

Historical Growth and Socio-Economic Upliftment Activities of Non- Government Organisations (NGOs) in Kanyakumari District



History

KEYWORDS :

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ABSTRACT

The concept of organized form of Non- Governmental Organisations came into existence in late 19th and beginning of 20th century in Kanyakumari district. They emerged when the programmes of the government failed to reach the poor, downtrodden, vulnerable, depressed, women and children. Here the NGOs engage themselves in promoting development and reducing poverty. The present study exposes the social and economic activities of the NGOs to provide a decent and just life to the targeted people.

Introduction

Non government organizations (NGOs) are powerful role bound social units having the dynamism and power of self-willed human action. "Voluntary action which is synonymous with community action is as old as community or the civilization itself. NGO's action in its simplest meaning is people's spontaneous action at the community level to serve their fellow men by self-help and mutual aid". They are known for their virtues of human touch, dedication, flexibility, self-reliance and nearness to the community. "They are essentially non-profit, controlled and administered by an association of citizens rather than any influence from the Government." Their main strength is the level of commitment not usually hierarchical, work out with their own priorities and can work out their own channels for reaching the poorest. "NGOs are becoming increasingly important in the people oriented development programmes and projects at the grass roots level by virtue of their involvement and commitment to the rural poor." They exhibit high degree of flexibility in their functioning; human touch and dedication are their assets. They act quickly without waiting for orders from above.

The growth of NGOs has occurred because of the failure of official aid programmes to reach down and assist the poor. The planning and implementation of development programmes introduced by the government during the past five decades proved ineffective and difficult to implement because of the gap between the rich and the poor. At present inter national crisis also have helped for the growth of NGOs. NGOs have gained more influence on every sphere of civil society and they are reaching to the remotest of the remote and the poorest of the poor. "Good education , health , safe drinking water and minimum welfare services are beyond the reach of the majority of the population even today." Their target group is the marginalized, unprivileged , downtrodden , children , women and handicapped . Voluntary actions have been the instruments for not only meeting the needs of the community and talking its problems but also participating in social, economic and political affairs of the community. Nowadays the government shifts the responsibility to the NGOs and they play a vital and vibrant role in improving the welfare of the people.

Just as all societies Indian societies also have voluntary institutions where voluntary agencies came into existence spontaneously. In India, the worthiness of voluntary action is more deeply in our social consciousness making as a core process of our social existence. The Hindu belief system cherishes serving others is a noble sacrifice. The Gita exposes to act with no expectation or reward (nishkamyakarma). In India most NGOs are setup to meet the needs of the vulnerable and those who cannot protect their interests. In the pre-independence days the leaders apart from their involvement in the struggle for independence devoted time and energy for welfare work. "Their approach to social welfare was more social problem and social reform oriented like prevention of Sati, Child Marriage and widow remarriage." "Winning our freedom through mass - based , non violent ,voluntary effort in which millions joined in our country of our size and diversities is perhaps the most unique and shining evidence" Gandhi exhorted the congress members to abjure power and dedicate themselves to pure selfless service to

others. The Government sponsored model of development was seen as having failed to deliver benefits to the poor and the formal political establishment had lost its legitimacy .So well educated young men and women average of electoral politics joined voluntary organizations. During the post Independence period the government systems were too rigid, bureaucratic and self centered to attend the people's need. The living conditions of the rural poor has not improved instead it has deteriorated with poverty and unemployment.

Growth of NGOs in Kanyakumari District

The Kanyakumari district which is a small district in Tamilnadu located in the southern most tip of the Indian sub-continent. It stretches to an area of 1684 sq km and occupies 1.295% of the total area of Tamilnadu. According to the 2011 census this district has a population of 1863174. This district has the highest literacy rate 92.14%. Earlier this dist was part of Travancore Princely state. After the pronouncement of the state reorganization act of 1956, the newly formed district Kanyakumari came into existence on 01.11.1957. Here the missionaries were the pioneers who carried out the social service activities in this region. The primary objective of the operations of missionaries was the spread of their Christian faith. In order to achieve this ,they approached the people through services in the field of education and health. "The official report of the diocese of Cochin mentioned there was a house of the "misericordia" a charitable institution which looked after the poor and the unfortunate" In 1701, Society for the Propagation of the gospel played an important role on education, health and equality apart from religious works. To bring social and mission activities many societies were started amongst these the London Mission Society came to India to the then Travancore region. They fought for the rights of the people and relieved them from casteism and oppression. During this period voluntary organizations worked for recognition of access to education, work of choice and worship for untouchables. Christian missionary based voluntary action had also transcended beyond the boundaries of church compounds and began to emerge in extension, consolidation, and organization of marginalized people in various parts of the district. The very first missionary William Thobias Ringel Taube made unprecedented changes ensuring the safeguarding of women. "He realized that education and imparting knowledge alone could lift up the oppressed people from the lowest rung". "The second missionary Rev Mead realized liberation from ignorance, superstition, oppression and poverty can be achieved only through education which alone could disseminate truth, overturn errors and uplift the people." "Because of the initiatives of the missionaries the then ruler of Travancore Rani Gowri Parvathi Bai in 1817 issued a rescript by which proclaimed that the state should defray the entire cost of the education of its people".

The health ministry of the church in South Travancore began as a mission of love to the poor, ignorant, illiterate and suffering masses. The early protestant Christian missionaries were the pioneers, in the field of allopathic system. As early as in 1838, the London Mission Society had laid foundation for the modern allopathic system and established a hospital at Neyyor."In 1892 the Salvation Army commenced their work in the Travancore state and established Catherine Booth hospital in Nagercoil for

the depressed classes in 1897. The Kanyakumari Medical Mission was established by Henry Andrew Ramsay to extend medical facilities to the poor and needy sick people irrespective of caste and creed."

"During that time those who found suffering from leprosy were thrown out of their homes and chased out of the town and villages because leprosy was considered a dreadful disease. A separate home for leprosy patients was started on 8 September 1888 at Alancode". The missionaries chose to uplift the status of women in the district. "Some initiatives were taken to improve the cause of women's welfare. In 1860 a Roman Catholic centre at Mulgumudu was set up by Rev. Mother Louisa and Rev. Mother Ursula nuns from Belgium devoted themselves for the cause of women welfare". "Dr. Thomson trained some women in mid-wifery, they were of tremendous help to women during times of delivery which was always conducted at home". Apart from Christian missionaries some native religious leaders also emerged like "Chattampi Swamikal worked for the betterment of the major Hindu communities like the Izhavars and the Nairs and brought about a radical change in the social order." Since many people started to join Christianity some local leaders like Vaikunda swamy from nadar community and Narayanaguru from Izhava started organizations to remove the superstitions in their own community. There were few women like Vottaduku Packiyam who put up a stiff resistance to what they perceived as unjust practices against the women. In 1886 when Swami Vivekanandha came to Kanyakumari he preached the people to fight against castism and superstitions. The evolutionary trends of institutionalized form of such organizations can be traced back in the late 19th and beginning of 20th centuries. "In 1947 an organization called CASA was started for the welfare of down-trodden for the first time". In 1963, Kottar Social Service Society (KSSS) was established for health and welfare for women and children, economic development and social action programmes. In 1971, Athencootasan Muthamizh Kazhagam (AMK) started for de-addiction and rehabilitation hospital. In 1972, Vivekananda Khendra was established with the idea of service to humankind is worship of God and it is guided by the national ideals of renunciation and nation building. In 1974, Centre for Social Reconstruction (CSR) established for HIV/AIDS affected patients community based care and support programme for adults and children. In 1977, Palmyra Workers Development Society (PWDS) organized for the community development of palmyra workers. In 1978, Peoples Association for Social Action (PASA) was started for community organization and community based enterprises and Peoples Movement for Development (PMD) was organized for community development and empowerment of women. In 1979, Centre for Rural Employment and Education for Development (CREED) was established for nature conservation, ecological balance and environmental protection. In 1980, Social Welfare Association (SWAN) established for resource movement and natural resource management. In 1981, Rural Uplift Centre (RUC) founded for promoting and protecting human rights of the marginalized people. In 1984 Rural Organization for Awareness and Development (ROAD) was established for strengthening civil society. "In 1986, Rural Women's Development Society (RWDS) was started for women empowerment. Peace Trust-Kanyakumari was organized aiming for justice and peace in the country and harmony among religion and Human Education and Action for Liberation Movement (HEAL) was started for children's education anti child labors and child rights". In 1987, Centre for Appropriate Technology (CAT) established for cost effective technologies in building construction, energy saving, rain water harvesting and a forestation to protect environment and ecology. In 1994, Voluntary Health Association of Kanyakumari (VHAK) started for promoting health literacy. In 1995, Mahalir Association for Literacy, Awareness and Rights (MALAR) was started for awareness creation on health, sanitation, environment protection and scientific development. In 1997, Life Care Trust (LIFT) was organized for working for the development of poor coastal women, head load fisher women workers, young girls, disabled people and coastal children. "In 1997, Marthandam Integrated Development Society (MIDS) established with the aim of empowering the marginalized sections of the society and to achieve a holistic devel-

opment for the marginalized and weaker sections". Since then, many organizations directly work with the people for improving the social economic welfare of the people.

Social Welfare Activities

The activities of the NGOs broadly classified into two categories they are, Social welfare activities and Economic development activities. In the first classification, the NGOs give more importance for community health because poverty and health are the court ant companions of the poor people. They give continuous health education to women on health, hygiene, sanitation and nutrition. Women Development programme was aimed at creating awareness among the women about the need for coming together, working together and developing leadership, communication and managerial skills. It is to rehabilitate the women and girls who are really in need of mental and physical help. Widow Rehabilitation programme was established to give a feeling of strength and solidarity to fight against the evils of the society. Children are the most valuable of community's resources. NGOs initiated children sponsorship programme to support students from socio-economically backward sections of the society to continue their education. Moreover to protect the rights of differently able children handicapped rehabilitation programme was established. Rural motivation programmes were started to organize the marginalized and the unorganized people. The social identification of the Dalit in this district was very low, in order to protect their life Dalit development programme was organized. "The fisher folk in this district witnessed frequent inter group conflicts so to bring peace and normalcy in their life, Coastal Peace and Development programme was organized." Family counseling programmes provide professional counseling services to those affected by dowry harassment, alcoholism, adolescent issues and sexual abuses.

Economic Development Activities

The NGOs have concentrated on economic developmental activities like introduction and spread of plywood boats among the artisanal fishermen which is acknowledged as one of the most successful attempts at transfer of technology in the artisanal fisheries sector. There is integrated dairy development project aimed at improving the life of agricultural coolies by providing milch cows. "An alternative energy source biogas plants were introduced this became a breakthrough in the rural energy development." They wanted to venture with the noble idea of providing and supplying quality furniture to the people providing employment opportunities to the rural artisans. NGOs have initiated Community organization programmes to enable villagers to form groups at the village level. They planned to make the people to participate in planning and implementation because it was realized that the beneficiaries were the best judges. Women are the integral part of every economy. So empowerment of women is essential to harness the women labor in the mainstream of economic development. "SHGs were organized which disbursed micro credit to the members and facilitate them to enter into entrepreneurial activities." These groups are not only speeding up economic growth but also provide jobs and improving the quality of rural life towards self-reliance. The natural resources are fast depleting due to uncontrolled use by the human beings for the benefit without any consideration for the future generation. So NGOs are taking efforts to preserve natural resources for a better tomorrow. They aimed at promoting simple eco-friendly technologies which help the common people practice conservation. The members of the NGOs are insured and Land for the landless scheme was started. In order to control the water scarcity problem the NGOs have adopted renovation of tanks, deepening of *ooranies*, artificial recharging of tube wells and roof water harvesting. The Capacity building shelter programme is aimed at promoting cost effective and disaster resistant construction technology to build houses. This service unit also promotes appropriate building technology by introducing cost reduction options and the use of locally available materials. Micro entrepreneurship development was initiated towards sustainability and self sufficiency to the people.

Conclusion

At present more than 2000 organizations have registered them-

selves as NGOs for serving the people of this district. These organizations in Kanyakumari district dedicate themselves to raise the level of people's education, organizing welfare activities, giving awareness and developing human resources. The NGOs here render services to the physically handicapped, mentally retarded, underprivileged, widows, orphans and old aged

people. At present, the NGOs play a very significant role in extending their helping hand towards the Tsunami affected people. Generally these organizations work with the least fortunate of the society by helping them to achieve decent satisfying life that is the right of all people.

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