

GREEN KERALA EXPRESS
A DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION
BONANZA

In an esteemed article on “ prerequisites for sustainable food security” published in The Hindu in July, 2010 Dr.M.S.Swaminathan had given a specific call – “ the challenge is to learn models and convert the unique into universal.

Model creation of course is a titanic task and development communication is an area where India holds very few successful replicable models. Though the term is very widely used, quiet often negative answers arrive as the out put. The first decade of the new millennium has shown us the mergence of the “embedded journalism” and more shocking “paid news”. Development journalism though is a coveted phraseology and has gained wide currency in the communication world has only few examples to pick up for replication.

In this context a 4000 minute T V programme extending over 105 episodes titled Green Kerala Express (GKE) done very recently by Centre for Development of Imaging Technology (C-DIT), an autonomous institution under the Government of Kerala along with Thiruvananthapuram Doordarshan and state local self department deserve a special glance and rewarding recognition. It was really a bold, magnificent and truly purposeful development reality show par excellence.

The thrill it has spread among the masses, both rural and urban is unique, unmatched and beyond linguistic description. I doubt. Whether any of the existing listener participation estimation methodology followed in our country will be able to asses and the influence it could creative in the minds and in the line of thinking of the viewers. While created an unbelievable rejoicing mood among all sections of the rural and urban population alike, it succeeded also in generating serious post- programme discussions among journalists, columnists, administrators, people’s representatives and senior politicians. The latest among the tall personalities showering encomiums are retired Chief Justice of Supreme Court of India Sri.K.G.Balakrishnan and the retired Supreme Court Judge Sri..V.R.Krishnan Iyer.

GKE’s objective was to give a green exposure to the very attractive and great scintillating development accomplishments made by the Panchayaths before the masses. In Kerala, it is worthwhile to add that more than 30% of the plan resources are made away to the district, block and grama Panchayath: So also bulk of the funds received from the Central Government for agriculture and rural development are also channeled through the same route. Instead of crimes, thefts, elopes, love-jihads, and scandal stories which get very colorful prominents, Green Kerala Express gave space and time in the small screen for

development sagas, which really created a miracle. People could see local self governments empowered for performing development activities, bringing in refreshing achievements in the fields ranging from rice culture to palliative and geriatric care and creating fallow-free and green village.

Mini and mighty programmes for protecting environment by bringing back quarter-century old rice fallows for paddy, vegetable and banana cultivation; large scale earth removal by leveling the hills and hillocks to arrest the destabilization of drinking water supply, creation of dairy villages; tripling the milk production through women empowerment in the dairy sector, modernization of schools, total coverage of drinking water supply, door-to-door public health awareness campaign and improving the infrastructure facilities of Primary Health Centers etc. have really created great impact among all classes of the society. The password for success here is transparency in activities and unique participatory approach that works. Green Kerala Express has really stolen the thunder by narrating the above green sagas and presenting them in a refreshing style.

One the outstanding feature of the decentralized development in the state is the establishment of a new wave of unity at the grassroots level, setting aside political differences. Panchayat representatives came before the jury panel to convince that the excellent results accomplished in the conservation of land and water resources, enhancement of agriculture production including milk, bringing more rice fallows of two decades old, empowerment of women, environment protection and social security programmes like formation of bud schools, palliative care units, upgrading infrastructure of schools etc the products of the combined action done with total political unity.

Magnificent models of community action by the people in this sphere rural development programmes ranging from Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guaranty Programme to the efforts to create dowry free Panchayat have generated great hopes. If somebody can evolve a methodology to quantify the same in terms of physical produce created, income generated, employment awareness formed, benefits made available and social inspiration created, it will be a magnificent documentation depicting the strength and assets made available by the participatory development approach.

Panchayaths are no longer just license issuing authorities but have become creators of unique development models, be it in the sectors of health education, solid waste disposal, drinking water supply etc also. This has been brought to light by GKE. Out of the 999 panchayaths and over 30 municipalities competed in the social reality show with great bigger and enthusiasm. Kerala was taken by storm when lakhs every day sat to watch and enjoy the new development models in which people themselves are the “ real performers”.

One great question emerged, which created real surprise was the viewers’ reaction that “If this could happen in that Panchayat, why cant ours also followed this?” To be frank, this may be identified as a true reaction of the viewers who want good things to happen everywhere. It surpassed all estimates of the organizers too, leave alone the critics.

GKE was not a reality show alone. One could see new ideas blooming on all development fronts. The First prize Rs. 1 crore went to Elappully gramapachayat which made astonishing progress in milk production, fodder cultivation, rice production and all through community actions resulting in the substantial hike in rural income. Accomplishments made in the building infrastructure of agriculture animal husbandry, social welfare education health etc have been done with the admirable degree of co-ordination cutting across all political barriers.

The second prize of Rs. 5 million was bagged by Akathenthara Panchayat again from Palakkad District. The third of Rs.2.5 million went to Adat Panchayat in Thrissur District. It is worthwhile to add Meenangady Panchayat in Wyanand District recorded an yield of 10 tonnes of paddy per hector in a large scale demonstration and several Panchayaths created similar unique farm models worth replication.

GKE is really a golden model accomplished in the sphere of development communication and detailed by top development and management study centers will be a big boon for bringing this unique development model before the developing countries.

According to the information available, no such development communication exercise has been undertaken in any of the developing countries so far. Perhaps, due to total literacy and a big spread over of its population in all contents, wherever they are, Malayalis were chasing this programme, so that they could get a green heartwarming experience on the positive result generating development efforts, going on in every nook and corner of their homeland, creating new sagas of prosperity, peace and welfare.

This great experiment could be replicated in all other states with sufficient changes. So that Panchayath Raj system will gain sustainability, which ultimately will add strength to our growing democracy, eliminating the social unrests. Really this is a great victory to the public telecasting system and it has been once again proved that it is the champion in the development communication efforts aimed for the nation building task.

South west monsoon commences its wetting of India from Kerala Coast and it slowly spreads to other parts of the country through majestic rhythm, bringing a new harmony to the life of all living beings, which paves way for the nature to regain its greenery and new spirit for growth from the damages inflicted by an unkind, hot and dry summer. So also, Green Kerala Express could be groomed and guided to spread a new wave of action for the creation of an unique development communication culture for making the country prosperous.

As quoted in the beginning “the challenge is to learn from models and convert the unique into universal.

❖ **R.Hali, Director of Agriculture (Retd) and Patron, Kerala Farm Journalist Forum.**

Address: Pearl Hill, Attingal, Thiruvananthapuram 695 101, Kerala, India.
Phone No. 04702622453