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WELCOME ADDRESS

By

SHRI MANILAL B. NANAVATI

President

Indian Society of Agricultural Economics

On behalf of the Indian Society of Agricultural Economics, I extend you a very hearty welcome to this Conference. Since 1947, some of us have been attending your Sessions and we have been very much impressed by the variety and comprehensiveness of the subjects selected and the high level of discussion that took place at the Conferences. For a long time, we have been wanting to invite you to India.

In 1952, your President, Mr. Elmhirst, was in India and we discussed various methods by which the study of Agricultural Economics could be promoted. We then approached Shri Chintaman Deshmukh, the then Finance Minister, and suggested to him among other subjects that the International Conference of Agricultural Economists should be invited to hold their Sessions in India and that the Government of India should extend financial support for the purpose. This was agreed to and my friend, Dr. Sen, the Economic and Statistical Adviser to the Ministry of Food and Agriculture, who has been attending some of your Sessions, took up the matter with his Ministry. It was arranged that a joint invitation should be issued to you. This was extended in Michigan, U.S.A., in 1952, but we were too late. However, in 1955 at Helsinki the invitation was renewed and accepted with the result that you are here amongst us.

So far, your meetings were held in America and Europe and naturally, the subjects discussed mostly referred to problems of economically well developed countries. But we wanted that the leading Agricultural Economists of the world in an International Conference should pay, if not more, at least equal attention to agrarian problems of undeveloped countries which are now struggling hard to raise the living standards of their people. They should get advice and help from you in their efforts.

I want to bring to your notice the enthusiastic help your President has been giving to us in the promotion of studies in Agricultural Economics. It may not be known to many of you that your President was responsible for the starting of the Indian Society of Agricultural Economics. He happened to be in India in 1939 and called a meeting at Delhi of some of the Government officials and a few economists. The foundation of the Indian Society of Agricultural Economics was then laid. For the first three years it held Annual Conferences at different centres where papers were read and then published in an Annual Number. In 1941, it was decided that the activities of the Society should be expanded into a full-time Research Institute in Agricultural Economics. You will see the progress it has made from the "*Retrospect*" published by the Society, copies of which are available to you.

However, one of the most important contributions that your President has made to India is helping Maharshi Ravindranath Tagore in establishing Shriniketan, a Rural Institution, as an adjunct to the Shantiniketan—now converted into Visva-Bharati University. It was his magnificent financial assistance that gave it a start and maintained it for a number of years.

Our Society was anxious that the study of Agricultural Economics should be pursued more energetically as the country has to face the most intractable problem of population and poverty and it had to make serious efforts to solve them. As a Society, we were anxious to see that more centres for research were created. With that objective, we invited the late Prof. Ashby of the Oxford University to attend our Annual Conference at Madras and then make a tour of some of the Universities and other research centres. The report submitted by him, examined the position in regard to the teaching and research in Agricultural Economics in the country. His finding may be summarised as under :

“Having regard to (a) the area of agricultural land, (b) the size of the agricultural population, (c) the importance of agriculture in the national economy—its actual and potential contributions to national wealth—I am appalled at the small provisions made for investigation and research in Agricultural Economics.” He added, “even recognising that India is a relatively poor country, it is still true that in comparison with other applied sciences of agriculture, Agricultural Economics has been starved.”

Naturally, we were not satisfied with the situation revealed by these findings. With the help of your President we suggested to the Finance Minister, who was a member of the Planning Commission also, if he would accept our suggestion to invite a leading agricultural economist from America where the study of this subject is very highly developed, to come to India and advise us. This question was taken up by Dr. Sen with his Ministry and Prof. Schultz was first selected but he was preoccupied with some other work and could not come. However, the invitation was extended to Prof. J. D. Black who visited India in 1954 with Dr. H. L. Stewart from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. They remained with us for nearly three months, toured all over the country and submitted a report suggesting that the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, a premier governmental Institute dealing with technical problems of agriculture, should have a section dealing with economics of agriculture. The section was soon opened and is now functioning. They also recommended a number of topics on which research might be undertaken.

After the attainment of Independence by India in 1947, and the formulation of a Constitution in 1950, the Government of India have been trying their best to develop the economy of the country. With that objective they established a national Planning Commission. The Commission established in 1954, as an aid to its efforts, a Research Programmes Committee composed of leading Economists and Sociologists of the country with the primary object of stimulating research in Universities and other Institutions and train research workers in modern techniques of study and evaluate the problems that the Planning Commission were dealing with. It is doing excellent work in guiding research in a very efficient way. During your stay here you will have the opportunity to see the nature of the subjects dealt with and their published results.

Just about that time the Reserve Bank of India expanded its Agricultural Credit Department. It is constantly engaged in the study of the structure, organisation and working of the rural credit agencies in India and in other countries. In 1954, the Reserve Bank published a comprehensive report in three volumes on the results of the survey of Rural Credit in India under the guidance of an expert Committee of Direction. The report, apart from its recommendations, contains most valuable data on almost all aspects of the rural economy of India. You will get copies of the report which you may peruse at your leisure.

It also established a special Division of Rural Economics in 1945, in the Department of Research and Statistics.

The Directorate of Economics and Statistics of the Ministry of Food and Agriculture, under the able guidance of my friend, Dr. Sen, is materially contributing to the study of rural problems by continuously assessing the results of legislative measures introduced in the country on various aspects of agrarian policies and by publishing a periodical giving complete agricultural statistics. It has made liberal provision for the setting up of Agro-Economic Research Units at four University centres. We in this Society are getting benefits of this policy.

In order to illustrate the nature of the problems we have to face and the studies made thereon, we have specially prepared on this occasion a Souvenir Volume containing research studies on some of the important aspects of the Indian national economy. The papers are contributed by some of our Research Institutions in the country.

In order that your presence here may be beneficial to the country and that you may also get some idea of our agricultural problems, with the permission of your President we have invited to this Conference as delegates nearly sixty of our leading Economists representing our Universities and other Institutions and where possible to participate in the discussions. We are sure that this contact will be for our mutual benefit and end in the fuller understanding of the magnitude of the task that faces India in the development of her economy.

I know what admirable work your President has been doing in the promotion and the development of your Institution. He is indefatigable in his efforts running from one continent to another, creating interest in Governments and Universities in this subject of fundamental interest to humanity. During the last few years he had seen the need for extending your sphere of operation to under-developed countries. Recently, he has secured from Ford Foundation \$40,000 to enable the participation of delegates for this Conference from Europe and Asia. We do hope in course of time more and more men from these countries, as is now seen, would join your organisation and ultimately make it a real International Organisation.

We also hope to benefit from your wider experiences. With this objective we have arranged for your visit to some of the rural areas in the country and institutions like the Community Projects and National Extension Service Blocks, agricultural research station and hydro-electric projects. At the same time, we shall supply you with some literature on the subject and try to show how the National Plans are operating.

It was the wish of your President that we meet in typical Indian surroundings rather than in a big metropolitan city like Delhi. With full-hearted co-operation from the Mysore State, we have done our best to provide the best of comforts available and we do hope that your stay amongst us would be pleasant as well as instructive.

Again, on behalf of my colleagues and myself, I extend you a very hearty welcome.