

Nomination of Dr. C.V. Ananda Bose for king Baudouin International Development Prize

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**DEVELOPMENT ■ KERALA**

## A house within your reach

Nirmithi Kendra's low-cost building techniques catch on

**I**TS major claim to fame in recent times has been as a centre of promoting and exporting cashewnuts. Before the non-flourishing part soon to reach Kerala has now been brought into the national limelight thanks to innovative bureaucratic reforms. First, the local administration experimented with the Ahmednagar reforms—of taking the administration to the people instead of literally sitting over people's problems. The field programme was a resounding success. In fact, the reputed Irvandrum-based Centre for Development Studies, which conducted a socio-economic survey of the area, concluded that the reforms had helped the poorest of the poor to avail of government aid.

Unfortunately, the scheme proved too good to last since bureaucrats were vying with one another to take credit instead of giving it a push. The squabbles killed the experiment and soon the bureaucrats were blaming one another for the fiasco.

But even as cynics were writing off the bureaucracy as a never-to-gain institution, it came up with yet another innovative scheme. In a way, the Nirmithi Kendra building centre scheme was an offshoot of the abandoned field experiment. It was conceived to provide the back-up services for various government construction projects, but was soon carrying rural and cheap construction techniques to the villages.

It took upon itself the task of helping villagers help themselves to cheap housing. The Changanassery district administration under Collector C.V. Ananda Bose began the scheme on a modest scale by registering the kendra as a charitable society.

The administration identified two reasons for the lack of popular enthusiasm for low-cost houses: lack of dissemination of modern low-cost housing techniques, and two, the continued use of traditional materials because of the lack of awareness of cheaper substitutes. The kendra was to provide prefabricated and standardised housing materials through a chain of retail



**Cheap and cosy: A house built of Nirmithi fabricated materials**

outlets. More important, it was to train local workmen in innovative housing techniques.

The kendra received a shot in the arm when it was entrusted with the construction of ferro-cement tanks for the drought relief schemes of the government. The porous water tanks of 1,000-litre capacity made by the kendra cost only Rs 1,000 while those available in the market were priced between

Rs 2,800 and Rs 3,500. Anti-theft shelter, village officers, minor water supply schemes and houses for the poor were some of the other works that the kendra successfully completed to generate a surplus of Rs 8 lakh.

Its biggest achievement, however, was the introduction of new construction methods in the remote villages with masons and carpenters trained at the kendra forming rural housing co-operatives. The kendra could provide the back-up services for the construction of 10,000 houses undertaken by the government within days of its inauguration by President Giani Zail Singh.

The kendra promoted rubble filler or stone masonry blocks, using rubble and cement mortar of lean ratio. This meant a saving of 15 to 20 per cent over the traditional brick masonry method. The filler blocks—a combination of soil, cement or lime—are ideal for foundations of buildings and they are cheap. Large-size country-burned bricks and hollow bricks were some of the other cheaper materials popularised by the kendra. For the roof, fibrous sheets proved economical—they eliminated

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the job of bricks. Prices (per 1,000) and 1980-81 were the lowest relative to the 1970-71 period. Cement consumption per sq ft of floor area was 100 kg. The use of concrete blocks and other concrete components was also not in vogue. Windows and doors were made of wood. The use of steel reinforcement was not common. The use of steel reinforcement was not common. The use of steel reinforcement was not common.

Large construction work involving structural concrete, light weight and joint flexibility are only some of the advantages of the innovative materials. The economy in effort and money is more cost-effective in plaster and cement and modern methods of building a house cost less than the traditional method. It is estimated that the cost of a 100 sq ft house is Rs. 1.20.

The success of the Kerala was the harbinger of the national level. The housing minister, Government of India, in 1980, visited the Kerala. The Central Housing Board, Government of India, also visited the Kerala and Maharashtra. The Tamil Nadu Government also visited the Kerala. The Kerala Government has been successful in convincing other States to adopt the Kerala method.



**Teaching out.** Training in building using new systems.

It is expected that the Kerala method will be adopted by other States. The Kerala Government has been successful in convincing other States to adopt the Kerala method. The Kerala Government has been successful in convincing other States to adopt the Kerala method.

Other States and a state-level research committee was formed with support of the Kerala Government. The committee was formed with support of the Kerala Government. The committee was formed with support of the Kerala Government.



**Sturdy.** A house built with concrete slabs.

like the Structural Engineering Research Centre, the Central Building Research Organisation and HUDCO are slowly but steadily reaching the poor house builder of Kerala through the Nirmali Kerala. Even more revolutionary was the idea of training women in masonry and carpentry, hitherto monopolized by men.

But, in spite of the success and relevance of the Kerala, the initial enthusiasm shown by the authorities in Kerala itself is on the wane. Ironically, though the movement was started as part of administrative innovativeness to meet the needs of the people, its progress is once again being stalled by bureaucratic red-tape. At the instance of the

state government, Kerala was registered in all except Alleppey, but most do not have even to work in. There had no attempt to obtain a grant from HUDCO for such kind.

The last Central Government announced a scheme for 5 centres in all the states. The urban development officer, 2 lakh for each centre for of workshop and purchase. An additional lakh, Rs. 4 lakh each was also.

Though the Kerala is doing exactly the kind of work which the Central Government had inspired the Central Government machinery did not of the assistance for training Kerala in the state. C. Chandran in Tiruvananthapuram, Trichy and Palakkad districts. HUDCO for the assistance. Experience has shown the ability cannot be ruled out.

—P. ARAVI

## Innovative, constructive approach

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with an investment of Rs. 3 lakh and it was thrown open to children.

Quilon was the first district in the state to copy the Nirmali Kerala and Bose launched his 'Be-to-Bed' programme as his logical extension. Village schools were converted into improvised dispensaries, handing out spot decisions on long-pending problems of the people. The new programme did not require any extra funds from the government. The necessary money could be found from the proceeds already made by various agencies, and it needed only some coordination among them to provide instant relief to the people. He did away with the red tape to help young entrepreneurs, unemployed youth, widows, hawkers, handicapped people and patients. The programme was eventually adopted in other districts.

His proximity to the people enabled Bose to understand their problems and find solutions that took the shape of schemes like the Nirmali Kerala—the soon caught on and was set up all over the state and in other parts of the country. Then fol-

lowed the Annapurna Society for training women in horticulture, garment making, etc. The society later started a working women's hostel. A hospital auxiliary service group was set up to provide ambulance, laundry and dietary facilities and trained volunteers to help patients. A Sanjivani Kerala raised a 'harkarak' and offered ayurvedic treatment in traditional style. Coe Annapurna Society organised visiting units

### Unorthodox, Anand Bose



including mobile restaurant promotion centres to provide facilities like booklets. The central too was set up as a model for other districts.

Anand Bose, however, states when the Quilon Television Co-Operative andhra construction works near a grove in the Adirampal area. The grove coconut grove were became a hindrance for Bose's detractors. It is Contractors and traders affected by people's direction in various projects. Bose's tenure as chief secretary was not help out their unorthodox ideas. Bose's tenure as chief secretary was not help out their unorthodox ideas.

The result was predictable. Bose's tenure as chief secretary was not help out their unorthodox ideas. Bose's tenure as chief secretary was not help out their unorthodox ideas.