



Dr. E. G. Silas

- Designation at retirement : Director
- Period of service : 1963-1985

Down memory lane

After a certain age, reminiscences become a way of life, looking back at events of the past and one's contributions towards betterment of societal concerns. Such recollections, when positive, give great joy, happiness and satisfaction. By God's Grace, my life is filled with such reminiscences and the one I intend saying has something to do about my nearly sixty years association with the CMFRI, which I first visited at Mandapam Camp in 1948 as a graduate student of Madras Christian College led by Late Prof. J. P. Joshua, when a young, handsome aristocrat named Raghu Prasad, gave us a pep talk about Marine Sciences. Least did I think at that time, that I would later have a "life-time" association with the Institution.

Almost sixty years of close association with the Institution enables me to look back with great joy, pride and pleasure at some of the events which I was instrumental in developing in marine capture fisheries and coastal aquaculture (Mariculture) taking them to new heights through

creative and innovative programmes of national and international importance. One such event, which I intend to recount here, is the establishment of the Centre of Advanced Studies in Mariculture at the Institute in 1979 under the auspices of the UNDP/FAO/ICAR for developing highly skilled manpower in the areas of mariculture research, research management, training and extension. I will consider this as a milestone, a turning point in the development of marine fisheries research in the country. It was not easy sailing, as the establishment of a Fisheries Sub-Project of the ICAR/UNDP Project on "Post-Graduate Agricultural Education and Research" was hotly contested with all odds heavily weighted towards CIFRI, Barrackpore bagging the project. I recollect with gratitude the moral support and encouragement I received from Late Dr. Raghu Prasad, Assistant Director General (Fisheries), ICAR. Dr. Prasad and I had to meet the UNDP/ICAR Commission at Bangalore as I had to justify the need for starting a Centre of Advanced Studies in Mariculture (CASM) at CMFRI to catalyze research and higher education in mariculture leading to M.Sc. (Mariculture) and Ph.D., aimed at ultimately augmenting fish production in the country through innovative mariculture programmes. After the meeting, when Dr. Stevenson representing the UNDP congratulated me on my concern for mariculture HRD, I knew that we had made it. It was a God given gift to me that I had a person of the stature and capability of Dr. P. Vedavyasa Rao to help in the running of

the programme and Mr. M. J. John to assist in the administration - both deserving to be called as Vice- Chancellor and Registrar!

From a total commitment to capture fisheries to a partial shift to mariculture as well as taking up research guidance and teaching in subject areas such as physiology, nutrition, pathology, genetics, aquaculture engineering and so on was not an easy task. But the enthusiastic involvement of all those concerned with out decent was a great achievement in our endeavor to make the course a success. Even this would have been fruitless, since at that time, statutorily no Agricultural University could affiliate such academic courses conducted in Fisheries Research Institutes for the award of Degrees. When I explained my predicament to Dr. M. V. Pylee, the then Vice- Chancellor of the Cochin University of Science and Technology (CUSAT), he with out any reservations and with open arms welcomed and approved the course to be affiliated to CUSAT for conduct of examination and award of Degrees of M. Sc. (Mariculture) and Ph. D. This was a great blessing, though I had to bear the barbs of Dr. O. P. Gautam, DG, ICAR at meetings in Delhi for my establishing affiliation of the CAS with an academic University!

The success of the course became a major obsession to some in the ICAR which despite my submissions did not wish to accord CMFRI a Deemed to be University status in the field of Fisheries as it had done earlier for Agriculture, Veterinary and Animal sciences (IARI, IVRI,

NDRI). The status quo was continued until I left CMFRI after a ten-year tenure as Director in June 1985. From then onwards, I understand that CASM was gradually allowed to disintegrate to oblivion. With the present leadership of CMFRI and the infrastructure facilities the Institute has developed, it is not too late to reconsider bestowing it the status of a Deemed to be University - a fitting recognition for its 60 years yeomen service to the nation.

The great thing about the CAS in Mariculture was the benefit the staff and the students had from the programme in improving their skills; the staff, as nearly 35 had the advantage of visits to foreign laboratories to work with experts from three to six months and to work as counterparts, for over a dozen experts who were invited by me to come and spend a month or two with the CAS and also prepare manuals and conduct workshops on the area of their specialization. These manuals published in the Special Publication Series of CMFRI had become an important and useful source of reference to students of aquaculture as well as aquaculturists. The CAS in Mariculture had an uniqueness and identity of its own. The products of the course were in great demand in the growing shrimp farming industry as well as in the research and management sectors such as banks, universities and research institutions in the country. I feel proud that almost all the students who have passed out are today holding high and responsible positions in the walks of life they have chosen. Down

the memory lane, I share the feelings of all those who unanimously and with total commitment, whether scientific, technical or supporting, helped in this great national effort to bring about a sea change in the development of marine fisheries to make it to also address societal concerns as well as the needs of the industry, research institutions and SAU Colleges of Fisheries; and reorient and upgrade the skills of teachers and students to be achievers. This to me has meant a lot and gives me immense satisfaction to look back on.