2.1. Origin of the Voluntary works in India

The voluntary services started with the evolution of the human beings. No one can say the exact date of the origin of this service either in India or in any other nation. Earlier period onwards people used to help their fellow beings especially when they confronted, the natural calamities, famines and other difficult situations. In the olden days most of the voluntary works were done by individuals and later by groups with the formation of society. People were motivated to do the voluntary works on each occasion. But this was not in an organised way, especially due to the absence of the state, organisations, and institutions. Historical fact says, some of the kings who had ruled our country had provided essential things and aids to the disabled and the depressed. [Venkataiah, C: 2009: p 91]

Besides, all religions, rooted in our country have done very creditable work in the voluntary sphere. Even in the ancient period, famous Hindu religious scriptures Bhagawad Githa and Rig-Veda had clearly mentioned the practice of providing charity and alms which existed and practised in the society. Arthasastra written by Kautilya also mentions about the rulers in India who did welfare activities to the poor and destitute. Hindu monasteries had also done various levels of voluntary work in our country.

Buddism and Jainism in our country protested against the age old practice of superstitions and some of the traditions of the Hindu religion.
Soon after the growth of the Buddhism, disciples of this religion had formed several monasteries in many places and had provided education to the downtrodden and poor people in the rural areas. At that time only the people belonging to higher caste received education. But Buddhism had ignored these practices. They selected monks and nuns for the social welfare activities in the society. The World famous universities like Nalanda, Amaravathi, Kanchi functioned under the guidance of Buddhism and Hindu religions. The great Chinese traveller, Fahien had depicted the existence of Nalanda University in his travelogue. ‘Jainism was also engaged in various levels of social welfare activities in the society. This religious sect started hospitals and appointed physicians, surgeons to take care of patients and supplied adequate medicines’[Rajesh Tandon,2001:p3]. Jainism had strongly condemned and raised voice against the caste system and idol worship practiced in the Hindu religion. This attitude had helped the poor village people to come closer to these religious sects and receive welfare measures from them.

The Muslim rulers who ruled some of the places in India had also shown much interest in the area of social welfare activities. This was very evident especially in the period of Mughul Dynasty. Muslim groups used to give some charity which is known as Zakat.

“During the Mughul dynasty, Muslims had used to donate one fifth of their income for the poor people of their community, Parsees cared for their poor through their Panchayat and a strong tradition of community service was there on and the Sikhs offered money through their Gurdwaras.” [Ibid:p3].
During the Pre-independence period the voluntarism concentrated more on the socio-economic development of the members in the society. It is continued even today. The poor got help from the individuals and the groups during the crisis situation. In earlier times, in joint family system, members who were facing problems would get help and assistance from other members in the family. Usually in the joint family system the elder person would control the family and a quite number of people were involved in this system. So there existed a strong relation and co-operation among the members of the joint family system. During the period of entertainments, customs and festivals, people in the village would come together and participate with the programmes. This encouraged unity and cooperation among the people for various development activities. The Hindus and the Buddhists considered trees and nature as sacred. So they tried to protect the environment from all types of threat.

After the arrival of Christian missionaries in India, the country underwent great changes in the social, welfare and voluntary activities. Just like Buddhism, Christianity also had nuns and priests and they worked for the wellbeing of the poor people in the village. They started various schools and hospitals even in the remote places. Their attempt had helped to improve the literacy level among the poor, marginalised and the tribals in the remote areas. The Missionaries had considered service of humanity same as the service to the God. They spent certain portion of money for the charitable work and for the welfare of the poor [Venkataiah, C: 2009: p92]. The Western thoughts like Freedom, Democracy and Rationalism had created new awakening and inspiration among the educated people of India.

The British had supported some of the religious and private organisations for making social reformations in our country. In that period
social welfare activities were done through clubs formed by the wives of the British and some of the Indian officials [Lawani, B. T. 1999: p41]. In 1858, ‘Friends in Need Society’ was formed in Madras and the British governor had also given financial assistance for the function of this society. Definitely this was a great source of inspiration for the voluntary work in India. Another speciality was some of the wealthy people had spent their money lavishly for the welfare and charity of the poor people in India. The Societies Registration Act made in the 1860 was one of the great episodes in the history of voluntary organisation in India.

Seeing the activities of the Christian Missionaries in the country, many groups and learned people were motivated to work against the irrational and evil systems. Some of the Non-profit organisations were formed to work with the missionaries and to make reformation. At the same time many non-profit organisations formed in that period was more or less influenced by the activities of the Christian missionaries [Pawar, S. N., J. B. Ambedkar and D. Shrikant: 2004: pp102-104].

The Brama Samaj which was started by Rajaram Mohan Roy in 1828 had caused the social, political and economical transformation in India. ‘Sati’ was one of the evil practices followed by the Hindu religion in certain places of India. As per the custom, during the cremation, the widow had to jump into the pyre of her husband and immolate before the mass. Later she would be considered as a goddess among them. But this evil practice was abolished in India due to the strong agitation of this organisation in 1829. Besides, this organisation had worked very efficiently for the education of women and for the removal of caste barriers in India. [Rajesh Tandon:2001:p 6].
Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar was one of the famous social reformers lived in the 19th century and his effort had instigated the Government of India to pass the Hindu Widow Remarriage Act in 1856. The widows had to face many difficulties and alienation from the society. His intervention had helped to improve the status of the widows in the society by providing money for remarriage and for leading a comfortable life. In 1849 he took particular interest for starting a school in Calcutta known as Hindu Balika Vidyalaya mainly for the education of the girls in the society. This effort could improve the literacy level of women who lived in the rural community. [Lawani, B. T.:1999:p35]

Keshab Chandra Sen was another famous social reformer who lived in the 19th century. Casteism had never allowed marriage between lower caste and higher caste. He strongly advocated for the inter-caste marriage and was against the practice of untouchability in the society. He was the kingpin behind the passing of the Civil Marriage Act in 1872. Besides, he also had done great works for the education purpose and for the welfare of the society.

In 1875 under the leadership of Swami Dayananda Saraswati a social organisation known as Arya Samaj was formed in Bombay. “Arya Samaj was established to fight against idol worship, child marriage, forced widowhood and caste discrimination. Social workers like Swami Sharanand and Lala Lajpat Rai were greatly responsible for the spread of education and promotion of the cause of the depressed classes” [ibid:p36]. This non-profitable organisation strongly advocated for the purification of Hindu religion and had made great contributions in the educational field.
A social Non-profit organisation known as ‘Prarthana Samaj’ was also started in Mumbai, under the leadership of Mahadev Govind Ranade. Some of the main objectives of this organisation were to oppose the caste system and to introduce widow re-marriage, encourage female education and abolish child marriage.

Mahatma Phule was another famous social reformer who stood for the progress of the Sudra community and to abolish the practice of untouchability among the Hindu community. During this time in certain places people of lower caste were not permitted to collect drinking water from the places where higher caste people lived. Touching the water by the lower caste was considered to be polluting the water by the affluent caste in the society. This bad practice could not be abolished very suddenly from the society because of the strong religious support and traditional belief gained by them. In order to show the protest against this bad practice he built a water tank for the untouchables, a school and a maternity home also for them. His work was highly appreciated by the depressed class and he founded the Sattya Shodhak Samaj in 1873.

Pandit Ramabai was a famous woman social reformer who lived in India during the 19th century. She raised her voice for the emancipation of the women. She spent a lot of time for discussing the terrible and shameful conditions faced by the women in our country. She had discouraged the child marriage and given importance to the education of the women in the country. She tried to fulfil these tasks through her own organisation known as ‘Mahila Arya Samaj’ in Pune[ibid.]. She could accomplish many things for women in the country that were denied to them because of the Patriarchal system and social taboos that existed in our country.
Maharshi Karve was an activist and a social reformer who lived in the 19th century and had done great contribution in the field of education and for the welfare of women in the rural areas. In 1896 he had built a home for the widows of Poona. During that period widows were having inferior status in the society and they faced a lot of discrimination from many sides. In certain places they had to shave off their head and had to wear the white dress for identification. These women were considered as a bad omen and disgrace to the society. He was the founder of Karve Women’s university in 1916. It was highly beneficial and another stepping stone for the women’s education process in India [ibid.].

Sree Narayana Guru was one of the famous social reformers lived in Kerala during the 19th century. He got the opportunity to meet Mahatma Gandhi and conducted discussions on various social problems such as casteism and untouchability. He belonged to Ezhava community, a sub caste of Hindu religion. ‘He stood strongly against the casteism, untouchability and advocated for the inter caste marriage and socio-economic development of the depressed communities in Kerala’[Venkataiah,C:2009:p 93]. As per the historical data, he had to face strong opposition from the high caste Hindus while installing the image of the deity of ‘Siva’ in Aruvipuram. He strongly asserted that he had made the image of ezhava Siva and not the caste Hindus concept of Siva. Later on, the organisation known as S.N.D.P was formed and it worked for the advancement of the depressed class in Kerala.

While mentioning the voluntarism and social reform programme in India before the Independence period none would forget the name of Sir Sayyad Ahmed Khan. Most of his works were concentrated for the prosperity of the Muslim Community in India. He had started a number of educational institutions. Finally it led to the establishment of the Aligarh
Muslim University. Even today this university is working in a very efficient manner and is having many centres in the country.

Baharamji Malbari was a social reformer and activist who lived in the 19th century. He has strongly protested against the child marriage and raised voice for increasing the marriage age of women. Due to this movement new act was passed in 1891 and the age of the girls for marriage was raised. He had started the ‘Seva Sadan Society’ in Bombay for giving care and protection for the destitute women and children. This society was a channel for providing medical aid and a centre for knowledge to the poor people without any discrimination of caste, creed.

Swami Vivekananda the great religious thinker, social reformer and the disciple of Ramakrishna Parama Hamsa, was a speaker, erudite thinker and he had a special concern and dedication for the poor, downtrodden and marginalised people in the society. “He preached that service to the ‘daridranarayana’, the afflicted and the ignorant is the highest form of religion”[ Lawani, B.T:1999:p37]. He started a religious organisation known as Ramakrishna Mission and its focus was the service to the humanity. He wanted to stop all bad practices and shameful traditions in the Hindu religion and at the same time Hindu faith should be able to defend all other religions existing in the world. Ramakrishna Mission’s interventions were very appreciable in the area of education, health and especially during the natural calamities.

Same as in the North India, the southern part also witnessed several social movements and reformation mainly to avoid the social evils and restructuring of the social systems. Some of the Non-profit organisations had emphasised more on widow re-marriage.
Two prominent castes known as Reddys and Kammas in Andhra Pradesh had done great social welfare activities through their caste associations. Main involvements of these groups were in the formation of educational institutions and agricultural promotion among the village youths.

Some of the affluent people in Andhra Pradesh came forward and spent their money lavishly for helping the poor and needy by starting educational institutions and building hostels for youths.

People having strong faith in Communism had organised camps in several places of Andhra Pradesh and conducted lectures based on the topics on Indian history, Marxism, Indian economy, history of national struggle among the peasant groups. These kinds of activities had created great awareness and knowledge to the farmers. [Rajesh Tandon: 2001:p10]

Peasants from Kerala had faced several problems like high rate of rents, eviction from the land, imposition of feudal levies during the pre independence period. In order to protest this exploitative nature, Karshaka Sangh Units [peasant association] were formed in different villages and conducted conference and meetings for changing the Malabar Tenancy Act of 1929.

There is a lot of difference between Indian culture and western culture. But collusion between them started and a new awakening was created. Considering this matter very seriously some of the people and groups had formed a non-profitable organisation mainly to regenerate the traditional institutions, religions, arts and philosophy of our country. This movement took place not in a sudden manner but gradually due to the continuous arrival of foreign forces and traders in our country in the last few centuries.
Indian National Congress was formed in 1885 as a Non-profit organisation and gradually it concentrated more on the National Movement. “The formation of the Indian National Congress represented the culmination of the efforts of politically conscious Indians, who saw themselves as representatives of the national interest against foreign rule”. [ibid:10]. Many educated people decided to spent the rest of their time for the National Movement. Some of the people had started schools and colleges in their own towns and villages for giving education to the people. The decision of the British rulers on partition of Bengal was a great incident in the history of Indian Independence Movement. People all over India had strongly protested and started agitation against Lord Curzon’s decision to divide Bengal on communal lines in the year 1905’ [ibid:p11]. This incident had caused to start the Swadeshi Movement in India. For supporting the movement many voluntary associations were formed in West Bengal. “They promoted swadeshi industries, agricultural, national education and arbitration courts, co-operative banks, community grain stores and sanitation measures in the villages” [ibid:p12].

Before the independence of India several organisations with social and religious back ground were very actively involved in the welfare of the rural community. The works of some of these organisations are mentioned in the history of voluntarism in India. Perhaps their working area may be limited but it had attracted great admiration all over the country. More or less these works were based on individual commitment and organisational inspirations than systematic approach to the rural development. In India from ancient period a majority of people staying in the rural areas took up agriculture as a main source of their livelihood. In India there is great
difference between one region and another especially in the areas of cultural, agriculture and customs.

2.2.1. Sriniketan Experiment

Ravindra Nath Tagore was one of the greatest poets and visionaries ever born in India. He was born and brought up in Calcutta. One of his poems known as ‘Geethanjali’ had received Nobel Prize for literature. The experiment done by Tagore in Srinikethan is considered as the first organised attempt in rural development activities in India. The main aim of this programme was to make the socio-economic development and the moral upliftment of rural community. He realised that basically people in the rural areas did not have the capabilities and adequate skills for the proper use of the natural resources for their own progress and welfare. The primary attempt of the centre was to eradicate the contagious diseases such as Malaria and overcome the problems created by the monkeys. Here great number of monkeys used to come and destroy the various crops cultivated by the farmers. After the first stage, this centre’s focus was more on the development of agriculture, poultry and village crafts. Great preference was given to the education of rural children and the adults [Sooryamoorthy,R. and K. D. Gangrade: 2001:pp 44-46]. The people in the rural areas got the opportunities to understand more about the new methods in agriculture. The Intervention of the Centre was limited to a few villages but it could improve the living standard of the people. A great awakening and confidence had come among the people. However these activities had not been able to continue in the later period because of the lack of professional guidance and the trained persons. The Government’s intervention was more or less based on a mechanical manner as said by the people. [Vasanth Desai:1988:p30]
“According to Tagore our practical achievements, our clean milk, our fresh eggs, our flourishing co-operatives, were all useful means, towards the achievement of a much greater end.” [ibid:p32]

This great man’s attention was not only based on various cultivations but also in the areas of music, songs, drama and other artist expressions so that cultural programme could promote happiness and rejuvenation among the people in the villages. To a certain extent there were similarities between Gandhiji’s concept of self-reliant village and Tagore’s vision on the progress of the village. Tagore had more concern for the sanitation in the selected villages in the Sriniketan Experiment. Games and different athletic activities were organised in these villages mainly to build up co-operative spirits among the people and for making social interaction among the students, as they come from different backgrounds. The experiments introduced by Tagore in these villages clearly reveal that he concentrated not only on literary works but also in the progress of the rural community. Later on many people and the intellects were prompted to look into the various dimensions of the rural development programmes envisaged by this Centre. Thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi and Tagore were deeply influenced by the socio-economic problems faced by the society. Tagore can be considered as one of the greatest intellectuals but Gandhiji, is called as an activist or karmayogi. This Centre had trained many people and sent them to the village for voluntary works and giving advices to the common people. Another intention of the Centre was to create self-help as well as mutual help among the people. The educational methods and information systems practiced were based on the ancient concept of Gurukulam. Those who participated in these programmes actually got motivated and inspired in their life.
2.2.2. Marthandum Experiment

In 1921, under the initiative of Herbert Spencer a rural welfare programme was started at Marthandum, in Trivandrum. The main aim of this Centre was to help the people of all walks of life. In that period most of the people in these places were very poor and some had involved in the cottage industries for their livelihood. But the people received only a meagre amount from cottage industrial products. Moreover they had to struggle much for getting pure water for drinking. The polluted water was the main reason for the continuous spread of contagious diseases. Another main problem faced by these people was poverty. Moreover they had huge debt as the rate of interest for loans was high. Seeing these problems Mr. Spenser had taken very apt decisions for the reconstruction of these villages with specific objectives. [ibid:p33].

1. The rural reconstruction should be based on people’s own programmes.

2. People should be helped to improve their body, mind and spirit and also economic, social and cultural aspects.

3. People belonging to all categories and religious groups should be included in these programmes with preference to the poorest in the society.

4. Special care had to be given to poultry farming, bee-keeping, cottage industries such as mat making, basket making, sugar, hand woven clothes etc.,

5. Spirituality is the basic element to be associated with all programmes.
6. For getting maximum benefits to the rural people, all programmes should be conducted in a simple manner. Besides simplicity will help to reduce the cost in many fields.

7. Maintaining good relations between government officials and common people is an important factor for the success of these rural reconstruction activities.

8. Training has to be given to the workers in a simultaneous manner.[ibid.]

This involvement of this Centre in development programmes had made great enthusiasm, co-operation and self-respect among the people in Marthandum. The Centre had made special arrangements for conducting the united religious prayer sections to all kind of religious people [Kanakaraj, A: 2000]. Here the Staff regularly visited the fields and gave training and guidance to the rural people in a continuous manner. Perhaps these officials did not get the modern facilities and travelling methods but they motivated, dedicated and prompted them to reach the rural people. [Sunny Varghese: 2005:pp 59-63]. Even now the activities of the centre are progressing in a very good and comfortable manner in this district. The Centre could generate more employment opportunities to the poor. “The Marthandum Y.M.C.A. was the first to introduce ‘the Guinea Grass’ along with Sindhi cattle and Surati goats. The extension programme started in 1928. Several wells were dug with Government aid” [Samuel, M.A : 1967:p5]. Besides this, the centre had taken the first initiative to introduce the borehole latrine in the rural areas of the Marthandum even before Independence. Special Employment training courses were arranged for the boys and girls in weaving and basket making process.
2.2.3 **Gurgaon Experiment**

In 1920 Mr. Brayne was appointed as Deputy Commissioner in Gurgaon District in the state of Punjab. In that period this place was actually poverty stricken and there were social and economic problems in many fields. These problems motivated him to plan some activities for the welfare of the people in the villages. Under his guidance a special course for the training in the co-operative labour was conducted for the children of the cultivators. This training had really helped the people to get more information in the areas of sanitation, medical-aid, co-operation, and agricultural improvement. Main topics included in the training curriculum were ‘scouting, co-operation, practical agricultural, first aid, infant welfare, public health, domestic hygiene and sanitation’. [Vasanth Desai:1988:p34]

One part of these training was to equip the people to produce various items in their house [Ammu Menon Muzumdar:1964:p133]. People who got the training used to visit the village and gave guidance and encouragement to the rural people. Mr. Brayne’s activities and bold decisions created a new awareness among the villagers to overcome the age old beliefs such as fatalism, unhealthy practices and customs deep rooted in the society.

Meanwhile, the Government was much pleased with these activities and came forward to give help and appropriate guidance to him.

“The secrets of their success were to deal with the whole of village life, to take the whole district as the field of operations and to deluge the areas with every form of propaganda and publicity that they could devise or adopt. Upliftment is a mass movement, a combined assault, and no area, no part of life and no method of attack can be neglected” [Vasanth Desai: 1988: p34].
Many development programmes were included in the Gurgaon Scheme which had focused mainly on six areas. They were Institutional, sanitation, agricultural development, education, co-operation and social reforms. The primary aim of this scheme was to equip the people to perform well and to participate in the development works.

Level of literacy was very low especially among the women folk in the villages. So local schools were started for improving the reading and writing skills of women in those places. By improving the literary skills of women they could be empowered and enabled to do various self-employment programmes. Going through these educational process women could acquire skills for ‘sewing, knitting, making clothes, doing embroidery works, toy making, sanitation, first aid and child welfare’. [ibid:p35]. Medical associations were formed mainly to protect the health of the common people. This association helped the people to take preventive measures to overcome the various diseases in the society. With in a short period women experienced great progress and developments in many areas.

Lack of sanitation had caused the spread of many diseases in the rural areas. Being aware of the seriousness of the situation, the Central Government had launched schemes for latrines and pits for dumping wastes, and as a preventive measure, vaccination against the epidemic diseases was given.

New methods were implemented for improving the cultivation of crops and against the diseases that affected the agricultural crops. Incentives were given to the farmers by the Government ensured and the co-operative basis of agricultural cultivation. The ultimate aim was to boost the spirit and the morale of the people who depend on agriculture. The survival of the
agricultural sector depends on adequate income for farmers. The Government gave assistance to the farmers to continue farming. India’s geography is more suitable for agricultural activities than industrialisation as has been adopted by the developed countries. So Gurgaon scheme had given more importance to for the development of agriculture.[ibid.]

The teacher has a great role in the villages. According to Brayne “The village school teacher, with his school library, his night school and his scouts, must be the centre of upliftment and culture, and he must be so trained that he can solve all the simple problems of the villagers, whether they are agricultural, social or moral, or related to public health.” [ibid].

The co-operation from all parts of the village is very important for the success of the rural upliftment programmes. In the early period the villages practiced various social evils, rituals and customs. Sadly many of these practices were against the progress of the society and hindered the economic and social benefits. So this Centre tried to work against the social evils like child marriage, purdha systems and promoted various steps for the development of the rural community. Perhaps this Centre may not have gained complete success in the social reform process in the villages but their attempt had created awakening in the society.

2.2.4. Baroda Experiment

This rural reconstruction centre was started in 1932 in the district of Navasari. Some villages in the district were selected for this purpose. Main purpose of the project was to improve the agriculture and to create many other job opportunities to the people. In India the land was cultivated for a particular period and rest of the time the land would be kept barren. The farmers do cultivation based on the rainfall, soil fertility and customs and
beliefs. This caused to raise the rate of unemployment and poverty among the rural people. So the aim of the Baroda experiment was to overcome these hurdles confronted by the people in the village. Another priority was to improve the leadership skill among the people so that good co-operation and fellowship could be maintained in the society. In this experiment other than agriculture many other programmes were included like weaving, poultry farming, sericulture, kitchen gardening, bee keeping etc. People had tried to improve the infrastructure facilities of the village by using their voluntary labour and money. The success of this experiment was mainly due to the participation of people and a holistic developmental approach. Special care was given for the development of cotton and some other crops cultivated by the farmers in these villages. Main responsibilities of the village panchayat were to supply the drinking water, constructing village road and sanitation process. While participating in the program, the people could realise that growing agriculture could be improved by the supply of good seeds, irrigation and proper care. Up to this period these people followed the traditional methods of farming and raising crops but now they got more information and awareness in these areas.

Besides, the Government of India had done a great effort for the development of social reform process. Main emphasis was to avoid the evil practice like early marriage and work against the irrational customs which existed in the society. Some of the main areas included in the educational programmes of the centre are the adult education, development of community sense and unifying the people. [ibid:p37]

The activities of the centre focused on all areas of the villages and tried to implement them in a very systematic manner. The co-ordination from lower level to higher level had been maintained to achieve the goals of the
centre. The Centre tried to give benefit to all the families in the village. The experiments done in Baroda were very successful and got appreciation from every where.

2.2.5. Firka Development Scheme

The Firka development project was introduced by the provincial government of Madras in the year 1946. This programme’s aim was to fulfil Gandhiji’s vision of Village Swaraj. Later on the Government had introduced some administrative structure for various development programmes. The main objective of the scheme was to make self-confident and self-reliant attitude among the people and promote all-round improvement of the living conditions.

The main purpose of the scheme was “to organize the villagers for a happier, fuller, and more prosperous life in which the individual villager will have the opportunity to develop both as an individual and as a member of a well integrated society” [Ammu Menon Muzumdar:1964:p135]

The co-operation from the local people will reconstruct the social, economical and political areas. This matter was taken very seriously in the Firka Development Programme. These factors will be a channel for achieving the self-sufficiency and self-reliance in the villages. The Firka development programme concentrated on the revival of village panchayat and the self-governing body. The Institutions were in the ground level and had to be strengthened and stood for the benefit of the poor people in the rural areas. This project is expected to get the help of the government and the non-official people in the villages. Great preference was given to the educational development of these villages. The state Government had very liberally given financial aids and grants for sanitation, agriculture and
cottage industries in this project. This project had given more preference to the participation of people and for democratic organisational systems. [Sunny Varghese:2005:p 67]. This Firka Scheme had done many things for the welfare of the women and children in the rural areas.

The workers belonging to the ‘Constructive Programme’ envisaged by Gandhiji also participated with the Development Programme of the Scheme. In this scheme officials tried to serve all the people in the villages. The Gandhian ideologies had inspired the entire programme of the Firka development Scheme.

2.2.6. Etawah Project

This Project was started in 1948 by Mr. Albert Meyer, under the help of Ford foundation and with the blessings of Mahatmaji in the district of Etawah of Utter Pradesh. Before starting the project he had done a very clear and analytical study about the problems confronted by the people in the rural community. This Project envisages the moral and material progress of the people living in the rural areas.

This project had brilliant visions for achieving the goals for the welfare of the rural mass.

1. Create the importance of awareness of the community in the people of the village.

2. Build the spirit of self-help in the village. By acquiring the skills people can raise various agriculture in their house without depending on outside agents. Rural people should use their potentials in a very good and efficient manner.
3. Establish good relation between village level workers and rural people. The participation of common people is very essential for attaining success.

4. Starting various village industries will lead to improve the self sufficiency of the villages. Before staring the village industries people have to acquire the good skill and analyse the availabilities of the resources.

5. Use the communication facilities for increasing the mental ability of rural masses such as radios, news agencies and information centres. The communication facilities should be used for delivering the information as early as possible to the common people. Perhaps the rural people would have received some inherent knowledge from traditional ways. However by using the advice of experts the knowledge of the people would improve in the rural areas.

6. Use better seeds, fertilizers etc for improving the agricultural yield. The Fertility of a particular place would be reduced to a certain level if the cultivation is done in a continuous manner. Farmers have to collect better seeds from available sources before starting the cultivation [Doshi, S.L. and P.C. Jain: 1999: pp 273-274].

7. Take steps for the betterment of public health through proper education and to provide medical and sanitary facilities. Usually health related problems are very high in rural societies and it could be solved only by increasing the general awareness and improving the education.

8. Increase the level of literacy among the village population. Basically in rural society the rate of literacy is very low because of the lack of
infrastructure facilities, travelling problems and non-availabilities of resource persons.


This project was helped by the farm experts from the United States, mainly for improving the agricultural, social elements and also to built up the self-confidence among the people.

2.2.7. Nilokheri Experiment

The independence of India in 1947 had caused heavy migration of people from both India to Pakistan and vice versa. Unfortunately, during that period these people had to face great troubles and turmoils in their makeshift living places. The refugees from Pakistan had been treated well by a foreign trained person, S.K. Dey in 1948. [Vani:2010:pp 9-10] He took keen interest to start a township at Nilokheri in Punjab. This township had helped to provide self-employment and training in various fields to the refugees. Some of the main work of the township was fisheries, cattle breeding, piggery, horticultural, vocational training etc [Sunny Varghese:2005:pp 68-70]

The recreation for the refugees also had been arranged. Reading rooms, facilities to stage dramas, music and other cultural activities were also provided. Besides, vocational training was also started there. Other than this, Nilokheri experiment was included in some other programmes also, its development schemes, such as weaving, printing, soap making, leather tannery. Nilokheri experiment had made great influence and received attention in India especially in rural development by the intervention of voluntary work during the earlier period.
2.2.8. **Bombay Experiment**

During the pre-independence period the Government in Bombay had decided to start rural reconstruction programme in the State. Here main intention was to carry out Mahatma Gandhi’s programme of Sarvodaya. This was the first Government initiative in rural reconstruction programme in India, before the Independence period.

The Government in Bombay was really motivated by the Gandhian concept of Sarvodaya meaning ‘welfare to all’. “Gandhiji was visibly moved by the ignorance, disease and poverty of the rural people and dreamt of a village reconstruction that would fire the imagination of the people and lead them through self-help to ensure ample food for all, adequate health protection and medical service free education, local self-government through village industries.” [Vasanth Desai:1988:p38]

Under this scheme three layers were formed and responsible people were appointed in each layer, in the village, centre and top level.

“The schemes include plans relating to education, agricultural, cow protection, village industries, public health, sanitation, social amenities and social welfare. Emphasis has been laid on principles of co-operation and methods in organising sarvodaya activities and on inculcating habits of self-help, mutual assistance, tolerance and thrift among the people.” [Dasai, A.R: 1988: p 603].

2.3. **The Influence of Mahatma Gandhi’s Ideas in Voluntary Sector**

The historical facts reveal that many years back, voluntary works existed in India. The arrival of Gandhiji in the political field had created new turn and development in the voluntary activities of India. The activities based on rural development increased more and more only with the intervention and
the influence of Gandhiji. The ideal society envisaged by Gandhiji was based on truth, freedom, non-violence and justice. The main focus of Gandhi’s ‘Constructive Programme’ was to create development in the rural areas of our country. More than eighteen programmes were included in the constructive programme chalked out by Gandhi. All these programmes were implemented in the village sector mainly based on voluntary works and there were no aims like profit generation, compulsions and any other motives. Many voluntary agencies started functioning in different parts of India by the influence of Gandhiji’s view on ideal village and his principles. Some of them concentrated on some particular areas and others to get freedom from the British regime. By voluntary work Gandhiji emphasized not only the political work but also social, economic and reformation work in our country [Venkataiah, C: 2009: p94]. Gandhiji had advised the Congress Party that their activities should be more people oriented and their activities should reach more at the grass root levels of the villages. Gandhiji had a plan to implement the Swaraj. It was not replacing one government with another, instead people should work voluntarily and in a more co-operative manner. In 1934 Gandhiji decided to keep away from the Congress party and decided to spend the rest of his time for the rural development and the voluntary activities in India [Rajesh Tandon:2001:p13]. Gandhi had established several organizations like Harijan Sewak Sangh, Sewagram [Wardha], All India Spinners Association, All India Village Industries Association, Nai Talim Sangh, Hindu Masdur Sabha, Hindu Kusht Nivaran Sangh etc as part of his ‘constructive program’, for the eradication of untouchability and upliftment of women and other downtrodden people.[Pawar, S..N.,J.B. Ambedkar and D. Shrikant: 2004: pp75-76].

By starting the All India Spinners Association at Patna in 1925 Gandhiji helped to provide jobs for hundreds of unemployed people who were living in
the rural sectors of the country. This association could give lakhs of rupees as wages for the workers and helped to sell their products in many places.

The Ashram started by Gandhiji at Wardha had got attention all over India. This was the venue for giving self-employment training to the hundreds of people in the nearby villages. Later on Gandhiji had introduced the Wardha Scheme Education which had received world wide admiration. Gandhiji does not mean education as a means for acquiring the reading and writing skills, instead a holistic development of the students. Education should be a way for learning the skills and the character formation of the students [Joseph.C. Mukalel:1997:p74]. In the Wardha education Scheme, Gandhiji had mentioned many things which created great discussion among the learned people and the common people in the country. Here, we see students learn more skills from the education such as handicrafts and this will be a way for them to find jobs in the society. Later on policy makers in the educational fields had given more preference to the technical education in India. The British never had the mind to provide skill oriented education to the common people rather people should have the submissive mind to do the assistant work in the bureaucracy. By knowing this fact Gandhiji had decided to make some changes in the academic field. This education process would inculcate great revolution in the rural sectors of the country.

The growth and the development of village industries in India were more or less influenced by the Gandhian concept of village swaraj and self-sufficiency. By using a small amount of money and infrastructural facilities people in the village could start suitable village industries in their own areas. Gandhiji could learn more about village industries and production from a learned person known as Kumarappa. So Gandhiji had included Kumarappa’s ideas and his own vision in the village industrial production in India. The
framework of the Gandhian Economics is done by Kumarappa. He believed that the growth of village industry will be an additional help to the village economy [Gandhi, M.K: 2008: pp15-18]. So Gandhian Organisations tried very earnestly for the development and success of the village industries in many parts of the country. An organisation such as the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi started khadi and village Industries in many states. But after the independence Government allotted funds, grants for the success for the village industries and reduced the taxes on these items. Even now also many Gandhian Organisations are very systematically organising various village industries according to the needs and priorities of the local people.

“Eradication of untouchability, emancipation of women, promotion of communal harmony and the amelioration of the impoverished masses through the means of khadi were the four passions of Gandhi” [Rajesh Tandon: 2001: p13]. Gandhiji has never tried to keep some distance away from the people rather he always tried to work among the common people with a genuine heart and committed mind. This attitude has been followed by most of the Gandhian organisations in the country later on. The presence of the Gandhian organisations known as the Gandhi Peace Foundation, the Sarvodaya Mandal etc had helped to solve and reduce the tensions between the different religions in many places of the country. In this tense period the Gandhian Organisations used to visit the representatives of the different religions, groups and would conduct discussions and seminars for solving their problems. Gandhiji asserted that all religions have the elements of truth and none can claim the complete ownership of the truth.

Even after the independence the Gandhian organisations were always in the front, for fighting against the social evils. In many places some organisations and women raised their voice and conducted strong agitations
against the alcohol consumptions and drug addiction in the society. As a result of these agitations, the Government interfered and either closed the toddy shops or changed their locations.

By seeing the corruption and nepotisms deeply rooted in the political and social field, many organisations and groups inspired by the Gandhian ideas used to conduct non-violence agitations against them. Here also, these organisations upheld the Sathyagraha principles against the social injustice. Sadly now some of them are using the Sathyagraha for their own vested interests.

In ancient period, women had the same status with men but gradually they lost their rights, privileges, due to the growth of Patriarchal system in the society [Mathai,M.P: 2000:p173]. The Sathyagrahas and Non-cooperation movement organised by the Gandhian Organisations incorporated the presence of women in India. Gandhiji considered women as an emblem of love, sacrifice and tolerance. He advocated that women should get equal status with men in the society. But in certain areas women are more capable than men, for example, childcare and household work. Gandhiji devoted a particular section in his book ‘Constructive Programme’ for explaining the welfare of the women. He had a strong contempt for the ‘Purdha system’ which was worn by a certain percentage of women in India. The Self-Help Groups started by some of the Gandhian organisations known as the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi provided self-employment and empowerment to women groups in some places. These organisations are really helping to improve the status of the women, economic stability and self confidence in the society.

Though Gandhiji belonged to the Hindu religion, he totally condemned the practices of untouchability that existed in that religion. Historical facts
reveal that caste system was the root cause which worked behind the practice of untouchability in our land. However, Gandhiji had given equal status for all people so that there is no concept such as higher caste and lower caste in his perception. According to him by doing a particular job people would be identified with a particular caste but that would not be a way for making a division in the society. So giving support to caste system, Gandhiji does not mean that he admitted the evil element in the caste system. In truth he tried to purify the caste system.

Gandhiji tried to revive the Hindu religion by abolishing the bad practices of untouchability. Gandhiji formed an organisation known as Harijan Sevak Sangh and its aim was to work against the practices of untouchability. His intention was to change the attitude of the caste Hindus in India. In several places in India, the lower castes were not allowed to enter the temples which belonged to the higher caste, their presence will create pollution to the deity. The presence of Gandhiji and some other organisations had caused the declaration of the ‘temple entry proclamation’ by the authorities in certain places of India. The Gandhian organisations always follow the footpaths of Gandhiji for the progress of women in Indian society.

The Gandian concept of Trusteeship had been a tremendous source for the socio-economic changes in India. Based on this concept, the ‘Bhoodan Movement’ was formed later. It was started by Sri. Vinoba Bhave. Many Gandhian Organisations also very actively participated with this movement in different parts of the country. This movement provided surplus portion of land for the landless people in the country.

Before the arrival of Gandhiji in the political field of India, many prominent people and organisations had tried to liberate India from foreign
forces by violent method. But those attempts were futile. But the Gandhian methods of non-violence based social agitation liberated India from the alien forces without shedding blood. The Gandhian Organisation’s role was very much appreciable in the freedom movement of India. In the post independent period these organisations had actively participated with the development programmes and projects, implemented by the government for the rural sectors of India. Meanwhile some of the organisations concentrated their activities in remote areas, especially for the welfare of the Adivasi Communities in India. By knowing the changes and trends in the present society, some Gandhian Organisations decided to make some alterations in their visions and focused more on the participation of people at the grass root level. In the professional social work people are motivated to work based on salary, increment and some other criteria but in the Gandhian voluntary work people are more dedicated to work for the vulnerable sections of the society [Sarat.C.Joshi: 2009:pp 44-45]. Many highly educated and socially influenced people had worked with Gandhian Organisations for a long time without receiving any money or sometimes may be accepting small amounts of salary from their offices. At the same time the Gandhian Organisations had given preference not only for the social and economic development of the people but also for the moral well being of the people. In the voluntary works Gandhiji never tried to act as a leader, instead he was always working with the people.

2.4.1. Community Development Programme

The Community Development Programme was started in India in the year 1952 by the initiative of our first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. After the Independence, the policy makers had given preference to Industrialisation. At the Same time they had not forgotten to follow the footsteps of Mahatmaji in the rural development Programmes. Main inspirations of these programmes
were Gandhiji’s vision on the self-sufficient village and constructive programmes. Main aim of the community development programme was to increase the agricultural production in India. Besides, some other objectives of these programme were fast development in communication process, overcoming the unemployment and poverty, improvement in health and education and the promotion of small scale industries [Ammu menon Muzumdar: 1964: p141]. The expense for the implementation of the projects had been borne by both the Centre and the State Governments, besides people also worked in a voluntary manner. Each state was divided into separate areas (blocks) and appointed Block Development Officers (B.D.O) and other subordinate officials to control the functions of these projects. However, a major portion of the benefits of these projects were captured by the rich and the middle class farmers in the country and the landless farmers were neglected in these projects. [Nayak, R.B: 2008: p82]. Later on Five Year plans were implemented in India in association with the community development programmes. For the smooth functioning of these programmes the Government had formed the grass root level organisation known as Panchayati Raj system in the country. To some extent this was the primary step for the implementation of the Gandhiji’s concept of decentralisation in the country. But in certain places the Panchayat Raj system had not been working in a systematic manner because the nominated members were not keen to give away their posts as there was no election process for selecting the members at the grass root level. [Leelamma Devasia: 1988: pp 6-9]. The fights between the educated government officials and non educated members had also created very far and wide consequences in certain places for the function of the project. Slowness and lack of co-ordination associated with the bureaucracy had also been other major hurdles for attaining the goals of the project in the
rural community. Initially, this project could build roads, schools, community centres, hospitals, wells in many places and people were more enthusiastic to participate with the projects [Gangrade, K. D.:1986:pp12-14]. Later the Mehta Committee was appointed by the government for studying the efficiency of the Community Development Programme and recommendations for further development of the rural society. This project was planned to change the rural economy by transforming the social and economic lives of the people in the villages. In this project great preferences had been given to agriculture but the final result was not that much effective in many places.

“The success of the Community Development Programme will depend on the ability of the villagers to improve their lot through their own voluntary effort. At best the Government can offer guidance and some measure of assistance in the execution of development work. For each project area, the programme prescribes a qualifying scale of voluntary contribution from the people in the form of money as well as labour,” [Ammon menon Muzumbar: 1964:p141].

The concept of Community Development Programme originated from the American concept of Community organisation which concentrated in the development and wellbeing of the poor in the third world countries [Prameshwari Dayal:1986:p57]. Officials of the Government belonging to the different sectors had worked together for the success of the program. Whatever criticisms had been raised against the project, it could lay down the minimum infrastructure facilities for the rural development programme in India after the Independence period. Through this project farmers received new variety of seeds and encouraged them to do multiple crop cultivation patterns. These projects also helped to improve poultry, fishery, dairy products and small irrigation process in the rural sector. The direct participation was considered
as important for solving the common problems confronted by the people in the rural areas.[Rao, V.M :1995:p 63]

2.4.2. National Extension Service

This was another rural development programme which was introduced in India after the Independence period in the year 1953. This concept was adopted from the United States of America. Later on this scheme was integrated with community development programme. The main aim of this programme was to create social and economic transformation among the people living in the rural sector. The people have to get more information about the modern method of practices and technologies for raising agriculture. The Government also had shown interest to give training to social workers and village workers so that they can cooperate and give guidance to the common people in the rural sector. The co-operation with the government officials and common people had helped to build the roads, bridges, schools and welfare centres in many places. The main motto was that the people would become more and more self-sufficient and energetic to do the developmental activities without expecting more help from outside agencies. In this project great priorities were given to the rural electrification, irrigation process and village industries. Little consideration was given to the land reforms because certain number of people in the rural sector did not have their own property for agriculture cultivation. Gandhiji also had a desire that workers should always try to identify with common people in the rural community. [Ammu Menon Muzumdar: 1964:p143].

“The role of the National Extension Service in the successive Five-Year Plans is to transform the social and economic life of the villages. The services of National Extension Service agents constitute a continuous process
designed to make the rural people aware of their problems and help them to seek ways and means by which they can solve them. This involves education of the rural people in determining their problems, finding methods of solving them, and then stimulating them towards positive action” [ibid: pp144-145]. This scheme reveals the fact that development approaches of the village have to be in an integrated manner rather than focusing on a particular area. All departments of the government should be incorporated in the development process so that benefit would reach the bottom level. This scheme was very much beneficial to the countries depending on agriculture. [Gangrade, K.D:1986:p14]

2.5. Presence of Gandhian Organisations in Rural Development

2.5.1. Harijan Sevak Sangh

Except few people, none had done the great work like Gandhiji for the upliftment of the Harijan Community in India. Gandhiji had taken primary interest and inspiration for starting the Harijan Sevak Sangh organisation in our country. The aim of this organisation was to make changes in the attitude of higher caste Hindus so that they can abolish the bad practices like untouchability from our society. Since a very long period this practice had been followed by the Hindu community in India. So there may not be a sudden change in our society. On September 30 in 1932, this voluntary organisation started to work in India for the welfare of Harijan Community with the blessings of Madan Mohan Malaviya. [Parameshwari Dayal: 1986:p 88]. Particularly this organisation did not have any political affiliation or inclination to any other organisation. ‘Chathurvarnom’ mentioned in the ‘Manu Smirithi’ did not give any priorities or importance to the untouchable people belonging to the caste system. So traditionally, Harijan communities
Chapter 2

were always in a very lower position in the society especially in the areas of social and economical fields.

Gandhiji had given the name of Harijan to the Untouchables and it means ‘children of God’. He knew that violence is never an alternative for eradicating this social evil from our society. But the non-violence method based on truth could touch the heart of the caste Hindus in India. Gandhiji framed the constitution of this organisation in 1932 and it is functioning upto this time in many states of India and has several provincial branches. This organisation is working mainly for the development and also for the educational betterment of the Harijan Community in India. This organisation used to conduct seminars, discussions, public meetings for the complete removal of the practice of Untouchability [Encyclopaedia of social work in India: 1987: pp142-143]. As per the historical evidence, Gandhiji had given admission to the people belonging to the Harijan Community in his Ashram and had to face criticism from many sections. This organisation had arranged scholarships and financial assistance to the students of this community throughout the country. Unfortunately in certain places of India the Harijans were not even allowed to enter the Temple of the Caste Hindus. Under the guidance of Mahatma Gandhi this organisation also joined with the Temple entry agitation. Promptly in many places rulers had ordered the Temple entry proclamation. The schools started by the organisation have provided the opportunities for the common children to study along with children of caste Hindus. So it helped to reduce the gulf between these two communities to a certain level.

In many parts of India Harijans were not permitted to collect the drinking water from common places. This organisation had made various arrangements for getting water to the Harijan Community. They tried to enforce the locals and higher authorities to use the available fund for supplying
water to the common people. Another attempt of them was to repair the old wells and dig new ones for the use of the poor people in the rural sector.

This organisation’s role in the health and medical fields was not in the high level but only in the discussions and common meetings. The Sangh had focused more on general awareness in practising hygiene. Usually in remote areas, traditionally the Harijan Community had been following dirty food habits and occupations. This also caused the alienation of these communities from the society. So the Sangh tried to change these kind of lifestyles among the people by strong propagandas [Parmeswari Dayal: 1986:p 91]

Harijan Sevak Sangh branches in Kerala focused their attention on many areas for the rural people such as house building, social and economic improvement programme, employment training, educational development and Temple entry agitations. “Gandhiji visualized the battle against untouchability, as an integral part of his fight for social justice. He considered the upliftment of the socially and economically backward classes, a religious obligation, a sacrifice and a penance for the persecution for centuries.”[Nair, N. Gopalakrishnan : 2010:pp1-4]

2.5.2. Vinobaniketan

Many people have lived and worked with Gandhiji. Among them Vinobaji was one of his close associates and he had tried to inculcate Gandhian ideologies more in the voluntary works mainly through the Bhoodan Movement in India. He stood for the proclamation of universal brotherhood and practice of non-violence in the society. He had the intense desire to see the sustainable and self-sufficient development of the villages scattered all over the country. He believes that the Sarvodaya concept is for the well being of the
rural mass in our society. Many people had closely associated for the propagation of his ideas and activities with vigour and enthusiasm.

Parivrajika Rajamma, a living saint had got the opportunities to work with Vinobaji and later on she decided to follow her master’s footpath and started ‘Vinobaniketan’ in Nedumangadu, in Kerala. This place was very close to a forest and there were hundreds of tribals living and working together with nature. Most of the people there were very poor, illiterate and they were not having adequate skills for the exploitation of natural resources in their locality. When she started the movement people were facing abject poverty in their life. Their younger generation did not have the opportunities for enjoying the fruits of modern development and education facilities.

In 1954, Vinobaniketan started to function with the approval of Vinobhaji and did development activities in various levels for the welfare of the tribes. Initially, they had adopted children of the destitute and the tribal and provided proper nourishments and education to them but later on the Government interfered and there were lot of restrictions to carry on this adoption process. Very soon both the Central and State Governments had started to extend help for the tribal welfare activities of this voluntary organisation. In Kerala this organisation followed the footsteps of Mahatmaji. By receiving help from the State Government in 1973, tribal hostel were built and admissions were given to the girl students belonging to these groups in Kerala. Training was imparted to the girl students and they had been equipped well for the participation of rural development programme through various self employment programmes. Besides girl students and many women were selected for jobs.[Parivrajika A.K. Rajamma: 2010:p14]
These students got opportunities for learning and working in different areas after school hours. Their curriculum was framed in such a way. The education pattern is more or less linked with the Gandhian concept of Nai-Talim. Every Sunday children of this organisation would visit the nearby villages and sing the peace song for the propagation of non-violence and harmony among the society in a very enthusiastic and joyful manner. [ibid:p19] Besides formal education institutions were started and given admission to the poor people living in nearby villages. By receiving advice and help from Council for Advancement of People’s Action and Rural Technology (CAPART) one year long Grama Sevika Training Programme was conducted for women and its focus is on the socio-economic development of the poor. The Bamboo project helped to find new employment opportunities and decent life among the rural people. By using Bamboo, these people could make many products and sell it in the markets their daily bread.

Under the initiatives of the Centre, the Bhoodan Movement was initiated in many parts of the Kerala. Many people had donated land to the landless in various capacities. “If there is no co-operation from the people and if a reform is thrust on them through legislation, it would not only fail to achieve its objective, but there would be widespread violence and hatred in society.”[Vinoba Bhava:1994: p49]. People as well as the activists belonging to the various Gandhian organisations had come and given full support and guidance to this organisation on several occasions. The Khadi products were made and supplied to the rural people by the help of this organisation.

The People living in the remote areas of the forest have received several benefits including medical assistance, which improved their physical condition. All the activities of the Centre are based on voluntary spirit and people oriented. The Central Government had supplied low cost houses and
toilets to the poor people living in the rural area. Alcohol Consumption is one of the bad habits which existed among the tribal people and continues as such even today. So the Central Government had made steps for the eradication of this problem from the society. Medical dispensaries and clinics were started by the organisation which was indeed a real benefit to the rural people. In that period people had very rare opportunities for getting proper treatment and maintain their health from any source. But many projects could not continue because of the financial inadequacies and lack of assistance.

This organisation had to confront several difficulties, inconveniences in its journey but the founder’s commitment and dedication have enabled the Centre to come up with this programme. Many students who got education through this organisation have achieved great position in the society which reveals the Centre’s contribution in the rural society [Viswanathan, K: 2007: pp22-24]. The Centre’s role in the area of rural development is highly appreciable and admirable. Various steps were taken for preserving the trees, forests and taught the lessons of vegetarianism and nature oriented life among the common people. In 1975 the Centre had given assistance for building water tanks near the water stream of the forests with the support of the forest department and pumped water for the agriculture and this process continue, even today and is known as the ‘Gustaf Irrigation’. [Parivrajika A.K. Rajamma:2010:p17]

The experts used to teach yoga for the people and the inmates of this Centre. The main aim of the Centre is to work for the development of the poor people living in the rural areas by promoting the self-employment training and skill developing venture. They envisage Gandhian based alternative developments which lead to village sufficiency and the welfare of the marginalised groups in the society.
2.5.3. Mithraniketan

Many voluntary organisations started to work in Kerala after the independence of the country, yet few of them stood more or less for the fulfilment of the vision of Gandhi and the progress of the oppressed and suppressed people in the society. Voluntary organisation known as Mitraniketan comes under this category. In 1956, Sri. K. Vishvanath had started this organisation in Vellanadu in Thiruvananthapuram district, Kerala. In his early life he was much influenced by the works of Gandhiji and Tagore and so with the auspices of his parent, decided to do education in Shanthiniketan in Calcutta. The time that he spent in this institution had really moulded his life and the way of thinking. So he decided to dedicate the rest of his life for the development of rural people, especially among the vulnerable sections in the Kerala society. Initially he had to confront several challenges and problems but he overcame these issues with the help of his friends and with the strong support of his parents. As per the testimony, he had witnessed and experienced the social taboos and bad practices which were prevalent in the societies in that period.

He strongly believed that education could play a great role for the progress in rural people and skill based curriculum than a mere book studying process which followed in many places of the country. He was more influenced by the Gandhian concept of Nai-talim education process. The organisation has taken care for giving education to the drop out students and those who do not have opportunities for studies. Simultaneously the Government and foreign agencies had come forward for supporting such activities of this organisation in the rural sectors. This institution also has both formal and informal method of education system. The formal education was mainly for the inmates and selected people but informal was for the youth and women. The organisation has also provided practical skills to the students in
addition to the academic knowledge. The children and the inmates were trained well for manufacturing various products in the land mainly for their own sake and for the society.

“Today it has grown up in the form of a rural university engaged in a variety of activities covering development, education, agriculture, appropriate technology, women empowerment and research” [Reghu Ram Das:2006: p139].

By considering the priorities of the agriculture in the state, the Centre had started research and training in this area which really had benefited hundreds of people staying near the villages of the centre. New varieties of goats bred in the Centre, with the help of technology, have improved very much the economic status of the poor in the villages. Training in organic farming was given to the farmers for their welfare.

The field data reveal that women had profited more by joining with various levels of the activities undertaken by the organisation, “women empowerment programmes include leadership training, housewives training, simple technical training programmes in farm and non-farm sectors, literacy programmes, awareness creation on health, environment, sanitation and legal literacy.” [ibid:p143]

The Self Help Groups had started by uniting women, staying near the villages. They tried to develop the Micro-entrepreneurships programme for improving the social and economic status of the people. Many people in our society naturally think that tribal people are savages, illiterate and brutish but their attitudes have got widely changed by the function of the organisation in this place.
Most modern technology should reach the farmers and working class as early as possible because it would improve agriculture and village industries in the state. This organisation also has been extending help and practical knowledge to various NGO’s working in the field of roof water harvesting system.

“Over the years the Mithraniketan has conducted frequent technology transfer workshops in the field of roof water harvesting, ground water recharging, vermiculture, mush room cultivation, low cost nursery techniques, red clay pottery and organic farming” [ibid:p142].

By uniting with the work of ‘HUDCO’ the Government of India had supplied building materials to homeless people such as cement blocks, ferro cement tanks and frames of doors and windows in concrete.

The health centres started by the Government of India have helped abundantly the local people and the inmates of the organisation. The common people had gained more by the service of x-ray units and laboratories started by the organisation. On several occasions this centre had organised medical and immunization camps to the local community. The Centre had taken particular interests for building toilets to keep sanitation and health at a very convenient level.

Even during the pre independence period the strength of the village industries had been declining day by day in our country. Even today this problem exists in our society. By knowing the depth of the problem this centre has taken many steps for the growth and sustainability of the village industries in the state. The khadi weaving practice is also being done in a very small level.

Each activity of the Centre has demonstrated the practical use of the Gandhian principles and development method among the rural people. Classes
are being organised continuously with the help of the experts for the propagation of Gandhian ideologies among the youths and students. Historical evidence very clearly depicts that all kinds of voluntary works have been undertaken by religious groups, social organisations, rulers who lived in our country. Even today many organisations are very actively participating in the development of rural masses in the country. Some of the Rural Development experiments like Sriniketan, Marthandom, Gurgaon, Baroda, Firka, Etawah, Nilokheri etc., had made great reputation to the voluntary works in India. At the same time the Gandhian organisations had made immense contributions in the field of voluntary activities at various levels. These organisations had mainly stood for the various components of the ‘Constructive Programmes’ as envisaged by Gandhiji. Soon after the independence of India, the Government had considered more on the development of rural community by allotting sufficient money and projects for the well being of the rural community. Later on, the Government also trusted the presence of voluntary agencies in rural areas by giving financial support for their activities especially in the remote areas of various places of the country where the Government agencies presence are negligible.

Reference


Brief History of Voluntarism in India (Delhi: Vani, 2010), pp-9:10.


Intervention of Voluntary Agencies in Rural Development: A Historical Perspective


