

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 primarily due 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 Foundations 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 have been carried out from since 1996 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. From January 2016, the head quarter has been shifted to Udaipur as 105, Vidhya Nagar, Hiran Magri Sector 4, Udaipur, 313002, Rajasthan, India.

(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 Dr Y L Nene's residence (47, ICRISAT Colony, Secunderabad). Periodic meetings are being held since then, either person or through emails.

(c) Trustees:

Dr Nene was the first trustee and Chairman of the AAHF. Now there are eleven trustees. The other trustees are B L Agarwal, K Anand Kumar, S P Beniwal, Gajendra Singh, S N Nigam, CLL Gowda, SL Choqdhary, 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), SipaniKrishiAnusandhan Farm, Monsanto India Limited, GokulkumariGhanshyamdas Charitable Trust, Genset Engineers, and Unicon Distributors Pvt. Ltd. In addition 44 Individual donors have contributed Rs 25,000 to 50,000 each.

(d) Website:

We have hired Rify Hosting, Hyderabad, to develop and maintain a website of the Foundation (www.asianagrihistory.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, 10 workshops and seminars have been held at different places in India.

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

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 the 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 20 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 eleven bulletins and one book have been translated into English.

Bulletins

- (1) Surapala's Vrikshayurveda (Sanskrit) (The Science of Plant Life) (also in Hindi, Marathi, Telugu, Kannada, and Tamil)
- (2) Krishi-Parashar (Sanskrit) (Agriculture by Parashar) (also in Hindi and Marathi)
- (3) Nuskha Dar Fanni-Falahat (Persian) (The Art of Agriculture)
- (4) Kashyapiyakrishisukti (Sanskrit) (A Treatise on Agriculture by Kashyapa)
- (5) Vishvavallabha (Sanskrit) (Dear to the World: The Science of Plant Life) (also in Hindi)
- (6) Lokopakara (For the Benefit of People) (also in Hindi)
- (7) Krishi Gita (Malayalam) (Agricultural Verses)
- (8) Krishishasanam (in Marathi) Management of Farm
- (9) Upavana.vinoda (Woodland Garden for Enjoyment)

(10) Indian Agricultural Heritage [c.400BC to 700 CE]

(11) Guide to Gardening (Mazwari)

Book

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

Resource Books

Glimpses of the Agricultural Heritage of India

Revitalizing Higher Agricultural Education in India

Textbook

A Textbook on Ancient History of Agriculture

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 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 MrManoj 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. Also a fellowship has been established for research in agri-history at the MS level at the GB Pant University of Agriculture & Technology, Pantnagar, Uttarakhand, India. Because of the financial crunch, we have not been able to yet support research trials in universities.

We have been offering advice to innumerable farmers through correspondence and visits. We have been responsible for turning few tea estates in Assam, West Bengal and Arunachal Pradesh into "organic" ones through adoption of Vrikshayurveda practices.

4. Organizing Seminars, Conferences, Field days, Lectures to promote heritage of a 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:

(1) 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 (2) Seminar on Vedic Agriculture on August 10 2001 at Agricultural Research Station, Durgapura, Jaipur (3) 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.

(4) National Seminar on Cow in Agriculture and Human Health on December 16, 2003 at Agricultural Research Station, MPUAT, Ummedganj, Kota.

(5) International Conference on Agricultural Heritage of Asia from 6-8 December 2004 at ANGR Agricultural University, Rajendranagar, Hyderabad.

(6) 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.

(7) National Conference on Traditional Agricultural Practices with Potential for Growing Plantation Crops from 22-24 February 2007 at Assam Agricultural University, Jorhat, Assam.

(8) 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.

(9) 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.

(10) National seminars Innovations on Traditional Agriculture was held on 15-16 November 2013 at GB Plant University of Agriculture & Technology, Pantnagar, Uttarakhand.

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 in universities has been slow but seems to be picking up.

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. A Trustees' Silver Medal was awarded to D Surya Prakash.

Through the donation of SipaniKrishiAnusandhan Kendra, Mandasaur, MP, India the AAHF has been awarding each year since 2005 a best paper award (Asian Agri-History) from 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

2009---- MC Varshneya, Nanaji Kale, VB Vaidya, PV Kane, and Vyas Pandey

2010---- Lalit Tiwari and PC Pandey

2011---- SC Ahuja, Siddharth Ahuja and Uma Ahuja

2012---- BD Sharma

2013---- Smita Mishra, Sanjanendra Swain, Sushant S Choudhary and AK Parida

2014---- Tara Negi and Dhriti Solanki

2015---- SC Ahuja, Siddharth Ahuja and Uma Ahuja

Another annual award, “Dr KL Mehra Memorial Award” was 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.

The recipients have been

2009---- AK Singh and KS Varaprasad

2010---- AK Singh

2011---- AK Singh

2012---- AK Singh

2013---- KG Sheshadri

2014---- SC Ahuja, Siddharth Ahuja and Uma Ahuja

2015---- Rohini Jadhav, M Datar, AS Upadhye, Anuradha Datta, Chandra Dev, BK Khanduri and Sanjay Sachin

Yet another annual award "The Falvey Award" was instituted from 2011. The Award became possible through a generous donation by Professor Lindsay Falvey and Ms Simone Falvey of Australia. The recipient for 2011 was

2011---- AB Damania

2012---- PK Pathak, AK Mohanty, H Rahman and Tasvina R Borah

2013---- Smita Mishra, SS Choudhary and VA Nambi

2014---- (Ms) Pakapun Skunmun

2015---- Richira Tiwari

Recognition

AAHF was honored through an annual national award, "ParamPoojaniya Shree GurujiPuraskar -2009. instituted by Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) JanakalyanSamiti, Maharashtra, India, at a function in Jalna on 22 February 2009, Maharashtra. The award was given to AAHF "for its devoted and excellent research work in the field of Indian Agriculture".

Impact

The historicity of Kalanamak, an aromatic rice variety, was quoted in Asian Agri-History journal Volume 9, No. 3 in 2005 in the article "Rediscovering scented rice cultivar Kalanamak" by **US Singh** and coauthors. This information was useful as Kalanamak was awarded the Geographical Indication (GI) tag in September 2013 for its geographical status in Uttar Pradesh. Kalanamak grain has black husk and a mild salty taste. Known for its aroma and distinct taste, it is considered as one of the finest rice varieties in the international market.

Krushak Ashram, a "cottage" for educated farmers, has been set up at Padali (Distt. Satara, Maharashtra) by **Srirang Supnekar**, a progressive farmer, with the aim of getting farmers and farm scientists acquainted with agri-heritage of India so that the wisdom of our farmer-ancestors is integrated with modern farming practices. Focus is on ever-sustainable agriculture.

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.
- (v) To establish a Vrikshayurveda Research Center for research on practices mentioned in Vrikshayurvedas.