CHAPTER – IV

SOCIAL ACTIVITIES OF THE GANDHI ASHRAM

The activities of the state and individuals undertaken to correct social dis-equilibriums between individuals, classes or groups are called social services. The scope of the social services has been constantly widening. All Governmental activities of modern democratic states have for their objective the general welfare of the community. The state also renders many specialized services in the various spheres, such as education, public health, housing, etc.

The Gandhi Ashram contributes for the improvement of the social condition of the villagers by involving itself in various social reform activities. The removal of untouchability, Harijan uplift and the prohibition movements were chief among them. From the day of the inception of the Ashram, Rajaji worked personally for the attainment of these two objectives. Added to these, Ashram has also undertaken various other social and welfare activities like the improvement of education for the downtrodden, medical relief for the poor, etc., 1

1 - Personal observation made by frequent visits to the Ashram.
REMOVAL OF UNTOUCHABILITY:

Gandhi’s crusade against untouchability and his leadership of Indian Independence movement were based on ideals of social and Political justice. His fight against untouchability was an advance in the direction of the recognition of human rights. To Gandhi the cause of untouchability was only a prominent phase of the great devil of inequality in action in diverse forms and manifestations. Gandhi believed in the spiritual oneness of all life and hence he was fundamentally opposed to untouchability and considered its removal as an issue of great importance, surpassing even Political Independence. According to Gandhi there is no sanction for treating single human being as untouchable in Hinduism.2

The institution of untouchability had plagued the Indian society from very early times. Lord Mahavira and Lord Buddha had, by their practice and precept, raised their powerful voices against this inhuman institution. The saints of Medieval India were also unsparing in their attack on it. Kabir, the most pungent

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2 – T.S. Devadas, *Sarvodaya and the problem of political Sovereignty*, University of Madras, 1974, p.228
among the critics belonged to this class of untouchables. The social religious reform movements of the nineteenth century took up the cause of the untouchables and attempted to get rid of the useless excrescence that debased Hinduism during its progress of centuries.³

Gandhi did not consider untouchability an integral part of Hinduism. In his opinion, “untouchability in the form we practice it today is not, and ought not to be, an essential part of Hinduism”.⁴

The practice in the present form, he thought, “does not protect religion but suffocates it”. More over, there was “sheer ignorance and cruelty behind it”.⁵ He was disturbed by the multiplication of castes on the Hindu society, which divided the society into segments and made it rigid. The worst feature of the caste system was untouchability. He could not find the slightest or even the remotest justification for treating God’s creation of men as untouchable. Gandhi’s concept of Hinduism was universal brotherhood and fundamental unity of all. He said, “untouchability is not a sanction of religion. Scriptures cannot transcend reason and truth. They are intended to purify reason and illuminate

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⁵ – Ibid.
truth. It is the spirit that gives the light. And the spirit of the Vedas is purity, truth, innocence, chastity, simplicity, forgiveness, Godliness and all that makes man and woman noble and brave. There is neither nobility nor bravery in treating uncomplaining scavengers of the Nation as worse than dogs to be despised and spat upon”.  

He called the untouchables, “Harijans”, which literally means, “Children of God”, and it is worthy to note that his weekly newspaper also bore the same name, ‘Harijans’.  

In 1926 Gandhi opined in the Young India that the existing innumerable caste divisions with the attendant artificial restrictions and elaborate ceremonies were harmful to the growth of a religious spirit and also to the social well being of the Hindus.  

He also affirmed in 1926 that, “caste will necessarily have to undergo reform”. He declared in 1932 that “caste is a social evil..”. In 1935 he stated in the Harijan “the present caste system is the very antithesis of varnashrama. The

7 – Ibid.
sooner public opinion abolishes it the better". He added caste had nothing to do with religion. It was harmful “both to spiritual and national growth”.9

Further in the columns of Harijan he said in 1935 that in Varnashrama there was and there should be no prohibition of intermarriage or interdining.10 He affirmed in 1936 that if India was one and indivisible, surely there should be no artificial divisions creating numerous little groups which would neither interdine nor intermarry. There was “no religion in this cruel custom”.11

Gandhi admitted an untouchable family in to his Ashram at Ahmedabad in the year 1915, a few months after the establishment of the Ashram. The family consisted of Dudabhai, his wife Danibehn and their daughter Lakshmi, then a mere toddling babe. They all agreed to abide by the rules and were accepted.12

This action of Gandhi created flutter amongst the friends who have been helping the Ashram. The very first difficulty was found with regard to the use of the well, which was partly controlled by the owner of the bungalow. He objected that the water got polluted as Dudabhai used it.13

9 - Ibid.
10 - Ibid
11 - Ibid, p.268
13 - Ibid., p.299
All monetary help was stopped. Then came the rumours of social boycott. But Gandhi by then was prepared himself and made his companions to accept all kind of difficulties. The Ashramites were even ready to go and stay in the untouchables quarter and live on whatever they could get by manual labour.  

According to Gandhi the admission of this family proved a valuable lesson to the Ashram. “In the very beginning he proclaimed to the world that the Ashram would not countenance untouchability. Those who wanted to help the Ashram were thus put on their guard and the work of the Ashram in this direction was considerably simplified. The fact that it was mostly the real orthodox Hindus who had met the daily growing expenses of Ashram was perhaps a clear indication that untouchability was shaken to its foundation. There were indeed many other proofs of this, but the fact that good Hindus did not scruple to help an Ashram where they went to the length of dining with the untouchables was no small proof.  

For the cause of the removal of untouchability Rajaji went even one step ahead of Mahatma Gandhi. Rajaji was practically the first to start,

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14 – *Ibid*
and the foremost to carry out the movement for the uplift of the Harijans in the state of TamilNadu. He helped and encouraged the late M.C.Rajah to get the Madras Removal of disabilities Act, placed on the statute book, and when he came into power, he then opened the gates of Hindu temples to Harijans.\textsuperscript{16}

This bold reform not only raised at one stroke the social status of Harijans to a level of equality with all other Hindus but in its operation, dealt a mortal blow on the whole of the gradations of superiority and inferiority in the Hindu caste system.\textsuperscript{17}

In his Ashram at Puddupalayam during his stay there for the first ten years Rajaji was very close with the Harijan people and did everything for their upliftment and welfare. Even removal of untouchability could have been a futile reform, had it not been combined with measures for the education and economic uplift of the Harijans and for a reform of their habits.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{16} - R.V.Krishna Ayyar, \textit{Friend of the poor}, Rajaji 93, Souvenir, p.245.
\textsuperscript{17} - \textit{Ibid.}, p.245.
\textsuperscript{18} - Gandhi Ashram, Tiruchengode, Diamond Jubilee Souvenir 1986.
Rajaji had started fighting the social disease even when he was at Salem as the Chairman of the Municipality. He had asked Harijans and caste Hindus to draw water from the same tap. This was something very revolutionary in those days, and the caste Hindus resented it fiercely. In fact, he was excommunicated from his clan on this issue. So when Gandhiji launched his Harijan uplift movement, Rajaji took to it as a fish takes to water. He vigorously campaigned by speeches, writings and by personal example, for temple entry to Harijans and for their economic uplift. In fact it was Rajaji who saved the precious life of Mahatma Gandhi in 1932 during Gandhiji’s “fast unto death” on the question of separate representation of Harijans, by making Ambedkar and Gandhiji to a satisfactory agreement.

The Ashram preached anti-untouchability since its inception. Four untouchables namely Angamuthu, Munusamy, Varadan and Sengodan were enrolled as members at the start. They ate and lived with the rest. This violation of custom provoked an instant reaction boycott.

20 - Ibid
Rajaji was a bold man to do this in those days to permit a Harijan to wear a chappal and to go about among caste Hindus, to hold an umbrella over his head or to ride a bicycle, which meant for him retribution through physical violence.\textsuperscript{22}

The Ashram published brochures and did propaganda among Harijans and educated them. Schools were started in Harijan colonies. Scholarships and clothes were given to the deserving pupils. Ashram workers visited Harijan hamlets regularly and helped and advised villagers to maintain health and hygiene.\textsuperscript{23}

In 1933 nine small houses for Harijans were put to relieve congestion in a nearby Harijan’s village. It was opened by M.C. Rajah on 30\textsuperscript{th} April 1933”.\textsuperscript{24}

It needs no great imagination to realize the hardships that Harijans had for drinking water in those days when water was scarce and the custom of untouchability was strong. The credit went to Ashram as it dug nine new wells, deepened old ones and provided drinking water to the Harijans, so many decades ago with slender resources.\textsuperscript{25}

\begin{flushright}
22 – Gandhi Ashram, Td, Diamond Jubilee Souvenir, 1986, p.XXX
23 - \textit{Ibid.}
24 - \textit{Ibid.}
25 - \textit{Ibid.}
\end{flushright}
In 1938, the Congress Ministry with C. Rajagopalachari as the Premier came into power in Madras and it took up the work of Harijan uplift with greater enthusiasm and gave it precedence over other problems. There was an urgent need to remove the social disabilities from which the Harijans suffered for long. The Harijans could not mingle freely and without fear with other communities. Their social status had to be raised. The removal of Civil Disabilities Act was passed in 1938 with this objective in view and it enabled the Harijans to enjoy all social and public amenities opened to caste Hindus. Their disability to have access to public streams, rivers, wells, tanks, pathways, sanitary conveniences and means of transport as also their disability to be appointed to public offices were removed. This enactment was followed by a more vital and significant step. In 1939 a Special Act, the Temple Entry Authorisation and Indemnity Act was passed. Under this act, the great temples of Madurai, Thanjavur and Palani situated in the most orthodox southern districts of the State were thrown open for the Harijans.

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27 - Ibid. p. 603
28 - Ibid. p. 603
In those days when schools were luxurious even for fair sized town ships it was “unthinkable” to start schools in villages, especially in Harijan hamlets. But the Ashram established schools in the Harijan areas in the nearby villages where even the children of caste Hindus had their education, ultimately. Resulting in eradication of untouchability.29

The places where the Ashram started schools were at; -

a. Puliampatty
b. Manianur
c. Vairampalayam
d. Gokali
e. Chinathambipalayam and
f. Machampalayam.30

The Harijan boys were finding it very difficult to get High School education at Tiruchengode in the absence of a Hostel. When nobody was forthcoming to give a site for locating the Hostel. Dr. P. Subbarayan was kind enough to donate a site, at the request of Rajaji. A Hostel was built on and declared open by the then Congress President Babu Rajendra Prasad on 26.10.1935, for the Harijan students.31

30 - Ibid.
Dr. P. Subbaarayan was born to a famous zamindari family of Kumaramangalam in Salem District. He was elected to the Madras Legislative Council in 1921 and was the Chief Minister of the Madras Presidency during 1926-30. He was always in the forefront of the Non-co-operation movement led by Mahatma Gandhi. Born of an aristocratic family, he became the man of the masses, a distinction, which he was able to achieve by service and sacrifice.32

The Hostel was run by the Ashram till 1959 and was handed over to the Government of Tamil Nadu through Harijan Sevak Sangh. The Hostel served the weaker sections in the same Building. Ashram presented Khadi Dresses on 25th December every year, in memory of Rajaji's Anniversary.33

These initiatives of the Ashram translated into reality its progressive and egalitarian attitude. For the upliftment of the Harijans the Ashram had the tradition of recruiting more than twenty percent of them in the Administration, Executive committee and General Body. The Harijans in the Executive

33 - Ibid.
committee comprised 20 percent, the General Body 30 percent. The staff 22 percent and Artisans more than 40 percent.\textsuperscript{34}

M. Krishnan, son of Muniswamy was born and brought up in the Gandhi Ashram under the fond care of Rajaji. Muniswamy was one among the four Harijan inmates of the Ashram who had stayed in the Ashram since its inception. Krishnan has retired as postmaster from Tiruchengode post-office in the year 1992 and leading a very happy family life at Tiruchengode. As a beneficiary of the Gandhi Ashram he has appreciated the community and social service of the Ashram and he has also nominated Gandhi Ashram, Tiruchengode for receiving the award of Bhagwan Mahaveer Foundation, Chennai.\textsuperscript{35}

**PROHIBITION & GANDHI ASHRAM**

**Alcohol-A. Historical Survey**

Drinks were known in India from Vedic and Post Vedic times. But intoxicating drink was severely objected to in Puranas, Shastras and Smritis. There are several references in the Manusmritis condemning drinking and laying

\textsuperscript{34} - www.gandhiashram.com.
\textsuperscript{35} - M. Krishnan-format submitted to Bhagwan Mahaveer Foundation, Chennai dt: 31.01.02
down severe punishment and penances for drinkers. Kautilya in his Arthasastra devoted a whole chapter to the regulation of liquor traffic in the land, giving elaborate injunctions.\textsuperscript{36}

Buddhism also denounced drinking. In Islam there is a very strong taboo against beverage alcohol. Emperor Akbar prohibited the sale of drinks and permitted Christians to drink. Lord Hastings when he came to India, observed, “The simplicity of the living and the conduct of Indians, can clearly be seen from simple food and their complete abstinence from intoxicants”.\textsuperscript{37}

\textbf{THE ECONOMICS OF ALCOHOL}

Liquor and poverty are close companions. Liquor has found at all times and in all claims, an enemy of affluence. Among the low-income group it plays havoc, blasting their lives, reducing them to perpetual and making the dependents destitute. It will not be an exaggeration to say that drink has been one of the principal causes of poverty and it has impoverished individual families, class and community. Of all the evil effects of drink its assault on the poor people was felt by Gandhiji, the most. While in South Africa he

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{36} K.S.Bharathi, \textit{A Handbook of Gandhian Thought}, S.Chand & Co Ltd, New Delhi, 2000, p.59.
\item \textsuperscript{37} Ibid. p.59.
\end{itemize}
remarked, "one of the most greatly felt evils of the British rule is the importation of Alcohol, the enemy of mankind, that curse of civilisation in some form or another".  

The money that a workman pays for his drink is generally more than the cost of good meal for him and often quite enough for a good meal for the whole family. To quote Rajagopalachari, "The most urgent reason for prohibition is the good of these depressed classes. No other single measure of reform can help these people and at once raise them economically and socially as total prohibition can. The rich and the educated may be indifferent about the reform. It is most necessary for saving the poor and the lowly".  

RAJAJI AND PROHIBITION

The story of prohibition in India was interwoven with the freedom struggle from the days of A.O. Hume, the founder of Indian National Congress. To quote few sentences from his impassioned denunciations of Abkari, the revenue derived from the poor traffic, which he called "The Wages of Sin", said

Hume, “I protest against the present iniquitous system which produced and now supports a large class whose sole interest is to reduce their fellows into drunkenness and its necessary concomitants, debauchery and crime. While we debauch our subjects we do not even pecuniary derive any profit from their ruin of this revenue, the wages of sin, it may be truly said that ill-gotten wealth never thrives, and for every rupee additional that the Abkari yields, two at least are lost to the public by crime, and spent by the Government in suppressing it”.40

The most important reform, which Rajaji promoted to improve the conditions of the Harijans and the poorer people was prohibition. In a foreword which Jawaharlal Nehru himself wrote to a Pamphlet on Prohibition issued by Rajaji as long ago as 1931, he had stated: “C.Rajagopalachari is the acknowledged expert in this domain and the unquestioned leader of the prohibition movement in India”.41

Rajaji was the chairman of Salem Municipal council between 1917-1919. He then got the Municipal council to opt for the closure of toddy shops within the limits of Salem Municipality taking the advantage of the “Local option”

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40 – Dr. Sushila Nayar, The Crusader for Prohibition, Rajaji-93 Souvenir, Tiruchengode p.138
clause in the Abkari Act. The British Government obliged him and closed the liquor shops under the local option clause.\textsuperscript{42}

Rajaji was the Secretary of the Prohibition League of India and the Anti-Drink Sub-committee of the Indian National Congress.\textsuperscript{43} As a result the Ashram became the hub of all activities directed towards total prohibition in India.

In Calcutta Congress held in the year 1920 Rajaji resolved that in the legislatures and outside, every attempt would be made to bring about total prohibition and that picketing of liquor and drug shops should be organized wherever desirable and possible.\textsuperscript{44}

A National scheme for prohibition prepared by Rajaji had been adopted by the Congress executive to implement it and a committee consisting of Dr. Ansari, Vallabhai Patel, Rajendra Prasad and Rajaji was formed.\textsuperscript{45}

In his scheme Rajaji envisaged a prohibition unit in each province attached to the Pradesh Congress Committee and a prohibition organizer in each Taluk. The latter was expected

\textsuperscript{42} – Dr Sushila Nayar, \textit{The Crusader for Prohibition}, Rajaji-93 Souvenir, Tiruchengode, p.139.
\textsuperscript{43} – Gandhi Ashram, Tiruchengode, Golden Jubilee Souvenir, 1975.
\textsuperscript{44} – Raj Mohan Gandhi – \textit{op.cit.}, p.187
\textsuperscript{45} – \textit{Ibid.} p.187.
to form prohibition sabhas in Towns and villages. A sabha could picket liquor shops or dissuade bidding at auctions where liquor vendors bought licences and sponsor healthy entertainment to draw off the tempted.

Rajaji published “Vimochanam” in Tamil and “Prohibition” in English for popularizing the cause of prohibition in those days. “Vimochanam” a Tamil monthly written at the Ashram, printed at the Madras and dispatched from the Ashram in which Rajaji struck the stamps came out only ten times. Yet it had left a mark on the story of prohibition movement and Tamil journalism.

Presenting the poor men’s misery, “vividly and with the infinite pathos, it became at least for one reader, “the symbol of how large the human spirit could be, and how good .. when .. men .. give of their best in the service of the majority of the people”. Some of the magazine’s columns were filled by an editorial and Ashram Colleague, “Kalki” Krishnamoorthy later acknowledged as an out standing figure of modern Tamil writing. Thirty-two coloured pictures were prepared for prohibition for propaganda. These pictures attracted younger

46 – Ibid., p.188.
47 – Ibid., p.188.
“Vimochanam” is a Sanskrit word which means “Redemption” in English.
generation. As the political struggle was on, "Vimochanam" had to be suspended.49

Sengoda Gounder the village Munsiff of chottampundi, a few miles off the Ashram had expressed the view to his Hindu Reporter, which had been published in the Rajaji –93, Souvenir as follows: "The Ashram people including Rajaji used to come in a double bullock cart, decorated with the tricolour flags, with a petromax light and a bundle of pictures and charts. Generally, the group included Messrs K.Santhannam, P.S.Ramadurai, R.Krishnamoorthy and a gentleman from Telugu country, who had given up wearing shirts N.S. Varadachari. As they neared the village, Ramadurai would start beating the Tappattai and Krishnamoorthy and others, with the harmonium playing, did sing National songs, Bharathi’s songs and prohibition songs. The pictures they brought could all be string to a rope near the light, some showing bulls, dogs or horses being offered liquor but refusing to drink it, some showing a drunken man in a street brawl or beating his wife and children and other showing him lying like a log near a ditch or on a rubbish heap. The pictures and the propagation they did had a telling effect.

Rajaji and his colleagues also visited the people in their houses and spoke to the addicts individually." Gounder mentioned how lease holders of liquor shops upset by the success of that propaganda and how on one occasion a lease holder Rangasamy Gounder of Velanayakanpalayam caused disturbance at a meeting. *51*

Another important and valuable reform of Rajaji in this field could be seen in correcting one drunken man named Veeran. *52* A cobbler woman narrated her difficulties because her husband, Veeran was an addict to drink. He wasted his earnings on toddy, leaving his dependents to starve almost everyday, and beat them if they questioned him about it. Rajaji asked her to send Veeran to him the next day. When the man came, Rajaji asked him if he used to drink and he denied it.

He struck to his denial even when Rajaji asked him about his drunkenness the previous night and beating his wife and others. Then Rajaji took a pair of chappals put them in his hand and asked him. "Now tell me, swear on those chappals, that you never drink" Veeran faltered and then putting the chappals, on

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51 - Ibid p.236.
52 - Ibid p.236.
the ground, fell at Rajaji’s feet saying, “sir it is true I drink. I was drunk last night. I beat my wife and children. I will never do it and I will never drink again, you have taught me a good lesson”. He remained true to his word to his last day. Rajaji took a fancy for Veeran after the incident. He put him to do footwear work and later put him in charge of the footwear unit.53

In the year 1929, thanks to sustained and continuous education, of the people by Rajaji and his chosen band of devoted workers through cartoon boards in each village, in the nights with lantern about the evil effects of drink, as well as representation to the Government, the then British Government of Madras consented to close down thirty one toddy and arrack shops in Tiruchengode Taluk and twenty two such shops in Namakkal Taluk after ascertaining the opinion of the public and created a dry belt.54 It was another notable first in the country. It was an experiment on prohibition. In his 1929 engagements diary Rajaji had recorded the dates, places and serial numbers of his prohibition talks, enthusiasm overcoming the strain, he toured and spoke without ceasing.

53 – Ibid. p.236 a,b,c.
54– Gandhi Ashram, Tirunchengode, Diamond Jubilee Souvenir, 1986, p.XXX.
There were sixty-two speeches in all; he delivered the least of them as President of the temperance conference held with the Lahore Congress of December 1929, which was chaired by Jawaharlal Nehru.  

Rajaji moved his prohibition bill in the year 1937 in the Madras Legislature immediately after taking up his ministry in the midst of several criticisms. Rajaji himself described the bill as a great venture, which would make or mar the reputation of the province.

He knew that the loss of revenue that his measure would result might seriously retard the implementation of several other congress pledges, and he also knew that the scope for additional taxation was extremely limited. Rajaji did not introduce prohibition all at once all over the Presidency. He selected his own native Salem District to make this experiment and he could not extend it to other Districts in the remaining period of his Ministry.

55–Rajmoham Gandhi, op.cit., p.180
57 –Ibid. p.274.
58 - Ibid. p.274.
The Salem District had the first impact of the policy of the Congress Government through the introduction of Prohibition Bill in 1937. The District was dry in October 1937. The introduction of prohibition brought about noticeable improvement in the social and economic conditions of the District. Public opinion was in favour of prohibition and women in particular were enthusiastic as it resulted in better and happier homes.

In order to compensate the loss of the revenue to the Government caused by the prohibition Bill, Rajaji moved the Sales Tax Bill in March 1939. This Bill sought to levy a tax on ½ percent on the sale of all commodities. The sales tax, which Rajaji introduced, had proved a veritable Kamadhenu not only of the Madras state Government but also of other state Governments in India. In 1970-1971 the return from the sales Tax in TamilNadu was over Rs. 105 crores.

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59 - Madras District Gazeteers, Salem, p.90.
60 - Ibid., p.274.
62-Dr.Sushila Nayar - The Crusader For Prohibition, Rajaji - 93, Souvenir, Gandhi Ashram, Tiruchengode, p.139.
To show how the Prohibition Movement had actually helped the poorer classes, few extracts from the Administrative Reports of the Government had to be mentioned here. The adviser to the Government issued these reports after Rajaji’s Government had resigned in 1939.63

These extracts are all the more revealing when it is remembered that the Adviser, Government actually abolished prohibition afterwards. This report was based on the investigations of a committee that the ministry had appointed earlier to make an on the spot study of the extent of success of this experiment at Salem. The committee reported that “the success of the prohibition campaign had exceeded their expectation” and that the ministry could hope to have the district “Permanently dry”.64

The Administrative report of 1940-41 had stated that in most areas, prohibition had materially improved the condition of the poorer classes, both economically and socially. The money that formerly found its way to liquor shops was most usefully spent on better food and better clothing and what was left was utilized generally in liquidating previous liabilities or was spent on jewels or invested in thrift securities.65

63 - Ibid., p.139.
64 - S.Krishnaswamy- The Role of Madras Legislature in the freedom struggle, I.C.H.R, New Delhi, 1989, pp.275,276
It is to be noted that prohibition found a prominent place under Directive principles of state policy in Article 47 in the constitution of India. This article says: "the state shall regard the raising of the level of nutrition and standard of living of its people and the improvement of public health as among its primary duties and in particular the state shall endeavour to bring about prohibition of the consumption, except for medicinal purposes of intoxicating drinks and drugs which are injurious to health".\textsuperscript{66}

It is obvious that the founding fathers of the constitution were convinced that prohibition was necessary for raising the level of nutrition and the standard of living of the people and improvement of public health and it was the primary duty of the state to bring about these improvements.\textsuperscript{67}

The Ashram arranged for a state level prohibition conference at Salem on 15.08.1972 to protest against the suspension of prohibition.\textsuperscript{68}

Subsequently when the toddy shops were auctioned at Tiruchengode Taluk office, a group of 12 volunteers led by S. Subbarathnam former secretary of the Ashram picketed auctioning of shops and were sentenced for 15 days.

\textsuperscript{66} – Dr.Sushila Nayar – \textit{The Crusader For Prohibition}, Rajaji – 93, Souvenir. p.139.  
\textsuperscript{67} – \textit{Ibid}, p.139.  
\textsuperscript{68} - Gandhi Ashram, Tiruchengode, Diamond Jubilee Souvenir,1986, p.XXX.
The old cartoons which were used by late Rajaji for prohibition campaign in villages were reproduced and exhibited in a lorry with a view to educate the masses about evil effects of drink.69

During Rajaji centenary year a 300K.M Padayatra, that is by walk from Madras to Thorappalli was organized by the Ashram under the leadership of R.Subramanian, Secretary of Tamilnadu Prohibition Council, Madras to emphasize the importance of prohibition, Khadi and village industries in the rural economy, and Anti-untouchability.70

The Padayatra group consisting of sixteen members left the Rajaji Memorial Hall Guindy on 10th November 1978 and from there they walked on to Thorapalli, Hosur and reached the place on 10th December 1978.71 The group visited the following places in their one-month march. They were Alandur, Porur, Poonamalle, Thandalam, Srierumbudur, Molachur, Attupputhoor, Chettiarpettai, Thirupputkuly, Avalur, Kaverippakkam, Valajappettai, Arcot, Pootuthakkul, Vellore, Poigai, Palikkonda, Madalur, Vadaputhuppattu, Ambur, Minnur, Vaniampadi, Naatrampalli, Pachur, Birgur Orappam, Krishnagiri, Guruparappalli, Chinnappalli, Kamanthotti and Hosur.72

69 – Ibid.p.XXX.
70 – Ibid.
72 – Ibid.
Zamin Ellampally Bungalow – donated by Sri Rajagurunnatha Chettiar.

Prohibition Banners in the Ashram
The Padayatra group consisted of 16 members with a bullock cart depicting Rajaji’s portrait and his sayings. It was inaugurated on 10th November 1978 at Rajaji Memorial Guindy, Madras by K. Santhnam, associate of Rajaji. Dr. B. Gopala Reddy. Dr. M. P. Sivagnana gramaniar and Shri C. R. Narasimhan offered felicitations to the group. 73

The padayatra group was blessed by true Gandhians, social workers and by the school authorities and school students in all the places, where they visited. The padayatra group was blessed at Vellore in North Arcot District by a true Gandhian and the then Governor of Tamilnadu Prabhudas B. Patwari. Rajaji centenary celebration was celebrated in a fitting manner by the Government of TamilNadu at Thorapalli village in Hosur Taluk of Dharmapuri District on 10th December 1978 when the Padayatra group reached the village. 74

The statewide Prohibition Padayatra from Madras to Kanyakumari, led by S. R. Subramaniam Secretary, TamilNadu prohibition Council, Madras, entered Salem District on 16.12.85 and halted 22 days in several villages and did prohibition propaganda in schools enroute. At Salem a reception was

73 - Gandhi Ashram, Tiruchengode, Diamond Jubilee Padayatra Souvenir, 1986, p.XXXII.
74 – Ibid., p.XXXII.
arranged for the party on 25.12.1985 under the chairmanship of C.R.Narasimhan, President, Trustee.\textsuperscript{75}

At Kumaramangalam village 50 local persons took pledge before the Padayatra group to give up drinking. Gandhi Ashram took charge of the Padayatra arrangements in Salem District from Valappady to Pallipalayam. The prohibition Padayatra created strong public opinion in favour of prohibition. As a result Government announced to close the toddy and arrack shops in the following year.\textsuperscript{76}

Nachiappan, a President of Kumarandipalayam village, located six kilometers away from the Ashram was very much inspired and convinced by the great Rajaji's propagation against this evil effects of drinks and this resulted him to report in front of Rajaji about the illicit liquor producers. This aggravated these liquor producers and they caught Nachiappan and made him blind. Rajaji brought Nachiappan to the Ashram, taught him to weave in the spindle and gave him wages. As he could not weave like the other ordinary weavers he has given hundred percent additional wages for a period of about forty years until the end

\textsuperscript{75 – Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{76 – Ibid.}
of his life the Ashram supported him in all possible ways. When he became old the Ashram paid him old age pension of Rs.50/- per month.  

Sengoda gounder a weaver of the Ashram became a great drunkard and was suffering with financial problems in the 1970’s. When he struggled very much to overcome this problem he was advised by Baskaran who is at present the secretary of the Ashram and Sengoda gounder made a promise in front of the Ashram temple by lighting the camphor that he would not drink thereafter at any cause. This has resulted very well and now Sengoda gounder is working in the Ashram in Lorry loading work and he has got a very good bank balance as savings to his credit. He keeps up the promise till date.  

Neelamegam, the Ashram weaver whose residence is at Kolandapalayam is doing yeoman service for the cause of prohibition. He has not even completed V standard. But he is able to compose poems in a very simple language in Tamil and is able to sing the same in the tune of film songs. He has composed more than hundred poems on the evil effects of drinks, about the women’s right  

77 – *personal interview with S.Aravamudhan*, Trustee Treasurer, Gandhi Ashram, on 18.3.2001  
78 – *Personal Interview with Sengoda Gounder and Baskaran*, the weaver and the Secretary, Gandhi Ashram, 18.03.2001
and problems and also about the great human killing disease AIDS. He is called by the Ashram people as Kavingar and for the past twenty years he is doing this service wherever he is called for. The ashram deputed him on 21st May 1992 during the second death anniversary of late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, when the Ashram kept a stall at Sriperumbudur and in the stall Kavingar Neelamegam was singing his poems continuously. The stall thus attracted huge crowds as many admired his songs and several others got inspired and the sale of Ashram also was mobilized. When Interviewed Neelamegam was quite exited and in a very humble way he said that the full credit goes only to Rajaji and to the Ashram. 79

All these Activities of the Ashram and its members prove that how the Ashram had worked and is working untiringly to fulfill its one of the objectives i.e. prohibition. Though these activities did not result in bringing out the total prohibition at the National, and State or even at the District level due to Government policies and partisan politics, one can proudly say that the Ashram really upholds the principle and the area is totally dry in this regard. The artisans and the workers of the Ashram follow this principle without fail. The Ashram’s

79 - Personal Interview with Neelamegam, Weaver, Gandhi Ashram on 20.03.2001.
artisans who compose poems and sing on the subject of prohibition are encouraged to sing the same on important days like Gandhi’s Birthday or Rajaji’s Birthday or any other days of National importance.

**WELFARE MEASURES TO THE ASHRAM WORKERS**

As per the annual report of the year 1999-2000, The permanent workers of the Ashram were one hundred and seventy five. Among them, five were women and the rest were men. Seventy-six of them were employed in the Gandhi Ashram premises and the remaining workers were spread over into the sales centres and production centres of the Ashram outside.\(^{80}\)

The Ashram is an eye opener to many when we find that there is no major differentiation in the categories of the employees except four classified groups based on their educational qualifications. They are:\(^{81}\)

2. S.S.L.C. Passed.
4. Graduate trained.

The payment and allowance of the entire establishment is normally fixed by the Board of Management. Annual increment of rupees twenty-five is paid

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81 – Personal Interview with A.Kuppusamy, Joint – Secretary, Gandhi Ashram on 13.05.2001.
equally to all the regular workers irrespective of their cadre. Sometimes there is also an enhancement of pay rise to the employees in proportion to the surplus acquired or out of necessity caused due to increase of consumer’s price index.\(^{82}\)

Added to their basic pay the workers are paid Rs.950/- (Rupees Nine hundred and fifty) as dearness allowance and rupees fifty as medical allowance per month. Other allowances include House Rent allowance, Cycle allowance and Hill allowance. If the workers are employed in panchayat area, they are paid 23.5 percent of their pay as House allowance. If they are employed in corporation area they are paid 34.5 percent of their pay scale as H.R.A. Every worker is paid Rupees forty per month as cycle allowance. In case the worker is employed in the hilly region he is eligible for rupees seventy-five per month.\(^{83}\)

As the Ashram comes under the purview of charitable institutions it is exempted from the Bonus Act. Still during Deepavali month Rupees four thousand one hundred and thirty seven (Rs.4137/-) worth of khadi clothes or one month salary is being distributed to the employees. All the regular employees are

\(^{82}\) Ibid.
\(^{83}\) Ibid.
given 10 percent additional rebate by the Ashram for the Khadi purchased by them.  

Every month the workers are given one toilet soap, three washing soaps and one Agarbathi pack all produced by the Ashram. During Pongal Season every worker is entitled to receive twenty Kilograms of rice free of cost. Apart from this each worker is paid fifteen days salary as Pongal allowance.

**LEAVE ELIGIBILITY:**

All the employees are eligible for fifteen days ordinary leave or causal leave, fifteen days special leave and fifteen days medical leave. The special leave of fifteen days can be surrendered if unused and full pay will be given. For female workers, two months of maternity leave is allowed with full pay subject to the condition of two pregnancies. Apart from these leave eligibilities, all the workers are benefited by ten declared Government holidays, among them seven are National holidays and three are local holidays.

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84 – Ibid.
85 – Ibid.
86 – Ibid.
EDUCATIONAL CONCESSION TO THE WORKERS CHILDREN:

Workers are given cash Assistance by the Ashram Board for the Education of their children as follows:

1. Rs.200/- Per year up to 5th Standard.
2. Rs.300/- Per year from 6th Standard to 10th Standard.
3. Rs.500/- Per year for Plus One & Plus Two.
4. Rs.1000/- Per year for Polytechnic and ITI.
5. Rs.1500/- Per year for any Graduate Course.

A worker can receive cash benefits only for two children at the same period.

Retirement Benefits:

The amount of gratuity paid to the employees is more than the statutory acts of the Government. For instance an employee of the Ashram is eligible to receive a maximum of Forty-five months of salary as gratuity during the time of his retirement. The amounts of gratuity paid to the employees depend upon the number of years rendered by the employee subject to the condition of minimum service of five years.

87 – Ibid.
88 – Ibid.
For an employee who has put on more than five years of service but less than fifteen years, he is eligible for half-month salary per year added to his total period of service. Thus an employee is entitled to receive seven and a half month pay as gratuity amount if he has served for fifteen years. If an employee has put in more than fifteen years but less than twenty-five years, he is eligible for one-month salary per year of his total service. Those employees who have put in more than twenty five years of service will get one and a half month salary as gratuity per year of their total service. However the maximum gratuity payable to an employee is restricted to forty-five months pay only. As per the gratuity insurance scheme if an employee dies while in service he is eligible to get forty-five months pay irrespective of the total period of service.  

EMPLOYEES’ PROVIDENT FUND:

The provident fund of the employee is managed by a separate trust named as “Gandhi Ashram Thiruchengode Employees’ Provident Fund Trust”. This was established in the year 1978. Ten percent of the basic salary and Dearness allowance is deducted as contributed for Provident Fund from the salary of each

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89 – Ibid.
employee. The same amount is contributed by the Ashram also. The trust is
established separately by the Ashram by obtaining special permission from the
provident fund commission, Salem Division. This Trust enables the employees
to receive PF Loans easily.\textsuperscript{90}

The employee pension Scheme 1995 formulated by the Govt. of India has
been made applicable to the Gandhi Ashram employee also.

\textbf{EMPLOYEE DEPOSIT LINKED INSURANCE:}

Added to the benefits of provident fund the above insurance benefits are
also provided to the employees. The entire premium for this insurance scheme is
contributed by the Ashram and also no amount is deducted from the salary of the
employees. Under this scheme if an employee dies while in service rupees sixty
thousand will be given to the legal heir of the deceased.\textsuperscript{91}

\textbf{ARTISANS BENEFIT FUND AND WELFARE MEASURES:}

A controversy is ranging currently in the Khadi World about artisans
benefit funds. It is likely to be an eye opener to many when we find that the
Ashram is spending considerable amount of money from its slender resources on

\textsuperscript{90} - \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{91} - \textit{Ibid.}
such welfare measures even when there is scarcity of fund available to meet such expenses.  

For instance, during the year 1928-1929 there was a total crop failure in the State and the weavers and the Harijans were the most distressed among the people.

Rajaji arranged to bring Jowar from Mysore State and distributed rations to about 650 families consisting of about 2848 members, for a considerable period of time. The whole operations cost Rs. 12,022/-, which was almost one fifth of the total resources of the Ashram in those days. In the year 1983-84 a sum of Rupees 28,330/- was distributed by the Ashram to mitigate sufferings of spinners and weavers at the time of drought.

On several occasions, the Ashram had to meet the rehabilitation expenses of several Harijan Villages accidentally burnt out by fire.

**MEDICAL RELIEF:**

The property and jurisdiction for even an elementary first-aid post in such

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92 – Gandhi Ashram, Tiruchengode, Diamond Jubilee Souvenir, 1986, p.XXXV.
93 – Ibid
94 – Ibid.
an out of the way place like Puduppalayam can be made out by the very fact that the village and its surroundings had no place for medical relief other than the Ashram. That Rajaji himself used to dispense at the Hospital show the importance of this simple need of people’s demand.95

A building for housing the Hospital was opened on fourteenth March 1928, by Dr. P.C. Ray, the eminent scientist from Calcutta.96 Dr. Raghuraman and Dr. Ranganathan devoted their attention to the cause. Dr. Ranganathan was sent by Rajaji to Calcutta to specialize in Leprosy Relief work. The Leprosy relief work was revived as an item of Gandhi Centenary Programme.97

The life of Dr. Ranganathan, who served there for several years, was a saga of sacrifice. The Doctor joined at a princely salary of Rupees 60/- in 1928 and reached Rs.100/- after serving for twelve years. As the Ashram was forced with financial difficulty, he offered to accept the starting salary of Rs.60/- once again.98

95 – Ibid.
96 – Ibid.
97 – Ibid.
The Leprosy Relief work was carried out in the Ashram under the Honorary Superintendence of Dr.(Miss) Y. Tiphagne, M.D. of France Serving with Head quarters at Salem from 1976 to 1992. She used to visit the Ashram periodically and treated the patients herself. Children affected with Leprosy were paid bus fare to reach the Ashram Hospital and back. From 1969, the Gandhi centenary year to 1985 a sum of Rs.1.71 lakhs was spent for treating the Leprosy patients. A special Leprosy relief fund has been created with the goodwill of friends.

The Ashram has been giving to its artisans the following benefits as and when necessary.

i. Educational Scholarships to the Children of the artisans.

ii. Spinning and Weaving implements at 50 percent Concession.

iii. Free rice distributed at the time of Deepavali at the rate of 5 K.G. each to the Weavers and 2 K.G. each to the spinners.

iv. A monthly pension of Rupees 100 each to old age spinners who are unable to work.

v. Ten percent additional discount on the purchase of Khadi from the Ashram.

100 – Ibid.
vi. Funeral expenses of Rupees 250 per head are given to the family of the deceased.

vii. One set of Khadi dress is given free to the artisan at the time of his or her marriage.

viii. Stipend up to a maximum of rupees 500/- per month for a period of three months is given to the artisan during period.

ix. Free Insurance cover of Rs.5000/- in case of natural death and Rs.25000/- in case of accidental death is provided.101

101 - Information obtained from the Ashram staff and artisan beneficiaries.