. This course was repeated for 20 additional teachers. The course introduction has been slow.

7. Award and Honors

The AAHF has so far awarded 3 AAHF Gold Medals for their outstanding contributions in building up the Foundation. The recipients have been Dr Nalini Sadhale, Dr SL Choudhary, and Mr SM Sinha. AAHF Trustees’ Gold Medal has been awarded to Ms Sheila Vijayakumar and Ms S Lalitha Annapurna.

Through the donation of Sipani Krishi Anusandhan Kendra, Mandsaur, MP, India the AAHF has been awarding each year since 2005 a best paper award (Asian Agri-History) form published papers. The recipients have been

2005----US Singh, Neelam Singh, HN Singh, OP Singh, and RK Singh

2006---- NC Shah

2007---- PR Kanani

2008---- Uma Ahuja, SC Ahuja, Rashmi Thakrar, and Shobha Rani

Another annual award, “Dr KL Mehra Memorial Award” has been instituted from 2009 in memory of the Late Dr KL Mehra, Founder-Advisor of AAHF. The Award became possible through a generous donation by Mrs Santosh Mehra, wife of Late Dr Mehra, and other family members.

Looking Ahead

The activities that we intend to undertake in future are:

- (i) To extend the “search for old texts” throughout the India and other countries, we look forward to establishing more Chapters on the lines of those established in Rajasthan and Uttarakhand.
- (ii) To collect funds to institute post-graduate scholarships throughout India.
- (iii) To continue efforts to include information on Indian agricultural heritage in all universities and other institutions.
- (iv) To explore ways and means to continue agri-history activities for years to come, thus making them sustainable.
