

Partnerships in Open Learning



by

Professor Gajaraj Dhanarajan

President, The Commonwealth of Learning, Vancouver

inaugurating the

Professor G. Ram Reddy Memorial Trust

Hyderabad, India

4 July 1996

Mr. Chairman,
Your Excellency, Shri K.V. Raghunath Reddy
Distinguished Guests,
Members of the Trust, and
Colleagues,

It is hard to reconcile to the fact that Professor Gaddam Ram Reddy is not with us anymore. I always identified him with Hyderabad and finding myself here today and he, himself, taken away from us only reminds us of the cruel reality of ephemeral time. Yet, time has its own eternal dimension, and friendships and relationships embody this eternal dimension. For my friendship and association with Professor Ram Reddy has become so immemorable that, to me, his presence is never lost.

The Memorial Trust that we are inaugurating today is but a manifestation of that presence. True greatness consists in the everlasting nature of one's ideas and contributions in the service of humankind and Professor Reddy's services to education will not only be remembered for a long time to come, but are such that will continue to yield fruit to succeeding generations. Thanks to the objectives of the Trust, Professor Reddy's educational vision will continue to light the path of educational expansion in this country.

Visions have a disconcerting tendency to blind the visionary's conception of reality. Too often, visions become substitutes for lack of real conviction but at the same time releasing inflammable forces in their trail. The immortal words of a poet come to my mind:

"The best lack all conviction
While the worst all full of passionate intensity."

Professor Reddy was a visionary in a far more constructive sense of the term, blending enthusiasm with pragmatism and synthesising trendy novelties with time-tested notions. Given his vast experience in higher education and his own personality, it could not have been otherwise. As a dedicated teacher at the college and university levels; as a researcher in the social sciences and, in particular, public administration; as vice chancellor of one of India's largest universities; as builder of two open universities, as the first vice president of the Commonwealth of Learning; and topping his career as the Chairman of the University Grants Commission, Professor Reddy had been nurtured in the art of studying and shaping human relationships. And, in this task, he learnt the lesson of tapping the benign and positive sides of human potentialities. His innate qualities of modesty, gregariousness, sweetness of temper and sincerity, provided the inner resources to achieve the highest pinnacle in educational endeavour.

I say these things not merely as an encomium to a departed friend. My association with him goes back to nearly a decade and a half. During these years, I had occasion to learn of his sterling virtues even as I learnt from him many wise lessons. In matters relating to open and distance learning, I was amazed at the way in which he would overcome the obstacles that we face in making open learning acceptable and in creating institutions from scratch. His persuasive skills and winning manners not only won him battles in India for the cause of open learning but endeared him to many friends abroad. In many an international fora, he had kept up India's image as promoter of just causes and sage counsellor.

The proposed Trust will, I am sure, promote the concerns that Professor Reddy's public life embodied. I am glad to note that the objectives which the Trust seeks to promote, cover significant aspects of educational administration and research in open learning. The latter aspect, in particular, is crucial. Even within the span of three decades, open learning has passed through a few generations with significant paradigm shifts attributed. In India, we also witness the co-existence of these generations - correspondence course systems, dual-mode universities, open universities along with varying manifestations of open schools. These experimentations will have to be analysed and evaluated if enduring solutions to problems confronting their inexorable growth are to be evolved. Thus, research in the area is the need of the hour. It will be a fitting tribute to Professor Reddy's contributions to education if valuable studies on the theory and practice of distance and open learning are to emerge from your projects. And, I am sure that this will happen under the wise guidance of you, Mr. Chairman, and your colleagues on the Board.

Thank you.