

SRI AYYAGARI RAMAMURTI BIRTH CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS

Late Founder-Managing Director
Andhra Scientific Company Limited, (Now BEL), MASULIPATAM
(1895 - 1995)



Commemoration Volume

October 20th, 1995





सत्यमेव जयते

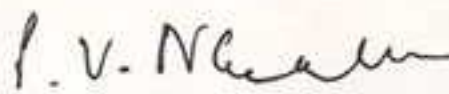
प्रधान मंत्री
PRIME MINISTER

MESSAGE

I am happy that the birth centenary of Shri Ayyagari Ramamurthy Garu is being celebrated on 20th October this year.

Shri Ramamurthy was a man of vision. He was the pioneer in establishing manufacturing units of scientific instruments in our country. The Andhra Scientific Company founded by him early this century i.e. long before our Independence, which was taken over by the Ministry of Defence a couple of decades ago, is a symbol of foresight, indigenous enterprise, resourcefulness and technical skill.

I wish the function all success.


(P.V. Narasimha Rao)

New Delhi
September 5, 1995

SRI A. RAMAMURTI -- A PIONEER

Sri K.P. MALLIKHARJUNUDU

Ex-Member of Parliament and
President, Centenary Celebrations Committee



In every sphere of God's creation, rise and fall, is an inexorable law. The town of Machilipatnam, once occupied a pre-eminent place in many fields of human activity like, trade, commerce, culture and literature. Its port was considered as the most important one on the eastern sea board of India. It attracted businessmen of the trading community from all over the world. As ill-luck would have it, there was a decline in its importance. The port was neglected, business and trade declined and prosperity in material terms diminished. However, in the earlier quarter of the present century, attempts were made for its revival, in the industrial sector and in this connection, the name of Sri Ayyagari Ramamurti garu needs special mention.

He was a science graduate, working as a science teacher in a local High School, Machilipatnam. It occurred to him that a factory may be established at Machilipatnam for the manufacture of scientific instruments, useful in educational institutions. He had no funds. He had no wherewithal. What he had, was only initiative, foresight and integrity. With these intangible resources, he started an institution called 'ANDHRA SCIENTIFIC COMPANY.' He had to face innumerable difficulties for its sustenance. As the great ancient philosopher-poet 'Bhartrihari' described in his inimitable 'Subhashitham,' while small-minded people desert their ventures in the middle confronted with difficulties, people with great minds continue their ventures till the end, undeterred by obstacles, however difficult or repeated they may be. Sri Ramamurti garu exemplified the poet's observation.

Of course, I am not fully conversant with the difficulties that the Company had to face but after his demise several years later, the Company ran into losses and work could not be carried on. If I remember right, there was a lay-off declared. By that action at least 1,000 families directly or indirectly depending for their sustenance on the Company, had to face starvation. Then I happened to be a Member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha) and the matter was brought to my notice. I was then impelled to intervene and do something to retrieve the position. Many friends and well-wishers of the Company met me at Delhi and explained to me about the critical situation. From my experience, in the political field I learnt a lesson that, if any right objective is to be attained through the agency of the Government, one should mobilise the support of a good number of Members of Parliament or the Legislature as the case may be. I then contacted M.Ps.

not only from Andhra Pradesh but also from other neighbouring States like Tamilnadu, Karnataka, Orissa and Maharashtra, discussed with them and convinced them that under the then circumstances of the case, the Central Government should take over the Management of the Company. I got prepared Memoranda stating the entire case and signed by as many as 50 or 60 Members, requesting the Government to take over the Company's management. Memoranda were presented to the Prime Minister Smt. Indira Gandhi as well as to the then Defence Minister, Sri Babu Jagjeevan Ram and the Defence Production Minister, taking along with me most of the signatories. This, I did not once but twice or thrice. I recall to my mind an occasion when Sri Babu Jagjeevan Ram frowned upon me for pressing the case, at a time when India was engaged in a bitter war with Pakistan. Still I pursued the matter and by God's grace succeeded in achieving our object. Ultimately, the then Defence Minister, Sri V.C. Shukla, now the Minister for Parliamentary Affairs, came over to Machilipatnam and took over the management into the hands of the Central Government.

In this episode, I should thank all the citizens of Machilipatnam for extending their full cooperation. Particularly my thanks are due to the workers of the Company who maintained excellent discipline under very trying circumstances, for a number of months. While I was negotiating with the Government they were constantly asking me whether any acts of indiscipline were resorted to by the workers. I assured them that they are very disciplined people and nothing undesirable will happen. Thus our endeavour became fruitful to the satisfaction of one and all. The Company was later on nationalised, resulting in tangible benefits to the employees.

These events conclusively prove that any project started by noble-minded persons, with no selfish motive but mainly with an eye on public good will attain fruition, notwithstanding hurdles that seem to be insurmountable.

'A NOBLE GENIUS'

A. PRASANNA KUMAR

"Men who are filled with the spirit of sacrifice," observed Mahatma Gandhi referring to the people of Masulipatam, a place that brought 'tears of joy' to the Mahatma's eyes. "I appreciated the gentle love and I realised the capacity of the people for discipline and their quick response to varying demands on their patriotic spirit. I praised God for his abundant mercy with tears of joy," wrote Gandhiji on seeing the social reconstruction work being done in the small coastal town. The Andhra Jateeya Kalasala was a shining symbol of the Andhra renaissance. Harijan emancipation, cottage industry, national education and vernacular press had struck roots even before the advent of Gandhi and as an Andhra leader aptly summed up 'they anticipated the arrival of Gandhi' in the first two decades of the twentieth century.

Raghupati Venkataratnam Nayudu inspired many young men and women of Masulipatam to take up social reform. Mutnuri Krishna Rao set a new trend in Telugu journalism through his 'Krishna Patrika' and Kopalle Hanumantha Rao and Pattabhi Sitaramayya wrote prolifically on national education and national integration besides articulating the demand for a separate state and a separate University for the Andhras. Pattabhi, one of the greatest institution-builders of modern India, founded the Andhra Bank, the Andhra Insurance Company and several other banking and cooperative ventures. Vemuri Ramji Rao was among the first in India to start a school for Harijans and he was another pioneer in the field of education and social reform. Andhra Jateeya Kalasala, the Noble College and Hindu High School attracted students from far and near and contributed much to the growth of education in this part of the country.

To such a hallowed place came around 1925 Ayyagari Ramamurti, a B.A.L.T., and his younger brother Narasimha Rao (later known as Dr A.N. Rao) trained in medicine in Calcutta, following the former's appointment as a science teacher in the Government School, Masulipatam. Cast in the mould of Rama and Lakshmana, the two brothers took up their jobs quietly and the shift from Amalapuram where they were born and raised to Masulipatam, a town humming with many activities, gave them a new opportunity to pursue their ideals. No two brothers lived in such perfect understanding and love as these two. Ramamurti lavished all his affection on his younger brother while Narasimha Rao served his elder brother with unflinching loyalty and devotion till the last. It was not known to many even in the family that A.N. Rao literally preserved his late brother's shoes, handstick, coat and glasses from July 1949 when Ramamurti passed away till June 1988 when Rao himself breathed his last. In prosperity they remained humble and in adversity brave, always together, never swerving from the path they had set for themselves.

The birth of the Andhra Scientific Company in 1926 resembles one of those fairy-tale adventures. It used to be said that Ramamurti, upset over a remark made by the headmistress of the school he was working in, resigned his job in protest. His friends felt

Murti was hasty in giving up a secure government job. His family dared not question his decision. A.N. Rao was ready, as always, to stand by his brother. Ramamurti started a small company in the building of Valluru Raja for making scientific instruments. The birth of the company was a formal but firm expression of Ramamurti's resolve to manufacture scientific goods with indigenous skill and free the people from dependence on imported goods. The rest is history.

Ramamurti's teachers and well wishers like Professors Vissa Appa Rao and Vemuri Viswanadha Sarma encouraged him in his venture. Within ten years the Andhra Scientific Company grew into a major industry. It was Murti's good fortune that both Dr. C.R. Reddy and Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, Vice-Chancellors of Andhra University encouraged Ramamurti's efforts and admired his creative genius. Locally elders like Sri Puranam Krishnamurti and Sri Jaldu Subba Rao lent solid support to Murti. So did the people of Masulipatam as over seven hundred families, later nearly a thousand, came to depend on the company for their livelihood. The employees of the company rose splendidly to the occasion. Displaying great devotion to duty and faith in the leadership of the founder the workers always served the company with loyalty and discipline. Within a short time they became highly skilled and the whole area grew into a thriving industrial complex exuding confidence.

Towns and cities, like individuals pass through ups and downs. Masulipatam's importance, sadly indeed, began to decline after Independence. The company's fortunes also suffered a series of setbacks. A fire accident in 1948 followed by a cyclone caused severe damage to the company. Worse was to follow. Stricken with cancer, Ramamurti was gravely ill in 1948. He underwent major surgery by Dr. B. Tirumala Rao without anaesthesia. He bore with courage the severe pain and radiation therapy. The disease spread rapidly and on July 26, 1949 Ayyagari Ramamurti passed away. A year later the Raja of Challapalli took over the management of the company and he along with his brother-in-law Sri C. Ramanadha Babu and Sri Kakarlamudi Subba Rao Naidu, the managing director, provided able leadership. Sri Bezwada Ramachandra Reddy, Chairman, Board of Directors, led a delegation to the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh requesting the government to save the sister concern of ASCO, the National Chemicals, founded by Ramamurti in 1948. But their efforts were in vain. Many still feel that the course of industrial history of Andhra would have been different if the state government had lent its support. Jai Hind School founded by Ramamurti in the year of Independence, however, survived and began to grow into a good school. Workers and officers of the company always lived like a family and mention must be made of the able managers like Sri E.L. Pathi, Sri Y.S. Narayana, Sri T. Umamaheswara Rao, Sri R.A. Padmanabha Rao, Sri Jaganmohan Rao, Sri Jagadiswara Rao and others who stood by the company throughout their long service.

After the company was taken over by the Ministry of Defence in July 1972, Managers like Col. Swamy, Col. Kumar, Col. Ramu and Sri Jaganmohana Rao and the present team headed by Sri Ramanujam have upheld the high ideals of the company. In 1982 the Company became a part of B.E.L. and all the General Managers from then Sri B.L.K.

Rao, Sri Ch. Bhaskara Rao (In-charge), Sri S. Ramachandra Rao and the present Manager Sri K.S. Ramanujam, Sri Rama Rao, Sri Jagadiswara Rao and others have contributed to the growth of the company.

The families of Sri Ayyagari Ramamurti and Dr. A.N. Rao take the opportunity to thank the management and employees of the company, past and present, the former directors of the company, the numerous well-wishers and the people of Masulipatam for their kind support to the institutions founded by Ramamurti and for honouring his memory. Ayyagari Ramamurti devoted all his energies and life for the service of the people through scientific and industrial development in difficult times. Ramamurti had neither the advantage of wealth nor the support of the government or outside agency. His assets were strong will, dedication, confidence in the people who served him and faith in God. He was unquestionably far ahead of his times. When genius is allied to a lofty ideal, it becomes, as only a C.R. Reddy could say, 'a noble genius.'

A PIONEER IN INSTRUMENT INDUSTRY

Sri K. ANANDA MOHAN

Former Manager, A.S.Co., Bombay

It was 33 years ago on July 26, 1949, that Ayyagari Ramamurti founder of the Andhra Scientific Company, Machilipatnam passed away. Ramamurti was born on October 20, 1895.

Cancer cut short a highly promising career of Ramamurti at 53 at a time when he was about to put Andhra in the forefront of the industrial map of India. The efflorescence of a teacher of science in a government school into a builder of a leading precision scientific instruments manufacturing company in the country is a saga worth recalling.

The instrument industry in India is essentially a post-independence development. Before independence there was hardly any manufacturing activity but for a very few and small units scattered in a few places in the country.

In those days, imports were free and plenty. Banking and financial credit facilities were few. Government encouragement, unlike at the present, was non-existent.

Training facilities for skilled and semi-skilled labour were meagre. Andhra Pradesh was then a backward area industrially. And Machilipatnam was not developed and isolated, in spite of having, by then two premier institutions -- the Andhra Bank and Andhra Insurance Company.

For everything, from a precision lathe to a standard screw or bolt and nut, one had to depend for supplies on Madras.

It is against this background one has to assess the achievements of Ramamurti in founding the Andhra Scientific Company and making it into one of the foremost of its kind in the country within a span of two decades.

Possessed with keen business acumen, foresight and creative urge Ramamurti felt restless even in a secure Government job.

As a teacher of science, he foresaw a great future for the manufacture of scientific instruments in India. He spurned promotion as headmaster and resigned from a lucrative government job to the shock of his family and dismay of his friends and plunged into his new venture.

With no resources but a few hundreds of borrowed money from friends and no assets but his abilities and faith in his capacity, he started the Andhra Scientific Company in 1926 as a trading-cum-manufacturing unit.

The first ten were challenging years for young Ramamurti. He had to undergo many trials and tribulations and contend with professional rivalries and personal jealousies.

With courage and devotion, he built up the business step by step and brought it up from almost a one-man-show into a considerable size and importance.

In 1937, he converted it into a public limited company with a capital of Rs. 5 lakhs.

Development of the company was as fast as it was varied. Being obliged to be self-dependent for everything, he had to start its own carpentry, smithy, foundry moulding, planting sections besides a full-fledged workshop. To keep all these divisions busy the production had to be diversified and increased.

Thus we find the Andhra Scientific Company manufacturing such a large variety of instruments.

But the real greatness of Ramamurti was finding suitable personnel for all these jobs and he did it successfully, almost all being from local talent. He made some of the most illiterate men into first rate skilled and semi-skilled workers.

The next ten years saw very great advance in the Andhra Scientific Company as well as in Ramamurti. The second world war gave a boost to indigenous production and the Andhra Scientific Company, which was already well equipped for it, seized the chance.

Ramamurti, who never lost an opportunity, spotted and recruited right talent and started a research and development department, which enabled him to go into designing and production of advanced and sophisticated optical instruments.

By the end of the second decade the Andhra Scientific Company became the leading and the biggest manufacturer of precision scientific instruments in the country with a turn-over of about Rs. 25 lakh a year and 600 people working and with spacious workshop and building of its own and share capital increased to about Rs. 10 lakhs.

Ramamurti was as zealous about the quality of the instruments as of the welfare of his employees. While he never compromised on the former, he never neglected the latter.

Innumerable were the ways, Ramamurti used to look after his employees, extending his sympathy and financial assistance in their hour of need. He used to pray daily thanking the Almighty for choosing him as an instrument in creating livelihood to so many.

In 1947, he set up a unit at Chittigudur, a village seven miles from Machilipatnam for processing the raw materials into semi-finished goods, thus saving a lot of time and energy of his workers. He wished to set up a chain of such units all along the Machilipatnam - Vijayawada Road and ancillary units and thus create-local employment.

Even when he was severely down with cancer attack, he was planning for the further expansion of the Andhra Scientific Company.

In 1948, he appointed an England-trained electronic engineer to start electronic instruments manufacture. Before the work could be started in earnest, he passed away. With him his plans also perished.

Ramamurti was a many-sided personality. His interest was not confined to instruments manufacture alone.

In the early 40's he and his brother, Dr. A.N. Rao, started a pharmaceutical factory at Machilipatnam called Eastern Drug Company.

Around 1944, he founded National Chemicals Ltd., at Machilipatnam with a capital of Rs. 10 lakhs for manufacture of industrial chemicals, fertilisers, pesticides and laboratory chemicals.

He started the Scientific Glass Products Ltd., for manufacture of optical components, But his biggest achievement would have been the starting of a Soda Ash factory in Andhra for which he had secured Central Government's permission to locate it at Machilipatnam with a capital of Rs. 1.5 crore.

While the protracted negotiations were taking place with the Madras Government, Ramamurti had a severe set-back in his health. While undergoing rest at Bangalore after a major operation, a huge fire accident in the Andhra Scientific Company in 1948 forced him to rush back and start reconstruction work right from ashes.

This strain caused a major upset and gradually sapped his energy and finally he passed away in July 1949, throwing all his plans and his dreams into disarray.

Dr. C.R. Reddy called Murti a noble genius. The Madras Governor, Sir Archibald Nye hailed Ramamurti's vision and genius.

No greater tribute could be paid to Ramamurti than that, three and half years later, all the company employees voluntarily contributed from their meagre salaries and erected a statue in his memory in the company's compound.

It was unveiled by none other than Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, the then Vice-President of India and a great admirer of Ramamurti, on the occasion of the Silver Jubilee of the Andhra Scientific Company in January 1953.

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