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COLLABORATION AND THE SMALL COMMUNITY: ARTHUR MORGAN AND THE MITRANIKETAN PROJECT IN KERALA¹

AARON D. PURCELL

ENGINEER, EDUCATOR, and community builder Arthur Morgan casts a long shadow across the first half of the twentieth century. As the chief engineer of numerous water control projects, especially in the Miami and Tennessee River valleys, Morgan designed massive earthen and concrete structures to control water levels and flooding. As a Progressive reformer and social engineer Morgan worked to infuse high morals, community living, and strong character into his workers and colleagues. As important to an understanding of Morgan as these career highlights are, however, this article takes a different starting point to Morgan's career by examining a less well-known but to Morgan far more important aspect of his work—the development of an educationally based, cooperative community in India known as Mitraniketan. By examining the origin and growth of the Mitraniketan community, Arthur Morgan's vision for society becomes clearer. Believing that rapid urbanization had led to a decline of morality, Morgan believed that character was best cultivated in small communities. As a result, Morgan hoped to build a society of small communities where students learned practical skills, cooperation, respect for others, and the importance of community. Mitraniketan was the

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living embodiment of Morgan's educational and societal philosophy. Moving away from studies of Morgan's more notable projects, this article examines what lay at the heart of Morgan's complex vision—a grass-roots movement of community development, universal practical education, and moral reawakening.

Arthur Morgan grew up during the 1880s, and, affected by the cultural and religious climate of the time, was concerned with reforming society through communitarian cooperation. Drawn to utopian books such as Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, and heavily influenced by his mother Anna, a pious churchgoer who stressed prudishness and religious intensity, Morgan demonstrated both a strong sense of morality and a genuine concern for the welfare of others. At age twenty-two he began an apprenticeship under his father, John Morgan, a civil engineer and surveyor, and quickly rose to become a specialist in drainage engineering. In 1910, following contract work with the government as a drainage consultant, Morgan and two associates opened an engineering firm in Memphis, Tennessee. Three years later, a flood committee in Dayton, Ohio selected Morgan to direct the Miami Conservancy District, a massive flood control project in southwestern Ohio. With this project Morgan established himself as a nationally known engineer and Progressive reformer.²

By the 1920s, Morgan had turned his attention to education. As a teenager, Morgan had envisioned developing a community-based school to provide students of all levels and interests with practical work experience. As his first major project, in 1917, Morgan and other reformers established the Moraine Park School near Dayton, Ohio. The K-12 school encouraged the importance of self-reliance and emphasized the principle that learning values was more important than learning facts. Morgan's continuing involvement with the Miami Conservancy District, however, meant that his participation with

2. Roy Talbert, Jr., *FDR's Utopian: Arthur Morgan of the TVA* (Jackson, Miss., 1987), 10–11, 22–23, 36–39; Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward, 2000–1887* (Boston, Mass., 1888); Aaron D. Purcell, "Reclaiming Lost Ground: Arthur Morgan and the Labor Camps of the Miami Conservancy District," *The Historian* 64 (winter 2002): 370–71; idem., "Plumb Lines, Politics, and Projections: The Florida Everglades and the 'Wright Report' Controversy," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 80 (fall 2001): 176–77.

Moraine Park was often limited. His interest in education was not so limited, however, and in 1919 Morgan became a trustee of Antioch College, a small, nearly bankrupt college in Yellow Springs, Ohio founded by Horace Mann, a member of the House of Representatives from Massachusetts (1848–52), in 1852. Mann called for education reform by improving methods of teaching, developing a consciousness among teachers, and placing school discipline on a rational basis. At Antioch, Mann established a nondenominational, coeducational, and multiracial institution. Intrigued by Mann's legacy and attracted by the opportunity to redesign higher education, Morgan was elected college president in 1920. With free reign to experiment, Morgan initiated a variety of reforms and programs during his twelve-year tenure at Antioch, including a student cooperative work program (workstudy), campus industries, and a system of personal student budgets.³

While college president, Morgan learned many lessons about management, curriculum development, fundraising, and the academic environment while cultivating his educational philosophy through constant experimentation and metacognitive examination. For Morgan, character, community, Christian morals, and cultivating a strong sense of one's purpose in life were integral to a good education and to achieving one's potential. Thus, Morgan's Antioch workstudy program (one of the first of its kind in the nation) reflected Morgan's belief that education should combine academic standards with practical experience.

As successful as Morgan was in some areas at Antioch, however, he failed to implement all of his programs or to get total cooperation from the faculty. As a result, Morgan expressed some level of disappointment with his Antioch experience, and in 1933 left to chair Franklin D. Roosevelt's newly created Tennessee Valley Authority. His TVA tenure began brightly enough, but he quickly clashed with fellow director David Lilienthal, and, after five tumultuous years as chairman, he was removed in 1938. Returning to Yellow

3. Arthur Morgan, "Notes Concerning Mitraniketan," February 1963, box 2, Morgan Papers; idem., "What College is For," *Atlantic Monthly* 129 (May 1922): 650; Thomas K. McCraw, *Morgan Versus Lilienthal: The Feud Within the TVA* (Chicago, Ill., 1970), 9; Talbert, *FDR's Utopian*, 42–44; Landrum Bolling, "The Influence of Arthur Morgan on Education," *Antioch Review* 34 (summer 1976): 453–68.

Springs to contemplate his next move, Morgan returned also to his interest in education and community. Since the beginning of his career, he had worked hard to combine his belief in community with his engineering commitments. While with the Conservancy District and the TVA, Morgan had built worker camps of small villages with modern, electric powered homes. During the Conservancy District project, Morgan built schools and offered classes to the employees and their children. His revolutionary labor camp designs were a significant departure from worker facilities of the time. Morgan designed the community of Norris, Tennessee. This permanent worker-village was Morgan's closest attempt to building a model small community, but despite his high hopes it never became what Morgan had first envisioned, and after World War II the TVA sold the town to private developers. By 1940, free from his TVA obligations, Morgan implemented his vision of community through the creation of Community Services Inc., a nonprofit corporation devoted to promoting small communities and small industries. Through Community Services, Morgan organized conferences, published books, sponsored lectures, provided consultation, and raised funds for numerous causes.⁴ Morgan also wrote a number of books and articles on community in which he argued that the development of character was best cultivated in what he called the "small community." Thus, Morgan encouraged the advancement, and often rebirth, of small rural localities, which he believed would result in the growth of small industries, localized cooperative ventures, and neighborly cooperation. In his quest to implement his vision, Morgan cited the possibilities that surely existed in the developing nations.⁵

In focusing upon what would come to be called the "Third World," Morgan was certainly in tune with his times. In August 1947, for example, after nearly two hundred years of occupation, India won freedom from the

4. Ernest Morgan, *Arthur Morgan Remembered* (Yellow Springs, Ohio, 1991), 82.

5. Purcell, "Reclaiming Lost Ground," 371, 386, 388, 390; Aelred J. Gray, "The Maturing of a Planned New Town: Norris, Tennessee," *Tennessee Planner* 32 (1974): 1-25; Arthur Morgan, *The Small Community, Foundation of Democratic Life: What It Is and How to Achieve It* (New York, 1942); idem., *The Community of the Future and the Future of Community* (Yellow Springs, Ohio, 1957).

British, albeit in the form of two separate countries.⁶ In India, in addition to restructuring the government and economy, the newly elected Indian National Congress gave due concern to education. The most pressing issue, addressed but never solved by the British, was how to provide social education for all illiterate adults and universal, free, and compulsory education for all children of school-going age. To tackle these and other educational concerns, the new government created a Ministry of Education and formed several committees.⁷ One of these committees was the Universities Education Commission, which, composed of both international experts as well as Indians, met for the first time in 1948. As a member of this committee, and in order to assess India's educational structure, Morgan visited numerous rural communities and universities throughout India.⁸ Through these visits Morgan observed that a great number of young Indian men and women were uneducated and permanently tied to their villages and that the few villagers who did attend the urban universities seldom returned to their rural homes to educate others. Morgan's solution was to have the Indian government establish rural universities that would both educate more people than current institutions, and, perhaps more importantly, educate them close to home, and thereby perhaps stem the exodus of educated citizens from countryside to town.⁹ Morgan's efforts on the commission proved invaluable, and rural universities with much

6. Britain's departure did, however, result in subsequent violence between the two nations. See: Larry Collins, *Freedom at Midnight* (New York, 1975); Manmath Nath Das, *Partition and Independence of India: Inside Story of the Mountbatten Days* (New Delhi, 1982); William J. Barndes, *India, Pakistan, and the Great Powers* (New York, 1972); Leonard Oswald Mosley, *The Last Days of the British Raj* (New York, 1962); Patrick French, *Liberty or Death: India's Journey to Independence and Division* (London, 1997).

7. Ranbir Vohra, *The Making of India: A Historical Survey*, 2d. ed. (Armonk, N.Y., 2001), 185–87; S. N. Mukerji, *History of Education in India (Modern Period)*, 5th ed. (Baroda, India, 1966), 237–38.

8. Suma Chitnis and Philip G. Altbach, eds., *Higher Education Reform in India: Experience and Perspectives* (New Delhi, 1993), 91; Amrik Singh and Philip G. Altbach, eds., *The Higher Learning in India* (Delhi, 1974), 26–27, 336–37; Hadley Read, *Partners With India: Building Agricultural Universities* (Urbana, Ill., 1974), 17.

9. Arthur Morgan, *It Can Be Done in Education* (Yellow Springs, Ohio, 1962), 3; Clarence J. Leuba, *A Road to Creativity: Arthur Morgan, Engineer, Educator, Administrator* (North Quincy, Mass., 1971), 208–10.

needed agricultural centers were soon built throughout India. With the conclusion of the committee's work in 1950, Morgan returned to Yellow Springs. A few years later, in early 1954, Morgan attended the Quakers' Society of Friends General Conference in Cape May, New Jersey, where he met a young Indian student. It was as a result of this meeting that Morgan not only reinitiated his connection with Indian education but that he also embarked upon what he was to consider his most significant endeavor.

K. Viswanathan, known as Viswan, was a twenty-seven-year-old Indian from a small village in Travancore (present day Kerala) on the southwestern coast of India, who hoped to reorganize the educational system in his small Indian village. Viswan and Morgan got along famously, resulting in an invitation from Morgan for Viswan to stay with him in Yellow Springs. Although fifty years and different cultures separated the two men, Viswan and Morgan shared the belief that community and practical education were vital to the development of the individual.¹⁰ Born in 1928, Viswan had grown up near the village of Vellanad (population twelve thousand), near the southwestern tip of India. Belonging to one of the lowest castes, and employed both in weaving and tapping coconut and palm trees for liquor, Viswan's family had struggled for generations to maintain dignity. Thus Viswan understood the denial of legal and social rights from an early age, and had found inspiration from the spiritual leader Sri. Narayana Guru. By the 1920s, Guru was calling for a casteless society, reforms in religious practices, and better education for the oppressed. Guru's movement changed the social structure of the region later called Kerala. Viswan attended high school in nearby Nedumangad and became deeply interested in the writer, poet, and educator Rabindranath Tagore. He was further influenced by the writings and teachings of Gandhi.¹¹

10. Arthur Morgan, "Introductory Letter—Viswan Newsletter," January 1965, box 2, section VIII Special Projects, R. Mitraniketan, 1954–1975, Arthur Morgan Papers, Olive Kettering Library, Antioch College, Yellow Springs, Ohio; Hadley Read, *Partners With India: Building Agricultural Universities* (Urbana, Ill., 1974), 41–85; Morgan, *It Can Be Done in Education*, 4.

11. Recent historical surveys include Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore: The Myriad-Minded Man* (London, 1995); and Ashis Nandy, *The Illegitimacy of Nationalism: Rabindranath Tagore and the Politics of Self* (Oxford, 1994); and Dennis Dalton, *Mahatma Gandhi: Nonviolent Power in Action* (New York, 1993), and Yogesh Chadha, *Rediscovering Gandhi* (London, 1997).

Upon graduation, Viswan longed to attend Tagore's Visva Bharati University, located in Santiniketan in the far northeast part of India. For a low-caste family to send a son to such a prestigious and distant school was a challenge, but his parents made it possible by mortgaging the family home. Viswan studied diverse subjects at Santiniketan for four years but did not pursue a degree. He criticized the luxury-bred population and the "unconcerned spirit" among the university's students. Viswan then traveled to Sevagram and briefly attended Gandhi's school. Viswan was interested in Gandhi's teachings, but the poor cultural quality of the institution, along with the school's tendency to deify Gandhi, disappointed Viswan.¹²

In 1952, dissatisfied with India's educational system, Viswan made use of Quaker connections at Santiniketan to travel extensively in the United States and Europe to study rural life. To help support the trip, Viswan agreed to work on farms and stay with Quakers while abroad and indeed spent much of 1953 working in factories, farms, and cooperatives throughout the eastern part of the country. In early 1954, Viswan attended the Society of Friends Conference where he met Arthur Morgan.¹³

The two men both admired Gandhi's educational teachings, particularly his belief that reforming the individual could influence social change. Gandhi taught that practical experiences would develop the intelligence of a child more quickly than mere academic learning such as reading and writing. Thus, instead of teaching children either academics or a trade, Gandhi believed that the practical and the abstract should be combined for a more effective education of the individual. This method of instruction, "whole education," encouraged students to be skilled in both academic subjects as well as some sort of craft to stimulate the local economy. According to Gandhi, this kind of instruction would strengthen the communities in the thousands of rural

12. Arthur Morgan, "A Biographical Note About K. Viswanathan," November 1963, box 2, Morgan Papers; Jeff Biggers, *From the Dusty Soil: The Story of Mitraniiketan, Community Education and Development in Rural India* (Vellanad, 1996), 28–29, 40, 45–50, 54–55; <http://www.narayanaguru.org/>, consulted 22 October 2002.

13. Arthur Morgan, "Viswan's Childhood," n.d., box 2, Morgan Papers; John Bryant, "Man With a Dream" (Research Paper, Antioch College, 1961), 2; Biggers, *From the Dusty Soil*, 59–63.

villages across the nation. In experiments with this system during the 1930s, Gandhi claimed that students developed a sense of purpose, concentration, promptness, perseverance, and perhaps most important, morality. He also noted that with “whole education,” students cooperated instead of competed.¹⁴

Gandhi’s educational philosophy served as the starting point for many of Morgan and Viswan’s discussions, conversations in which they expressed mutual respect for each other’s pedagogical ideas. Viswan, for example, believed that Morgan’s practical curriculum prepared students for vocational trades and community concerns better than the methods used in India. Likewise, Morgan applauded Viswan’s belief that education involved the active participation of children and adolescents in the common life of the family and community. For Viswan, a true education incorporated everything related to the full development of personality—health, economic life, academic study, social life, and ethical and aesthetic values. In short, both Viswan and Morgan agreed that education was a lifelong endeavor and that the best instruction combined practical skills and academic knowledge.¹⁵

As a college president, Morgan had created a curriculum based on practical experience and liberal arts; as a student, Viswan had learned that academic education must be supplemented by real-life situations. With the perspectives of both administrator and student, Viswan and Morgan combined their experiences and philosophies, and designed a community-based educational project. Viswan’s desire to return to his rural village to establish a school that combined academics, practical education, and community involvement appeared to provide an ideal location for the two men’s vision. As perceived by Morgan and Viswan, the school would be the center of the new community, which would support itself with local agriculture and small industries. Impressed with Viswan’s character, his educational goals, and his aspirations to rebuild his Indian home, and ready to use private funds for the

14. S. Abid Husain, *The Way of Gandhi and Nehru* (New York, 1959), 69–74.

15. Arthur Morgan, “Viswanathan’s Educational Philosophy,” n.d.; idem., “Friends of Viswanathan” August 1962; idem., “Friends of Viswanathan,” 2 November 1962; idem., “Viswan’s Childhood,” box 2, Morgan Papers.

project, Morgan saw the opportunity to undertake an educational and societal project free from governmental or academic bureaucracy and regimentation. Near the end of Viswan's stay at Yellow Springs, Morgan and Viswan agreed that Community Services would fund the project. With Viswan's direction and Morgan's financial support, the proposed community would put their educational theories into practice on a grand scale. After leaving the United States in early 1955, Viswan traveled through Europe and Scandinavia, where he was most impressed by the folk schools of Denmark. A network of self-governing folk high schools designed to educate all of the country's adult citizens, the schools were based on a practical curriculum that emphasized life experience over academics, and promoted cultural heritage, tolerance, and the value of the vernacular or colloquial—the same tools that Viswan wished to promote at his new school. In addition to providing Viswan with an inspiring example of community schools in operation, this visit also resulted in sporadic but not insignificant financial support from the Danish government for Viswan's efforts in India.¹⁶

Viswan's return to his home in December 1955 coincided with a major political upheaval. Vellanad was in the state of Travancore, but with the States Reorganization Act of 1956, the Indian government merged this territory with several neighboring provinces into a larger state called Kerala. Although the smallest of the Indian states, the new political entity was one of the most densely populated, averaging twelve hundred people per square mile. A governor appointed by the Indian president served as head of the state and democratic elections chose the legislators. A principle reason for this merger was to unite all of the Malayalam speakers into one political unit, but although Malayalam was the main language of the state, Hindi, Tamil, and English were also prevalent. As for religious membership, although the Hindus were the largest single denomination, together the Christians (mostly

16. Morgan, "Biographical Note About Viswan"; idem., *It Can Be Done in Education*, 4. The schools had been planned by N. F. S. Grundtvig in the 1840s. Spreading across the country and doing much to ease social class tensions in Denmark, the folk schools fostered an intense personal educational experience, a positive interaction with peers, and common progress for the community. See Biggers, *From the Dusty Soil*, 1996), 75–78; <http://www.infed.org/thinkers/et-grund.htm>, consulted 21 October 2002.

Orthodox and Catholic) and Muslims accounted for 40 percent of the population.¹⁷

During the 1950s, as part of its commitment to education, Kerala's state government funded the building of a large number of schools, universities, libraries, and educational facilities. For his part, however, Viswan was less interested in mass education and more concerned with providing students with individualized curriculums, which combined practical skills with academic subjects. In the spring of 1956, Viswan broke ground for his community about two miles from Vellanad.¹⁸ At the same time Morgan was also busy and started sending Community Services supporters a "Friends of Viswan" newsletter. During fifty years of public service and three major professional careers Morgan had amassed countless political allies and wealthy philanthropists as friends and colleagues whom he now called on for support. Although eager to accept financial help in the early days, however, both men hoped that their experiment would become self-supporting.¹⁹

Building on the tenets of Sri. Narayana Guru, Morgan and Viswan's initiative began as a local effort to educate the oppressed castes, but it quickly expanded to include those in other social groups. Viswan began his work by visiting five families and recruiting seven children to start his primary-level school within the new community. Voluntary classes met outside on most weeknights, weekends, and during holidays, and covered basic skills such as reading and writing. Even with buildings still under construction and a lack of accreditation, by the end of the year the enrollment at Viswan's informal school had reached two hundred. By December 1956, Viswan and four friends had completed a community building on the property. It housed a small library, lodging for guests, a meeting room, and space for several school classrooms. The structure itself cost \$300, and with the purchases of various

17. A. Sreedhara Mehon, *A Survey of Kerala History* (Kottayam, India, 1967), 369–70; *States of Our Union: Kerala* (Delhi), 5, 24–25.

18. Morgan, "Biographical Note About Viswan," 3; Donald Helm, "History of Mitraniketan," 18 April 1964, 6–8, box 2, Morgan Papers.

19. Arthur Morgan, "Friends of Community Services," 29 March 1956, box 2, Morgan Papers; Biggers, *From the Dusty Soil*, 89.

school related materials Viswan's funds were severely depleted. Near the end of 1956, Morgan informed supporters of Viswan's progress and immediate needs. He estimated that for the community to survive Viswan would need an annual promise of \$1,000 from Community Services.²⁰

As Morgan secured financial support and Viswan recruited new workers and students, 1957 proved to be a successful year. Not only did the school's enrollment increase to nearly three hundred students, the close interaction between instruction and application transformed teachers and students into residents of a small community. Although Viswan wanted the community to remain informal with few rules and regulations, he recognized that without some kind of administrative structure the experiment would crumble. Thus, Viswan created a three-person governing board known as the Executive Council and established an open forum session, called the General Council, to discuss community concerns. As one of their first acts, in June 1957 the General Council named the community Mitraniketan, Sanskrit for "An Abode of Friends." As Morgan and Viswan had hoped, the school was the center of Mitraniketan.²¹

Viswan was interested in educating children between the ages of six and sixteen. He believed that with proper guidance and the right environment, lower-caste children could be as intelligent and active as higher-caste children. A typical day's curriculum at Mitraniketan included cloth spinning, general knowledge consisting of biography, history, and geography, language study of Hindi, Malayalam, and English, mathematics, health and hygiene, manual work such as gardening, and elementary science. Teachers used hands-on approaches to instruction, and, when possible, invited specialists to direct lessons. Unlike other schools, the teachers lived in the community as equal partners in the experiment. Their work was wholly voluntary and their contributions affected both the students and the community. India's climate allowed for most of the classes to be held outside in the shade of

20. Arthur Morgan, "Newsletter to Members," no. 7, 15 December 1956, 3-4; idem., "Friends of Viswanathan," 7 May 1958, box 2, Morgan Papers.

21. K. Viswanathan to Arthur Morgan, 22 June 1957; "Rules and Regulations of Mitraniketan," 1967, 1-5, box 2, Morgan Papers.

trees, while meetings took place in the community center. In the first year, a small volunteer staff of twenty, consisting of Viswan's friends and college students, both taught and carried out two to four hours of manual work daily. Several staff members had training in village development as well as specialized skills such as spinning, weaving, bookbinding, notebook making, and beekeeping.²²

Despite struggling with ancient traditions, widespread poverty, no educational accreditation, and inadequate funding, Mitraniketan persevered throughout its first year. The next year, J. Dudley Dawson, vice president of Antioch College, visited Mitraniketan for a week. What Dawson saw impressed him and he remarked: "There is an air of creativeness, freedom, self-discipline, friendliness, and purposefulness about the whole proceeding." Dawson observed Viswan working with the children of the community. On an informal basis, children would have talks, plays, songs, and technical discussions with youth leaders or teachers. Viswan's informal approach gave students a sense of purpose, self-confidence, and a mastery of occupational skills. Finding the educational aspect of the community fascinating and productive, Dawson, with the help of an American professor at the nearby agricultural college in Trivandrum (a college started after Morgan's 1948 suggestion) also assessed the school's physical plant. From their observations, Dawson reported to Morgan and Viswan that Mitraniketan needed major agricultural adjustments.²³

According to the report, the chief agricultural problems stemmed from a combination of unstable water supplies and inadequate irrigation systems. The two problems were related, as the region's annual rainfall of 150 inches occurred during three or four months of the year, making irrigation necessary through the rest of the year. Dawson recommended building storage and collection tanks to supply water during the dry season. He further suggested soil testing, introducing fertilizers, and increasing water retention through

22. Viswan to Morgan, 22 June 1957, Morgan Papers.

23. J. Dudley Dawson to Arthur Morgan, 9 February 1958; Arthur Morgan, "Friends of Viswanathan," March 1958, box 2, Morgan Papers.

terracing. Dawson and Morgan understood that maintaining the school was Viswan's main objective, but without successful agricultural production the growing community would not be able to feed itself.²⁴

As a result of these reported difficulties, Morgan informed supporters in the summer of 1958 that Mitraniketan needed more money to purchase land and agricultural equipment. His appeal was successful and allowed Viswan to purchase fifteen acres of land adjoining the community for \$4,000 in August. The new property included four acres of wetland for the production of rice, and eleven dry acres for the community's chief farm and cash crop, tapioca macaroni. Also known as cassava, the tropical root crop contains a superior quality of starch and can be produced quite inexpensively. On their farm the community also maintained small groves of banana, coconut, mango, and cashew nut trees. With enough funds to cover well over half the initial cost, Morgan forwarded Viswan \$1,500 in November, and by the next year the newly acquired lands were fully cultivated.²⁵

In early 1960, Viswan sent the Kerala government a lengthy outline explaining education at Mitraniketan. To develop his school further Viswan needed a state license to operate a full-time private school. Viswan had applied for a permit in the late 1950s but had been denied on the grounds that he lacked adequate financial support.²⁶ In March 1960, Viswan had an interview with the governor and the education minister of Kerala to discuss his reapplication. He explained that Mitraniketan was more than just a school, it was a rural community center offering facilities for agricultural, industrial, and educational activities. Viswan reviewed the history of the community and emphasized his strong devotion to the project. He stated that his

24. Dawson to Morgan, 9 February 1958; Morgan, "Friends of Viswanathan," March 1958, Morgan Papers.

25. Arthur Morgan, "Friends of Viswanathan: From the Report of Baij Nath Singh, September 1958," November 1958; Dawson to Morgan, 9 February 1958; Morgan, "Friends of Viswanathan," March 1959; Elizabeth Morgan and Ernest Morgan, "Friends of Viswanathan," July 1959, box 2, Morgan Papers.

26. K. Viswanathan to Elizabeth Morgan and Ernest Morgan, 18 March 1960; Arthur Morgan, "Friends of Viswanathan," August 1963, box 2, Morgan Papers; Morgan, *It Can Be Done in Education*, 81-82.

school was designed to instruct from infancy to adulthood through “effective liberal education suited to enrich rural life.” Viswan explained that once agricultural, industrial, and vocational training became part of the secondary curriculum the school would be raised to the university level. As for teachers and students, Viswan listed a lengthy process for their selection, and closed his presentation by saying that Mitraniketan was financially secure, with physical assets totaling approximately \$12,000.²⁷

Viswan knew that consideration of his application would take many months if not a few years. To increase his chances for accreditation, Viswan developed relationships with professors at nearby Trivandrum University and government officials. In early 1960 he accepted the Indian government’s invitation to administer a local system of cooperative banks (credit unions). The next year, Viswan founded a regional farm cooperative program to control fertilizer use and tapioca production. He also established a spinning and weaving cooperative called the Khadi Society, which produced homespun cloth. In 1961 the Indian government rewarded Viswan’s regional work by recognizing Mitraniketan as a Service Cooperative Multipurpose Society. This endorsement made government funds available to financially support the cooperative aspects of Mitraniketan. Viswan refused this assistance, however, believing that if he accepted funding from the government he would lose significant independence in the project.²⁸

During the next year, Viswan focused his energies on reworking Mitraniketan’s activities and curriculum. In anticipation of accreditation, daytime classes became the norm and the enrollment was purposely reduced to about eighty students with children representing low, middle, and high castes. For the first time, tuition, ranging from 20 cents to \$2.00 per month

27. K. Viswanathan to Arthur Morgan, 18 March 1960; K. Viswanathan, “Mitraniketan: An Outline of the Proposed System for Rural Education,” March 1960, 1–5, box 2, Morgan Papers.

28. K. Viswanatha to Arthur Morgan, 9 January 1960, 1; K. Viswanathan to Arthur Morgan, 27 July 1960, 1–2; Arthur Morgan, “Friends of Viswanathan,” November 1960, 1–2; Elizabeth Morgan, “Friends of Viswanathan,” March 1960, 1; Arthur Morgan, “Friends of Viswanathan,” ca. 1961, 2, box 2, Morgan Papers; idem., *It Can Be Done in Education*, 97.

(though most paid the minimum), was charged to meet the annual \$5,000 operating budget. The community had three levels of teaching: a nursery school with children three to six years old, a children's group of six- to twelve-year-olds, and a youth group of young adults from ages twelve to twenty. Reminiscent of the Danish folk school model, Viswan also held open informal discussions for adults and children on technical topics, community issues, and practical subjects.²⁹

In spring 1963, three years after his application, the state government granted Viswan a license to operate a primary school at Mitraniketan. The approval did not cover the elementary or secondary levels, but it allowed for Viswan to add one year of schooling (grade or standard) each year. Viswan believed the decision to be a major breakthrough, and upon receiving the good news used his existing funds to build new classroom buildings and renovate dilapidated structures.³⁰ Although Viswan continued informal elementary and secondary instruction, he now focused on building the primary education program. During the first official school year for the primary school, the teachers kept records for each child. The first class of thirty-two consisted of twenty-four Hindu and eight Christian children. On average, students came from families of seven members, who earned an overall income of approximately \$14.00 per month. A majority of the children came from lower castes, but by the second year several higher-caste families applied to send their children to Mitraniketan.³¹

Meanwhile, in the United States Morgan remained active in generating publicity for the project. During the previous year, Morgan had written a book about Mitraniketan called *It Can Be Done in Education*. Published by Community Services, the book explained the purposes of the community and was designed to attract new supporters, either to teach or to contribute. The book outlined the importance of character development, practical instruction,

29. Arthur Morgan, "Friends of Viswanathan," ca. 1962, box 2, Morgan Papers.

30. About twenty students made up a standard. Helm, "History of Mitraniketan," 18; Arthur Morgan, "Friends of Viswanathan," August 1963, box 2, Morgan Papers; Biggers, *From the Dusty Soil*, 114.

31. Helm, "History of Mitraniketan," 19.

open inquiry, a holistic approach, community life, and actual experience with economic processes. In the work Morgan included chapters on Tagore and Gandhi, and made comparisons between their teachings and Viswan's educational philosophies. Morgan also called on contributors to provide Viswan with \$10,000 annually for staff support and operating expenses, and to supply an additional \$35,000 to improve the community. Morgan explained to supporters that the extra funding was needed to purchase more land, install indoor plumbing, prepare to harness electric power (from a line a mere three miles away), and increase staff and teachers' salaries. But most importantly, Morgan wanted \$6,000 of the requested sum to go toward improving the primary education program. Morgan's call was answered, and during the first half of 1964, donations totaled over \$12,000.³²

To facilitate his Mitraniketan responsibilities, Morgan in early 1965 organized a nonprofit foundation to support the bulk of the community's fundraising efforts, and in February, Community Services established an Overseas Committee to oversee the funding of Mitraniketan. Their board of directors was made up of six representatives and was headquartered in Washington, D.C. Later that year, the Indian government officially recognized and incorporated Mitraniketan as a nonprofit community, making Indian contributions tax deductible and Western funds tax-free.³³ Even though selling surplus tapioca and other crops generated some income for the community, and even though small enterprises such as coconut oil processing, hand pounding of rice, carpentry, leatherworking, brickmaking, and bookbinding existed, Morgan pushed for the development of alternative small industries to provide a source of additional revenue. Thus, in March 1965 Morgan challenged donors to support a publishing firm at Mitraniketan. As nearly all the Indians who spoke Malayalam (about fifteen to twenty million) lived in Kerala,

32. Morgan, *It Can Be Done in Education*, 112–13; idem., "Friends of Viswanathan," 2 November 1962; idem., "Friends of Viswanathan," ca. 1962; idem., "Notes Concerning Mitraniketan"; idem., "Friends of Viswanathan," ca. 1963, box 2, Morgan Papers; Biggers, *From the Dusty Soil*, 115–17.

33. Arthur Morgan, "Friends of Viswanathan," January 1965; idem., "Friends of Viswanathan," February 1965; David H. Scull, "Mitraniketan—At the Take-Off Point," October 1965, 15, box 2, Morgan Papers.

Morgan found it odd that the state had no educational publishing firms. With Kerala's high literacy rates Morgan saw an ideal opportunity to educate millions and at the same time to generate much-needed income for the community.³⁴

That summer, Morgan and Community Services secured approximately \$15,000 from donors to cover the purchase of a printing plant. Viswan then chose a nearby industrial site and bought the property, building, two presses, and roughly six tons of type in Hindi, Malayalam, and English. With the help of Morgan's grandson, Lee Morgan, Viswan hoped to publish both scientific and literary materials while providing employment for a large number of teenagers interested in learning the printing trade. By the next year, Mitraniketan's printing plant was up and running, and in August it began publication of a monthly newsletter describing community events called the *Mitraniketan Marg*.³⁵

In 1966, Mitraniketan completed its tenth full year of existence. To celebrate, Morgan planned to visit Mitraniketan in early 1967. This would be Morgan's first visit to the community that, through fundraising efforts and support, he had helped found. Coincidentally, Richard Kaplan, a filmmaker and Antioch College alumnus, was making a documentary about Morgan. For the ending, Kaplan wanted footage from Morgan's first visit to Mitraniketan to show how that project was the epitome of Morgan's life-long aspiration—to build a self-supporting community based on cooperative learning. Thus Kaplan and an assistant traveled to India with Morgan in order to document the journey and to finish the film.³⁶ In early 1967,

34. Arthur Morgan, "Viswanathan Newsletter," March 1965; idem., "Viswanathan Newsletter," August 1965; idem., "A Multipurpose Undertaking," ca. 1962, 7; idem., "The Abode of Friends: Mitraniketan [brochure]," box 2, Morgan Papers; George Woodcock, *Kerala: A Portrait of the Malabar Coast* (London, 1967), 25.

35. Morgan, "Viswanathan Newsletter," March 1965; idem., "Viswanathan Newsletter," August 1965; idem., "Friends of Viswanathan," ca. 1961; K. Viswanathan, "Mitraniketan: Past, Present, and Future in Brief," January 1966, 3, box 2, Morgan Papers; *Mitraniketan Marg* 1, no. 1 (20 August 1966): 1–12.

36. Arthur Morgan to A. B. Shah, 26 December 1966, box 1, Morgan Papers; Richard Kaplan, *I See A Village: The Arthur Morgan Story*, Richard Kaplan Productions, 1968, 30 minutes, videocassette; Biggers, *From the Dusty Soil*, 139.

eighty-nine-year-old Arthur Morgan embarked on an extensive six-week trip. On 6 February, Morgan's small entourage arrived at Mitraniketán. Morgan first noticed the area's beautiful surroundings and remarked that the physical plant was "more than I had expected." He found the fifty acres of land well kept and was pleased to see nearly every corner of the steep terraced hillsides planted with tapioca and other crops. He was further impressed with the cleanliness of the grounds and the solidly constructed buildings and houses.³⁷

More importantly, at Mitraniketán Morgan found that education was top priority. That year, the community was preparing to add both seventh and eighth grades to the school, and, as long-range goals, Viswan showed Morgan where they planned to build a two-year high school. Morgan found that education at Mitraniketán was an informal venture where the teachers and students were open and friendly. He was most impressed with the children's resourcefulness and their respect for their teachers, and noted that in the community-based environment the students were very receptive to learning. Morgan was amazed at the large number of students, of all ages, actively working in the community. Their work was part of the curriculum, but more importantly it significantly contributed to the community and trained the students for future occupations. In sum, Morgan saw that learning and working together created a vibrant community.³⁸

After the trip, Morgan reported in the March newsletter that Mitraniketán had exceeded his expectations and that working with Viswan was one of the major accomplishments of his life. Still, Morgan realized that there was no assurance of Viswan's continued success. As serious hazards for the next decade Morgan pointed to possible political unrest, the inability to find new supporters, and Viswan's poor health due to overwork. Realizing his own mortality, Morgan hoped that during his last years he could find new associates who would both help Viswan and contribute to Mitraniketán. By the summer of 1967, Morgan had personally recruited nine volunteers to

37. Arthur Morgan, "Viswanathan Newsletter," February 1967, box 2, Morgan Papers.

38. *Ibid.*

work and teach at Mitraniketan, and had arranged for nine others to visit the community.³⁹

In 1970, Mitraniketan had reached a high point. After nearly fifteen years, the grounds had expanded to nearly sixty acres with nine permanent buildings, seven temporary structures, and five open-air classrooms. A wealth of cooperatives including a print shop, a cabinet shop, a dairy, a khadi store, and a local bank dotted the landscape. As for the school, during the early 1970s the community added secondary sections to make it a primary through grade ten institution with roughly two hundred students. Other high points included a health center and successful production of tapioca.⁴⁰ Also by 1970, however, Mitraniketan faced a rising debt, struggling with lower prices for agricultural products and higher rates for supplies and materials. Looking for new ways to solve old problems Viswan worked hard to keep the community growing. That year too, Morgan resigned as executive director of Community Services and passed the reigns of leadership to his son, Griscom Morgan. Viswan immediately opened communication channels with Griscom and reassured the new director that within a few years Mitraniketan would be more financially stable. As a first step, Viswan hoped to recruit “business-minded persons with a human outlook, who understand and accept our educational and community goals, to assist me and guide me to carry on the work.” In 1971, carrying out Viswan’s recruiting for him, Griscom sent several individuals to India who fit Viswan’s criteria.⁴¹

By 1972, although he continued to raise funds for the project, Morgan was unable to read, write, or type for himself and remarked that he was a “friendly outsider.” Morgan repeatedly reassured Viswan, however, that with Griscom in charge of Community Services, the organization would continue

39. Morgan, “Viswanathan Newsletter,” March 1967; idem., “Chronology of Mitraniketan and AEM,” 1967, box 2, Morgan Papers.

40. Morgan, “Mitraniketan Newsletter,” ca. November 1969, box 2, Morgan Papers; “Mitraniketan—Little-Known Institution in Kerala,” *The Hindu* (18 March 1973): 1–3.

41. K. Viswanathan to Griscom Morgan, 19 September 1970, box 1, Morgan Papers; Biggers, *From the Dusty Soil*, 138.

to support Mitraniketan.⁴² Three years later, in April 1975, Morgan mailed what would be his last “Friends of Viswan” newsletter. He reported that with a handful of small industries, a new irrigation system, and agricultural production providing both subsistence and profits, Mitraniketan could be self-supporting and financially independent within a few years. Seven months later, on 15 November 1975, Arthur Morgan died in Xenia, Ohio. In addition to Mitraniketan, he left behind a legacy of flood control projects, the expansion of Antioch College, over twenty books, and a lifelong devotion to education and the small community.⁴³

With Morgan’s passing, Viswan and Mitraniketan entered another phase of development. Even with continued support from Community Services, the Danish government, and a number of other international organizations, the community retained a significant debt throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Higher costs of living and low prices for agricultural commodities such as tapioca kept the community in a financial bind. Although some of Mitraniketan’s cooperative ventures proved successful, a state of financial self-sufficiency was never achieved. Today, the community still exists under the direction of Viswan, now in his seventies, and is still largely dependent on international support. Progress in the past few years has been slow due to Viswan’s poor health, but much of what was established in the first twenty years of existence remains. Indeed, the community has grown significantly larger than its founders had expected. Currently, the grounds consist of seventy acres with a population of about one hundred adults and three hundred children and adolescents. While university-level classes were never offered at Mitraniketan, and although the schools closed because of the debt for thirteen years, from 1978 to 1992, today the nursery, primary, and secondary schools remain active and are consolidated as the People’s College, a folk high school sponsored by the Danish government. The khadi shop, farm,

42. Arthur Morgan to K. Viswanathan, 22 May 1972, 1; Arthur Morgan to K. Viswanathan, 23 June 1972; Arthur Morgan to K. Viswanathan, 16 November 1972, box 1, Morgan Papers.

43. Arthur Morgan, “Mitraniketan Newsletter,” 30 April 1975; idem., “Mitraniketan Newsletter,” May 1972, Morgan Papers; Morgan, *Morgan Remembered*, 116.

handicraft cooperative, and printing operation are also still active today, along with later additions such as an arts and sports unit, a home for the aged, a speech therapy center, computer facilities, vocational training, and classes for the deaf.⁴⁴

Beginning with the Communists' political ascendancy in the late 1950s, Kerala's legislature promoted education and literacy. Nonetheless, and despite the generous state funding available for schools as a result of this thrust, Viswan operated outside the state government's fold in order to retain as much independence as possible. With little educational oversight from the national and state government, Viswan was able to chart his own course for Mitraniketan, resulting in more freedom with the curriculum and greater community development. Thus it was private Western funding and support, and in particular the work of Arthur Morgan, that made the community of Mitraniketan a reality. For nearly twenty years Morgan provided and coordinated funding while encouraging others to participate in the Mitraniketan experiment as teachers. During a 1999 conversation at an educational conference hosted by the Arthur Morgan School in North Carolina, Viswan informed the author that Mitraniketan would have never been possible without private Western funds and Arthur Morgan.⁴⁵

From Viswan's and Morgan's perspective Mitraniketan was an enormous success. The creation of an educationally based cooperative community fulfilled the lifelong goals of two visionaries. Perhaps best known for his American engineering and educational successes during the early twentieth

44. Lee Morgan, "Visit to Mitraniketan, Kerala, India, August 17–23, 1994," *Community Services Newsletter* 42 (November/December 1994): 6; Judith McGahey and Robert McGahey, "Report on Mitraniketan," *Community Services Newsletter* 45 (April/June 1997): 7; Editor's note, *Community Services Newsletter* 42 (November/December 1994): 9; <http://www.differentindia.org/mitraniketan.html>, consulted 22 October 2002; Prabhakar Raizada, "Mitraniketan: An Experiment in the Field of Community Education," *Journal of Indian Education* 20 (September 1994): 36–39; K. Viswanathan, "About Mitraniketan," *Community Services Newsletter* 41 (May/June 1993): 9.

45. Author's conversation with K. Viswanathan, Conference for Reflection on Arthur E. Morgan's Educational Ideas at the Millenium, Arthur Morgan School, Burnsville, North Carolina, 14–18 July 1999. Founded by Arthur's son Ernest and daughter-in-law Elizabeth, the Arthur Morgan School was a pioneer educational project at the Celso Community, Burnsville, North Carolina, and is still in operation today.

century, Arthur Morgan's work with the Mitraniketan project from the 1950s to the 1970s provides important insights into his complex vision. Morgan believed that small communities, where students learned practical skills, cooperation, respect for others, and the importance of society, were the answer to the world's ills. Mitraniketan was the living embodiment of Morgan's educational and societal philosophy. In turn, Morgan's enthusiasm for community education was vital to the success of Mitraniketan. While helping others realize their goals, Morgan fulfilled his own lifelong dream of building a small community with facets of morality, education, and cooperation. Assessing his life's work, Morgan pointed to Mitraniketan as his most notable accomplishment, and in an even more hopeful light, as the beginning of a larger grass-roots movement of community development, practical education, and moral reawakening.