

WELCOME ADDRESS
BY
DR.G.MUNIRATNAM, GENERAL SECRETARY, RASS
ON THE OCCASION OF 3 DECADES CELEBRATIONS &
WOMEN EMPOWERMENT SEMINAR ON 6TH JULY, 2011

Her Excellency, President of India Smt. Pratibha Devisingh Patil ji, His Excellency Governor of Andhra Pradesh Sri Narasimhan garu, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh Sri Kiran Kumar Reddy garu, Hon'ble Minister Smt. Geetha Reddy garu, Sri Raghuvveera Reddy garu, Member of Parliament Dr. Chinta Mohan garu, Member of Legislative Assembly and Dr.K.Chiranjeevi garu and other dignitaries on the dais and off the dais and brothers and sisters.

RASS extends warm and cordial welcome to you all. I am personally much beholden and obliged to every one of you on this momentous occasion for having accepted to participate and witness another milestone in the long, eventful and successful journey of RASS towards the goal of realizing self-reliant communities and self-sustaining programmes of social and economic development. Her Excellency and other dignitaries participation in today's event will certainly inspire the entire voluntary sector not only in Andhra Pradesh, but the entire country to rededicate ourselves to the cause of social service.

Rashtriya Seva Samithi was conceived in 1981. It symbolizes a strong and resonant Gandhian method of addressing problems of rural and semi-urban poor. RASS belongs to this Gandhian School and spared no efforts in trying to translate this into some perceptible reality. This vision of RASS was

realized under the guidance of stalwart Gandhian leaders like – Acharya Vinoba Bhave, Prof. N.G. Ranga, Ms. Nirmala Deshpande and Sri. P. Rajagopal Naidu.

At the beginning, RASS had three programmes which were carried out by a small band of 15 workers, in 8 villages. Today, RASS has its presence in four states of India – Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Odisha and Delhi with 39 ongoing programmes serving around 30 lakh children, women, youth, the aged, farmers, artisans, disabled and tribal population. It remains secular in nature despite its large scale of operations and coverage. The focus of the organization has been on – women and children in difficult circumstances and engaging them in development work; working for gender equality through participation in development. Over the last thirty years, RASS facilitated the process of asset creation, community owned, community – operated and community – managed people’s institutions.

Her Excellency, may I recall, with your kind permission, your continuous interactions with women activists of various groups in the Rashtrapathi Bhavan in recent past that had a geometric effect on the democratic functioning of our nation. Under your stewardship, the Government of India had sanctioned Rs.500 crore to Rashtriya Mahila Kosh to enable the body to provide micro credit to women in the uncovered areas of the country. On the same lines, the Government of Andhra Pradesh is providing credit at a nominal interest rate of 4 % to poor women. We are congratulating the dynamic Chief Minister Sri N. Kiran Kumar Reddy garu for adopting the measures to empower the women such as allowance for the women victims of trafficking, 50 % reservation for women in the local bodies under the guidance of His Excellency Sri E.S.L. Narasimhan ji.

RASS today takes pride in the promotion of women empowerment programmes in the state that had left a contemporary legacy for other organizations to follow. RASS Mahila Pragathi has been a flagship programme in this direction. RASS has been able to finance women through Self Help Groups since 1989, when the bankers were not in favour of the idea. Through the support of Rashtriya Mahila Kosh, SIDBI and Ford Foundation, RASS was able to mobilize sources for lending to SHGs for women empowerment through 4578 SHGs in Andhra Pradesh and Tamilnadu under the banner of RASS Mahila Pragathi.

The organization is facilitating the state mechanism by preparing teaching and learning material under Sakshar Bharat for minimum education, especially functional literacy for women adults in 10 districts through State Resource Centre for Adult and Continuing Education with the support of Ministry of HRD, GOI. Besides, RASS is extending functional literacy and skill building programmes through Jan Shiksha Sansthan since 2004 in Chittoor District support by Ministry of Human Resources Development, GOI.

With support of Government of Andhra Pradesh, RASS – ICDS Tirupati Urban Project is covering women and children through 121 anganwadies by adding additional interventions to make it as a holistic one for the past 27 years.

To transfer the latest technology to the farming community in Chittoor District RASS through Acharya Ranga Krishi Vigyan Kendra for the past 2 decades.

Most of the families have crossed poverty line and able to achieve better living standards. Some of the members of RASS SHGs are politically aware and contested in local body elections. Many of them today are members of Panchayat Raj Institutions.

In recognition of RASS multifarious activities, four National Awards on RASS as well as on its Chief Functionary have been conferred, besides prestigious Jamnalal Bajaj award for transferring technology to the rural areas, Rotary India Award for creating employment opportunities in rural areas as well as Rajiv Gandhi Manav Seva Award were conferred in addition with regional and local recognitions.

RASS feels that no NGO can afford to be oblivious to the fact that it alone cannot deal with the larger macro socio-economic policies or micro-structural issues as a whole. It is only through legislation and democratic action that the fundamental structural issues can be resolved. In the process NGOs can play a pivotal role in facilitating reforms through social action and development models at micro-level, which can be replicated elsewhere. It is towards this lofty goal that RASS rededicates itself today.

JAI HIND

Tirupati
July 06, 2011

G. MUNIRATNAM
General Secretary