

Voluntary Organisation in Emancipation of Rural Women: A Village Study in Chittoor District, Andhra Pradesh

Dr N. Padmaja¹, Prof R. Siva Prasad²

¹Department of Anthropology, Sri Venkateswara University, Tirupathi, Andhra Pradesh, India

²Department on Anthropology, University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh, India

Abstract: *The concept of Voluntary Organization is not a new phenomenon in India and it arose during ancient period. After independence, the planners gave importance to Voluntary Organizations that could assist the Government in the successive plans or policies to improve the conditions of the poor, especially women. Voluntary Organisations are non-governmental and non-profit making agencies. The voluntary agencies play the role of enabler, helper, facilitator, transformer and as catalyst.*

The aim of the paper is to see socio economic conditions and the impact of RASS in emancipation of women. The study was conducted on RASS a Voluntary Organisation in Chittoor district, Andhra Pradesh. The RASS promotes all-round development of the children, the women, the households and the communities. The paper identifies that due to the efforts of both the RASS as well as the Government considerable change is noticeable in the areas of cultural, social, economic and political spheres of women, especially the poor women. Thus, RASS clearly brings to the fore the fact that voluntary action can alter the fortunes of the weaker sections, especially women, drastically through a concerted effort.

Key words: *Emancipation, Government, Voluntary Organisation, and Women.*

I. Introduction

Women constitute nearly half the segment of population in India. The problems of inequality as well as poverty are closely related to one another. From centuries the deprivation of women is seen in the country. Though there are a few matrilineal pockets in the country, by the large the patriarchal norm has been prevailing all over the country. The males control property, decision-making, equipment and cash flows. Women are confined only to household work, and agricultural and non agricultural labour. To empower women, since independence, both Voluntary Organizations and the Government have been playing a very important role.

The concept of Voluntary Organization is not a new phenomenon and it arose during ancient period. Till 19th century the main concentration was towards attaining social reform. Later in the 20th century the emphasis has moved towards rehabilitation programmes. After independence, the planners gave importance to Voluntary Organizations that could assist the Government in the successive Plans or policies to improve the conditions of the poor, especially women. This was felt necessary because of the failure of Governmental efforts in proper implementation of developmental programmes. Besides this, Balwantraj Mehta committee (1957), the Rural Development committee (1966) and Ashok Mehta Committee (1978) have also recognized the need for involving voluntary sector.

II. Review of Literature

Many sociologists, social scientists and a few anthropologists worked on Voluntary Organisations or Non-Governmental Organisations. The review of literature would help in focusing more sharply to understand the role of Voluntary Organisations in emancipation of women living in rural areas.

D.K. Gosh (2001) opines that attacking poverty and its reduction to an appreciable extent seems to be not manageable only by the Government sector. He considers Government Organizations need collaboration and co-operation from other than Government institutions for creation opportunities, facilitation empowerment and providing security for the poor. The author argues that, there is need for the Non Governmental Organizations to fight against poverty. He prefers NGOs because they have greater accountability to the poor, as they work among the poor, while the official system is yet to be totally pro-poor.

Y.V. Rao (1984) considers that rural development is a gigantic task for Government to deal alone, and a number of Voluntary Organizations have done Pioneering work. He opines that better coordination with local institutions would minimize the wastage of resources and also reduce the duplication of efforts and spread the resources more evenly among the group.

According to Krishna Murthy (1985) eradication of poverty does not define fully rural development. He considers that there are also other dimensions to development like health, sanitation, education, welfare,

recreation, etc. He also emphasizes that Government alone cannot do this; hence voluntary agencies have to be involved in implementing rural development programmes.

According to Muniandi (1992) bringing development in India is not an impossible task, provided voluntary agencies put intensive efforts on the task. He says that the Voluntary agencies are necessary whenever advertisement baits the illiterate and ignorant masses. He opines that main objective of Voluntary agencies must be to make villagers self-sufficient.

III. Objectives Of The Study

Based on the above literature review, the following objectives were chosen for the purpose of our study:

1. To understand the socio-economic conditions of women in the study village.
2. To study the role of RASS in emancipation of rural women.

IV. Methodology

4.1 Area of study

In terms of rainfall, river waters, irrigation potential, soil, climate and poverty, Rayalaseema region, especially Chittoor district, is not favourably placed in Andhra Pradesh. Hence, our study is undertaken in this region.

This area is mainly dependent on rain-fed agriculture. Hence, it is very much affected by unreliable rainfall and that the area has been experiencing severely below average rainfall since the past few years.

4.2 Data collection

The data for our study was collected from both primary and secondary sources. The primary data were collected through a structured household schedule, informal interviews (using detailed checklists), key informant interviews, case studies and observation. Secondary data and information were collected from census, records, annual reports of Mandal Development Office, and RASS office.

4.3 Tools of study

The main tools for data collection included the traditional anthropology tools such as observation, informal interviews, key informant interviews and case studies to gather qualitative as well as quantitative data in the village.

V. Socio-Economic Conditions

5.1 Demographic Profile

The village has 134 households and has a population of 560 with 289 males and 271 females. Out of these 134 households, 11 are marginal farmers, 30 small farmers, 39 medium and 9 large farmers, and the rest 45 are agricultural labourers.

This is a multi-caste village and it has the following castes: Palli Reddy, Kapu, Kamma, Baliya, Modaliar, Chakali, Mangali, Yadav, Kaikalu, Kummari and Mala (Scheduled Caste). Among all the castes, Palli Reddy (44.8) predominate over the others. Among the others, Kamma and Rajulu have a significant representation (Table 5.1).

Table 5.1: Distribution of Households by Caste

Caste	No. of HHs
Palli Reddy	60(44.8)
Baliya	10(7.5)
Kamma	18(13.4)
Modaliar	8(5.9)
Chakali	8(5.9)
Mala(SC)	5(3.7)
Rajulu	17(12.7)
Others	
Kapu	2(1.5)
Kummari	1(0.7)
Kaikalu	3(2.2)
Mangali	1(0.7)
Yadav	1(0.7)
Total	134(100)

Among the different age groups, those in the age group 35-60 are more (27.5%) than the others, followed by the age group of 1-12 (26.6%). Another important feature here is that the number of males is lightly higher (51.6%) than the females (Table 5.1.1).

Table 5.1.1: Sex-wise and Age Group-wise Distribution of Population

Age	Male	Female	Total
Children 1-12	73(49.0)	76(5.10)	149(26.6)
Teenage 13-19	46(56.9)	36(56.8)	81(14.5)
Adults 20-35	58(46.0)	68(54.0)	126(22.5)
Middle Age 35-60	87(56.5)	67(43.5)	154(27.5)
Old Age >60	25(2.0)	25.0	50(8.9)
Total	289(100) (51.6)	271(100) (48.3)	560(100)

Note: Parentheses indicate percentage

5.2 Education

There are 335(61.9%) literates in the village. The adult male literacy (34.3%) is marginally higher than that of females (31.2%). The literacy rate of the boys (17.5%) is marginally higher than that of girls (16.8%). Among both adults and children most (28.6%) of them are educated up to primary level. Among the others, those educated up to secondary level (23.2%) are more than those educated up to college and above level (4.25%). All those who have studied above Inter level among the adults are only males. Significantly, illiterates are found more among females (72.8%) than males (Table 5.2).

Table 5.2: Sex-wise Distribution of Education

Level of Education	Adults		Children		Total
	Male	Female	Boys	Girls	
Illiterates	84(45.2)	123(72.8)	--	1	208(38.4)
Balwadi	--	--	18(18.9)	11(12.1)	29(5.4)
Primary	50(26.8)	35(20.7)	30(31.6)	37(40.7)	152(28.1)
Secondary	45(24.2)	16(9.5)	38(40.0)	27(29.7)	126(23.3)
Inter	02(1.1)	--	2(2.11)	6(6.5)	10(1.8)
Degree	07(3.7)	--	4(4.2)	2(2.2)	13(2.4)
Drop Outs	--	--	1(1.0)	2(2.2)	3(0.5)
Total	188(100) (34.7)	174(100) (32.2)	93(100) (17.1)	86(100) (15.9)	541(100)

5.3 Occupation

Kamma, Palli, Baliya and Rajulu are traditionally landowners, whereas Modaliar are moneylenders, kaikalu are weavers, Mala are agricultural labourers;and Chakali are washer men. Almost all members of the households from different castes are engaged in agriculture and agricultural labour. Only two, one each from Rajulu and Palli Reddy, are in service.

5.4 Land Holdings

The total acreage of Sadasivapuram village is 270.5 acres. Out of which the cultivable land is 257.5 acres and the rest is under houses and fallow. About 33% of the households are landless. On the basis of land holdings, the residents of Sadasivapuram are classified in to marginal, small, medium and large famers. A majority of them is small and medium farmers and the average land holding is 2.9 acres. Among the landed, most of the wetland is in the hands of Kamma and Palli Reddy. In fact, there are very few dry land owners among Baliya households (Table 5.4).

Table 5.4: Land Ownership by Size Class and Type of Land

Lang size class	Wet	Dry	No. HHs Owning	Average landholding
Below 1	0.5	8.0	11	0.8
1 – 2.5	23.0	34.0	39	1.5
2.5 – 5	74.5	56.5	30	4.4
above 5	42.0	19.0	9	6.8
Total	140.0	117.5	89	2.9

VI. RASS (Rastriya Seva Samithi)

Rastriya Seva Samithi (RASS), the NGO, was established in the year 1981 at Tiupati. In the past, it was called as Rayalaseema Seva Samithi because its area of operation was only in Rayalaseema region. Now it is operation in three states, i.e., Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Orissa. Among the various voluntary

organisations in Chittoor District RASS was the first to establish extension activities, while the others aimed at institutional welfare activities.

VII. Role Of RASS In Emancipation Of Women

It is clear from the above that social, cultural and economic change occurs through different channels. It is pertinent to note that in Sadasivapuram village major changes took place only after the initiative taken by RASS in organizing self-help groups. Due to the efforts of both the NGO as well as the Government considerable change is noticeable in the areas of cultural, social, economic and political spheres of women, especially the poor, in Sadasivapuram and surrounding region.

Prior to RASS intervention, socio-economic and political participation of women in this village was low. Women were confined to household chores, agricultural and non-agricultural labour, and other customarily defined activities. Both economic and political power was in the hands of men. There were no women leaders and women were not organized. Patriarchal norm was more prevalent and men did not accept women to participate in the development programmes undertaken in the village, as they felt that a women's position is within the confines of the house.

7.1 Self Help Groups:

Before inception of RASS there were no self help groups in the village. Now there are 13 SHGs in the village, There are eight DWCRA groups in the village. They are Aswini, Sarojini, Maheswari, Priyanka, Jhansi, Harithalaxmi, Alluri Seetharam Raju and Devi groups. In the year, 1992 RASS established Himagiri Mahila Mandal in this village. It consisted of four SHGs they are Hamsa, Harika, Hyndavi, Hymavathi. In the year 2000 and deepthi was established.

7.2 Savings: Initially they were saving only Rs.30/- on monthly installment and later on with increase in economic conditions they started saving Rs.100/- monthly.

7.3 Increase in health status:

Health facilities in this village are poor. A government nurse visits the village once in a week and looks after pre-natal and postnatal mothers and infants. If people face serious health problems they have to go to Papanaidupet or Tirupati. In Papanaidupet only a primary health center is located. In the absence of proper health facility the villagers were depending on the native medicine men as well as on quacks. RASS appointed a multipurpose health worker to create awareness among the villagers and also to provide medical aid to the villagers. Now people approach allopathic doctors in Tirupati, Government as well as private, in case of any health problems.

7.4 Education to Girl Child:

Earlier due to lack of awareness among the people in the village, and also due to poor economic conditions, parents used to withdraw their children from schools, especially girl children, to look after their young ones at home or work in the fields as helping hands. After the inception of RASS, the attitude of parents has changed. Previously children were sent only to the Government schools (which are regarded as inferior to privately run convent schools) due to lack of money. With an increase in economic condition, a few children from Kamma and Kapu families are sent to English medium schools and colleges located in the vicinity. Increasingly, this attitude is also spreading among the other castes members also. The members of the village community now consider education as an important medium of upward mobility and empowerment.

7.5 Change in attitude of Men towards Women:

It is important to note that hitherto women were not considered as an important source of strength for augmenting the family income and assets. With the emergence of SHGs and DWCRA the credibility of women has substantially gone up. This is clearly reflected in the treatment meted out to them by men folk.

Men used to treat women as inferior to them, because they owned assets and controlled finances. RASS brought a change in the attitudes of men. They made women as agents of change to improve their economic condition by giving loans or credit to women, even though lands/assets are in the name of men. As a result, men in the family now concede equal important to women in decision-making, and men seek financial assistance from women when they are in need. There is almost a role reversal that has taken place due to the measures initiated by RASS and the Government.

7.6 Increase in Self-Confidence Levels:

Prior to RASS' entry, women were confined to household or agricultural work. Now women are actively involved in SHGs and take lead in the economic activity of their groups and families. They now handle

bank or money transactions efficiently. They run their groups or cooperative societies efficiently and effectively. They directly consult or deal with government or RASS officials to discuss their problems or to learn about development programmes.

7.7 Changes in cropping pattern:

After launching Swarnajayanthi Swarojgar Yojan Programme by the Government, there was a change in the cropping pattern. Earlier farmers used to cultivate only cereal crops, now a few of them are cultivating commercial crops like Barlaria and jasmine. This change in the cropping pattern is made possible due to concerted awareness campaign made by RASS to change the lives of women and children and through them the poor in the village.

7.8 Decrease in Migration:

People used to migrate due to drought to nearby towns with their families to work as wage labourers to earn money. After inception of RASS developmental programmes the economic condition of some of the families has improved. However, still male members from some agricultural labour families due to the persistent droughts conditions continue to migrate seasonally to Bangalore and Tamil Nadu to work as wage labour.

Most of the people in the village are agricultural labourers, small and medium farmers. After the introduction of development programmes by RASS and Government, there is a change in the attitude of people towards dairying and cultivation of commercial crops. This led to an improvement in the economic condition of the people, which is now clearly reflected in their material possessions.

7.9 Increase in spending on marriages:

Dowry has become more prevalent due to an improvement in their economic condition, and now they are conducting marriages of their children in kalyana Mandapams in the neighbouring towns, more so by the 'upper' caste families.

7.10 Improvement in Infrastructure:

Before RASS entering this village, the infrastructure facilities were quite poor. There were less transport facilities with kacha roads. There were only five hand pumps for drinking water and there was only one petty shop in this village. After RASS entering this village, transport facilities have improved. Their own jeeps also started plying into this village frequently. Under protected water scheme, the Government constructed a water tank, and RASS built, with the help of the village community, a veterinary hospital and a community hall. Petty shop, tea stalls, cycle shop and a tailoring shop also came in to being due to the developmental efforts of RASS' SHGs. As a result if the development programmes like housing and sanitary scheme the living condition of the poor in this village have substantially improved.

7.11 Decision Making and Community Participation:

They are now involved in decision-making dealing with selection of beneficiaries for development programmes, and loans or credit. They equally participate along with men in village development activities like construction of check dam, water channels, repairing water tank, etc.

7.12 Increase in political participation:

Earlier women were not involved in any political activities of the village. In case of any problem they were approaching the caste and village elders. Now women resolve their problems themselves. RASS, in order to strengthen the village Panchayat system, had given the authority of beneficiary selection to the village community, especially involving women group leaders. This has enhanced the solidarity and unity among the villagers.

7.13 Awareness about development programmes:

The efforts of RASS are yielding results in empowering rural poor women both socially and economically, there is a greater awareness among them about different development programmes, significance of SHGs and Milk cooperative societies, etc.

7.14 Decrease in Social distance:

Prior to RASS' entry there was greater prevalence of social distance between higher and lower castes, and this has been significantly altered after the initiative taken by RASS. The so-called lower caste people are also now part of SHGs along with others. The leadership to the SHGs is not decided on caste basis, but on the basis of education and qualities of leadership. Similarly, credit is not given on the basis of caste but on the basis

of their need. The lower caste women equally participate with higher caste women in the group meetings wherein decision to sanctioning of loans is taken based on the need of the persons on a priority basis. This shows a change in the attitudes of higher caste women towards lower caste women. This change in the attitude of upper caste women has come about as a result of concerted efforts of RASS.

VIII. Conclusions

The change that was brought about in this village due to the developmental efforts by the Government as well as RASS has brought significant changes in the relationships between men and women and between castes. The process of change is now altering the power relations in favour of women. In the long run, if the same trend continues and women's groups work more on a sustainable basis, this may have structural implications too. Major changes are observed in this village as a result of the efforts of RASS with the people. There is a change in the attitude of men towards women; women were exposed to the outer world; social distance between higher and lower caste has come down; dropout rate of children has decreased; awareness about government programmes; change in their living condition; improvement of the economic condition, etc. The SHGs are now a major economic force to reckon with in Sadasivapuram and it has been also a major instruction of development and empowerment.

RASS, the NGO, has been acting as a catalytic agent in women development. RASS is potentially better placed than the Governmental agencies because their workers are sincerely devoted to the task of reducing the sufferings of the poor than the Government officials. They have better rapport with the rural poor than the Government employees have with the poor and they are not bound by rigid bureaucratic rules, regulations or procedures. Therefore, they operate with greater flexibility, whereas Government officials are bound by rigid bureaucratic rules with less flexibility.

References

- [1]. Ghosh, D.K. 2001. NGOs Intervention in Poverty Alleviation. Kurukshetra, March 2001, pp.2-9.
- [2]. Krishna Murthy. 1985. Voluntary Action in Rural Development: A Survey. Kurukshetra, 32 (1), pp. 33-36.
- [3]. Muniandi K. 1992. Role of Voluntary Agencies in Rural Development. Khadi Gramadyog, 38 (10-12), pp 628-630.
- [4]. Rao, Y.V. 1984. Voluntary Action in Rural Development. Kurukshetra, 32 (5), pp. 22-24.
- [5]. RASS Organising Committee for Development. 1998. Partners in Progress. Tirupathi: RASS