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**Professor M.L. Dantwala**  
**(1909-1998)**

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## **Professor M.L. Dantwala:**

### **A Tribute**

**A. Vaidyanathan\***

For all of us in the Indian Society of Agricultural Economics, Professor Dantwala's passing away is a grievous and irreparable loss. We will remember with affection and gratitude his invaluable contribution in a variety of capacities to nurturing the Society and the Journal, establishing healthy norms and conventions for their functioning, the tactful, humane and yet principled manner in which he managed the Society, and the sage counsel which he gave even in his retirement. We will miss his gracious and lively presence.

His passing away is no less a loss to the wider community of economists and the country. His many accomplishments and contributions are detailed in the accompanying Obituary. As a professional economist, he wrote extensively on all aspects of agricultural and rural development. He was incisive, prescient and critical without being dogmatic. Among the first to criticise the notion that inadequate price incentives is the main reason for slow agricultural growth, he emphasised the critical importance of technological improvement and institutional change for sustained growth. He was for government intervention in food markets in order to protect the poor against the ravages of inflation. Even as he supported green revolution technology (despite risks of increasing inequality), he strongly endorsed the concept of targetted poverty alleviation programmes. At the same time he constantly reiterated the need to make sure that these programmes augmented the productive, asset base of the poor and made it more productive; the necessity to improve the quality of programmes and their implementation, and the role of integrated local level planning. A consistent supporter of land reform, he was an early advocate of loans to finance the landless and land-poor to acquire land. Later in his life, faced with the consequences of rising demographic pressure on limited land, he saw that land redistribution would not by itself be adequate; and that raising productivity and diversifying employment are essential to eradicate poverty. Much of what he had to say on these subjects remains pertinent and valid even now.

Prof. Dantwala was among the major public figures of his times: Active involvement in the freedom struggle, which led to imprisonment several times during his youth, brought him in close contact with some of the tallest personages of the period. The interest in wider political issues kindled at that time continued throughout his life. A deep concern about social and economic inequality attracted him to socialism. It led him to take active part in the founding of the Congress Socialist Party. He sought to reconcile socialist ideals with Gandhian ideas through the concept of Trusteeship which meant that property owners must hold and use their wealth not for their personal benefit but for the common good of the entire society.

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Over the years, while supporting the need for state intervention for the poor, he became increasingly skeptical of the government as the instrument for engineering social transformation. The Emergency was a serious blow to his faith in government. Deeply upset at this attack on democracy, he resigned from a number of official positions he held at that time. He came to the conclusion that voluntary community action and stronger and more active organs of civil society are critical to check the state's abuses and to transform society. His last book, significantly, was on voluntary action. Prof. Dantwala was throughout an active participant in debates on public policy. He also sought to influence actual policy through participation in numerous official and non-official committees. Several academic institutions and NGOs have benefited from his presence on their Boards and the interest he took in their affairs.

Prof. Dantwala's rich and varied contributions to the country's public life will be remembered with respect and set an example worthy of emulation by succeeding generations.