



AgEcon SEARCH
RESEARCH IN AGRICULTURAL & APPLIED ECONOMICS

The World's Largest Open Access Agricultural & Applied Economics Digital Library

This document is discoverable and free to researchers across the globe due to the work of AgEcon Search.

Help ensure our sustainability.

Give to AgEcon Search

AgEcon Search

<http://ageconsearch.umn.edu>

aesearch@umn.edu

*Papers downloaded from **AgEcon Search** may be used for non-commercial purposes and personal study only. No other use, including posting to another Internet site, is permitted without permission from the copyright owner (not AgEcon Search), or as allowed under the provisions of Fair Use, U.S. Copyright Act, Title 17 U.S.C.*

Vol XLVI
No. 3

ISSN 0019-5014

JULY-
SEPTEMBER
1991

INDIAN JOURNAL OF AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS



INDIAN SOCIETY OF
AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS,
BOMBAY

Obituary

Professor V.K.R.V. Rao (1908-1991)

With the sad demise of Professor V.K.R.V. Rao on July 25, 1991, the academic community has lost one of our greatest Social Scientists. Professor Rao has left an indelible impact on the academic world which will endure even after much of social science literature of his time becomes obsolescent. He will be remembered not only for the path-breaking influence he exerted through his writings, but also for the institutions he built to develop social science expertise and research in India.

As an economist, his contributions to the understanding of problems of developing countries, India in particular, have won world-wide acclaim. His pioneering work at Cambridge in the nineteen-thirties on the national income of India laid out a new path for subsequent work in the field. In the words of Professor Austin Robinson, he "single handedly tackled the almost impossible task of estimating the Indian National Income at a time when hardly an ingredient was known". When he reverted to the theme much later in the early nineteen-eighties, he provided once again many new valuable insights. Though influenced by Lord Keynes in many ways, he also wrote critically on the limitations of any mechanical application of Keynesian economics and its prescriptions to a developing country like India. According to Professor Singer, "Rao's paper on Full Employment and Economic Development was particularly seminal in the development of ILO World Employment Programme". He was also one of the earliest to give attention to the human factor in economic growth, and continued to write on this theme almost till the end. The thrust of the Tumkur project which he undertook at the Institute for Social and Economic Change, Bangalore, in the seventies, was precisely on this subject. He saw in the 'Cluster approach' to rural development a viable and effective means of developing the human factor, promoting social and economic interaction within rural areas, which to him were more important than mere economic growth.

Even more important was his contribution in developing indigenous economic expertise and infrastructure for collecting and processing economic data so that rational economic policy formulation becomes possible. Professor Shigeto Tsuru of Japan writes in this connection that Professor Rao "not only came to realise quite early in his professional career that mainstream economics as developed in Cambridge, England, was not adequate for the developing world, but he also put his herculean energy into founding and actually building up three major institutions in his country. In these institutions, he created an atmosphere of free inquiry which was oriented, however, toward 'patriotic' reflection in the best sense of that term". Two of the major institutions founded by him were in Delhi, the Delhi School of Economics (1948), and the Institute of Economic Growth (1957). The third, the Institute for Social and Economic Change (ISEC), was founded at Bangalore in 1972. He was also instrumental in starting the Agro-Economic Research Centres to study the problems of almost all parts of the country and promoted the collection of statistics on scientific lines by Government agencies. Again, to promote co-ordinated research effort in Social Sciences, he, as the Chairman of a Committee set up by the Planning Commission in 1965, proposed the establishment of the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), and had this proposal implemented in 1969 as the Education Minister in the Union Cabinet.

After obtaining the Tripos, at Cambridge and winning the coveted Adam Smith Prize in Economics and also his Ph.D., it was easy for Professor Rao to settle abroad in a prestigious University or in an International Organisation. He had in fact several tempting offers (from FAO in 1946, IMF in 1948, ECAFE in 1950), but he opted to remain in India where his potential was recognised early. He became a University Professor at Delhi in 1942 at the young age of 34, and became its Vice Chancellor in 1957.

Professor Rao also plunged into public life before long. Even when he was in the Academics, he used to be consulted by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, and served on several Committees. It was a distinguished group of which Professor Rao was a member, set up by the Government of India in July 1962, which for the first time went into the question of fixing a 'poverty line'; this was fixed at a per capita monthly expenditure of Rs. 20 at 1960-61 prices.

He was the first economist member of the Planning Commission in May 1963, and a Member of Parliament and Union Cabinet Minister in 1967 under the Prime Ministership of Mrs. Indira Gandhi. He first held the portfolios of Transport and Shipping (1967-69) and then of Education and Youth Services (1969-1971). He came back to academic field with the founding of ISEC at Bangalore, of which he was the Founder Director and Chairman. Though he relinquished its Directorship in 1977 and Chairmanship in 1980, he continued both his association with this Institute and his academic activities almost till the end. He was awarded the distinction of Padma Vibhushan in 1974 and National Professorship in 1984.

Though based in India, his influence was not be confined to India. Professor Rao was the Chairman of the U.N. Sub-Commission for Economic Development (1947-50) whose reports influenced international economic policy in regard to technical assistance and institutional aid on liberal terms. He is also acknowledged as the person whose ideas gave birth to SUNFED (Special U.N. Fund for Economic Development). As Chairman of the U.N. Expert Committee on Indicators and Levels of Living, 1953, he made pioneering attempts in making possible international comparisons of levels of living. He was a member of FAO Committee along with Dr. H.W. Singer, which was instrumental in FAO starting the programme of Food for Aid.

A great quality of Professor Rao was that he sought out young talent and encouraged it even if it meant going out of the bureaucratic ways and rules. Few, other than Professor Rao, can claim the distinction of having spotted and brought up, by giving early recognition, several eminent economists like Professors K.N. Raj, Amartya Sen, and Sukhamoy Chakravarty. Whosoever had the privilege of working with him, could not help being smitten by his broad vision as well as his boundless enthusiasm for work. But he also often chided them for being too narrowly focused on individual research work, and called upon them to actively involve themselves in understanding the problems of institutions and persons working there and carry on the task of building up expertise among the young, even if it meant sacrificing personal research work, to some extent. He preached what he actually practised.

He was one of the oldest members of the Indian Society of Agricultural Economics and was closely associated with its activities in one capacity or other. He was the President of the Annual Conference of the Society in December 1961 at Pilani, and delivered his Presidential Address on "Agricultural Production and Productivity during the Plan Periods: A Review of the Past and Some Reflections on the Future". At the Golden Jubilee Conference of the Society held in December 1989, he delivered the Inaugural Address, even at an advanced age of 81, on the theme: "Some Reflections on the Problems facing Indian Agriculture". Agricultural Economics as a profession in India owes a good deal to his vision and energy displayed in the early steps he took to improve the data base required for research as well as policy making, extending back to 1944, and the institutions he set up. He was more than a Social Scientist. Like the other patriotic intellectuals who were the product of the freedom movement, he was one of the great builders of post-Independent India.