

Mr. BonBehari Vishnu Nimbkar
Recipient of the Award for the
Application of Science and Technology for Rural Development – 2016

Born: July 17, 1931

BonBehari Vishnu Nimbkar has been a silent-beginner and self-motivator. He set up the Nimbkar Agricultural Research Institute (NARI) in 1968, with an objective to use the best tools of science and technology for solving rural problems and contributing to a constructive policy development.

Nimbkar, is known for his pioneering work in the field of agriculture and animal husbandry for over five decades; and has been instrumental in increasing crop and animal productivity and taking their benefits directly to farmers and animal rearers.

Background: Nimbkar studied in Rajkot before going to his maternal grandfather's home in USA, in 1945. His grandfather was a Quaker and Nimbkar got all his ideas of living a simple life dedicated to the people of India, from him. It was also his father's wish, that he return to India and carry out farming. Therefore, on finishing high school, he went to the College of Agriculture at the Rutgers University.

Bonbehari Nimbkar, was brought up with a feeling of nationalism. This was further strengthened by his fortunate marriage to Jai Karve, a highly educated girl, who wanted to stay in a village after marriage. She came from the philanthropic family of Karves.

Agriculture and Crop Improvement: Nimbkar tried planting new types of cotton in spite of Government ban on this activity, as it went against the Permit Raj, which was in force at the time. A team of crop breeders and an agricultural engineer from the Rockefeller Foundation (RF), who in the early sixties were in India to initiate the green revolution, helped Nimbkar to set up the seed company. Thus, he was able to grow thousands of acres of seed crops, process them and market the seeds all over India. Nimbkar also learnt how to convert CSH-1 (the first sorghum hybrid released in India) to Vasant-1, by changing the pollinator. Vasant-1 is still on the list of approved varieties in Maharashtra.

Nimbkar mobilized farmers to organize lift-irrigation schemes in 1972. With the help of his friend, 14 lift irrigation schemes were designed and set up. Nimbkar was at the time, the Director of the Central Bank of India and could arrange finance for the schemes.

He started making regular trips to the US every five years or so and every time he saw some new crops at the US, Nimbkar tried to introduce them into India. He used the same technique used by the RF viz. the foreign germplasm suitably modified for Indian conditions. Sweet sorghum was another crop introduced to India by Nimbkar and work on which, along with that on safflower, is continuing at NARI under the All India Coordinated Research Programme, funded by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR).

NARI obtained all the germplasm for the sweet sorghum project from United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Research was carried out on the initial breeding to improve the quality and quantity of grain in sweet sorghum and in the 1980s and 1990s, protocols for production of syrup, jaggery and ethanol from sweet sorghum and lanterns and stoves for use of ethanol for lighting and cooking was developed.

Animal Husbandry: In 1990, Nimbkar directed his interests away from irrigated agriculture to dryland farming. He soon discovered that most of the rain-fed farming areas had lost their soil fertility due to ploughing and excessive cultivation with tractors. Growing grasses was the only option to utilize them and profitably raise ruminants on these grasses. As the Chairman of Maharashtra Sheep and Goat Commission, Nimbkar submitted a detailed report to the Government in 1992, wherein he emphasized the introduction of genetic material from abroad and genetic improvement of sheep and particularly the goats. Nimbkar was surprised to find that sheep are not very important in Maharashtra when compared to goats. The poor own one or two goats each. The Government was not interested in improving these animals.

Nimbkar and his team learnt about the discovery by Dr. Helen Newton Turner in Australia, that the Garole breed of sheep in West Bengal has a high frequency of twinning. In India, sheep produce only one lamb at a time. Therefore, Nimbkar felt that if this gene was introduced into Deccani sheep, they would produce two lambs instead of one and the income of shepherds would be increased at least by 70%. Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research supported this research from 1998 to 2008. The outcome was the production of the prolific 'NARI Suwarna' sheep, which was promoted in Karnataka, especially in Tumkur district, with the support of the Ministry of Animal Husbandry.

The second assistance of the Australian Government to Nimbkar's work was when 20 embryos of the Boer goat were imported from Australia with the support of AusAID. These crossbred Boer goats have been very popular in India and their introduction is resulting in large increase in productivity and profitability to goat owners. The impact of this research on small ruminants is probably the most lasting of all of Nimbkar's activities so far.

Nimbkar, observes all that ails Indian farms and tries to cure it by bringing global research to India and to Phaltan. At the same time, his solutions suit local conditions and draw on traditional practices. Nimbkar's leadership has led to the formation of a dedicated team; facilitated resource mobilization and collaborating with best of the professional agencies and scientific communities to effectively bring forth technology, tests, modification, stability and dissemination for the benefit of the rural community.

NARI is a good example where one can see involvement of Nimbkar's family members in his work, they also being socially motivated, technology-driven and dedicated to rural development.

BonBehari Vishnu Nimbkar is the pivot, who is providing leadership and initiatives to the rural people and other members of his family, on a sustained basis.

Associations and Awards

- Conferred the Padma Shri, Government of India, 2006
- Member of team for Vasantrya Naik Samayik Award to NARI, 2006, presented for outstanding work in the field of Agriculture, Sheep and Goat development
- Member of the team for CSIR Award to NARI for Science and Technology Innovations for Rural Development, 2007
- Agricultural Director of the Central Bank of India
- Member of the Agro-Irrigation Commission, Government of Maharashtra
- Consultant to the World Bank on Irrigation Projects
- NARI's work on sheep has been internationally recognized in a book published by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of United Nations
- NARI has published many educational pamphlets and booklets regarding rearing of goats and sheep

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