



COMMISSION OF RURAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES UNDER THE ARCHDIOCESE OF MADRAS-MYLAPORE WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO MADRAS SOCIAL SERVICE SOCIETY IN TIRUVALLUR DISTRICT

L. RAYAPPA ARULSAMY

Ph.D. Research Scholar

Centre for Rural Development, Annamalai University, Chidambaram, TN, India.

Abstract: Community Development Programme has been the biggest rural reconstruction scheme undertaken by the Government of free India. The presence of churches in the communities allows them to be accessed by communities and develop grassroots networks through their existing human and physical infrastructure and systems. The documents of the Second Vatican Council of the Roman Catholic Church (1962 – 1965) invited the universal and particular Church to have common ground for charitable and welfare activities. With this background this article observes that what crucial role the Church can play/plays in community building and uplifting the standards of living for the community within its vicinity. In this context, it analyses the primary objective of the Madras Social Service Society and discusses its rural community development programmes for the development of the socially and economically marginalized people in the Tiruvallur district of Tamil Nadu.

Index Terms: *Community Development, Second Vatican Council, Archdiocese of Madras-Mylapore, Madras Social Service Society, Caritas India, Empowering the Powerless.*

INTRODUCTION

The concept of community development in India was initiated well before Independence and after independence in 1947, it assumed high priority. And, the Community Development Programme has been the biggest rural reconstruction scheme undertaken by the Government of free India.¹ It is important to state here that Christianity has a critical role to play in the nation building process of any country.² Churches have, in the past, driven a crusade to provide education to people. And, the presence of churches in the communities allows them to be accessed by communities; be in proximity with community people; connect with the community people; and develop grassroots networks of church and community members through their existing human and physical infrastructure and systems. Community use of churches ranges from provision of support services for various groups such as the elderly, the homeless, welfare of women and children, providing venues for civic events, adult education, IT training, after-schools clubs and increasingly to help deliver various other services for the well-being of the community.³ In addition, Churches have come of age and collaborate with different organizations to improve the well-being of communities around their vicinity through social and economic community development programmes.

To realize the words of Jesus in action, the Christianity is engaged from the beginning in social activities such as helping the poor, feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, caring the sick, etc. These have been made as the mandatory for all through the social teachings of the Church in its compendium – human dignity, community and the common good, rights and responsibilities, option for the poor and vulnerable, participation and subsidiarity, dignity of work and the rights of both men and women, stewardship of creation, solidarity, role of government and promotion of peace. Hence, the charitable activities were carried out all over the world including our nation, India.⁴ The documents of the Second Vatican Council of the Roman Catholic Church (1962 – 1965) invited the universal and particular Church to have common ground for charitable and welfare activities. Thus, the followers of the Christian faith make up the largest group in the world today with more than 2.5 billion of people, in which the members of the Roman Catholic Church sum about 1.2 billion which is the biggest denomination of whole Christianity. Over and again, the Church has asked herself whether present-day Christianity still lives and progresses under the commission of her founder. By looking back to her origins and experiences, the Church ensures that her way of proclaiming the faith – the “spreading of the seed” – is still in line with her mission. Hence all the Diocese have started their own Social Work organs and they have been linked with the regional level and national level social organs.⁵ In India, “Caritas India” is the official social work organ of Catholic Bishops’ Conference (CBCI) and in the regional level Tamil Nadu Social Service Society (TASOSS) functions to unite all Diocesan Social Service Societies of Tamil Nadu.

With this background, an attempt has been made in this article to highlight on how the Archdiocese in Madras-Mylapore has carried out and is carrying out Jesus’ commission as interpreted in the 21st century. The article observes that what crucial role the Church can play/plays in community building and uplifting the standards of living for the community within its vicinity. The special reference made in this article for community development is associated with the Madras Social Service Society (MSSS) which is the official organ for social work of Archdiocese in Madras-Mylapore. Therefore, this article analyses the primary objective of the Madras Social Service Society and discusses its rural community development programmes for the development of the socially and economically marginalised people in the Tiruvallur district of Tamil Nadu.

OVERVIEW OF THE ARCHDIOCESE IN MADRAS-MYLAPORE

Like Catholics in almost all regions of the world, the Catholics of Indian society has a distinctive feature of their open willingness and they form an essential part of the society in the city. This is obvious by the number of Catholic schools, universities, hospitals and homes for disabled people. The city of Chennai is a world of contrasts, especially in its various social milieus. Many hundreds of people live on the streets and in the slums. Hunger and thirst are the everyday enemies of thousands of people. Even during the times of the technological developments, people are still being separated from one another and prevented from making social progress because of backwardness and downtrodden nature. The Second Vatican Council takes its ministry in and for the world so seriously that it expects the Church of God to account for these social problems.⁶

Looking into the brief historical overview of the Archdiocese in Madras-Mylapore, Chennai was erected as the Diocese of Mylapore on 9th January, 1606 from then it had its own social activities to eradicate the regular famine and drought in its jurisdiction till Tanjore. The North Chennai was created as the Archdiocese of Madras on 14th January, 1832. The Catholic directory of Archdiocese of Madras carried lots of community development activities particularly during the times of flood and famine relief activities, under its jurisdiction covering half of Andhra Pradesh. Amalgamation of both dioceses took place on 27th November, 1952 and designated as “the Archdiocese of Madras-Mylapore”. Archdiocesan News Letters brought out the numerous social activities done by the two associations such as Society of St Vincent de Paul and Catholic Workers Movements.⁷ Since the Archdiocese in Madras-Mylapore had a wide jurisdiction of Vellore, Tanjore and Chengelpet were made as new dioceses from Madras-Mylapore Archdiocese. At present, the Archdiocese of Madras-Mylapore has its jurisdiction of two districts namely: Chennai and Tiruvallur. It is a fact that the inhabitants of the Archdiocese of Madras-Mylapore are on principle God-believing people, regardless of their religion. Therefore, this article attempts to focus on to what extent the Archdiocese in Madras-Mylapore has carried out and is carrying out Jesus' commission as interpreted in the twentieth century by the Second Vatican Council.

ORGANIZATION OF MADRAS SOCIAL SERVICE SOCIETY

Madras Social Service Society (MSSS) is the official organ for social work of the Archdiocese in Madras-Mylapore, and it is registered under the Societies Registration Act, on 3rd July, 1969. The primary objective of MSSS is to work for the development of the socially and economically marginalized people in the coastal towns, slums, suburbs of Chennai and Tiruvallur districts of Tamil Nadu. Since 1969, the MSSS had carried out many tangible projects and works on continuously till date for the upliftment of socially oppressed and marginalized in the suburban and rural areas. All these benefits go well with the process of Community Development services and is instrumental in raising the standard of living resulting in the establishment of sustainable rural livelihoods. The vision of MSSS is “Creation of a Just Society” and the mission is “Empowering the Powerless”. The focus area is Chennai – Coastal, Slums and Sub-urban and Tiruvallur – Rural areas and Special Towns. The focus is given to fishing folk and slum dwellers, women and children, special attention is given on health and sanitation, preservation of the nature, socially oppressed and marginalized in sub-urban and rural areas, persons with disabled and incurable diseases.⁸

The objectives of the Madras Social Service Society⁹ in the context of rural community development programmes are as follows:

- To initiate, organize, establish and execute developmental programmes aimed at the relief, welfare and development of the poor of all castes and creeds and to create awareness in them to improve their socio-economic status.
- To co-ordinate and co-operate with the state government and other local bodies at various levels, to enable the society to carry out development programmes on the basis of self-help the people.
- To encourage environmental, health and educational programmes, for the under-privileged sections of the society.
- To help local groups of all communities, irrespective of caste or creed, to develop co-operation and collaboration in order to solve their social and economic problems.
- To undertake capacity building on the personnel involved to have a meaningful network.

Since 1969, the MSSS had carried out many tangible projects and works on continuously till date for the upliftment of socially oppressed and marginalized in urban and rural areas.¹⁰ The 50 milestone programmes of the Madras Social Service Society from 1969 to 2019 are as follows:

1. Food Aid Programme
2. Emergency Relief Projects
3. Child Development Programme
4. Community Health Education Programme
5. Mother and Child Health Programmes
6. Food for Work Programmes
7. Madhar Sangams
8. Day Care Centres
9. School Feeding Programmes
10. Dairy Development Projects
11. Small Savings Scheme
12. Promotion of Credit Unions
13. Medical Assistance
14. Domestic Workers’ Development Programmes
15. Social Awareness Programmes
16. Co-operation of Salt Production Unit
17. Leprosarium
18. Roof for the Roofless Programmes
19. Child Development Programmes
20. Central Purchasing Services
21. Thrift and Savings
22. Income Generation Projects
23. Save a Family Plan – Madras
24. People’s Development through Micro-credit Co-operatives
25. Empowerment through People Centred Development
26. Kolping-Madras Projects

27. Children as Partners for Developmental Projects
28. New Thrust Projects of TASOSS
29. Tamil Nadu Women Development Projects
30. Skill Development Programme
31. Programme for Sri Lankan Tamil Refugees
32. Entrepreneur Development Programme
33. Dissemination of Vermi Compost Projects
34. Decentralization Scheme of Caritas India
35. Tsunami Relief and Rehabilitation Projects
36. Ruby Building
37. Tsunami Emergency Assistance Project
38. Pulicat MSSS Bluefield Training Programme
39. Post-Tsunami Sustainable Livelihoods Project
40. Construction of School Buildings
41. Livelihood Development Plan
42. Social Security for the Underprivileged Project
43. Community Managed Disaster Risk Reduction
44. Community Based Rehabilitation of Disabled Project
45. Beemathope Green Field
46. Chennai Floods
47. Vardha Cyclone Relief
48. Dutch Academy
49. MSSS Golden Field
50. Urban DRR

In addition, Madras Social Service Society has been involved in various activities since 1969 through its centres such as Vetri Mayam, Vilithezhru Mayam, Nalvazhvu Mayam, Oli Mayam, Viduthalai Mayyam and various centre-based activities.

ANALYSIS OF MSSS AND RURAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES IN TIRUVALLUR DISTRICT, TAMIL NADU

In a democratic system, the role of the state is primary and most crucial in formulating and implementing the social welfare and economic development programmes. However, in the contemporary society, the problems that people have been facing especially the poor are much more complex. This is especially true in a country like India where a large number of vulnerable sections are experiencing inequalities at all the levels. Development does not only mean economic development but also includes promoting social equality, gender equality, improving quality of life etc., It is not possible for government alone to effectively undertake such complex development activities. So, there is essentiality of other groups or organizations to support the government on various fronts. These essentialities pave way for the emergence of civil society.

Non-Government organizations being a major arm of civil society thus have a crucial role in the development process and they are the groups or institutions or organizations that are not reducible to the administrative grasp and work on “non-profit” basis with the principles like social equality, altruism and human development as their foundations. At present in India there are nearly 25,000 Rural Community Development Services spread across various parts of the country. In the Seventh Plan a task of developing “self-reliance communities” was emphasized to Rural Community Development Services in order to promote rural development. Later in the Eighth Plan government sought to promote nationwide network of Rural Community Development Services. In its Ninth Plan it envisaged the primary role in promoting Public Private Partnership in the country. The Tenth Plan envisaged the need and importance of Rural Community Development Services in developing agricultural sector by promoting awareness among the farmers about various modern farm techniques and government initiatives for their benefit. Moreover, government has also

been promoting the development of Rural Community Development Services through financial aid and assistance programmes.

Development programmes implemented in certain ecologically sensitive areas like Thiruvallur district must require mandatory prior development clearance so as to incorporate Rural Community Development Services development and sustainable policies, planning and implementation of development programmes such as SHG, people education, agriculture, development and industry. It has been unearthed that the Rural Community Development Services of MSSS, is silently revolutionizing the development processes among rural people. It is true that the people receive benefits such as awareness, training and capacity building programmes as well. They are fully aware of the happenings and participate in the conservation, production and technologies. The organization gives continuous training and impart knowledge about easy way to understand conservation and SHG development programmes. Similarly, it also provides continuous income sources for the indigenous people which helps absolutely in the sustainable development of the community.

Besides, the community also gets government facilities like ration card, drinking water taps, sanitation and drainage facilities, community certificate and land patta which enhances their quality of life. Rural Community Development Services of MSSS have been supported by the government to accelerate development activities by taking up specific issues like poverty alleviation, child rights, caste stigma and discriminations, women rights, child labour, rural development, water and sanitation, environmental issues etc. Thus, the programmes of MSSS is in coordination with the Rural Community Development Services and has become proactive in the social sector development of the community.

The health sector development programmes like leprosy eradication programme and programmes of eliminating TB, malaria and improving water and sanitation facilities by Rural Community Development Services have met with huge success. The most highlighted success of Rural Community Development Services could be seen in their achievement in influencing government to bring out various development-oriented policies and laws. Few of such laws and policies include: Right to Information, Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS), Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS), MNREGA, Juvenile Justice, Nirmal Gram Initiative, Rastriya Swasthya Bhima Yojana (RSBY), various policies on women development, forest and environment development, anti-trafficking, people with disability etc. The process of women empowerment not only enhances women's own social and economic status but also has many other dimensions for their household and society at large. Such enhanced status of women and their participation in SHG activities contribute substantially to the overall development of the nation. Therefore, in all the stages of development, participatory methods are followed by MSSS in planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation by involving all the stakeholders especially people, staff and experts.

The Madras Social Service Society (MSSS) concentrated more on health, education, inclusive development, livelihoods development, social security and sustainable development. Since right to life and dignity is essential part of livelihood, MSSS has enabled the women to own various enterprises like beauty parlors, canteens and auto rickshaws etc. Livelihood promotion through credit linkages is part of sustainability of poor families through SHGs. More than 300 crores are mobilized from the banks for SHGs through Rural Community Development Services enabling process. Special thrust was given to achieve hundred percent education to all the tribal children in the Thiruvallur District as well. Thus, the Madras Social Service Society has initiated various activities to mainstream the differently abled persons and their organizations, which paved way for the marginalized persons to come to limelight and live on par with other human beings.

Several Non- Governmental Organizations in the country are looking after the problems of development. Empowerment of community and partnership in development is an important objective of MSSS. Rural Community Development Services of MSSS play a vital and vibrant role in facilitating sustainable development by strengthening the local governance institutions and ensuring effective discharge of their responsibilities through advocacy and effective use of development in the local areas. MSSS has fulfilled most of the development requirements of the community and helped the community to articulate innovation and uniqueness of the approach, coverage, networking and linkages. Activities imparted by MSSS increased the skill, technologies, intelligence, risk management, livelihood and knowledge. Very high emphasis on convergence with other programmes of the government ensures adequate coverage of vulnerable section of the community. Thus, the MSSS has brought a change in the mind set and way of life of people in different Blocks of Thiruvallur District.

CONCLUSION

The people who were tied down due to low spirit on the account of deprivation of jobs, have now become aware by attending trainings, skill programmes and enterprises setting. Training programmes on accounts and managerial skill provide them the availability of credit, leading to set up successful enterprises. This success in turn leads to a growth of their confidence and improves their status at home and in the community. Activities such as educational, health, income generation, legal awareness, entrepreneur development, livelihood opportunity, promotion of human rights, etc. promoted by MSSS have been thoroughly led the people towards the sustainable development. Their life style has changed and the standard of living has been enhanced in a healthier manner. Above all, the Rural Community Development Services of MSSS and government departments have come openly to collaborate with the community to shear risk for unique creativity in the development process. This shows that the community has put forth the step to march forward to reach the desired destination. Various micro enterprises have been initiated to economically support the poor people and the increased individual family income has contributed to the development of education and health conditions of the family. Thus, the fundamental objectives of the Rural Community Development Services of MSSS act as catalyst in bringing about local, national, international initiative and community participation in the overall improvement in quality of life of the rural people. It would also help the government to obtain relevant information for promoting and facilitate the implementation of major policies and programmes.

REFERENCES

1. Brahmadeve Mukherjee: Community Development in India, Orient Longman, University of California, 1961, p.12.
2. Doraisamy, Solomon: Christianity in India: Unique and Universal Mission, The Christian Literature Society, Madras, 1986, p. 34.
3. Arulappa, Rayappa: An Outline of the History of the Archdiocese of Madras-Mylapore, Madras, 1986, pp. 120-25.
4. Leonard, Fernando/Gispert-Sauch: Christianity in India. Two Thousand Years of Faith, New Delhi 2004.
5. Mundadan, Mathias: History of Christianity in India 56. Podipara, Placid: Die Thomaschristen (Das östliche Christentum 18), Würzburg 1966, 25f.
6. Mgr. P. Thomas, 'The Catholic Mission in Madras', in: The Madras Tercentenary Commemoration Volume, Asian Educational Services, Madras, Jan 1, 1994, 375-383.
7. Fernando, Leonard and Gispert-Sauch, G., Christianity in India, Penguin, London, 2004, 60.
8. Golden Jubilee Souvenir: 1969-2019, Madras Social Service Society, Chennai, pp.1-5.
9. Annual Report 2021, Madras Social Service Society, pp.5-8.
10. Golden Jubilee Souvenir:1969-2019, Op.cit., pp.5-10.

