

## The Role of Sri Ramkrishna Ashram, Nimpith in the Socio-economic Development of Sundarbans

“..... Let New India arise out of the Peasants' Cottage, grasping the plough; out of the huts of the Fishermen, the Cobbler and the Sweeper. Let her spring from the Grocer's Shop, from beside the oven of the fritter-seller. Let her emanate from the factory, from marts and from markets”

– Swami Vivekananda

To give a concrete shape to the noble and lofty ideals of Acharya Swami Vivekananda, Revered Srimat Swami Buddhanandaji Maharaj started his Rural Welfare Services by setting up Nimpith Sri Ramkrishna Ashram in 1960-61 with a view to improving the physical, mental and economic condition of the neglected and under privileged masses of the most backward South 24-Parganas District of West Bengal after devoting himself in numerous Social Reforming Services in various renowned Math and Missions Centres of the Ramakrishna Math & Mission, Belur particularly in the Rajkot Centre.



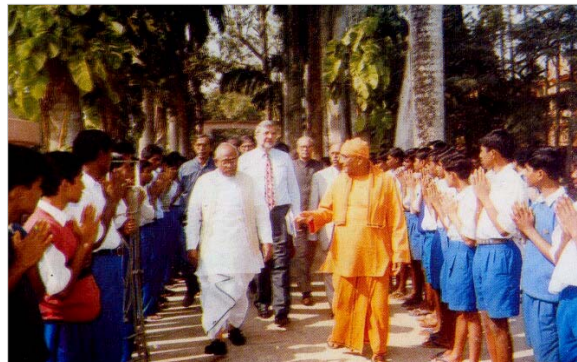
Ashram Temple

The first and foremost needs for the development of the remote areas of Sundarbans are the improvements of Communication System, Education, Health, Culture, Agriculture and Small-Scale Industry. Therefore, in order to improve the Communication System a 20- Kilometers Pacca Road from Joynagar to Jamtala Via Nimpith was constructed with the kind help and co-operation from the then Hon'ble Chief Minister of West Bengal, Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy as well as with active support and financial aid from the P.W. (Roads) Department, Govt. of West Bengal. This 20 Kilometers Tar Road is keeping the connection with Joynagar-Kulpi Road and also it is the Connective Road with Kolkata and other cities. Gradually Swami Buddhanandaji Maharaj creates the improved modern communication in the backward area of inaccessible Sundarbans by providing with Electricity and Telephone facilities.

This great Social-reformer Saint began his Rural Developmental Activities on priority basis with great emphasis on Education and Health and initiated a unique method of Ten Year Plan in place of Government's Five Year Plan. When Swamiji first stepped in this backward area of Nimpith, there was only a Junior High School where 133 students were provided with education. As there was no scope for Higher Education, most of the students were deprived of the torch of knowledge for higher studies except a negligible number of meritorious students availed themselves of this opportunity of higher education.



Ashram Type School Campus



To increase self-awareness among the people of Sundarbans especially among the youths, Swamiji began to spread education by establishing a Pre-basic and a Jr. Basic School.



**Ashram Basic School**



In the beginning co-educational system was accepted but it was transformed into separate Boys' and Girls' Schools from Nursery level to Higher Secondary level thinking it to be congenial to Rural Environment. At present the Ashram has been conducting 11 educational institutions. Now around 5500 Students are prosecuting their studies in all these schools out of them 1000 students are accommodated (with food and lodging facilities) in four well equipped Ashram Hostels. Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe, Harijan and Muslim Community Students hailing from the inaccessible and far-off Islands of the Sundarbans are given preference for admission as Hostellers. Among the aforesaid boarders, 60% to 70 % pass Madhyamik Examination with First and Second Division Marks and go for Higher Studies.

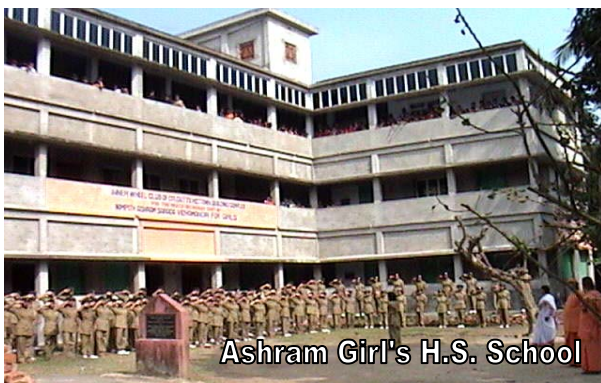


**Ashram Boy's H.S. School**



**Ashram Boy's Hostel**

One of the Schools is a Residential High School with 180 Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Students are being educated. In this School there are only 30 Students in each Class. Those 30 Students are admitted in Class – V and they succeed in passing all the classes with credit and reach Class X. It is worth mentioning that out of those 30 Students, 15/20 Students come out successful in M.P. Exam. with First Division Marks and 4/5 pupils even obtain star marks.



**Ashram Girl's H.S. School**



Besides there is a Child Labour School where the Child Labours who work as labourers in the Tea stall, Brick-field or in any richman's house as bonded labourer are taught with special care nursing them in the Ashram Boarding House. The less quality students read upto class VIII and are trained in different vocational trade as Carpentry, Masonry, Tailoring Motor Mechanic, electrical wiring etc. for making them self-dependent in their later. It is noteworthy that two students from this section are continuing their higher studies after having passed M.P. Examination in Second Division. Under this system of education a considerable number of pupils have proved their worth by occupying high rank and office in many prestigious institutions. Some of them have emerged successful and well-known as Doctors, Teachers, Engineers and Top-rank officers in various fields of life.

**H**aving no medical facilities for want of proper medical infrastructure at Nimpith and its adjacent areas, a Rural Hospital (first with 10 bed and later 30 bed) came into open light on the land and building gifted by Ashram with the generous help from the Department of Health, Govt. of West Bengal and particularly for untiring effort of Swamiji.

As well as with the Primary Health Centre an X-ray Clinic and a Chest Clinic were started to supply with proper treatment to the miserable inhabitants of Sundarbans and also to create consciousness among them about the necessity of sound health and proper hygiene. In addition to these, a free Eye Operation Camp has been still going on to get around 250-300 Eye Cataract Patients operated upon by specialized Doctors every year. These needy and hapless patients supplied with all facilities before and after operation, free of cost and supplied with spectacles also. At present, the Eye-Patients are operated upon with IOL.



**I**t has been common feature that 60% to 70% students have been successful in prosecuting higher studies after passing Madhyamik Examination in First & Second Division. The remaining number of students either passes in the third division or falls prey to compartmental Group. As a result, the drop-outs with this sense of false prestige get themselves involved in different antisocial activities. This ominous aspect of education interrupts the smooth sailing progress of education in this area in many ways. To fight this grave situation, transforming the uncultivated land into cultivated one and mono-cropped land into double-cropped one were thought to be the means of solution. Accordingly, the then Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, Sri Morarjibhai Desai,



Internationally Reputed Scientist Dr. M.S. Swaminathan and the then M.P. of Diamond Harbour Sri Jyotirmoy Basu came forward to offer their sincere and self-less service to the Development of

Nimpith Sri Ramkrishna Ashram and with their generous support Srimat Swami Buddhanandaji Maharaj with his indefatigable spirit of work became successful in making the long-cherished



auspicious beginning of Krishi Vigyan Kendra and under its worthy management and supervision along with Modern Agro-technological facilities High-Yielding Paddy cultivation, Vegetables Production,, Pisciculture, Cattle-rearing (Cow, Broiler, Bird, Duck, Goat, Lamb) etc. are going on effectively and successfully to support the downtrodden people of Sundarbans in developping their economic status and the small and marginal farmers are being made self reliant by imparting then various training free of cost.



Here every year on an average 4000-5000 trainees are making themselves self-dependent by receiving the necessary training and the suitable counsel for the application of them on the practical field.

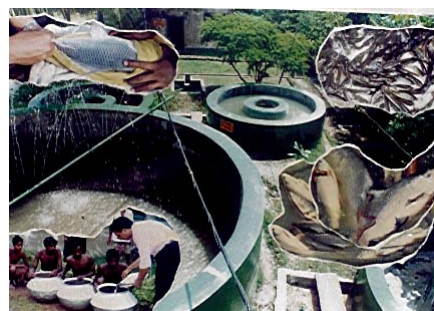
It is indeed known to all that the main hardles in transforming the unfertile land into double-cropping one are (i) High percentage salinity (ii) Low lying (iii) Impeded drainage system.



To get rid of these impediments and to make mono-cropped land into poly-cropped one, Nimpith Ashram Krishi Vigyan Kendra has invented the unique solution method – the Land Shaping Programme.



By this Programme one-fifth portion of 2/3 Bighas of Low Land is excavated to make a pond and with the earth dug out the remaining low land is raised by 1 to 1½ feet and embankment round the total periphery of the land is done. The rain water is preserved in that pond and different species of fishes are reared especially mixed rearing of Rohu, Katla, Japanese punti, Nilotika and sweet water prawn.



Thus a man can earn Rs. 5000-6000 per year. On the elevated land a farmer can earn Rs. 2-3 thousand by cultivating high yielding paddy with 16-20 mound of corn production per bigha. Besides these incomes, a tiller also gets the bonus profit of Rs. 3-4 thousand annually by consecutive farming of brinjal, ladies' finger, bean, gourd, tomato etc.



Moreover after paddy cultivation a peasant can also earn additional income of Rs. 4-5 thousand per year by cultivating Cotton, Mustard, Sunflower in the Rabi-Season. As a result a farmer can be able to earn Rs. 15-20 thousand every year with the proper application of this Farm Project.



This Project duly sanctioned and implemented by West Bengal Government, Sundarban Development Board and CAPART is helping the educated unemployed youths in their economic progress by creating employment facilities to them.

Moreover, in the Krishi Vigyan Kendra by the joint effort of Indo-Israel Project, artificial breeding



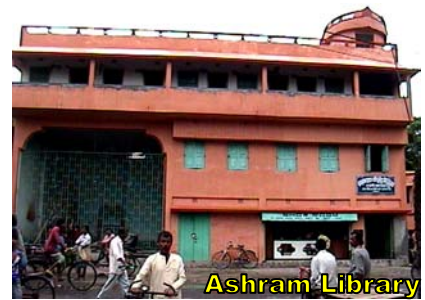
of rare indigenous cat-fishes and ornamental fishes are being carried out and this Project is standing by the unemployed youths of this area with creating employment facilities for them and consequently advancing them in their financial stability.

In the field of cattle rearing by setting up Hatchery and supplying the poor village women with hatched birds [(Chicks, Broiler, Khaki Cambel (duck))] and also providing them with proper training, the Self-Help Programme is accelerating the progress of the un-employed masses of Sundarbans through different Small Scale Project by which new sources of alternative livelihood are creating. Besides, with artificial insemination facilities the indigenous cows are increasing the amount of milk production to ten litre from one litre at a leap which shows some kind of optimism and courage in the minds of the wretched people of Sundarbans.



In order to save the Primary Producers from the exploitation of the unscrupulous middlemen and to give them proper price for their Products, Nimpith Ramkrishna Ashram Marketing Centre was founded in the year 1979.

At present, there are 100 big sized shops and 50 small sized shops (of Grocery, Cloths, Medicine, Tailoring, Stationary, Utensils, Hardware goods, Puffed rice, Dairy, Poultry-feed etc.) by which one thousand families earn their livelihood smoothly and happily. In addition to these, there are two large-sized sheds (tin) for vendors of Vegetables, Fruits, Fishes, Meat, Rice etc. and here the small and marginal farmers (nearly 200-250 persons) maintain their families by selling their products to the consumers directly.



The Cotton grown by the Cotton-farmers is sold at fixed price (Rs. 2000 per Quintal) through the Cotton Corporation of India Ltd. and these purchased cotton is ginned in the ginning machine installed at Nimpith Ramkrishna Ashram Marketing Centre.



The producers of Mustard Seeds and Sunflower Seeds come to Nimpith to get their Seeds crushed in machine for getting liquid edible Oil and Oilcakes. The so-called Shylocks used to take the advantage of poverty of the poor and hapless villagers and forced them to receive 'Dadan' (earnest money) and with this system the 'receivers' became bond-slaves to them and this cruel practice had been continuing generation after generation. To stop this illegal and inhuman practice, a branch of SBI was opened effectively for the masses of Sundarbans in their economic upliftment.

It is an admitted fact that the power of fertility of land degrades for the cultivation of the identical crops year after year and for the excessive uses of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. To regain the lost fertility of land, the Bio-technology Department of India and Agriculture Sector of West Bengal Government together have made a Five Year Plan (first with BGA and Azolla) under the inspiring and commendable leadership and management of Sri Ramkrishna Ashram, Nimpith and gradually to shape the full-fledged form of the Project Vivekananda Institute of Bio-technology was inaugurated in 1990. Now this Institute is being run by the Ashram with financial support from



the Science and Technology Department, Govt. of India and this much needed Institute is recognized by SDB, BCKV, B.U. and C.U.



This Institute is equipped with the facilities of a Soil Testing Laboratory, Production of 17 varieties of Bananas by Tissue Culture method, Production of Mushroom Seeds, Producing of Azolla, BGA



and its Application, uses of Neem Project, Preparation of Rizobium and Ajotobacter and its uses,



Farmers' Training in making and using Vermicompost and Bio-gas and through all these service works it has been able to create some kind of employment facilities for the educated unemployed youths of Sundarbans and to facilitate them in solving their problems in day to day life.

As an example it should be noteworthy that several educated youths of different Blocks of Sundarbans have taken three months' training in soil testing method and provided fertilizer recommendations to the respective farmers by bringing the soil of those lands of farmers in the VIB and examining the soil with their own hands and this method has enabled them to earn each 5000-56000 rupees per year collecting the minimum amount of Rs. 20/- from the farmer as fertilizer recommendation fees. The married women of villages have started to enjoy the fruits of their labour through the collection of Neem seeds and through making nursery for banana saplings

by tissue culture method. Besides these, a Technology Resource Centre under VIB has been set up with generous help from CAPART of the Rural Development Department, Government of India where 50 men and women could be accommodated at a time and they are also trained in Bio-technology and Vocational Professions in this centre.



For the inconveniences in reaching Nimpith from the different remote and inaccessible Islands Kaikhali Island Service Centre has been established to eradicate those hardles and to help the



wretched people of Sundarbans in promoting their economic, social and moral condition. At the beginning, a Primary School with a Hostel capable of accommodating 100 Scheduled Caste and



Scheduled Tribe Students was set up. The pupils from 9/10 Islands adjacent to Kaikhali come to this School and study here upto Class IV and then they are provided with further education upto Class XII in the Schools at Nimpith.

However several public welfare services works have been implemented by Kaikhali Island Service Centre which are -

1) Jetty Ghat, (2) Brick-built river embankment, (3) Metalled Road, (4) Post Office, (5) Police out post, (6) State Bank of India (now computerized), (7) Arrangement of light and water through Solar Energy, (8) Telephone etc. The underdeveloped peasants and fishermen of Sundarbans have been and are being much benefited by those Projects and constructive works which usher in a new era of economic development of the backward masses of Sundarbans.

These Projects (except the aforesaid ones run by Ashram) – (1) 20 K.M. Tar Road from Joynagar





to Jamtala via Nimpith and the Vivekananda Setu on the Nemanian river constructed by Ashram and Nemanian-Kaikhali (12 K.M.) Pacca Road under construction), (2) Block Development Office-Jaynagar – II, (3) Anchal Panchayat Office, (4) Police Outpost, (5) Sri Ramkrishna Rural Hospital (30 bedded), (6) Electricity, (7) Nimpith & Jamtala Telephone Exchange, (8) Rural Water Supply Project, (9) Nimpith Post Office and Telegram Centre (21 Branch Post Offices under it) having been established and run by Central and State Govt. under the active help of Nimpith Sri Ramkrishna Ashram are revolutionizing the rural economic state of the neglected masses of Sundarbans. Those projects have accelerated and are being accelerating the pace of Socio-economic development of this neglected region of the Sundarbans.



As well as with the studies, the formation of Physical and mental growth of the students through different kinds of Games and Sports is compulsory and to fulfil that purpose Sri Ramkrishna Ashram, Nimpith has constructed a large Play Ground in the name of Swami Vivekananda, the Spiritual leader of India and Bidhan Chandra Pavilion where Annual sports, Inter-School sports Competition (District level and State level) are held every year with pomp and grandeur and these functions create enough enthusiasm and enjoyment among the students and others. Moreover N.C.C. Training for the students, a long-term Coaching in Football and Swimming are developing the sense of discipline and competitive skill among the students which makes the way for bright future for the students. Again it would be relevant to say that in our Nimpith Ashram Campus there is a colossal Cultural Hall (Viz-Indira Gandhi Community Hall) with 2000 seat capacity where at the presence of dignitaries various kinds of programmes as prize- distribution ceremony, Farmers’ conference and different types of



Workshops are now and then held. The Exhibition of Bio-technology for Agriculture and different Scientific Technologies are also the sources of attraction to the local people of this area during the week-long “Krishi-Mela” every year. The contribution of Sri Ramkrishna Ashram in transforming uncultivated land into double cropped and poly-cropped ones is always mention worthy with admiration and gratitude.

For instances the mass welfare services carried out by Nimpith Sri Ramkrishna Ashram Janakalyan Kendra (Rural Development Wing) as construction of Farm Science Club and Model Villages in many Islands of Sundarbans particularly for the uneducated farmers to teach them about improved farm Technology and Application of Bio-technology; Land Shaping Programme;



desiltation of ponds and composite Fish culture and Sweet water prawn; Production of Vegetables; Organizing Community Centre (where at least 50 farmers or mothers to meet together); supply of drinking water through deep tube well; construction of suitable latrine; low cost house; providing with improved farming tools with Power-tiller; establishment of self-employment and Self-Help Group; Supplying the women with Poultry Farm; Cultivation of Mushroom; Farming of Bananas etc. and above and over all with Mother and Child Care Programmes and making planned family



are co-operating in socio-economic development of the backward people of Sundarbans. These Service Programmes are being carried out with the financial help and support from DW, Germany,



CAPART, NABARD, UNICEF and Sundarban Development Board. In addition to these services, a Launch with the facilities of X-ray and Pathological Testing facilities under Mobile Health Care Project is contributing a lot in creating awareness about health and hygiene among the people of remote and outreach Islands of Sundarbans providing them with clinical advantages. The implementation of these beneficial and substantial services are not only confined to 24-Parganas, especially to Sundarbans but also extending its branches to Midnapore (Jhargram), Purulia even Paradwip, Jagatsinghapur and Kalahandi (Scheduled Tribe area) of Orissa, Nimpith Sri Ramkrishna Ashram is determined to set a land mark in the benefit of advanced Agro and Bio-technology in the Socio-economic Development. With the desire to make the poor village women especially the widows and husband deserted women stand on their own feet and save them from the oppression, torture, exploitation and neglect of the Society, Ramkrishna Ashram Mahila Samity was started at the very beginning of this Ashram in the early Sixties and accordingly training centre has been set up to train the miserable women in Tailoring, embroidery and needle works.



After training period the successful trainees are supplied with sewing machines to earn their livelihood by themselves and by this method Ashram is endeavoring to improve the socio-economic condition of the downtrodden and the oppressed.

Rotary Club of Calcutta Midtown has been instrumental in providing necessary funds for SRAN's initiative to sink deep tube wells under the project – "Jal Seva Prakalpa" for providing clear and fresh drinking water to the people of remote villages, both in mainland and islands. So far more than 200 tube wells has been sunk in this region.



Construction of low cost house named as "Vivekananda Kutir" is another novel achievement of SRAN. Under this project a family of 3-4 members have been provided a modest brick tiled house



completed with a room, a kitchen, a smokeless chullah and attached bathroom. DW, Germany supports this programme by providing the necessary funds.

One of the most laudable ventures implemented by SRAN is "Project Toilet" funded initially by the Inner Wheel Club of Calcutta Midtown and presently by Rotary Club of Calcutta Midtown.



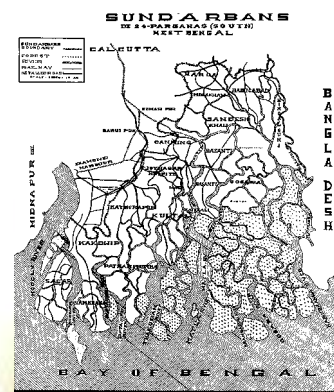
This came as a great relief for particularly the womenfolk's of Sundarbans and has thus helped in promoting health and hygiene in different villages. So far 350 units of toilet has been constructed.

In order to utilize women power to strengthen the economic condition of a village family and as an alternative livelihood, the SRAN has successfully joined hands with a renowned business house – "Rajda Sales" for developing cottage industry on "gloves-making". The required raw materials are supplied by the said concern and the finished products are also procured by them for marketing. Around 25-30 women are presently engaged in gloves making business and the number is gradually increasing.





Except those direct benefits, the common masses of Sundarbans have been much profited for the establishment of Nimpith Sri Ramkrishna Ashram in the remote area of Sundarbans and innumerable families are earning their daily needs depending indirectly on this Ashram, particularly the illiterate and semi-literate unemployed youths, who have been able to maintain their families by paddling Rickshaw Van. Thus in many ways Nimpith Sri Ramkrishna Ashram is performing the key role for the regeneration of the backward masses of Sundarbans in the field of Socio-economic ground.



*"Penniless, but with a burning and pioneering zeal I plunged myself headlong into the solemn and supreme task of bettering the lot of the down trodden people with the aid and co-operation of devoted and selfless band of workers"*

*Swami Buddhanandaji*

