ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of voluntary social action is as old as mankind. The subcontinent of India has had a long and glorious tradition of voluntary service for the uplift of weaker sections of the society: women, children, the destitute and the handicapped. In India, characterised by problems such as high rate of illiteracy, ignorance, superstition, unemployment, poverty, and many other socio-economic problems, the existence of Voluntary Agencies (VAs) is viewed as a great resource of both moral and managerial strength to supplement the efforts of the Government.

As change agents, VAs can provide complementary and supplementary services to the people, since their common aim is the development of the people and their areas. VAs, today, have proved themselves to be important instruments in the development of rural areas, the Government of India has demonstrated its appreciation and recognition of the indispensability of the partnership between the Government agencies and the VAs in the process of development, through its Five-Year Plans.

In recent years, however, Voluntary Agencies have proliferated in the country, to an extent that, they now occupy a significant place in nation building. The State of Tamil Nadu, too, has had a long tradition of voluntary action. The emergence and proliferation of Voluntary Agencies in the State dates back to pre-independence era. As in other parts of the country, the precise figures about their nature and the extent of their voluntary action is not available. However, several VAs which are working for and championing the cause of the oppressed, downtrodden sections of the society, women inclusive, have been functioning in the State. In recent years, they have increased in number and have acquired greater importance and significance in social, economic and political spheres. The positive roles of VAs have been widely recognised in the context of the larger realisation that the Government is not fully able to accomplish all tasks of development in the State.

Dindigul District, where the present study has been conducted, is one of the twenty-nine (29) districts of the state of Tamil Nadu. VAs have been increasing over the years in the district, particularly those who are working for women and children, the destitute, the handicapped, health awareness programmes in general and the killer disease, AIDS, in particular. Their significance as change agents is increasing day by day. However, not much systematic research has been done on their working. Hence, a study on this sector is not only of paramount importance for a better understanding of their functioning but also the insight of their contribution towards women’s empowerment and hence, their development. Hence this study.

The researcher decided to undertake an empirical research work on “Women’s Development Through Voluntary Action; A Study on Selected VAs in Dindigul District”. The researcher has attempted to make the study as comprehensive as possible by focussing on the selected VAs, their
activities/programmes, the beneficiaries and also the approaches adopted by them in realising their objectives. This study, probably, is the first of its kind to be conducted in Dindigul District.

The present thesis covers a comprehensive study in relation to women's development through voluntary action routed through the selected voluntary agencies working in Dindigul District of Tamil Nadu State in India. The objectives of the study and the methodology adopted for collecting the required data and material, on the basis of which reasonable conclusions are drawn and findings arrived at, along with suggestions made in the end are briefly stated hereunder for better appreciation of the study. The Thesis is divided into six chapters. The First Chapter: Introduction, is designed to analyse the factors responsible for the emergence and proliferation/development of voluntary action, nature and classification of VAs, nature of their inspiration, the theories of the origins of voluntary associations, models of Community Action Groups, the contribution of the Central Social Welfare Board in promoting voluntarism, advantages and weaknesses of VAs, and, future challenges of VAs in India are dealt with. In the Second chapter: Research Problem and Methodology, the research problem and the methodology of the present study have been presented. The methodological aspects of the study such as the objectives of the study, need for and scope of the study, hypotheses of the study, selection of respondents, techniques used for data collection, collection of the data, limitations of the study, operational concepts and definitions used in the report have been presented. The Third Chapter: Review of Literature, contains a review of the relevant studies on various aspects of the functioning of VAs and their development. The chapter presents the available secondary data dealing with emergence and proliferation of VAs, leaders of VAs, voluntary workers-related aspects of VAs, range of VAs' operations and strategies of their voluntary action, problems/difficulties faced by VAs, significance and impact of VAs' involvement in voluntary action and theories of and approaches to women's liberation.

The Fourth Chapter: Women's Development: An Indian Scenario, deals with the concepts of development, women and development, criteria of women's development and status of women in general and Indian women in particular at different ages. Mention has also been made of the status of women in Tamil Nadu State, the Government of India's efforts towards women's development and strategies/policy approaches employed by both the Government and the VAs in women's cause.

The Fifth Chapter: Analysis and Interpretation, an attempt has been made to analyse and interpret the collected data by employing statistical methods: tabulation and classification and percentages so as to draw relevant conclusions. The chapter has been divided into three segments: 1 Profile of the selected VAs, 2. Socio-Economic profile of the Beneficiaries and 3. Case Studies. The Sixth Chapter: Major Findings, Conclusion and Suggestions, presents a summary of the major findings of the study, conclusions and the researcher's suggestions regarding the problem. Areas of further research have also been indicated.