



# A MESSIAH OF FARMERS

**T**he demise of Professor MS Swaminathan on the 28th of September 2023 in Chennai at the age of 98 ends an era in the world agriculture.

He will go in the annals of history as living legend for having pulled out a large population in India from the jaws of hunger deaths, and proved the Pad-dock Brothers wrong of their prophecy that Indians will have no choice but to die of hunger in huge numbers.

While MSS is known in India and around the world as the great scientist and Architect of India's Green Revolution, who worked with a vision and determination to feed the billions, he was truly a saint, who dedicated his life to the well-being of farmers, poor and hungry. Rightly termed as Kisan Vaigyanik (farmer scientist) by the Prime Minister, Narendra Modi ji in his article on him on October 7, 2023 and Krishi Rishi (agriculture saint) by the then Vice President of India, Sh. M Venkaiah Naidu on the occasion of the launch of the Table Book on him, authored by none other than his daughter Nitya Rao and hosted by Agriculture Today Group in 2016 in New Delhi.



**Dr. M.J.Khan**  
Chairman,  
Indian Chamber of Food and  
Agriculture

### My First Meeting

I recall my first time meeting him in 1997 in Hyderabad at a dinner hosted by APAU, the closeness grew with time and in 2003, when he was appointed as the Chairman, National Commission on Farmers, we started meeting more often and discussed issues at length. He also started participating in our different events more regularly, importantly the annual events; MPs Round Table on Farmers Issues and Agriculture Policies and Agriculture Budget analysis. We were always amazed by his memory of small things and ability to pick up minutest of points in the discussions. I recall travelling with him from Ludhi-

ana to Delhi in 2007, after attending a conference at PAU, we discussed in details about the need for making agriculture a profession of pride and glamour to attract youth and attract investment. We conceptualised the famous program, Agriculture Leadership Summit and Leadership Awards, which we launched in 2008, and that continues to be amongst the most important events and the awards most sought after in agriculture sector.

### Stellar Contributions

Dr Swaminathan had made stellar contributions to agricultural research and development. The Father of Green Revolution across tropical Asia, Dr. Swaminathan later on also emphasised on the environmental impacts of agriculture and urged for the introduction of strategies for Sustainable Development. Ever-green revolution for him was as close to his hear as green revolution. Apart from food security, he was also concerned with nutritional security.

His concepts of "biovillages" and Village Knowledge Centres" to empower the rural and tribal women and men is an instance which showed that he was not just a scientist but a humanist who believed in all round development of humanity. He also lent his support to farmers. As the head of the National Commission on Farmers from 2004-06, he recommended that the Minimum Support Price at which farmers sell their crops to the government should be at least 50 per cent more than the weighted average cost of production.

### A Global Icon

Professor Swaminathan was equally respected the world over for his work in the areas of ecology and environment, and thrust to nutrition security and women empowerment. I recall one





instance at the World Food Summit in 2016 in Des Moines, where I was seated on the front row in the talk by Chelsea Clinton, and a lady sitting next to me introduced herself as Oluremi Tinubu, former President of Nigeria. As I introduced myself from India she instantly asked if I knew Prof. Swaminathan? I told that he was sitting two chairs next to her, she got up to him and half bend talked to almost for almost ten minutes.

Next evening I left for Washington DC by morning flight and Professor was coming by evening flight. As I was staying with Ambassador Islam Siddiqui, both of us decided to go to airport to receive him. When we reached inside there was US Secretary of Agriculture, Tom Vilsack waiting for arrival of his luggage. He enquired about us being there and knowing about Swaminathan he decided to wait for almost 20 minutes to meet and greet him. Such was the respect and rever-

ence for professor the world over. In 2018 at the FAO Global Strategy Meet at Changsha in China, when I met Prof. Yuan Longping, he told that the title of “father of hybrid rice” was given to him by Prof. Swaminathan as DG, IRRI at an international rice conference in Bangkok. This was reconfirmed next day when we saw plaque in the photo gallery while visiting Longping Hybrid Rice Institute on the outskirts of Changsha along with the then DG FAO, Graziano and the current DG, Prof QU, then Vice Ag Minister, China.

I recall in 2015 I casually asked if he would have time to visit Lucknow, he immediately agreed. Besides other engagements, we had meeting with the then CM Akhilesh Yadav, who graciously received him at the portico along with his few cabinet colleagues. His knowledge of the local agriculture issues amazed the CM, who later asked me if I had briefed him about

the state’s agriculture and context, to which I replied in the negative. There are hundreds of such stories and personal experiences to share.

#### Association with ICFA

The blueprints of Indian Council of Food and Agriculture were finalised at his room at India International Centre in 2014, and he was instrumental in its launch and working. We were fortunate to have him in our office 2-3 times to chair board meetings, besides having him always with us at the annual Agriculture Summit till 2018, when his life’s last visit to Delhi was to attend the Summit and of course to receive the 1st World Agriculture Prize instituted by ICFA.

Every meeting with him has been an exciting experience. The simplicity, warmth, energy and positive vibes one gets being with him, besides depth of unmatched knowledge. My last meeting with him was on 28 Sept 2022, when we announced instituting MS Swaminathan Global Leadership Award for Sustainable Development for INR one million. Accordingly a 15 member awards jury under the chairmanship of Prof. Ramesh Chand was formed and the 1st Award was presented to the Agriculture Minister of Phillipines, Dr. William Dar. Incidentally, after exactly one year on Sept 28, 2023 this great son of soil, a noble soul, messiah of farmers, role model for millions of us in agriculture and a saviour of billions of people breathed his last, bidding good bye to this mortal world.

