

## **Dr. K. V. Sundaram : *Obituary***



Born : 30-11-1929

Died : 23-11-2013

Dr. K. V. Sundaram, one of the pioneers of regional planning in India, is no more with us. He left for his heavenly abode, after a prolonged illness, on 23th November 2013. Kavassery Vanchi Sundaram was born on 30th November 1929 at Calicut in Kerala State in India. His father, Shri K. A. Vanchi Iyer, moved to Tamil Nadu in 1930 to take up a job as Headmaster of a high school at Devakottai in Ramnathpuram district. Sundaram completed his schooling at Devakottai and under-graduate studies at Tirunelveli and Madurai. He joined the first batch of the University of Madras for his Master's degree in Geography and completed the course in 1951.

Sundaram started his professional career as a faculty in Alagappa Chettiar College at Karaikudi in Tamil Nadu in 1951. After

seven years of teaching and research, he moved to the Town Planning Organization, now Town and Country Planning Organization (TCPO), Government of India, New Delhi as a Research Associate in 1958. He worked with a multi-disciplinary team in preparation of a Regional Development Plan for Metropolitan Delhi, which was the first of its kind in India. After completion of the Delhi Master Plan, he worked on regional planning projects for the Rajasthan Canal Region, Dandakaranya Development Region, South-east Resource Region and the dacoity infected districts of central India. This wide ranging on-the-job experience stimulated his thinking on inter-state regionalisation for planning. His paper on Planning Regions of India, discussed in a special session of the International

Geographical Congress at New Delhi in 1968, was highly appreciated. Equally appreciable was his critical evaluation of the prevailing 'Town Group' concept of the Census of India, and his suggestions for a more rational approach to delimitation of urban areas. Another valuable contribution of this eminent geographer, during his stint at TCPO, was his study of spatial planning of the tribal areas of Bastar district in Madhya Pradesh, now Chhattisgarh, as part of a United Nations project on 'Growth Poles and Growth Centres in Regional Development Planning in India'. The study forms part of the widely referred book, 'Regional Development Planning in India : A New Strategy', jointly authored by R.P.Misra, K.V.Sundaram, and V.L.S. Prakasa Rao. In 1973 Sundaram was invited by the United Nations Centre for Regional Development (UNCRD), Nagoya, Japan as a consultant, where he worked with a research team on a multi-national comparative study of 'Growth of medium sized towns in relation to their rural regions', covering case studies in Japan, Philippines, and India. Sundaram moved to the Planning Commission, Government of India in 1973 and served in various positions : Joint Director, Director/Deputy Advisor, and Joint Advisor of the Multi-level Planning Division. His activities in the Planning Commission concerned research, planning and appraisal of projects, advisory services, promotion of training activities, and directing and managing some centrally sponsored projects. His major contribution was promotion of multi-level planning at district and block levels and related training activities. He wrote extensively on regional, local and multi-level planning, which had great impact on contemporary

thinking on spatial planning and integrated area development. He played a crucial role in preparing guidelines for block and district level planning initiated by the Planning Commission. He firmly believed in capacity building of the personnel at the sub-national levels for ensuring effective decentralisation of powers and functions, and for initiating planning from below. He actively collaborated with the Department of Science and Technology, Government of India in setting up information systems for planning at sub-national levels. He was instrumental in initiating a centrally sponsored programme of the Planning Commission for creating a multi-disciplinary team of planners, and strengthening planning machinery at the district level. The inclusion of a post of geographer in this team was a significant contribution of Sundaram.

Sundaram's academic pursuits impressed British Scholars and he was awarded a Senior Fellowship by the Nuffield Foundation, London to pursue research on spatial dynamics of under-development at the Centre for South Asian Studies, University of Cambridge, U.K. During the tenure of the fellowship (1978-79), he wrote his widely acclaimed book titled "Geography of Under-development : The Spatial Dynamics of Under-development." As Nuffield Fellow, he lectured at a number of European universities, and was invited as a visiting professor to the U.S.A. by the Center of South Asian Studies, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and the Department of Geography, Boston University.

Following international recognition for Sundaram's work, a number of international organizations desired to utilize his expertise in the fields of urban and regional planning, rural development, multi-level planning,

and training of personnel. Sundaram took voluntary retirement from the Planning Commission of India in 1987 and joined the United Nations Organization. His major international assignments included : ESCAP, Bangkok, 1979-80; UNCRD, Nagoya, 1981-82 ; UNESCO, Paris, 1986 ; FAO/UNO, Rome, 1986-87, and 1988-92 ; International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development, Kathmandu, 1988 and 1993 ; Centre of Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific, Dhaka, 1992 and 1995 ; and Asian Institute of Technology, Bangkok, 1993. He was a prolific writer. He authored/edited 20 books, 30 manuals/reports/monographs, 43 chapters in edited books, 06 reviews, 15 key-note/presidential addresses, and presented 41 research papers in national and 30 papers in international seminars/workshops.

Dr. Sundaram was conferred the Degree of Doctor of Letters (D.Litt.) by the University of Mysore in 1977 for his published work, 'Urban and Regional Planning in India. He was honoured with Jayendra Saraswati Lifetime Excellence and Achievement Award of the Centenarian Trust of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham by His Holiness Sri Sri Sri Jayendra Saraswati Swamigal in 2004. He has been felicitated by a large number of universities, research institutes and professional organizations in

India and abroad for enriching the theory and practice of regional planning in the developing world. He was elected President of the National Association of Geographers, India (NAGI) in 1998-99. He established a professional consortium of Earth scientists - Bhoovigyan Vikas Foundation at New Delhi in 2000 to take care of Mother Earth and formulate appropriate Earth care policies for environmental protection and preservation. He continued to nourish the foundation as it's Founder Chairman to the last days of his active life.

Dr. Sundaram was an excellent human being. He led a simple life and was an embodiment of humility. He was generous to the core and loved to share with others whatever he had. He valued friendship and all those who have been associated with him, cherish his friendship. His migration from this world is indeed an irreparable loss to the bereaved family, especially his partner-in -life, Girija ji, and his loving son and daughter, and to the large fraternity of his friends and admirers. May this noble soul rest in eternal peace.

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