



DR. S. A. DABHOLKAR

Recipient of the Award for Application of Science and Technology for Rural Development - 1990

Born: 1924

S.A. Dabholkar, Master in Science, is an educationist of a unique kind. His efforts are to shape education as a tool for total change in the life situation of an average worker in the rural areas.

Till 1958, he was occupied with several institutional activities of his own design. Since 1958 till voluntary retirement in 1979, he worked as lecturer in Mathematics in Mouni Vidyapeeth, Gargoti. Premature retirement was with a view to venturing into diverse fields of work on non-institutional lines. He has all along evinced special interest in:

- i. Techniques of teaching and knowledge communication
- ii. Agricultural productivity research and innovation.

He pursued his early experiments in the field of kitchen gardening, home farming and market gardening and developed a new approach and technique in this field. Some of these results were later published in two special supplements in Kirloskar Magazine which creates sensation among the readers and more than ten thousand letters poured in, expressing their desire to have experimental involvement. To channelise this budding enthusiasm various action oriented programmes were dynamically propagated.

A minimum of 10,000 sq. ft (1/4 acre) of wasteland is enough, he contends, to bring an average family of five persons substantially to average middle class. His work during the last more than a decade has brought about a revolution in grape culture in Maharashtra State that started at Tasgaon, Sangli District, in 1966. Farmers holding hardly half an acre to one hectare and facing very adverse natural conditions have now taken to grape production all over Maharashtra (30,000 acres/15,000 growers) and earned high incomes in the international and national markets. They are now the leading grape producers in India fetching the highest price to their production. The yearly turnover is over Rs 300 crore creating full-time employment pr acre. These grape growers over the State honour him as 'Draksh Mowli', 'Prayog Mowli', etc. for his voluminous work done by way of publications on grape culture (more than thousand printed pages) in Marathi. This trend has now spread in other horticultural crops (Pomegranate, Ber, mango, Banana, etc.).

He has now perfected his own system of "Prayoga Parivar" or "Experimental Web" and is busy building a new sociology of science and education through this Web (cell) activity. It has some close resemblances to the recently put forth thesis of 'Deschooling Society' by Ivan Illich and Paulo Freire (Pedagogy of the Oppressed).

His work in the field of non-formal and mutual network education (through demystification of science and various types of venture designs) is now gaining critical appreciation and world-wide support. Some of his work is now published in German.

He realized the need for demystification when he decided to reach the last man in the field, and to find solutions in his own life situations. His method of teaching is novel; he tries to make the farmer examine his land, what it grows, makes him observe how a plant grows, etc; the method helps farmer to understand not only science but the ecology in which he lives and helps to seek solution to his problem

in his own environment. For example, government agents advocate chicken mash as a food for poultry breeds. Is it expensive? Farmer is goaded into buying it. Dabholkar raises the question: What is there in the chicken mash which may be available in the neighbourhood? He can thus improve his understanding, develop insights into his own environment and reduce his dependence on outside forces. Often he gets better substitutes at no cost. This line of thinking has resulted in reducing dependence of farmers on chemical fertilisers, pesticides, etc. Further, which is equally important, a farmer understands better the plant physiology and how to intervene in the natural plant growth in order to get maximum production, in lesser time and through use of wasted resources in his environment.

Dabholkar is presently busy with the thesis on Survival Agriculture (End poverty approach) through a new type of network venture neighbourhood, and demystified science. He hopes to arrive at a practical and universally applicable solution. He has two publications now on this thesis in Marathi language- “Vipula cha Srishti” and “Kelyanae hot aahe re” are in great demand.

Dabholkar is the recipient of many honours/awards. In 1979, the Marathi Vidnyan Parishad honoured him for outstanding contributions to research in rural development. In 1988, he received the Award for Rs 51,000/- from the Vasantnao Naik Pratishthan, again for his agricultural research. The Doordarshan, Bombay Kendra, presented two episodes showing Dabholkar's work in the field of grape and other cultivation. Recently, he has been appointed a consultant and resource person by the Yeshwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University for its study courses for the farmers.

