

Architect of defence research

PROFESSOR SURI Bhagavantam took over as Scientific Advisor to the Defence Minister and Director General, Defence Research and Development Organisation in July, 1961.

He was instrumental in making the DRDO an effective instrument to provide the country's fighting forces on land, sea and air with the latest technologies.

In the nine years he headed the DRDO, he set up labs for development of missiles, air craft, aero engines, combat vehicles like tanks, electronic warfare systems, high ex-

SURI BHAGAVANTAM (1909-1989)

plosives and underwater weapons.

Encryption and decryption, war gaming and training of service officers in modern warfare technologies were other disciplines in which he created necessary facilities.

A chain of labs was established in different parts of the country from Visakhapatnam to Leh and Tezpur. The best tribute to his contribution to the building up of DRDO came from one of his distant successors Dr. V. S. Arunachalam. He said "His tenure saw an explosive growth of

the organisation with many, many laboratories and disciplines nucleating at various parts of the country and a large number of scientists getting inducted to defence research. But for these laboratories and competent scientists, DRDO's contribution in these areas of national defence would have been grossly inadequate."



In doing all this, Bhagavantam had to brush aside summarily the advice given by the Nobel laureate and "friend" of India Prof. PMS Blackett to Pandit Nehru that DRDO should confine itself to development of sub-systems and import substitution and not attempt to develop major sys-

tems like radars, missiles, tanks etc for which India should depend on imports. The country has to be grateful to Bhagavantam for ignoring this friendly advice.

Bhagavantam's formal college education ended with a first class first B.Sc., degree in Physics of the Madras University from the Nizam College, Hyderabad. As a prize-winning essayist Bhagavantam joined Sir C. V. Raman's Laboratory in Calcutta as a research scholar.

He impressed Raman with his scientific abilities, thinking and experimental skills. He obtained his M.Sc., degree from Madras University.

He joined the Andhra University at Waltair as a lecturer in Physics in 1932, rose to become Professor and Head of the department in 1938 at the very young age of 28 years. The university conferred on him the D.Sc. degree (Honoris causa) a little earlier.

In 1948-49 he spent one year in London at the High Commission as the first scientific liaison officer. This was his first trip abroad.

While in London, he was invited by a number of universities in U.K. and Europe including Soviet Union to deliver lectures.

During this period he developed a friendly relationship with M. V. K.

Krishna Menon, the then High Commissioner. Returning to India in 1949 he moved to Osmania University as Professor of Physics.

Within a short span of a few years he became the Vice Chancellor of the University when he was in his early forties. In 1957, he was appointed Director of the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore from where V. K. Krishna Menon persuaded him to take up the post of Scientific Advisor to Minister of Defence. He retired in October, 1969.

He authored about 300 research papers. He wrote three books on *Group Theory*, *Raman Effect*, and *Crystal Symmetry and Physical Properties* which are considered classics and have been translated into various languages. He was elected fellow of a number of scientific and professional bodies in India and abroad and awarded honorary doctorates by many universities.

He was an erudite scholar in Sanskrit and Telugu. He had a tremendous sense of humour. Bhagavantam had a great faith in the future of this country. A teacher by choice, he continued to be one throughout his life.

● **M. Krishnamurthi**
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