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Bhavarlal H Jain: An Innovative Gandhian

Shri Bhavarlal H Jain, Founder Trustee of Gandhi Research Foundation, aged 79 passed away on 25 February, 2016 after a brief illness at a hospital in Mumbai.

'Bhau' as people fondly called him, was a multifaceted personality; a Gandhian thinker, Educationist, Writer, unique Agro innovator, Water Technocrat, Ecological Campaigner, Businessman, Institution Builder, Patriarch of a joint family, warm grandfather, enviable human and many more. Indian agriculture sector would ever remember him for his pioneering work on Micro-Irrigation.

As a young man, despite having a guaranteed government job at hand, he

chose to turn towards agriculture, with the purpose of finding meaning in his life and make a difference to the lives of millions of fellow farmers . Drawing inspiration from his mother, who advised him to do something, neither for money nor prestige, but to make a real difference in the lives of his fellow human and other lives, he entered into agricultural inputs and equipment trading.

Being born into a Jain family acquainted him to virtues of Ahimsa, Brahmacharya, Aparigraha and Anekanth. These virtues were further reinforced when he read Gandhiji's Sarvodaya and its precursor 'Unto This Last' by John Ruskin. They helped him understand



what the great souls meant by 'nonviolent living' or 'life based on Truth'; that is 'the life of tiller and craftsman are the life worth living'. By dedicating his life to agriculture based living, he became an ardent Sarvodaya practitioners in modern times.

His early orientation to morality and Gandhian philosophy helped Bhau lay ethical foundation for his enterprise. Undeterred by the ups and downs that shook his business to its core, he pursued the business with steadfast ethical conviction and inspired thousands of associates, and small farmholders around the world to tread the line. Believing that adversity is a great teacher, he weathered losses to learn, adapt and then grow with greater vigour. Uncompromising in his principles, he consciously refrained from any business that exploited scarce resources or the weakness of other human beings.

Perhaps that tells the secret of this son of the soil rising to head the world's second largest drip irrigation company. The magnitude of his success can be gauged better considering his humble origin in a farmer cum petty trader's home in a remote village of Vakod in north Maharashtra.

Appreciating the nation's abundant natural resources, biodiversity and human talent, Bhau had pioneered the concept of sustainable agriculture and agri-management systems, with the purpose of realizing his life's mission, 'To leave the world better than you found it.'

Gandhiji advocated to the nation appropriate technology as a precondition to development with justice. By promoting Micro Irrigation, Bhau not only laid the foundation for water conservation in the sub-continent, but offered a human face technology for that to ailing farmers, as well.

True to his commitment, he brought positive changes in human perspective about water. Today with 10 million farm families adopting micro irrigation, his initiative helped the nation save water to the tune of 3751.85 billion liters, and a crore families to achieve increased yielding out of their meagre landholding.

Today, Jain Irrigation System Limited (JISL), his establishment, is engaged in advanced agri research projects in collaboration with many international institutes, and brought in increased financial investment in the sector. JISL also catalyses partnership between farmers, private industries, government, universities and like-minded institutes, to make 'water conservation' a development culture.

Over the years, Bhau nursed a deep desire to create something substantial so that Gandhiji's life-work and his vision may be preserved for posterity, that transformed into a reality in the form of Gandhi Research Foundation. Located amidst well-manicured lawns and a pollution-free zone, the Foundation houses a museum on 'Khoj Gandhiji Ki'. Inside the museum, the saga of India's freedom struggle comes alive through photographs, memorabilia and state-of-the-art multimedia interactive displays, film and video clips, audio books, light and sound shows and depictions of significant incidents like the Swadeshi Movement.

Bhau established an academic wing in the Foundation called Gandhi International Research Institute, which in collaboration with global Universities such as Arisona State University, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Cetys University, Mexico, Gujarat Vidyapith, Ahmedabad, offers academic courses, Training and applied research on the principles and praxis of Mahatma Gandhi particularly on Nonviolence, Peace Building, Social Transformation and Conflict Management.

'Upliftment of All' with emphasis on 'upliftment of the least' is the purpose of nation society, as Gandhi proposed in his Sarvodaya Treatise. GRF has initiated a concerted gram swarajya programme in 29 neighbouring villages with the aim of realizing this purpose.

Any effort towards the formation of such a society must go hand in hand with a comprehensive research which in turn requires compendious research facility. Today, Gandhi's original documents are preserved in different places. Bhau planned for GRF to make available all essential resources in one place for serious research. GRF today is equipped with one of the finest Gandhian Archival collection.

In order to guide the Foundation in its chosen path, Bhau brought into it a team of notable leaders: Padma Bhushan Justice Chandrashekhar Dharmadhikari, as Chairman; Padmabhushan D R Mehta. I.A.S., as Trustee; Padmavibhushan Dr. Raghunath Mashelkar, Padmavibhushan Dr. Anil Kakodkar and Dr. Sudarshan Iyengar as Advisors; and Dr. T Karunakaran and Prof. M P Mathai as members of Academic Council.

In order for the children to grow with right orientation, Bhau wanted them to get acquainted with Gandhiji's life, work and thought. He initiated a programme called Gandhi Vichar Sanskar Pariksha, with this purpose, nine years ago. Thanks to GVSP, over two hundred thousand students get to read Gandhiji's literature every year, around the country.

The residential school, Anubhuti that he established in Jalgaon, follows modern teaching methods, curriculum and offers an international quality of education, while retaining Indian customs & values as seen in our Gurukuls.

He firmly believed that economic backwardness should not prevent deserving children from getting good education. This prompted him to adopt a defunct panchayat shala and raise it into a school for children whose parents live below poverty line. With free education, books, wholesome meals and every other academic necessity, this school stands as the best among the public schools in the region, nurturing disadvantaged children into bright blooming young citizens of tomorrow.

His zeal for Antyodaya and belief in appropriate technology led Bhau to design an international programme called EmPeaceLABS, connecting three core components of human life: Youth, Agriculture and Peace. As farmers who are otherwise wonderful producers, get a beating in the market, this programme trains local youths in agri marketing leadership so that they create system and structure in their locality for farmers

to get access to market, and enjoy equitable share of economy. It draws about 100 youth from around the globe, annually for a weeklong training, and a year long follow up.

With a view to train similarly, farmers from all over India and abroad on the latest farming methods, Bhau set up a huge Agri-Institute at Jain Hills with a faculty of agronomists and scholarly tutors. Around twenty four thousand farmers are given exposure to the technology free of cost annually, while five hundred of them are given intensive training.

His work and concern for the environment had its roots in the tenets of Jainism which teaches one to protect nature and live in tune with it. The once barren bald Jain hill turned into fertile emerald green forest, is but a small witness to his this concern, as well as to his unflagging energy and readiness for risky innovations which ever amazes his younger colleagues and contemporaries.

Bhau's sterling work on rain water harvesting, watershed management and conservation in the arid region of Khandesh is a landmark in the annals of Indian agriculture. Universities that bestowed on him four honorary doctorates and the international Institutes that honoured him with numerous national and international awards, endorse this fact. The prestigious Crawford Reid Award, which has been given to only two Asians till date, recognizes his work on advanced irrigation techniques. The nation acknowledged him for the same, by conferring on him the Padmashree Award, in 2008.

His tremendous reserves of strength never failed to surprise people. Seven heart attacks, two bye-pass surgeries, an angioplasty and cerebral stroke did not daunt him from a sixteen hour busy day including eight hours of administrative work.

Living a simple life on a personal front, he promoted values cherished and practiced by Mahatma Gandhi. He also penned down his own reflections on these values in numerous books, which reveal a colourful part of his multifaceted personality. Bhau was a firm believer in Gandhi's notion of trusteeship, by which wealth at the disposal of an individual should be used for the benefit of the community at large. He was certainly one of the few industrialist-philanthropists who took Gandhiji's principle of trusteeship in letter and spirit, in modern times.

Acknowledging the need for preparing future generations to respect and carry his legacy forward, Bhau wrote a profound letter to his eldest grandson Athang, expressing his deepest empathy for India's farmers and his simple business mantra. He had told his grandson to approach the company with love and realise that mutual interdependence is far more valuable than independence. He had gone on to explain that true wealth and success must be achieved by hard work, integrity, compassion and commitment to preserve and protect the environment, and that respect based on education and position needs to be earned and deserved rather than taken for granted. An inspiring note for all young entrepreneurs indeed!

Bhau's legacy is sure to live on and he will always be known as the Enlightened

Entrepreneur who heralded the true second green revolution in India!