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Rural Development by Making Villages Self Reliant: A Case Study of Amrita Self Reliant Villages (ASeRVe) Project of Mata Amritanandmayi Math, Amritapuri, Kollam, Kerala

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Abstract:

Out of India's population of 130 crores, 88 crores live in the rural areas. However, contribution of village economy which includes agriculture, forestry and fishing in India's GDP during 2014-15 was 17 percent. Based on these figures, it is clear that average per capita income of rural population is one tenth that of urban population.

Green revolution which came in the seventies and which was based on high yield variety seeds, (HYV), chemical fertilizers, pesticides and irrigation facilities, brought high growth of food grains in contiguous tract in north India comprising of Punjab, Haryana and Western Uttar Pradesh. This brought prosperity to the villages in these states. This covered only 30 percent population of the villages.

Rest of the states where agriculture is rain-fed, and where 70 percent of India's farmers live, did not benefit from green revolution. The poverty and destitution has been continuing in these areas, even till today. These regions needed different type of technologies. But the government's obsession with HYV –fertilizer technology has prevented adequate attention being paid to research in alternate technologies suitable for non irrigated lands.

Farming is not highly remunerative profession. Often the crops fail due to floods, draughts, untimely rains etc. Even the market rates for their produce are highly fluctuating. Because of these factors, it often becomes difficult for the farmers to repay the loans taken by them. The private moneylenders create intense pressure on the farmers to recover their loans. Under these circumstances, the farmers are resorting to suicides.

In the back drop of the aforesaid and keeping the interest crores of poverty stricken village people in mind, Mata Amritanandmayi Math, Amritapuri Kollam announced in 2013 to adopt a total of 101 villages and develop them as self reliant villages in various states of India. Ninety two villages has already been indentified and work has started in twenty one villages. A special project namely : Amrita Self reliant Villages (ASeRVe) was started by the Math in September 2013. The entire budget for this project will be provided by the Math.

A lot of development work has already been carried out by the math in these 21 villages during last two and half years. The author wants to delineate the development activities carried out by the Amritanandmayi Math as a case study for the motivation of government , corporates , NGOs, civil society and villagers themselves

Keywords: ASeRVe, Game Changer ,Green Revolution , HYV, MGNREGA, Orphanages, Water Harvesting.

Introduction

Since the beginning of Indian history, India has been a land of village communities. It still continues to be mostly rural based. A very high proportion of India's population resides in the villages. The proportion was 89 percent in 1901, 83 percent in 1951 , 80 percent in 1971 , 74 percent in 1991,72 percent in 2001 and 68 percent in 2014.

Out of India's population of 130 crores, 88 crores live in the rural areas. However , contribution of village economy which includes agriculture, forestry and fishing in Indias's GDP during 2014-15 was 17 percent. Based on these figures, it is clear that average per capita income of rural population is one tenth that of urban population.

Every government during the last seven decades had been promising to improve the lot of villagers. But they have miserably failed in this task. Green revolution which came in the seventies and which was based on high yield variety seeds(HYV) , chemical fertilizers ,pesticides and irrigation facilities. This brought high growth of food grains in contiguous tract in north India comprising of Punjab , Haryana and Western Uttar Pradesh. The GR brought prosperity to the villages in these states. This covered only 30 percent population of the villages.

Rest of the states where agriculture is rain-fed, and where 70 percent of India's farmers live, did not benefit from green revolution. The poverty and destitution has been continuing in these areas, even till today. These regions needed different type of technologies. But the government's obsession with HYV –fertilizer technology has prevented adequate attention being paid to research in alternate technologies suitable for non irrigated lands.

Fall out of green revolution

Although green revolution made the country self reliant in food grains bur it brought some unexpected fall outs. Wide imbalances in cropping pattern and wide regional disparities in agriculture sector cropped up in the country. It produced burdensome surpluses in some crops and extreme shortages in others. The country has bulging buffer stocks of wheat and rice but is spending huge amount of foreign exchange in importing vegetable oil and pulses.

Green revolution created two contrasting regions as far as agriculture is concerned. One dynamic and progressing (Punjab , Haryana and western U.P) and the other backward and stagnating (rest

of the country). No dent has been made in the basic problems of poverty, under nourishment and destitution of the later.

Indebtedness of the farmers and resultant suicides

Farmers have to take loans for investment in raising the crops. The government and private banks normally discourage the loans to them because they have outstanding loans taken in the past. Hence they have to go to private money lenders who give loans on high rate of interest.

Farming is not highly remunerative profession. Often the crops fail due to floods, draughts, untimely rains etc. Even the market rates for their produce are highly fluctuating. Because of these factors, it often becomes difficult for the farmers to repay the loans taken by them. The private moneylenders create intense pressure on the farmers to recover their loans. Under these circumstances, the farmers are resorting to suicides.

As per a paper published in 2008 by Guillaume P. Gruece, Purvi Mehta Bhatt and Debdatta Sengupta, titled, “Bt cotton and farmers suicides in India” as discussion paper no. 00808 of Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) in October 2008, the National crime record Bureau record said that more than 16000 farmers are committing suicides, every year. As per one more paper published in 2014 by Dr. Srijit Mishra, a total of 2,49,778 farmers suicides have occurred between 1995 to 2012.

Farmers suicides is a very serious problem in our country but government is not taking any serious steps to put a full stop to this tragic problem.

In the light of foregoing, it is imperative for the governments to design their policies and budgets to give priority to benefit rural population rather than urban population who are well off.

What Mahatma Gandhi said about rural India

The rural character of economy and need for regeneration of rural life was stressed by Mahatma Gandhi. He wrote in Harijan on 4th April, 1936

“India is found not in its few cities but in its 700,000 lakh villages. What, we town dwellers have believed India is India is to be found in its towns and villages were created to minister our needs. We have hardly paused to enquire if those poor folks get sufficient to eat and clothe themselves and whether they have a roof to shelter themselves from sun and rain.”

Gandhiji further wrote in Harijan on 29th August, 1936

“I would say that if village perishes, India will perish too. It will be no more India. Her own mission in the world will get lost. The revival of the village life is possible only, when it is no more exploited.”

Rural development is therefore, absolute and urgent necessity now. It is a foundation on which India as a whole can become a developed country.

In the back drop of the aforesaid and keeping the interest crores of poverty stricken village people in mind , Mata Amritanandmayi Math , Amritapuri Kollam announced to adopt 101 villages in various states of India and has plans to adopt a total of 101 villages. A special project namely : Amrita Self reliant Villages (ASeRVe) was started by the Math in September 2013. The entire budget for this project will be provided by the Math.

Developmental work is already in progress in 21 villages during last two and half years. A total of 93 villages has been identified by the MA Math. The target is 101 villages. The author wants to delineate the development activities carried out by the Amritanandmayi Math as a case study for the motivation of government , corporates , NGOs , civil society and villagers themselves.

Mata Amritanandmayi Math

Mata Amritanandmayi Math is a spiritual and humanitarian organization led by world famous saint Mata Amritanandmayi. It has its head quarters in Amritapuri, Kollam, Kerala. The Math has started : ‘Embracing the world ‘ , a global network of charitable projects which provides food ,housing ,education and medical services for the poor. The global network works in 40 countries around the world.

Math has built and/or supported schools ,orphanages throughout India. The hospital located in the territory of Math in Kerala offers medical care on a sliding scale allowing people to pay what they can afford. Over the year , the Math has been active in providing significant help to needy people. Math has built thousands of houses for the poor people, given scholarship to poor students, given pensions in large numbers to needy, donated crores of rupees to the government for the cause of flood relief, building of toilets , cleaning the Ganges etc.

Amrita Self Reliant Village Program (Amrita SeRVe)

In September 2013 , Mata Amritanandmayi Math has started an ambitious program under the title: Amrita Self Reliant Villages (ASeRVe) of adopting 101 villages spread in all states of India. The project aims to bring improvements in areas of health, education , water supply ,sanitation , agriculture , housing , infrastructure and income generation in Indian villages. The project is entirely funded by Mata Amritanandmayi Math.

So far work has started in twenty one villages under ASeRVe and regular development work has been proceeding in these villages. As explained earlier ,ninety three villages has already been identified and the work will start soon batch by batch. The target is 101 villages. The list of villages where work has started is given in Table 1 .

Table 1

List of villages where work has already been started by Mata amritanandmayi Math

S. No	Village Name	District	State
1	Byse	Shimoga	Karnatka
2	Deurbal	Kondagaon	Chattisgarh
3	Devgain	Ranchi	Jharkhand
4	Dunda	Uttarkashi	Uttarkhand
5	Ettimadai	Coimbatore	Tamilnadu
6	Gudipati Cheruvu	Guntur	Andhra Pradesh
7	Guptapada	Janla	Odhisia
8	Harirampura	Swai Madhopur	Rajsthan
9	Indpur	Kangra	Himachal Pradesh
10	Juna Kathiwada	Alirajpur	Madya Pradesh
11	Kalinagar	South 24 Parganas	West Bengal
12	Kanti	Mahendragarh	Haryana
13	Kodur	Medak	Telangana
14	Maira	Pathankot	Punjab
15	Malcopen	South Goa	Goa
16	Mothakkara	Wayanad	Kerala
17	Nani Borvai	Arravalli	Gujrat
18	Pandori	Kathua	Jammu and Kashmir
19	Ransai	Raigarh	Maharashtra
20	Ratanpur	Bhojpur-Ara	Bihar
21	Sarai Nuruddin	Bahadurpur	Uttar Pardesh

Work done in the villages

Health

Thirty health workers were trained from the villages of five states namely: Uttarakhand , Chattisgarh , Bihar , Rajasthan and Kerala. These health workers are rendering simple medical and diagnostic services in their respective villages .

Medical camps in all the villages are being organized periodically for the benefit of the villagers. Many diseases like T.B., Diabities , Malaria are diagnosed and treated.

Drinking water supply and sanitation

Bore-wells were dug to supply water in many the villages .Water distribution networks were also set up in many villages. Drinking water filters were given in villages of Kerala and Rajasthan and many other states.

Women groups from all the villages were taught masonry and plumbing skills so that they can start constructing toilets for their families.

Agriculture

Awareness sessions were conducted for farmers of several villages on harmful effects of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. They were encouraged to make compost and use in their fields. They were also trained in rain water harvesting by making contours and trenches.

Education

Evening school tuition centers were started in all the villages to ensure that the comprehension of the students , improves. Tuition teachers were trained in the use of Tablets and innovative learning programs. For the benefit of illiterate adults , read and write classes were conducted. More than 550 students were given Vidya Amrita Scholarships in various villages to meet school expensis.

Income generation

Village women were trained in skills like : Making artificial jewellery , Dhokra metal crafting art, carpentry , tailoring , soap making etc. This has improved the earning capacity of the women. Many of the women are earning money by using these newly acquired skills.

Housing and toilets

Forty four pucca houses were built by MA Math in various villages for needy families in the states of Andhra Pradesh , Gujrat , Jammu and Kashmir ,Jharkhand , west Bengal, Maharashtra, Odisha , Himachal Pradesh and Kerala.

Similarly, ninety three toilets were built by MA Math for needy families in various villages in states of Uttarakand, Himachal Pradesh, karnatka, Odisha, Gujrat, Uttar Pradesh, Goa, and Jharkhand.

Pensions for Old people and widows

More than 150 people have been given Amritanidhi pensions in almost all the villages. This gives monetary relief to the old people and widows.

Tree plantation

Thousands of trees were planted in various villages which is a ongoing process. The villagers are encouraged to look after the trees as long as the trees need care.

Kitchen Gardens

In every village , a drive was undertaken for setting up kitchen garden to grow vegetables, fruits and flowers in the house. Almost every one responded positively and made the scheme successful.

Future Program

Amritanandmayi Math will progressively start work in other villages and carry out the development activities. The target is 101 villages. Math will continue to support the villages and improve the standard of living of the villagers. It is a long term program and the results will come progressively from year to year.

Conclusion

The benefits of India's development has gone to rich and middle class population who are residing in cities and towns. The villagers have not benefited from India's growth. It has been an exclusive growth. Nearly 68 percent of the population who live in villages continue to suffer from poverty and destitution. Mata Amritanandmayi Math's bold step of adopting 101 villages and developing them is a shining example for all to see. It is going to be a game changer event in the history of Village development in India. The governments, corporate, NGO's, civil society and villagers themselves are going to get the inspiration out of this grand example and a revolution of village development in rural India will usher in the years to come.

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