

Shri K. Viswanathan

Recipient of Jamnalal Bajaj Award for Application of Science and Technology for Rural Development-1992

Born: 8.2.1928; Graduate from Shantiniketan, studied Basic Education at Sevagram. After his studies in India and abroad, Shri Viswanathan settled down in his own native village, Vellanad, in Trivandrum District, founded Mitraniketan in 1956 and has continued as its Director since inception. Beginning with supplementary education, this institution has branched off into diverse activities.

In the field of reclamation of waste land, Mitraniketan has set a model to the farmers around. Three decades ago, this village was taken to be a "God forsaken place". The land chosen to work on had deep gullies, was heavily eroded and barren. It was seemingly unable to sustain any vegetation and was written off as waste land. The wells, tanks and channels were all dry in summer. As an integral part of effective educational and development scheme, conservation of soil and water was given prime importance in an effort to save waste lands. Soil conservation measures were little known in the area. Shri Viswanathan sought advice of geo-hydrologists and soil conservation experts and took effective measures to stop formation of more gullies and ravines and checked further depletion of the top soil through measures like terracing, contour bunding, etc.

Intensive planting of a great variety of trees, hardwood and light wood shrubs and plants were started once irrigation possibilities were established. Now Mitraniketan has a lush growth of vegetation. Manure and fallen leaves have over the years added fertility to the soil. The fruits and the green cover have given a shelter to birds, animals and other living organisms to restore the ecological balance.

Social Forestry was practiced by Mitraniketan from its inception and has gained better momentum with departmental assistance. The bamboo and reed seedlings obtained from the Forest Department were distributed to 108 selected villagers as a specific project apart from planting them in Mitraniketan campus and its boundaries.

The Krishi Vigyan Kendra functioning with the assistance of ICAR is one of the best among the few such Kendras allotted to private institutions. This Kendra has recently developed mushroom cultivation thereby creating avenues for self-employment to many youths of Kerala and neighbouring States.

Mitraniketan has a model dairy with a veterinary dispensary with all facilities for artificial insemination, which was started as early as in 1958. As a result, the qualitative and quantitative improvement in upgrading local breeds in the Vellanad Block has already taken place. Recently 15 more sub-centres for offering Veterinary and artificial insemination services have been set up in the adjacent district of Quilon and other areas of Trivandrum District.

Mitraniketan has also made significant contribution to poultry and Goatry development and training. Apart from its own poultry unit, it has taken up a "back-yard poultry development project for weaker sections".

The Rural Technology Centre emerged as a result of Shri Viswanathan's philosophy of education linked with work experience. In this Centre, vocational training is given in various trades like carpentry, metal fabrication, welding, turning, blacksmithy, plumbing, pottery, spinning and weaving, printing, composing and book binding, bamboo crafts, batik printing, bakery, fruit preservation, tailoring, shoulder bag making, coir mat weaving etc. with a view to self-employment or organising co-operatives for the trainees. The Khadi spinning society now helps not less than 500 families to earn their living.

At the instance of Mitraniketan, the Regional Research Laboratory, Trivandrum, under CSIR, has perfected a chemical treatment for lengthening the life of Coconut thatches. It helps the poor -families to save the expenses on re-thatching, as the treated leaves last for about 4 years.

In the field of coir industry, an innovative loom has been introduced in the technology centre for weaving circular mats for being used as oil filter. A low cost machine, operated by hand and power, is used for the production of these mats. The Coir Board has approved this new machine and its product.

Adoption of Bio-gas Technology has been one of the major programmes of Mitraniketan. Every year, around 1000 plants are targeted.

Providing simple water seal and other types of low cost latrines, supplying treated pure drinking water and other sanitation and health care measures to keep the environment clean and healthy are schemes taken up by Mitraniketan in rural areas. 400 houses have been selected for construction of low-cost sanitary latrines under CAPART scheme.

The rural technology centre is manufacturing simple types of wood burning stoves with appropriate vents and with aluminum reflectors to ensure supply of effective heat and prevent emission of smoke. These cheaply priced stoves are in high demand among the bamboo workers who can carry the stoves to the work spots and do their cooking while at work using the bamboo wastes.

