



19TH VAIKUNTH BHAI MEHTA MEMORIAL LECTURE



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Hon'ble Vice President of India

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NATIONAL COOPERATIVE UNION OF INDIA
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I am glad to be with all of you today to deliver this year's Vaikunth Bhai Mehta Memorial Lecture being organized by National Cooperative Union of India (NCUI).

On this occasion, I am happy to see various eminent cooperators and dignitaries who are present on the occasion of this event. I welcome the initiative of NCUI to organize this Lecture in the memory of a cooperative leader who was fully dedicated to the principles and values of cooperatives. His pioneering contribution to the growth of cooperative movement, particularly education and training is acknowledged by all. In 1953 he was appointed Chairman of the All India Khadi and Village Industries Board He had been a member of the Bombay Province Banking Inquiry Committee (1929), Textile Labour Inquiry Committee (1939-40), Textile Inquiry Commission (1953-54) and Chairman, Commission on Agricultural Co-operative Credit (1959). We are also aware of the valuable contribution made by him when he was the Finance Minister of Maharashtra. A devoted Gandhian, Vaikunthbhai was more interested in the Mahatma's constructive activities than in politics. He accepted the Finance Ministership in 1947 only after personal pressure was brought upon him by Gandhiji and Sardar Patel. He spun daily and wore only Khadi. His one hobby was reading and he built up a rich library of his own. He was a man of genuine humility who abhorred publicity of any kind. His life provides an excellent example of quiet dedicated service to the nation in the fields of co-operative movement and

village industries. I pay my respects to this illustrious son of our great country.

The concept of cooperation has inherent strength in its principles and values.

The principles and values provide a unique character to a cooperative organization which is not found in a private enterprise. They not only help a cooperative to sustain its business, but also create social harmony in the society by bringing people together irrespective of caste, creed or any other distinction.

Cooperatives are socio-economic organizations which have community service as the essential ethos, and are not merely driven by profit motive. They are primarily meant to help the poor sections of the society.

Agriculture plays an important role in our national economy and livelihood of more than 55% population of our country is dependent on agriculture and allied activities.

As per the recent data published by the International Cooperative Alliance in the 'World Cooperative Monitor' among the 300 largest cooperatives in the world, about 30% are found in the agriculture and food industry sector.

Agricultural cooperatives throughout the world have played a significant role in organizing the small farmers and it is worth

noting that these small farmers are responsible for 80% of the world food production.

Keeping in view the strategy of Government's Seven Point Agenda for doubling farmers' income by 2022, the agricultural cooperatives can play a vital role in educating the farmers to reduce the cost of cultivation through balanced use of fertilizer, improve water-use efficiency, establish more warehouse to avoid distress sale of produce, link with National E-market (e-NAM), emphasize value addition and encourage farmers to take up other allied activities like poultry, beekeeping and fisheries.

In the recent years, after globalization of economy the cooperative movement has been facing many problems. The Indian cooperative movement, the world's largest movement, has its own inherent strength and weakness. With more than 8 lakh cooperatives, the cooperatives have significant presence in all the areas of socio-economic activities.

Dairy cooperatives have ushered in milk revolution in the country. AMUL has become a household name. The big institutions like IFFCO, KRIBHCO, AMUL, etc. are the big success stories in cooperative sector. Besides, there are a large number of cooperatives at the state level, like urban cooperative banks, primary agriculture cooperative societies, housing, fishery and other forms of cooperatives which are making untiring efforts to improve the socio-economic condition of the people in the rural areas.

At grass-root level, the impact of cooperative sector has a big role in bridging the urban-rural divide and creating opportunities for income generation.

Sisters and brothers,

I am a son of a farmer from a small village. Having strong background in agriculture, I am aware of the problems of the farmers. It is pity that the farmers are still at the mercy of moneylenders, despite the presence of a large number of agricultural cooperatives. We need to strengthen cooperatives so that they can work for the welfare of the farmers and give them credit at the time they need at a reasonable rate of interest.

I am pleased that the present government is committed to encourage the cooperative movement. We have an example in case of NAFED where Govt. has given a guarantee to a tune of Rs.40,000 crores.

The cooperatives for their sustainable existence and to serve the members better, have to diversify their operations in new areas like honeybee production, seaweed farming, etc. The cooperatives should also train the farmers in the right use of fertilizers, and also train them in new technologies related to agricultural farming.

The cooperatives through their wide network in the rural areas have won the trust of the farmers more than any other institution. Various schemes of the government like Jan Dhan

Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana, Mudra Scheme. provide a good opportunity for cooperatives to collaborate with the government and reap multiple benefits. The cooperative sector has immense professional manpower spread across the country, huge infrastructure of its own, and it has strong community roots in the rural areas. In the times to come, I feel cooperatives need to find mutual synergies with the public and private sector so as to explore new avenues of resource generation. At present, we talk only of public-private partnership. The third element of cooperatives must be aligned with this, so that we have a public-private- cooperative partnership which can provide a new model of development having wide relevance for the farming community in the villages.

I find tremendous opportunities for cooperatives in solving the problem of unemployment, more particularly in the rural areas where the poor lack skills. So, skilling the rural population through cooperatives can be a big leap forward. This is in accordance with the current government's emphasis on skill development. Many of the cooperatives like NCUI, NCDC, IFFCO, etc. have their projects and programmes in the rural areas. So making these programmes focus on skill generation can not only prepare the rural youth to take up employment, but also provide them opportunities for becoming good entrepreneurs.

India has set a goal of establishing 100 smart cities in different States. To achieve this task, the services of labour & contract cooperative societies such as Uralungal Labour Contract and Construction Society need be engaged in modern and high-tech infrastructure development and such models of organized labour cooperative societies can be replicated in other proposed cities.

As mentioned earlier, the contribution of Vaikunth Bhai Mehta to the cause of cooperative education and training was significant. This is very relevant in the current times when the cooperatives need to professionalize their functioning through effective training.

Cooperative training must not only be imparted to employees in cooperatives, but also extend beyond cooperatives, to children in schools, colleges, universities, technical and professional institutions, and also for those who want to form cooperatives, but who are not aware of the various modalities, and requirements.

Since “Cooperation” is a state subject and cooperatives are participatory and people-based organizations, the cooperative movement needs to be strengthened by the states.

Today, the use of digital technology has been transforming governance banking and businesses. The Cooperatives must also fully utilize the power of technology in their functioning.

I am glad that the Government of India has given a substantial budgetary support to computerize more than 63000 Primary Agriculture Cooperatives (PACS). PACs are the most important cooperative societies serving the farmers in rural areas. So strengthening the PACS through application of appropriate technology is indeed the need of the hour.

It is high time that cooperatives at all levels gear up to meet the future challenges in a professional manner.

Sisters and brothers,

India with a rich cooperative culture and a vibrant cooperative movement can march ahead only if we have a strong leadership which can provide a new direction to the growth of the cooperative movement. The ICA Blue-Print of Cooperative Decade lays emphasis on cooperatives emerging as the most preferred model of development of the people by 2020. To achieve this objective, the cooperative leadership today must have vision, dedication and commitment and transparency.

This internalization of the noble ideals of the cooperative movement will be the real tribute to Late Vaikunth Bhai Mehta.

I wish you all in your endeavor to strengthen the cooperative movement for the welfare of our people.

Jai Hind!