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Dr. A Abdul Jameel
Asst. Professor, P.G. &
Research Department of
History, C. Abdul Hakeem
College, Melvisharam, Tamil
Nadu, India

**Dr. KMA Mohamed Omer
Farooque**
Assistant Professor,
P.G. & Research Department
of History, C. Abdul Hakeem
College, Melvisharam, Tamil
Nadu, India

Socio-economic, educational and health services of DEEPS

Dr. A Abdul Jameel and Dr. KMA Mohamed Omer Farooque

Abstract

This paper highlighted the socio-economic, educational and health conditions and issues of the people of Dharmapuri district. Development Educational and Environment Protection Society commonly Known as DEEPS. It is located at Pennagram in Dharmapuri District of Tamilnadu. This NGO mainly work for the development of downtrodden people. The district has 32.3 percent poor people as identified by the BPL census; hereby this organisation particularly focuses the main issues of female infanticide, women's development, education, AIDS and social welfare.

Keywords: DEEPS, NGO, CANG, KFO, Female Infant, AIDS

Introduction

Development Education and Environment Protection Society (DEEPS) is a Non Governmental and Non profitable organisation. It has been working for the rural poor and the poorest among the poor people in Tamil Nadu. It was established in 1988 and was registered under the Societies Registration Act of Tamil Nadu 1975. Its register No is 60/88 dated 27th May 1988. Its register office is located at Kombaipatti, Kulipatti Post, Batlagundu in Dindigul District of Tamil Nadu. The head quarters of the project office is located at Aruna Meenakshi Nagar, Reddipattipatti Post in Dindigul district. It is also registered under the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India whereby it is authorised to collect donations and receive financial assistance from foreign countries under FCRA (Foreign Contribution Regulating Act) regulations.

The main focus of DEEPS is on the development of health, education, economic and social aspects among the rural population. The area of operation of DEEPS is extended to seven districts of Tamil Nadu namely Dindigul, Theni, Erode, Namakkal, Karur, Salem and Krishnagiri. It has direct intervention only in two districts namely Dindigul and Dharmapuri but the networking activities are extended to other districts. The Project Office for Dharmapuri district is situated on the B.D.O Office Road, Pennagaram in Dharmapuri District. Therefore, it is a voluntary organisation promoting developmental activities in an inaccessible area in Dharmapuri District. It has been addressing social issues such as female infanticide, foeticide, declining of child sex ratio and violence against women. The major thrust of the organisation is to enhance the status of women and children since its inception in 1988.

Vision and Mission

The vision of DEEPS is to 'envisage the society where unreached section in civil society can lead life with dignity and social justice'

The mission is politicising civil society towards access to livelihood resources and obtaining mainstreaming services.

The aims and objectives of DEEPS are given below

- To enhance economic status of women
- To increase literacy rate among girl child
- To minimize Infant Mortality Rate, Maternal Mortality Rate (IMR/MMR) and female infanticide
- To ensure livelihood resources to tribal community

Correspondence

Dr. A Abdul Jameel
Asst. Professor, P.G. &
Research Department of
History, C. Abdul Hakeem
College, Melvisharam, Tamil
Nadu, India

- To ensure food security
- To address social issues

Panchayat Heads Demand Basic Facilities in Anganwadi Centres

A group of women Panchayat Presidents petitioned the Dharmapuri district administration on Monday seeking basic facilities in 11 anganwadis in the district. They are members of 'Muzhakkam', an organisation of elected women panchayat representatives. 'Muzhakkam' is an initiative of DEEPS. It has been providing skill development to women panchayat representatives in Palacode. As part of it, the member of Muzhakkam inspected facilities at a number of anganwadis in the Panchayats of Palacode. "Many of them lack basic facilities," said Muzhakkam president Kala, who is also the President of Kumanoor Panchayat. She pointed out that anganwadi centres in Veppilailalli and Karakoor did not have toilets while those in B.Chettihalli, Endapatti, Pattalamman Koil, Upparahalli, Kanampatti, C.M.Puthur, Karakathalli, Samanoor and Porathoor did not have water connections in their toilets. The Panchayat President demanded that the district administration should also provide more facilities in anganwadis.

A group of Arunthathiyars from Nathamedu in Mottandurichi Panchayat also petitioned the district administration on Monday demanding land for constructing their houses. They said, more than 100 Arunthathiyar families were living in Nathamedu for generations but most of them were landless. So, they insisted the district administration to allot land and title deeds to them ^[1].

Parenting Children

DEEPS identified anaemia problem among anti-natal mothers and children, and poor accessibility of services like Anganwadi Services and Health services in five Panchayats of Pennagaram Block. Due to this poor accessibility, many of the anti-natal mothers did not go for the Medical checkups and also the babies did not vaccinate on time. In this context, DEEPS had Initiated Pilot Project of "Parenting Children" with the Support of UNICEF.

They conducted various activities to disseminate the Parenting Children such as IEC (Information, Education and Communication), Cultural programme, Children's pongal and convention.

The outcome of this project is tremendous. Majority of the anti-natal mothers practised regular medical checkups. Most of the children were vaccinated on time. Both father and mother were involved in Parenting Children. The Parents are motivated to keep clean their children, home and surroundings. One active baby was untied her mother after the parenting children and counselling by the field contacts. Most of the parents avoided quarrelling with each other in front of the children.

School Children Committee

This is one of the successful interventions of the project that it covers 70 schools intensively. The major thrust of this activity is to minimize drop out among the school going children in the operation area of the partner NGOs, and it has been proved by high retention and enrolment during this period. And major success of this program is that the children extended their support to identify the dropped out

and non schooling children in their respective villages and identified 200 children. All of them were enrolled into residential centre to continue their study for one year and mainstreaming them. All these centres are being run by the project partner NGOs in five blocks. It is because of this project that it was possible for the NGOs to strengthen their credibility and reputation with the Govt and obtain the residential centres for drop out children.

Activating District Level NGOS Network

In 1992 a District level NGOs net work had been formed with 15 members and named DHVANI (Dharmapuri Voluntary Agencies Network Initiatives). The major thrust of the forum was to create a platform for NGOs of the district.

The Network went on effectively until 2002. However, because of internal problems regarding leadership, it had setback between 2003 and 2005. Hence, many members felt to reactivate the network and DEEPS initiated the process with KFO partners. At present it functions well under the leadership of Mr. M. Shankar the Secretary of DEEPS, the networking process are being strengthened by capacitating its 45 member NGOs.

Campaign against Negligence of Girl Child (CANG)

Developed state like Tamil Nadu is not exception for the fighting societal issues like gender inequity including female literacy, employment opportunity, female infanticide, sex ratio etc., Civil society organisations in Tamil Nadu had taken multiple efforts to address these issues in their own way including community level work, criticising the government policies which are pertaining to reduce the gender gap and advocating for gender sensitive policies. Campaign Against Negligence of Girl child (CANG) is one of the important networks in Tamil Nadu, which works consistently on the rights of the girl child. The woman and girl child's rights are being a social issue which is set in within the caste system and patriarchy nature of Tamil society. In the past, CANG had taken multiple level interventions including working with communities, civil society organizations to build strong coalition to reduce gap in child sex ratio, taking legal measures including filing of Public Interest Litigation against cradle scheme and opposing government's narrow approach to a larger social problem.

Census of India 2011 report reveals that Tamil Nadu has shown overall improvement in reducing the gap in sex ratio, while overall strategies including government and people's own consciousness helped to improve the situation. It is worth to mention that the districts in which CANG partners work, had contributed to this overall development. Over the years CANG had developed understanding of social complexity of the issue including the impact of neo liberal economic policies of India, its impact on the working class especially on the women unorganized workers and on gender equity including sex ratio.

KFO Project on Campaign against Negligence of Girl Child

Declining of sex ratio in Tamil Nadu became an alarming issue in few districts and it is not a good indicator in social aspect. In order to address the issue, DEEPS has strategized that, the experience gained from KFO Project implemented in Dharmapuri District for the past seven years had an

¹ The New Indian Express, Coimbatore., dated 25th August 2015.

opportunity to replicate. During the year 2007- 08 it has been achieved at an extent by implementing the planned measures. The project covers seven districts which comes under declining of sex ratio and associates with 70 NGOs in the state thus covers 23% of the districts in Tamil Nadu.

CANG Awareness Programmes

These CANG activities have been carried out in eight districts of Tamilnadu. They are Krishnagiri, Dharmapuri, Salaem, Erode, Namakkal, Karur, Dindigul and Theni. These district are identified as very poor in Child sex ratio based on the 2001 censuses. The mindset of a society is that the women are more burdensome compared to man due to dowry. The male members are considered heir-apparent for all their properties. In this context, DEEPS identified voluntary organization and formed a network in the respective districts.

Negligence of Girl child in Tamil Nadu has social recognition irrespective of communities except Tribal community in Tamil Nadu. Basically negligence is an instrument for denying the rights of girl children. It is evident that the child sex ratio in Tamil Nadu has been continuously decreasing in 17 districts out of 32 during the past two decades. This made DEEPS to enhance the child sex ratio by addressing various negligence issues and ensuring the rights of girl children by empowering the civil society and using community based institutions as a tool to address the issue.

It is reported that The Cradle Baby Reception Centre, on the premises of the Government Medical College Hospital Dharmapuri, has, of late, recorded a drop in the number of babies being received by it. It is no doubt a positive trend. However, it is alleged that the trend indicates the involvement of child racketeers, “who strike a deal with the parents outside the centre”.

It was the then AIADMK Government which established baby reception centres across the state under the Social Welfare Department to save infants, especially females with a view to curb from the evil of infanticide. The centre was inaugurated on the hospital premises on April 13, 2002 by the then Social Welfare Minister S. Valarmathi and first lady Collector of the district Ms. Apoorva. Since its inception, 1,366 babies, including 70 baby boys were handed over to the centre. They received babies and in turn handed over to various approved children’s homes for further care.

However, the local residents recently have raised doubts about the presence of some people near the centre in the name of ‘counselling’, without the knowledge of Social Welfare Department. “Whether they are convincing parents against forsaking their Child, or are leading them into the hands of child traffickers is what needs to be ascertained”, sources said. There is no proper record maintained to track the number of parents approaching the centre with their babies. As per the norm, even if the parents decide to take back the child after any counselling, they should submit an affidavit at the centre.

“If there is drop in number of parents forsaking their children, it is welcome. But that the Government should ascertain the reason why it is receiving less number of children in course of time”, assisted M. Shankar, the secretary of DEEPS and State convener of Campaign against Negligence of Girl Child.

As the centre is located in an isolated place, it is possible for trespassing and is conducive to child trafficking. The brokers have accessibility and they may approach the parents. Therefore, adding that the district administration should initiate action to install surveillance facilities including CCTV (Closed Circuit Television) cameras etc, at the centre.

According to hospital sources, the centre, located in a remote corner of the hospital premises near the mortuary, is being frequented by some unidentified persons. The officials concerned are yet to learn their where about, despite repeated plea from the public. The police personnel at the outpost have also failed to control the ‘backyard visit’ of such unwanted elements during office hours, they alleged.

The hospital sources pointed out that it was necessary for the Social Welfare Department officials to visit the centre periodically and also there is a need to shift the centre to some “safe place” near the hospital’s children’s war, where there will be much more vigil.

When contacted, Collector in- charge District Revenue Officer P. Ramar told Express that the officials concerned would inspect the centre soon and take steps to check any unwanted practices. “So far, no complaint of child racketing has been lodged. However the official, periodical visit to the centre will be streamlined”, he said ^[2].

Strengthening Women Empowerment through Electoral Process (SWEEP)

DEEPS has organized and motivated rural women members in two blocks of Pennagaram and Palacode of Dharmapuri district and one block of Kelamangalam in Krishnagiri District. Through the electoral process 250 potential women leaders were motivated and 197 women contested in 2011, in the Local Body Election apart from the 33% of women reservation from 93 Grama Panchayats.

The Hunger Project (THP)

Strengthening Women’s Leadership” is the thrust of THP to eliminate poverty and hunger through collective action by EWRs (Empowered Elected Women Representatives), being implemented by DEEPS since 2011 in Dharmapuri and Krishnagiri districts. During this period the project activities have been carried out intensively by Empowered Elected Women Representatives in Local Govt. Hence, breaking the power structure is not an easy task in patriarchal society. It has been become part of politics. Gender discrimination still exists whatever position they are, in fact due to continuous intervention it has been minimised to some extent.

Adivasi Community Development

In Dharmapuri district there are 2.08% (2011 Censes) tribal population from the total population. This is the first generation; the tribal Population are getting education at least at the primary level. These people are living with poor condition of Health, Education, Economic and Social aspects. And also they are having poor accessibility to Health Centres, Educational Institutions and Transportation. In most of the times in a year, these people are living in forest areas for their livelihood. Their main profession is catching snakes and collecting herbal medicinal plants from the forest areas and collection of non timber forest produces. The people are living like barbarians for a long time. Still

² The New Indian Express, Coimbatore 1st January 2013.

now the people are not properly recognized by the civil society.

In this situation, DEEPS identified ten tribal villages from Palacode block and seven tribal villages from Pennagaram block of Dharmapuri district and worked for their various developments like health aspect, education, economic aspect and socio cultural aspect. And also it has formed them as SHG (Self Help Groups) and Adivasis Federation. Through this federation subscription for the federation's maintenance are collected. This tribal population collect of medicinal plants and seeds for their livelihood from the forest areas. They uplifted one step forward in their standard of living after DEEPS reached there.

Watershed Management

Supported and assisted by NABARD (National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development) and Government of Tamil Nadu, DEEPS did Water shed Management project in Pennagaram block. The major thrust of the project is to enhance the livelihood options of farming community by protecting and promoting natural resources through participatory approach. It has been identified 1201 hectare rain fed area and intervened on various activities such as construction of Check Dams, Percolation Ponds, Trenches, Gully Plugs, Tree Plantation and Credit Assistance to land less etc. Through this project, the soil was protected: Virgin lands become cultivable, Tree plantation was improved and water harvesting developed.

The main impact of the project is the migration was reduced and most of them they were immigrated to their mother village and the ground water level has been sustained. And also the village population economic status has been increased. Indirectly the cattle have been benefited by the drinking water source through the watershed.

Transfer of Technology demonstration programme

DEEPS conducted Transfer of Technology demonstration programme in 14 Villages of Pennagaram block, Dharmapuri District, Tamilnadu from 13 to 19 September 2011 through National Institute of Rural Development (NIRD), Hyderabad, AP. The aim of the demonstration programme was to bring awareness on solar energy as an alternative energy among the rural population. The important demonstration arranged are, solar cooker, solar dryer, home light, rotary charger, rotary charger with torch, re glowing device, cycle charger, cono weeder, conical tail, water filter and agri- waste chullah. In this solar cooker and solar dryers are possible to produce even the rural people with locally available materials of thermo cool sheet and thin plastic. The rural population knew that there was some alternative energy which can be getting from the sun light.

Pudhu Vaazhavu Project

The major objective of the project is to "Eliminate Poverty" by strengthening social capital. In order to obtain its objective it seriously implements the project for the very needy people in society especially physically challenged and the vulnerable. DEEPS is part of the project activities in Pennagaram block of Dharmapuri District.

The major activity done was assessment in all 33 panchayats and identified the potential beneficiaries and extended monetary support towards ensuring livelihood options.

Elton John HIV/AIDS Project

Dharmapuri district is noted for the prevalence of higher rate of HIV/AIDS in the state of Tamil Nadu. The major cause for the alarming situation is due to high rate of migrations during off- season. During the past five years, the migration rate becomes increased due to drought; normally the district has 15% of regular seasonal migration which went to 30% for the past few years.

As per the Joint Director of Health Services office report, the people in the target area are farmers. Agriculture is the major income source of the community. 90% of the families depend on rain fed cultivation only. During off- season, they are forced to migrate to nearby cities and Border States. The male members of the family stay away from family for a long time which forces them to have sex with commercial sex workers and others. In turn, they carry the deadly HIV virus and pass it to their spouses back. There are truckers and helpers and chick vendors who are pocketed in some clusters in large numbers. Hogenakkal, the tourist place situated at Pennagaram is prone to the spread of virus. As per the prevailing culture here sex is neither taboo nor divine. So, having sex with multiple partners is a commonly found in the target area.

The district has more than 2000 persons infected with HIV, especially the women become the most vulnerable. It has been found at the headquarters hospital during anti-natal check up at the PPTCT (Parents to Child Transmission Centre). During the period of 2004 –2005, there are 462 HIV affected cases identified at the Government Hospital as per the statement by the Joint Director of Health Services during the meeting held at his chambers with the NGOs.

DEEPS' intervention in Elton John HIV/AIDS Project for care and support by minimizing Stigma, Discrimination and Denial found and registered 17 PLHAs (People Living with HIV/AIDS) out of this number 5 persons were died within the short span of life time. As per the information by the PLHAs the block has registered more than 200 members in Thambaram Sanatorium- Chennai.

In this prevailing situation, the area badly needs to intervene in prevention and control of HIV/AIDS. In order to obtain its objectives, DEEPS aims to intervene with development perspective towards ensuring care and support to PLHAs in its target populace and generate awareness among various stake holders on behaviour change communication values among the high risk behaviour groups in community also ensuring institutional deliveries to minimize Parents to child transmission of HIV/AIDS. DEEPS is aware that the problems cannot be solved with mere health care services unless addressed in multi dimensional interventions. Since women are affected badly on HIV/AIDS, this project can be strategized as a tool to empower the women on reproductive choices as rights of women.

There is not much intervention for HIV/AIDS in Dharmapuri District, a few interventions are being made by APAC (AIDS Prevention and Control) and TAI (Tamil Nadu Aids Initiatives) project which are target oriented and urban oriented, the rural people who are affected had not been cared. In fact the district is coming under the priority area as per the document in PHCs (Public Health Centre) and VCTC (Voluntary Counselling and Testing Centre) in headquarter hospital.

In order to reach out the rural people, TNVHA (Tamil Nadu

Voluntary Health Association) - Chennai with the support and assistance by the Elton John HIV/AIDS Project partner initiates the programme to enhance the complete knowledge of the community on care and support by unveiling DSD (Disorders of Sex Development). DEEPS is an implementing NGO in three Health Sub-Centre areas only and also plays District Facilitation Role for five NGOs who are partner with the project of TNVHA.

Apart from the above intervention there are NGOs who are doing with the support of their own resource mobilization such as CARE (Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere) in Dharmapuri. There are no comprehensive models in addressing the issue.

Conclusion

Development of Education and Environment Protection Society popularly known as DEEPS play a vital role in socio-economic transformation of the rural society. Its main focus is on the development of health, education, economic and social improvement of village population. Through its main area of operation is extended to seven districts of Tamil Nadu, it has direct intervention only in Dharmapuri and Dindigul. It works in partnership with other organisations such as Tamil Nadu Voluntary Health Association, National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development, Katholische Frauen Bewegung Osterriechs, Watershed Development Fund, UNICEF and The Hunger Project etc.

“Muzhakkam” an organisation of elected women Panchayat representatives is an initiative of DEEPS. It provides skill development to women Panchayat representation. It fought for providing toilet and water facilities to Anganwadis. School Children committees were constituted in the target villages to minimize dropouts and to increase retention and enrolment of children in schools. District level NGOs Network was formed called Dharmapuri Voluntary Agencies Network Initiatives with a view to create a platform to the NGOs of the district to exchange ideas and knowledge, to undertake development activities and to resolve conflicts among its members. There was set back in 2003 and 2005 but under the leadership of Mr. Shankar, the Secretary of DEEPS, it functions well by strengthening the networking of 45 NGOs.

Campaign against Negligence of Child (CANG) is another initiative of DEEPS which works for the protection of the rights of girl child and undertakes multiple interventions like working with communities and civil society organisations to reduce the gap in child sex ration and to empower working class.

DEEPS organised a seminar on Alternative Scheme for Cradle Baby Centre highlighting the adverse effects of the scheme of Tamil Nadu Government and proposing alternative scheme to minimize the cases of female infanticide. Campaigns on the negligence of girl child, domestic violence, sexual abuse, female infanticide etc were organised in the target areas. Strengthening Women Empowerment through Electoral Process (SWEEP) was given much priority. Through this SWEEP campaign, about 197 women were motivated in the form of potential leaders workshop, rally and mini conventions were organised. Adivasi Community Development, Pudu Vaazhavu Project and Elton John HIV/AIDS Project etc. are the most significant programmes of DEEPS which contributed to

effect a great change in the socio-economic life of the rural population of Dharmapuri District.

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