

“I am delighted to inaugurate this event of Ranga Trust being held to commemorate the 120th birth anniversary of Acharya N G Ranga, who was a great freedom fighter, farmers’ leader, social reformer and an outstanding parliamentarian.

Friends, Gogineni Ranga Nayakulu garu, or more popularly known as N G Ranga, came from a peasant’s family. After receiving his B. Litt in Economics from the Oxford University, he returned to India.

Inspired by Mahatma Gandhiji’s call in 1930, he joined the freedom movement. Championing the cause of farmers, he had led farmers agitation in Andhra in 1933. He fought for the peasants, their self-respect and economic freedom. A true son of the soil, he is considered the father of the Indian Kisan Movement along with ‘Swami Sahajanand Saraswati’.

Plunging actively into the freedom struggle, he took part in the Civil Disobedience Movement, Individual Satyagraha (1940) and Quit India Movement (1942), and brought many peasants into the fold of the national liberation movement. Starting from pre-Independence time, he contributed to Indian polity as an astute parliamentarian for six decades- 60 years! This was a Guinness World Record!

Acharya Ranga was an outstanding parliamentarian. He was the farmers’ voice in parliament. He was the epitome of dignity and always followed value- based politics. He was known for his simplicity in personal and public life. He had trained many political workers across the country and more so in Telugu states.

Brothers and sisters,

Agriculture is very close to my heart and I have always striven to further the cause of my brothers and sisters in rural India. As we all know, India has been an agrarian economy since ancient times. Agriculture is the bedrock of our civilization and economy. Endowed with great natural resources of soil and the monsoon rains, agriculture had always played an important role in the growth of our economy. Even though it does not dominate the GDP numbers in the recent years, it will not be an exaggeration to say that we depend on it, directly or indirectly.

The adage ‘Annadatha Sukhibhava’ aptly reflects the respect accorded to the a farmer by our culture. Over the years, in spite of the implementation of several policies and schemes to improve the lot of the farming community, the results have not been satisfactory and the farmer continues to face challenges on many fronts— from not getting remunerative price for his produce to effectively tackling the hazards of natural calamities.

For the past few decades, we have been witness to an increasing number of extreme weather events like cyclonic storms, floods and droughts. The farmer becomes the worst-hit in every adverse event. In addition, the farmer has been perennially facing a variety of problems like shortage of water, farm labor, lack of timely and quality inputs, lack of mechanization, cold storage facilities and access to timely credit as also the absence of effective marketing system are some of the reasons for agriculture not fully reaching its full potential.

Thus, there is a need for a multi-pronged effort for making Indian agriculture, sustainable and profitable. By according the highest priority to the well-being of the farmers, the government of India has initiated a series of measures, including the recent revolutionary legislations giving the farmer the freedom to sell his produce at the place of his choice and removing inter-state trade barriers, among others.

In another 30 years, we will have another additional 30 crore mouths to feed in the country. There is not much scope to increase the area under cultivation. This only leaves us with the option of producing more with less land and other inputs. That’s only possible with a change in our practices and our approach: by making agriculture resilient, sustainable and profitable.

In these times of uncertainty, we have to bring in an effective synergy between our traditional knowledge and state-of-art technology. Our forefathers have mastered the art of agriculture-- they had bred resilient seed varieties, they used eco-friendly manure and raised hardy leguminous crops that strengthened soil quality. They also engaged in allied activities that supplemented their income. The innovations we made in agriculture over the millennia are numerous.

In the far North-East Arunachal, paddy-cum-fish cultivation practiced by Apatanis, an agricultural community, has become world-renowned for its advanced, sustainable methods of cultivation. For hundreds of years now, they have mastered this unique practice of integrating fish culture with rice farming in the same plot of land. We need to popularize such local innovations for replication elsewhere.

Other traditional practices like zero-budget natural farming and the use of organic fertilizers have gained traction in recent years in order to restore soil health and meet the increased demand for organic products.

These sustainable practices have also been found to give better productivity with minimal investment.

On the other hand, technological advancements in the agri-field have to be leveraged too.

According to a 2019 NASSCOM report, India has more than 450 agri-tech start-ups growing at a rate of 25% annually.

This new wave of technology in agriculture is more than just the shift to mechanization like the use of tractors. While basic mechanization should further expand to all corners of the country, we should not lose sight of the cutting-edge technologies that are changing the way agriculture is practiced the world over.

We should develop and use more climate-resilient seed varieties.

We should also adopt precision-agriculture practices, which have become the order of the day now with the use of drip irrigation, drones and sensors that cater to the needs of each individual plant.

Even artificial intelligence is used in agriculture now! It was reported that a farmer in Japan used AI to sort and grade his produce of cucumbers on the basis of their size, color and texture, thereby saving hundreds of laborious man-hours. We should not lag behind in experimenting with such technologies here.

The current situation arising out of the coronavirus pandemic has added another challenge to agriculture. However, many companies have utilized this situation to create new and more efficient supply chains, dismantling the old ones.

COVID-19 has also taught us important lessons about the changes we need to make to our eating habits. Consumers are expecting higher levels of nutrition in their food. This presents an excellent opportunity for budding entrepreneurs in agriculture while giving a profitable and steady income to the growers.

Dear sisters and brothers,

We need to ensure that Farmers get their fruits of his hard work and their endeavours are profitable. This should be the main operating principle in agriculture, going forward.

Better price discovery mechanisms like the e-NAM portal of the government are laudable initiatives and we should give freedom to farmers to make decisions on when, where and whom to sell.

Farmers should be encouraged to take up allied activities like horticulture, sericulture, aquaculture, dairy, poultry, and food processing to diversify their sources of income. Similarly, there is a need to create awareness among the farmers for diversification. Apart from the cultivation of pulses and cereals, farmers should also be encouraged to grow commercial crops.

The private sector in food processing should be encouraged for building post-harvest facilities like warehouses and cold storages that will help farmers to retain value for their produce and also generate employment.

Government insurance schemes like the Fasal Bima Yojana are steps in the right direction and should be universalized.

All these measures, along with the technological interventions and sustainable practices will bring a shift from just having food security to ensuring income security for the farmers. Farmer welfare was the core aspiration of Acharya Ranga garu and ensuring income security to farmers is the way to achieve this dream.

Dear sisters and brothers,

It is heartening to see that agri-sciences and agricultural universities have made a resurgence of sorts in recent years. They have to attract more talent and come out with innovative research to make Indian agriculture more robust, sustainable and profitable. Research should focus on benefiting the farmers and Lab-to-Land should be the mantra of the agricultural universities.

I would also like our schools to include a component in the curriculum where students will grow vegetables or fruits in their yards. Farm visits can be arranged too. This will not only re-connect students to nature but will also help them appreciate the back-breaking efforts of the agri-community in bringing food to their table.

I must appreciate Ranga Trust for organizing this programme and continuing Acharya Ranga's mission by updating them on the latest technological advancements in agriculture. I also commend the various social welfare activities undertaken by them, especially during the COVID pandemic.

Dear sisters and brothers,

Finally, I would like to reiterate this. We cannot afford to remain stagnant in our approach to agriculture. In times of climate change and other uncertainties, we should keep these three mantras in mind:

Innovation-- We need to leverage technological innovations while continuing with traditional practices.

Generation- We need to encourage the next generation to take up this challenge--- Be it in the universities or through agri-based start-ups. After all, it is their future and they are the biggest stakeholders.

Motivation-- We need to extend all the support to our farmers-- Be it in better access to finance, policy support, CSR activities, or just the appreciation for the immense sacrifices and risks they take. We need to show that we are always with them.

Once again, I express my happiness to be here at this event with all of you. My best wishes to the participants-- farmers, students and government functionaries for their endeavours to build Atma-Nirbhar Bharat of our dreams.

Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan!

Jai Hind!"

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