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THE FRAME OF REFERENCE

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VOLGAS AND DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT:

Developmental interventions based on centralised planning in the post independence era though created large physical and institutional infrastructure and increased manifold the agricultural and industrial goods and services have not benefited all the sections equitably. The process of development by and large bypasses the large masses of disadvantaged sections of the society. The 'trickle down' theory never worked to the advantage of the poor. The poor are not able to gain effective access to the opportunity structure. Their space of opportunity has been shrinking instead of expanding. There is a large-scale growth in the phenomenon of middlemen preventing the disadvantaged to gain access to the market or to the state governance on the basis of equality and justice. The survival of the poor is at stake. The Human Development Reports of UNDP and World Bank Reports every year since 1990 sharply focussed on the poverty of India. This situation encouraged the emergence of 'grassroots groups' at micro level to improve the economic, ecological and cultural aspects of village life.
Over a period of five decades many alternative strategies and models were tried. There has been development based on growth strategy, on growth and distribution strategy, on basic minimum needs, on decentralised development, on a target group approach and so on. The general conclusion of the various assessments of these attempts is “that development cannot be achieved simply by throwing together the necessary technical and physical inputs and demanding that the beneficiaries respond or participate in the manner specified by the plans. The poor are not passive recipients, yet they have to be organised to become active, demanding participants” (S. R. Pande, 1991). In this context the new social and political force, namely Volgas (Voluntary Organisations) have emerged aiming to socialise knowledge, economic power and people’s participation. The concept of participatory development is central to the work of Volgas. In the Indian society, that is for centuries highly hierarchic and authoritarian, to translate the concept of participatory development in to action is a stupendous task. It is in fact an epic struggle. The struggle is carried through by the Volgas with limited success here and there but is indicating the hope and potential to spread and yield significant benefits to the poor and disadvantaged.
The role of Volgas as the instrument of change has been increasing as the concept of development has been changing (Reddy, V.E., 1985).

The following are the stages of change in the concept of development:

1. Development—Growth in Income

This is a unidimensional concept. It is based on percolation principle. If the national income is increased it is believed that the welfare of the people has also improved automatically. It ignored the social aspects of development and emphasised only on economic aspect of development. The role of Volgas was minimal since this concept does not directly seek to involve the mass of people into the process of development.

2. Development—Social Progress

It was realised that development was more complex than mere increasing the income. A large variety of variables related to several indicators of level of living like health, nutrition, education etc., were introduced in to the development equation. The first Development Decade declared by U.N.O. introduced this concept.
Volgas assumed more important role to enhance the access to social services for the rural poor.

3. Development – integration

The first two approaches to development were found to be inadequate as they were more in the nature of aid coming from outside either in the form of finance, capital or social benefits, and vast number of people were still seen on the 'margin' of the society. “The chief task of development therefore came to be seen as that of re-integrating these marginal people into the existing social structures. Attempts were made to broaden the latter and, ensure a greater flow of benefits from the 'have' to 'have-nots'. India's 20-point economic programme can be seen as a concrete expression of this approach to development” (FAO 1985). This approach involved the motivating and mobilising the poor. The role of Volgas as a means has considerably increased.


The third approach did not attempt major changes in the existing social structures. It also presumed that the poor would respond automatically to the help coming from above or from outside institutions. It was realised that the real development can only start from below, from the people at the bottom. ‘Grassroots’,
‘Barefoot’ are typical expressions on development vocabulary. “The first step in development must be an attempt, to help the people free themselves from the various oppressive forces keeping them in a state of dependence. Further, in this phase, the people are conscientised about the situation in which they live, the oppression they suffer, the contradictions they experience. They are encouraged to ask questions, to get organised, to build up countervailing power to exert pressure from below” (FAO 1985). In this approach the role of Volgas became much more important and also intimate to the people to prepare them to participate in the process of development as decision-makers.

In this context it may be in order to cite some examples of Volgas who made significant contribution to the development of the people. Their work is inspiring for those who have the zeal to join the Volgas movements. Their models and strategies are appropriate for the government to replicate on large scale.
The Statement of the Problem

Declaration of the Right to Development, adopted by the U.N. General Assembly (1986) recognises that "development is a comprehensive economic, social, cultural and political process, which aims at the constant improvement of the well being of the entire population and of all individuals on the basis of their active, free and meaningful participation in development and in the fair distribution of benefits resulting therefrom".

The purpose of this concept of development reflects also the spirit of "Sarvodaya" - a concept advocated by Mahatma Gandhi. The wisdom of this concept is to focus on the point that development does not occur or poverty cannot be alleviated merely through the implementation of economic programmes per se and without the active participation of the people at all the stages of the development, namely - planning, implementation, and sharing of the benefits. Macro level centralised planning approaches; adopted in India, largely ignored the ground realities that should guide the planning and development processes. Particularly in the context of rural economy and society characterised by authoritarian and rigid hierarchic social structure and organisation perpetuating social and economic evils like illiteracy, poverty culture and the like, the centralised planning has not been able to meet the desired objectives. It is everybody's
knowledge that there are strong negative stakeholders like the middlemen preventing the benefits of development reaching the poor, which leads to the increased inequalities. It is also now well realised that poverty is not only an economic problem but it is as much the cultural, social and political problem. Interventions are required in all these domains. Prolonged poverty conditions since several generations made the poor people insensitive to their own existential realities. To motivate and mobilise them even for their own development has become very difficult and which is an advantage to the exploitative forces. Many development programmes fail because of lack of response on the part of the people on one hand and the systematic disadvantage they have on the other. However, there are many examples where, when the people were prepared, empowered and organised through the social mediation of the Voluntary Organisations, they have reaped the benefits of development programmes.

The researcher, in view of his long association with the voluntary sector in various capacities, has undertaken the experiment on action research to work with the village communities in East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh, India and mobilise them for their own development process. He has adopted participatory research methodology as it is considered as an appropriate empowering instrument.
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