



DR. DEVENDRA KUMAR

Recipient of the Award for Application of Science and Technology for Rural Development - 1998

Born: August 16, 1925

Dr. Devendra Kumar, in 1946 after graduating in Science and Technology, joined the All India Village Industries Association (AIVIA), Wardha, of which Mahatma Gandhi was the President and Prof. J. C. Kumarappa, the Secretary. He was given the responsibility of the village oil section and AIVIA Laboratory. Between 1946 and 1952 he successfully conducted several experiments utilization of groundnut cake for dibble purposes in Rotis (its results were appreciated by Gandhiji) and effected many improvements concerning the village oil industry. He also developed new approaches such as solar evaporation of palm juice for 'gur' making, smokeless chulhas, gobar-gas plants, improvements in bee keeping, pottery and handmade paper.

Since May 1952, Dr. Devendra Kumar involved himself in integrated development of the villages, living as one with the landless poor and actively participating in the Bhoodan and Sarvodaya movements through lecture tours and *Padyatras*. He also kept in close touch with the various urban sections like educational institutions, labour unions, voluntary agencies, political parties, religious bodies, journalist, teachers and other moulders of public opinion.

In 1965 he took up the National Secretaryship of the Central Gandhi Smarak Nidhi and organized the National Committee for Gandhi Centenary. For more than a decade, under the guidance of Jayaprakash Narayan, Morarji Desai, Indira Gandhi, Dr. Zakir Hussain and Vinobha Bhave he worked for the coordination of various Gandhian constructive programmes. He became a conduit between the Gandhi movement and the policy-makers of the country.

In 1976, after renouncing all organizational responsibilities with which he was connected, he established the Centre of Science of Villages (CSV) and has won great fame by pioneering successfully the movement for Transfer of Technology to Village Industry, or to put it in striking form, to carry the scientific movement and temper to the villages. He was able to induce changes in the national policies of village industries by closely associating with IIT's Department of Science and Technology, Council for Scientific and Industrial Research and with technological missionaries like E.F. Schumacher and Ivan Illich.

The Centre for Science or Villages has now become the most prominent NGO for developing rural technologies. It has a team of 100 young Scientists, Architects, Engineers, Biochemists, Physicists, Material Scientists, Artisans and Field Workers engaged in taking the benefit of science and technology. Various technologies in the field of rural housing, sanitation, energy, fuel, industries, crafts, tools, equipment, ecological land management and technologies for women have been developed. Among the technologies developed, the most prominent are the following:

1. Development of new concept of 'clay-emitter' irrigation, which can increase India's irrigated areas by wells by more than 3 times.
2. Development of techniques of handling the wild Rock Bee without harming its comb or destroying its brood and making it possible to extract honey from the same comb more than once.

3. Designing low-cost mud houses, proof against rain and rodents. HUDCO in India and UNESCO in other countries are taking up this model for propaganda.
4. Making bio-dung from biomass, which is a highly active, bio-manure as well as a part-substitute for cow-dung in biogas.
5. Pioneering work in cellulose technology for making soft and hard boards from low cellulose wastes from banana stem, coir-waste and even sawdust.
6. Improvement of simple hand-tools and agricultural equipment.
7. Working in the field of minor forest products like gums and resins, medicinal herbs and plants, tree born oil seed and fruits.

Between 1986 and 1989, Dr. Devendra Kumar was Vice-Chancellor of the Rural Institute of Gandhi Gram where he was conferred with an Honorary Doctorate.

Dr. Devendra Kumar is a thinker and prolific write and has been editing the journal 'Science for Villages' for more than two decades.

He has to his credit the following publications:

1. Whither Science
2. Four phase of Human Progress
3. University and the community
4. Status Report on University Participation for the development of rural artisans and weaker sections
5. The Perennial Gandhi

He is the President and Member of many National Committees for education, science, technology and rural development.

