CHAPTER FOUR

A SHORT HISTORY OF KERALA GANDHI
SMARAKA NIDHI

4. Introduction

The assassination of Mahatma Gandhiji had caused immense grief among the people, many silently lamented and then took the decision to follow his footsteps. His body was cremated at the Rajghat. Many of his followers and disciples could not console themselves with the sudden departure of Mahatmaji. Later some of the members, belonging to the Indian National Congress decided to form a trust, mainly to keep the memories of Mahatmaji. This trust is known as ‘Gandhi National Memorial Trust or Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi’. [Nair, P. Gopinathan: 2003: p15]

In the beginning, a temporary committee was formed with Dr. Rajendra Prasad as the chairman, and Sri. J. C. Kumarapa and Kripalani as secretaries. Many other prominent freedom fighters joined this Trust. Main aim of the Trust was to keep alive the memories of Gandhiji and follow his ideologies and continue the development programme already undertaken by him.

From April 1948 onwards representatives of this trust began to travel to different places of the country and collected funds and donations from people to start the Trust. The funds received initially were not adequate, hence Dr. Rajendra Prasad again requested the Indian mass to contribute money voluntarily for this great purpose [Jagadeesan, K.G:2007:p3].
Hearing this request people from different walks of life started contributing money for the formation of the Trust. This attempt helped to collect more than ten crore from different parts of the country. Interestingly, this was the greatest fund collected so far, for a particular purpose. One speciality of this fund was that more than one crore people had genuinely participated in this effort.

Very soon bye law was formed for the functioning of the trust. Total number of members in the Trust is ten and Dr. Rajendra Prasad and Sardal Patel were also included. This committee approved mainly twelve main purposes for the functioning of the trust.

According to Vinoba Bhave the funds were to be collected only for ten years and after that the programme of the trust must be concluded and more people oriented activities could be started so that the memories of Mahatma would exist for ever in our country. He was totally against the method like collecting funds from common people for doing various developmental activities incorporated with Gandhian ideologies.[ibid:p3]

As per the bye law of the Trust, money collected from the States should be spent there itself. Another suggestion was that one third of the money should be kept by the Central committee and balance with the State committee for various developmental activities.

Soon after the formation of the States in India, sixteen state committees were formed and the administration of the Trust came under the Sanchalak (director). He was guided by twelve members for the function of the trust. In June, 1951 the Kerala Gandhi SmarakaNidhi had appointed Sree S. Sivan Pillai as ‘Sanchalak’ and Sri. K. Janardanan Pillai as ‘Upa-Sanchalak’.
Mr. Sivan Pillai belonged to the Kanyakumari District. Besides he was an advocate, a well known freedom fighter, member of the assembly and an ardent follower of Gandhi’s ideologies and had a strong commitment towards the Gandhian activities.

Sri. K. Janardhanan Pillai was working in the social field from 1938 onwards and had the opportunity to hear the advices directly from Gandhiji. Sri Kelapaji was appointed as the first Chairman of the Advisory Committee in Kerala Gandhi Smarak Nidhi.

The funds collected from Kerala was around Rs 23,64,285 which had gone to Nidhi’s Central Committee and out of this Rs 17,52,053 had been allotted to the Kerala Gandhi Smarak Nidhi. As per the rule, a certain amount of money should be kept for each purpose of the Trust.[Nair, R.R:2007:pp 6-11]

Till 1962 a particular Advisory Committee was working in Kerala under the Director of Nidhi’s Central Committee. From 1962 onwards a separate Administrative Committee was formed and worked as a unit under the care of the Central Committee of Nidhi.

Mr. Kelappaji was the Chairman of the Kerala Gandhi Smarak Nidhi till 1971 and from 1971 to 1980 Sri Mr. K.P. Madhavan was as the chairman. In 1953, Sri Sivan Pillai gave up the post of Sanchalak and afterwards Sri Janarthana Pillai worked as sanchalak up to 1962 .Then he worked as the Secretaty of Kerala Gandhi Smarak Nidhi till 1980. Besides he was the chairman of the Kerala Gandhi Smarak Nidhi from 1980 to 1998.Due to physical ailments he handed over the responsibility to Sri P. Gopinathan Nair.
4.1. Kerala Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi

Kerala Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi started in 1951 in the house of Sri. Janarthanan Pillai in Thiruvananthapuram. Sri. Gopinathan Nair was appointed as the first worker of Kerala Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi in July 1951. The main aim was to proclaim the principles upheld by Nidhi all over Kerala. Very soon, a rented house was taken in the central part of Kerala in Eranakulam, mainly to extend the activities of the Nidhi throughout Kerala. But as per the instruction from the Central Committee in Delhi the office of Nidhi was transferred back from Eranakulam to Thiruvananthapuram.

4.1.1. First Stage of Activities

Main activities of the Nidhi in the state of Kerala were to provide help to the centres which focused more on the ‘constructive programme’ envisaged by Gandhiji. Nidhi provided financial assistance to various social organizations in Kerala [Shriman Narayan:1976:pp128-129]. While considering the future activities, at Vedchi in Gujarat, Nidhi conducted a particular study class for Sanchalaks who were from different states. The main decision taken was to generate more employment opportunities in the villages by starting various employment programmes. It really helped for the promotion of rural development activities. The first stage of Nidhi’s activities in the villages of Kerala was based on this decision. Kerala Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi committee decided to appoint one person in each district in order to promote the employment generation programmes at least in one or two villages of the particular district.[Ramdas, V:2008:p 4]

Twelve village assistants had associated with the Kerala Gandhi Smarak Nidhi in the year 1954. They had involved in works like spinning,
weaving, and production of fertilizers, beehives, development of agricultural activities, other cottage industries and adult education programmes.

In 1958, the Kerala Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi had decided to extend their work under a Central Institution consisting of two or three members. For this, they had started centres in each district under one leader. The village activities envisaged by the KGSN had given more concern in the areas of personality development of individuals, training and increase in productivity. This new movement emphasised that, without developing, the ideas of social changes and collective imaginative social power, we could not attain the Gandhian Grama Swaraj.

After the independence of India, Vinoba Bhave and his companions started the Bhooldan Movement which had made great influence and social changes in our country. So the KGSN wanted to follow the footsteps of Vinobhava and initiate the Boodhan movement in Kerala through the Grama Seva centers which were working under this organisation [Janardhan Pillai, K:1976:p16]. Many members of Grama Seva Kendra became the workers of district Sarvodaya Movements.

Great efforts were made by the activists of KGSN, in order to strengthen the Sarvodaya movement in Kerala. Many people donated their land for starting the centres of Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi in the state. Based on the Bhooldan Movement programme some of the centers were able to provide land to the landless people. In certain places houses were built in the land donated by the Bhooldan activities. The official member’s of the Kerala Gandhi Smarak Nidhi and the Sarvodaya activists, Sri. Kelapaji and Sri. Gopinathan Nair had shown great interest to do four months Bhooldan training activities in Melady and Nirmalloor on experiment basis. This
organisation started the Grama Sabha mainly for concentrating the work among the rural people. Some units had already registered under it. Very soon Banks, commercial and financial institutions showed interest to give loans and grants for the developmental activities by the intervention of the Nidhi’s centres in many places. These centres are sources for making peace and brotherhood among the people.[Nair, P.Gopinathan:2003:p17]

Many centres had started khadi village industries in their areas with the help of Central Khadi Village Industrial Commission. The activities started from 1964 onwards, to help and provide jobs to hundreds of members who associated with various centres of Nidhi in Kerala. As per records, at present more than one hundred and forty registered Grama Seva Centres and twenty five Khadi Village Industrial Centres are working in Kerala from Parasala to Kasargodu.

4.2. Main Activities of Kerala Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi
4.2.1. Propagation of Gandhian Ideologies

Kerala has highest literacy level when compared with the other States. Majority of people read newspaper every day and people living even in the remote areas were keen in analysing various issues faced by the society. People keenly observe and make very critical comments on various problems and issues confronted by the humanity.[ibid.]

The KGSN has introduced Gandhiji as a humanist before the intellectuals and image of god in front of the religious persons and projected as a personification of human values towards the communist ideologists in our state. They discussed the problems and its solutions in many popular meetings. Many writers, scholars, teachers and professors had voluntarily
participated in the programmes, discussions and seminars conducted by Nidhi at different places. [Ramadas, V:2008:p7]

Gandhi Smarak Nidhi’s ideological propagation section started to function in 1956, under the initiative of Sri. Gopinathan Nair and three main centres were started in Thiruvananthapuram, Eranakulam and Kozhikode. The Chairman of Thiruvananthapuram centre was Sri. Gopinathan Nair and the other members were Sri K. Velayudhan Pillai, Sri.V.Sivaraman Nair and Sri. R.K. Sudharam.

Seminars, discussions and classes were conducted under the guidance of the Kerala Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi in different parts of Kerala based on the relevance of Gandhiji’s ideologies in the present day society. In these programmes great renowned Gandhian activists, intellectuals and experts in different fields participated and aired opinions and view points on different aspects of Gandhian ideologies. Besides, Kerala Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi organised state wide meetings for national rallies, Gandhi memorial rallies and cow protection rallies throughout the state of Kerala.

4.2.2. Work Training Camp

More than hundreds of Training camps were organized in different parts of Kerala from 1952 to 1964. Kerala Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi had taken interest to conduct short and long term camps on many occasions. From each camp at least fifty to eighty members received training on various employment programmes. These camps brought qualitative changes among the youth who showed interest to participate in Gandhian and Sarvodaya Mandal activities. In several places the KGSN organized open meetings, rallies, prayer meetings for the propagation of peace and communal harmony. [Nair, P.Gopinathan:2003:p18]
4.2.3. Peace -Army Activities

Interventions of the Kerala Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi had helped to halt the spread of communal conflicts and riots which broke out in Kerala on many occasions. Shanthi sena activists belonging to the KGSN worked day and night continuously, mainly to find out the causes behind the communal tensions and riots and tried to solve these problems. When communal tensions and violence broke out in Thalassery between Hindus and Muslims, Shanthi Sena activists had reached there and tried hard to maintain peace and harmony among them.

On these occasions Shanthi Sena activists under the leadership of Sri. Gopinathan Nair had spent one month’s time in fasting, house visits, pamphlets distribution, and neighbourhood meetings for the restoration of peace in Thalassery. In the same way, when Naxals attacked in Kilimanoor, activists of Shanthi Sena conducted fasting and prayer meetings for maintaining peace.

In another incident, a section of Christian groups in Pathanamthitta Taluk had planned to build a new church in Nilakal, very close to the famous pilgrim centre, Sabarimala temple. So there developed a rift between Hindu and Christian communities. Under the guidances of Sri. K.P.Madhavan Nair the chairman, Sri M.P. Manmadhan the vice-chairman, Sri Gopinathan Nair the convenor and the Shanthi Sena activists, a peace committee was organised for solving communal tensions between the two religions. In short, within one month peaceful atmosphere was restored in place by the intervention of the activists of Kerala Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi.

Another memorable service done by the Gandhian ideologies propagation committee and Gandhi Smarak Nidhi was the settlement of
struggle between the Christian and Muslims in the coastal areas of Beemapalli and Poovar of Thiruvananthapuram District.

4.2.4. Student Youth Training Programmes of Gandhi Smarak Nidhi

One of the meritorious services of Gandhi Smarak Nidhi was the training programme organised for the youth on various fields of activities. This type of training programmes had tried to cultivate a Gandhian way of life and value oriented thinking among the youth.

The camps conducted by the KGSN helped to provide different kinds of training activities among the Youth. Before starting a camp in a particular place, Nidhi’s practice was to conduct a programme with the participation of the people and collected money and received contribution for the expenses of the camp. One month before the camp, usually authorities of Nidhi would select the members from different parts of Kerala. [Nair, P. Gopinathan: 2011:Oct-26]

In this camp the members offered prayers of all religions. By these activities, Kerala Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi could create brotherhood attitude among different religious groups in the state. Various lessons were taught by experts in order to emphasise the relevance of Bhoodan Movement among the students community.

Another activity of Nidhi is to bring the spinning work among the members. The Members in the camp have to participate with ‘shramadan’ or voluntary work with the people. Some of the activities involved by the members were village road construction, building of sanitation facilities in each house, cleaning of well for rural community.

Besides, these camps had also organised classes for the propagation of the ideas of the Sarvodaya Movement and other inter village programmes
among the village people. So each camp would be a celebration to the villagers. It cultivated unity and helping mentality among the people. Every camp makes an atmosphere of the establishment of new Sarvodaya units. The major Sarvodaya camps were organised at places such as Chenkal, Kummanam, Nandhiyattukunnom, Ramanattukara, Iritty, Mannar, Pandalam and Kadambanad.

Gandhi Dharshan Programmes and Training conducted by the KGSN had influenced the life of youth in many places. Gandhian ideologies, had always upheld the efficacy of non-violence. A silent revolution can be made by adopting Gandhian principles in the personal life and in the social life.

4.2.5. Publications

The people of Kerala had taken the first initiative for publishing the Gandhian literature in regional language. Translation of Gandhian Literature was first started in Kerala in the year 1954 with the ‘Biography of Gandhi’ and ‘Gandhi and Marx’. Under the guidance of Sri Kainakara Kumarapillai and Gandhi Literature Publishing Committee, seven volumes of the Gandhian Literature were published in Kerala in 1956.[Nair, S.Gupthan and Janardanan Pillai :1969:p160]. In this committee great eminent scholars and Kerala Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi activists were also included and this was completed in 1961. There after more than one hundred and fiftyeight publications were made by the Kerala Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi which included books and critical reviews. Later on many well-known writers and historians had taken the responsibility for the publication of the Gandhian literature in Kerala. The Nidhi had taken particular care for publishing the books and magazines which deal with the Gandhian ideologies mainly for students and youth. Publications were also made in the areas of environmental issues,
swadeshi attitude and simple life. Many well known people and activists associated with Kerala Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi for the publications of Gandhian literature.

4.3. **Grama Seva Centres**

The Gandhi Smaraka Seva kendram came to be known widely through its grama seva centres and the ideological propagation of this trust. Growth of this organisation depends on the members who have strong faith in Gandhian ideologies and dedication for development activities. Each centre was seriously active in various functions in the village level and the district level. In short Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi’s activities were widely spread all over Kerala mainly through the involvement of various centres and with the presence of highly skilled and learned people. Each centre of the Kerala Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi had keen interest to do various developmental activities in the villages, in order to strengthen the unity and brotherhood among the people. Kerala Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi had organized grama sabhas, ‘mahila samajam’ and ‘balasamajam’ in many places of Kerala. Peace samithi and sarvodaya movement conducted by Nidhi helped to reduce the conflict in the society. Another attempt of the Nidhi was to reduce the religious conflicts and promote the common religious prayers in the society.

The Nidhi had worked hard to reduce the rate of unemployment by starting the khadi and village industries. Credit unions were formed and they helped to create job opportunities for the small scale farmers. Some of the centres had helped in providing loan from Banks based on agreement for doing self-employment programmes such as cow and goat rearing and milk production. Here the main intention was to increase the level of milk production in the state. Use of bio-fertilizers was widely encouraged in the
agricultural field. Various techniques were introduced for improving the yield from the barren land.[Ramdas, V : 2008:p5]

People got more understanding and guidance about the concepts such as grama swaraj, panchayat raj and this would be a channel for the appropriate development in rural sectors of the state.

Main attempt of the Grama Seva Kendram was to think and work over the political ideologies and religious attachment, to live in a homely atmosphere in the Village. Grama seva centres existed as an emblem of Gandhi’s concept of Village Community. From the beginning, the KGSN’s activities were meant for the village community.

4.3.1. **Autonomous Gramaseva Centres in Kerala**

2. Gandhi Smarak Gramasevakendram Kariyadu, Kannur.
5. Gandhi Smarak Grama Seva Kendram, Nanthiyattukunnam, North Paravoor, Ernakulam.
4.4. Contribution of the Kerala Gandhi Smarak Nidhi in Rural Community

During the last 40 years Gandhi Smarak Nidhi activities are going on in different villages of Kerala. Kerala Gandhi Smarak Nidhi has developed appropriate technology for the development of the villages.

4.4.1. Khadi and Village Industries

Gandhiji believed that Khadi and village industries could improve the regional economy and thereby the stability of the country. The Kerala Gandhi Smarak Nidhi had taken special interest for starting the Khadi and Village Industries in Kerala through its centres. However, the formation of Khadi Board had reduced the funds to the khadi production centres. The Khadi Board has the responsibility for providing financial aid and sustainability of the khadi products in Kerala.[Subramanian,T.R:2003:p91]

Many prominent people as well as social activists praised the role taken by the KGSN for the development of khadi production and distribution in Kerala. The KGSN’s attempt was to increase the rate of khadi production and distribution in the market so that it will improve the employment opportunities in our country. Some of the benefits of the employment programmes of khadi industrial products are that they do not create any pollution, consume less electricity and above all eco friendly. Changes had taken place to a larger extent, in the area of khadi-industry centers of Kerala Gandhi Smarak Nidhi which had done several experiments for introducing the ‘charka’ and ‘thary’ in the state.

Even today many centres are providing self-employment training to the people and supply of the small scale industrial products in accordance with the situations and natural resources.
In Kerala, the Khadi village Industrial Commission started a training centre in Gandhi Smarak Seva Kendram at North Paravoor, known as Khadi Village Employment Institutions in 1956. More than three thousand people could complete training in a very successful manner from these institutions. But at the initial stage this training centre concentrated only in the training of producing khadi. Now, it has added many courses such as, spices and masala processing, rural engineering, paper conversion, carpentry, ophthalmic lens making, modern garment making, handicrafts, wiring and electrical home appliances conducted under the guidance of grama seva kendram at North Paravoor [Nair, P. Gopinathan: 2003:p28].

The Small Scale Industries like Khadi was non-profitable. The people refused to work in Khadi as they received only low payments. So the Small Scale Industries were unable to compete with the big industries that produced in bulk amount.

4.4.2. Experiments in Silk Cloth Making

Silk cloths have great demand all-over the world. One of the centres of KGSN in Idukki District has made an effort for making the silk without destroying the worms. Interestingly, in this experiment tapioca leaves are given to silk worms than other leaves for the production of silk’s raw materials. These kinds of experiments helped and motivated people to continue this in the rural areas. In short in the history of Kerala, the KGSN has taken the first initiative for starting this experiment in a very creative and successful manner.

4.4.3. Handmade Paper

In many ways Kerala Gandhi Smarak Nidhi had contributed much for the development of Kerala Society. Some of the memorable contributions are
re-cycling of paper, honey making process, modernisation of clay products, making of smokeless and low price cooking facilities. Kerala Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi is always in the forefront for making the products that are more eco-friendly.[Ajith Vanniyoor:2003:pp 41-43]

4.4.4. Clay Products

Great attention was given to start the clay furnaces and Pug-mills in Neyyatinkara under the initiative of the Kerala Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi. Raw materials and items used in the traditional furnace would make 60% damages to the products but in this new furnaces damage will be less than 2% and workers can collect raw-materials from the local places. Neyyattinkara became very famous for clay products in Kerala, due to the function of pug mill in Thozhukal.

In Kerala, the Kerala Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi had taken the first attempt for giving training to the workers producing the clay products. Its aim was to strengthen the worker’s skills and service in an appropriate manner. These products had been marketed in different parts of Kerala.

4.4.5. Agriculture Fields

The attempts made by the Kerala Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi in Agricultural section really helped thousands of farmers in Kerala. The Gandhi Smarak Nidhi always upholds the proper use of land for cultivation. Nidhi believed that even small part of barren land should be used for cultivation. Activities done by the Kerala Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi in the agricultural field, in the last few decades, shows that proper bio-fertilisation helps to reduce the cost of the cultivation and would improve the level of production. To a certain extent, following the traditional employment will help to get a reasonable income for the common people. Another notable
attempt made by the Kerala Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi was the adoption of French method of agriculture and recycling of the old and used things for improving the fertility of the soil. This method is known as bio-dynamic agricultural method. Nidhi had created the technology for using the slope land for cultivation and thereby control the soil erosion. Kerala Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi was giving effective training to the farmers for doing the scientific oriented cultivation, systematic agricultural method and reduction of expense etc.

Farmers should use available water and sunlight in most suitable manner so that the amount of production would be improved to a higher level. Destruction of forest could cause the soil erosion and lack of fertility. Discussions and studies organised by the KGSN had given more concern for the sustainability of forests. Fast growth of Industrialisation has quickened the destruction of trees, exploitation of natural resources and filling the paddy fields with soil from other places, in a great level. Ultimately this will be a threat to all. Kerala Gandhi Smarak Nidhi has always been upholding the relevance of the multi-crop agricultural method [ibid].

4.4.6. Sprinkler Irrigation

By using a small amount of water, sprinkler will help to irrigate the crops even in the time of summer in our country. Many years before Kerala Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi had introduced this method for the water irrigation process in Kerala. At present these techniques are widely used both by government and private agencies in the state. Kerala Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi has selected a place known as Thazava in the district of Kollam for this experiment. Beside the first user of drip irrigation in Kerala is also the Nidhi.
4.4.7. **Hydraulic Pump**

Water can be pumped from lower places to higher places by the power of hydraulic Pressure without depending on electrical power or fuels. This method is known as Hydraulic Ram. This was experimented at Chelachuvadu in Idukki District by the initiative of the Kerala Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi. This method has helped to supply water for drinking and for cultivation to many people in the hilly areas of the state. Many adopted this method even outside the state.

4.4.8. **Jayanthi Pump**

Another initiative of the Kerala Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi was to introduce low cost pumps known as Jayanthi pumps. This pump can be worked without electricity and oil. It can be worked with human legs. The cost of this pump is affordable to the common people. It is very suitable for the farmers who possess cultivable land.

4.4.9. **Use of Traditional Power Sources**

People should never try to discard the traditional power sources. In this area the KGSN had shown very great interest and attention. Another problem in the present society is that the artificial and manmade energy sources are decreasing day by day because of the increase in population and large level of consumption of energy both in rural and urban areas. Some of the experiments of the Kerala Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi were the use of bio-gas plants, solar energy for household activities and training for the proper use of traditional energy sources.
4.4.10. Knowledge Transferring and Trainings

The Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi has always been trying to collect various informations and pass them on to the people living in the villages for their benefits and for getting better yield from agriculture. The Kerala Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi used to send its representatives to different places inside the country and even abroad for acquiring knowledge and attending the training programmes, seminars in order to pass the latest knowledge to the people. Almost all centres of Kerala Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi are working as a knowledge imparting centre in their areas.

4.5. Health Programme

Common men are forced to spend their money and whatever they have with them for keeping their health. Now maintaining good health is very expensive. The Kerala Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi’s approach is to find the exact cause of the diseases and use traditional methods for treatment. Gandhiji in his life had great preference for Nature cure treatment. Based on this topic several camps, discussions and lectures were conducted by the Kerala Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi in Kerala [Sadiq Ali:2001:p12]. Nature Cure and ‘Nature life Centre’ located in the Gandhi Bhavan is always in the forefront to show the effects of this treatment and importance of life style in health related problems of the people in the state. Nature cure Treatment was practiced widely in our country many years before. Common people think that this would give benefit only for the Saints and Yogis and others would not get much benefit from this treatment. According to the officials of KGSN this understanding is quiet wrong. Here the form and mode of treatment is more or less related with the life pattern of the patient. “The benefits of including more vegetables, both cooked and raw in the diet, are explained to
the patients. Those spiritually inclined are asked to go in for some meditation and observe fasts and other rituals of their faith. Yoga sessions too form a part of the treatment” [Hindu:2002:Jan-31]. Lots of problems and issues are faced by the people to keep good health. In many places lack of toilets and unhygienic atmosphere have caused the spread of contagious diseases in the remote villages of Kerala.

Many people understood the efficacy of the Naturopathy but believe that it cannot cure quickly. “Natural living is a holistic approach to a healthy life and it involves both preventive and curative aspects” [Hindu:1999: Nov-29]. In short Nature cure is not a new medical Science. Infact it is going back to our age-old and traditional mode of living.

Some of the sub centres used to conduct medical camps for the benefit of members and common people. These kinds of opportunities are getting rare in the life of rural people living in the country. Water-borne diseases are very common as the people have to use polluted water. By knowing the seriousness of the problems, on several occasions the KGSN has taken the responsibilities for cleaning and digging wells for the needy people. Some sub centres are giving special care for the rehabilitation of leprosy patients and eradication of this disease from the society. [Nair, V. Sivaraman: 2003:p33-34)

4.6. Women Development Programmes

In Kerala the women got the opportunity for social awakening by joining with the Gandhian organisations in various non-violent based agitations and self employment programmes. The use of the violent methods against the social evils will not produce good and lasting results. Women involvements in Bhoomdan Movement and Shanthi Sena activity have helped
to create good image and social upliftment in the society. Self-Help Groups started by certain centres have given various employment opportunities and social and economic advancements to the women who had been associated with the groups. Women could improve their leadership skills and self awareness by participating with the rallies, satyagrahas and camps organised by the KGSN on various occasions in different places. (Nair, N. Nanukuttan: 2011: july-5)

Basically women are receiving more benefits by joining with the rural development programme started by the Kerala Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi. They acquired self empowerment, leadership skill, and economic stability from their association with the centre. Women living in the patriarchal dominant society used to face several restrictions in the areas of freedom and in personal life. This dogma was wiped out due to the impact of social reformation and the presence of voluntary organisations and progressive institutions which emerged in the last few centuries. By joining with social organisations they got opportunities for raising their voices, against social evils and bad customs which was deeply rooted in the society. Activities of Kerala Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi have abundantly helped the women group to improve their will power, economic stability, courage and social awareness.

4.7. **Self Help Project**

Some of the sub centres had made good collaboration with human resource development institution for starting the self help projects in many places in the late fifties. These projects were conducted with the guidance of the leaders of the Kerala Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi and the representatives of certain other likeminded institutions. By the help of Kerala Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi, this project has been started in Mangalam in Palakad and as such they
conducted several selfemployment training courses to the youth. Besides, some of the areas for the training are in seeding nurseries and bio-fertilisers. Camps organised by the project focused more on the relevance of traditional employments as well as the propagation of Gandhian ideologies in the society.[Nair,P.Gopinathan:2003:p26]

4.8. Community Organisation Projects

Gandhi Smarak Seva Kendram in Palakad was started as a community organisation project under the help of Indo-Germen Fisheries Department mainly for the welfare of the downtrodden people and the families belonging to the fish co-operative units living near the dam of Mangalam. During that period very few organisations were genuinely interested and had commitment for the development of targeted groups, other than government agencies. But this project really focused on the development of women, children and self employment programmes. Many other sub centres also started community organisation projects with the help of the Government and some other agencies.

4.9. Self–Help Groups

Many years before Gandhi Smaraka Grama Seva Kendram has been started, the Self Help Groups in Kerala had provided job opportunities to the people living in the rural sector. Common women are more active and vibrant in the formation and function of the Self Help Groups. The Number of people in each Self-Help Groups is between ten and twenty. One of the major programmes of some of the Centre was to link the people with banks. The workers received funds from these banks to start various self employment programmes. In some Sub Centres men had also started Self Help Groups and are working in a very active and enthusiastic manner.
4.10. Poverty Eradication Programmes

Though we got freedom in 1947, even today many people in our country are below poverty line at various places. This cannot be wiped out very easily mainly because of some invisible problems encircled in the social and economic systems of our society. People living in the coastal areas of Kerala used to confront the extreme level of poverty. There the subcentres of the Kerala Gandhi Smarak Nidhi have extended help by providing them with fishing materials and guidance to overcome the situation. Poverty eradication from rural sector is the main agenda kept by Kerala Gandhi Smarak Nidhi throughout their function because this was the one of the prime desires upheld by Gandhiji in his life [Radhakrishnan, N: 2011: Aug-3]. Officials of the Kerala Gandhi Smarak Nidhi believed that starting of khadi and village industries would help to alleviate poverty and create more job opportunities.

4.11. General intervention of the KGSN in Social Fields

One of the greatest desires of the Kerala Gandhi Smarak Nidhi is to work for the development of the people living in the rural community, especially in Kerala at the time of the natural calamities like earthquake, floods and fire. In such situations Nidhi’s workers would reach the places and assist the people in a dynamic manner. The Kerala Gandhi Smarak Nidhi has provided financial assistances and machineries to the people who are working in the coir field which provided more employment opportunities.

4.11.1. Work against Drugs and Alcohol Consumption

Addiction to Drugs and alcohol is a serious problem among the people. This habit had become a curse and nuisance to the society. It is true
that these people may get comfort and relaxation for the time being. But it will be very sad when they have to face the real situations. The number of cancer patients is increasing day by day all around the world because of the use of drugs and other intoxicated items. Smoking not only injures the health of the one who engages in it, but also affects the nearby people through passive inhalation.

In 1955 Mr. Kelapaji has conducted several satyagrahas against the practice alcohol consumption in Kerala. But from 1970 onwards the KGSN and other likeminded Gandhian organisation, known as Sarvodaya Mandal had worked continuously for the prohibition of alcohol in Kerala. Based on this issue KGSN had been organising several camps, rallies and open meetings in many places of Kerala. In connection with this programme, members who got training from the Gandhi Bhavan in Thiruvananthapuram visited several places and supplied pamphlets to the people to make them aware of the harmful effects of toddy consumption and drug addiction. Influenced by the Gandhian ideologies, even women had organised satyagraha and picketing against the toddy shops in many places. Almost all Sub Centres had very actively participated with the movement against alcohol consumption by joining with some other organisations and social activists in the state.

Drug addiction and Alcohol Consumption may lead to the destruction of the families. Alcohol addiction would destroy the potentialities of the people and become a menace even to the society.

4.11.2. Arts and Cultural Programmes

The Gandhi Smaraka Grama Seva Kendram is always in the forefront to preserve the age old indigenous cultural festivals and arts of Kerala. These
centres used to organise dance, bhajans, thiruvathira competition and sports for the members, during the time of festival seasons. These kinds of activities helped to maintain good relationship and social bondage between the individuals and the society. On these occasions members and officials of Gandhi Smaraka Grama Seva Kendram gather together and performed cultural activities in a very pleasing way.

4.11.3. Actions against Cow Slaughtering

Some sect and religious groups of people in our country have considered cow as sacred and gave respect and adorations to this animal. On the contrary, some people used to consume the flesh of cows. This created fight and animosity between these two groups in the last few centuries.

Cow slaughtering had become a serious issue even at the time of Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhiji has strongly protested against this practice. Vinobhaji the great companion of Mahatmaji strongly argues that government should issue order for curtailing the practice of cow slaughtering. However a law was passed in India against the cow slaughtering when Morarji Desai was the Prime Minister. But this law is exempted in two states of India which are Kerala and Bengal. As per the view of Vinobhaji and some experts, in India most of the people depend on agriculture for their survival. Considering this matter in an economic purview, preservation of cow is very essential. In our country cow is the main source for milk production and its manure is being used in a bulk manner for various cultivations.

Presently people depend more on petrol and some other fuels for industries and transportation. We cannot predict the availability of this natural resource in the world for ever. The amount of this natural resource is
reducing day by day. In future there are even chances that people especially in the third world country, will be prompted to depend more on cow as an alternative resource for various purposes. Looking at this matter in a Gandhian concept of non-violence manner, none can justify the cow slaughtering process which is prevalent in our country. This was the main view emphasized by the workers of Gandhian organisations in Kerala and outside [Nair, P. Gopinathan :2003:p59].

The Gandhi Bhavan in Thiruvananthapuram was the main centre for organising the satyagraha against the cow slaughtering in Kerala. Committees were formed in the Gandhi Bhavan and in each district for the agitation. Many eminent people had participated with this agitation programmes throughout Kerala. Later on, the officials of the organisation had met the prominent people belonging to the Christian and Muslim community. Their aim was to find an amicable solution for this burning issue. This issue should be viewed in an economic view point than in a religious outlook. However, people belonging to the Hinduism consider cow as very sacred animal. Based on this movement government has given the approval that order should be made in near future against the killing of young cows. In short this agitation movement led by the KGSN has helped to create general awareness about the preservation of cows in our society.

4.11.4. Work against the Practice of Untouchability

In the historical data, it had been very clearly depicted that many bad and evil social practices were prevalent in Kerala either by the support of religious dogmas or cultural taboos. Swami Vivakanda once asserted that this state is the den of mad people. But with the arrival of social reformers great changes took place in the social system of our state. In the Hindu
community various sections were kept out based on casteism and this has created the practice of untouchability. The role taken by the KGSN is very much appreciable for the upliftment of adivasis communities, the service to the Harijan society and against the practice of untouchability in our society. [Shriman Narayanan:1976:p128]

4.11.5. Constructive Programme

The programmes conducted by the KGSN, for the development of rural people coincided with the ‘Constructive Programmes’ as envisaged by Gandhiji. In the eighteen programmes Gandhiji has mentioned all issues in the areas of social, political and economic fields. So the KGSN had taken great interest and commitment for the successful implementation of the ‘constructive programme’ throughout Kerala through its Sub Centres.

“The Kerala Gandhi Smarak Nidhi is a unique organisation, which has attempted from the beginning, to concretise almost all the aspects of Gandhian ‘Constructive Programmes’, literally all over the State, right from Parasala in the South to Kasargode in the North. It was bold enough to attempt this daunting task, because of the firm resolve of a galaxy of leaders, social activities and field workers, whom the founding fathers could identify and bring in its fold.”[Subramanian, T.R:2003:p 91]

4.12. Objectives of the Kerala Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi (KGSN)

The officials of the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi had always kept some ideologies and principles from the beginning of its activities which are self-sufficiency, simple life, universal brotherhood, non-violence and people oriented economic system, truthfulness, total development and permanent peace. From 1951 onwards the KGSN’s attention was focused more on the
village development work. The KGSN took initiatives and encouraged them to work hard and take responsibilities.

4.13. Case Studies

4.13.1. Activities of the Kerala Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi in Kazhakuttom Block

The activities of the Kerala Gandhi Smarak Nidhi in Kazakootom have attained great attention. This centre was mainly engaged with milk production. Here Banks helped them by giving loans for buying cows, buffaloes and goats to the people below the poverty line for finding employment and earning for the livelihood. It was possible only by the initiative of the Kerala Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi. On certain occasions the doctors had also assisted various development activities incorporated with milk production. The Nidhi had taken direct responsibility for the supply of milk. To some extent this attempt has helped to reduce the level of exploitation which existed in connection with the production and supply of milk. Particularly Nidhi had used certain apparatus for assessing the quality of the milk supplied by the farmers and fixed its price based on the quality measurement.

Veterinary hospitals situated near the centre used to provide proper treatment and artificial insemination to the cows. Besides, the depot working close to the centre used to supply the cattle-feeds to the farmers at a reasonable rate. Since it fetched good results the centre has planned to start various milk collection units in far and near locations. People became satisfied and strongly participated in the centre’s each and every initiative. Meanwhile the centre had a plan to start a plant which produced dairy products such as ice-cream, sweets, ghee and butter. For this function, technical help and advice was provided by an organisation known as ‘World
Neighbour’. It had been formed for the welfare of the milk farmers and had given training to the farmers by using the services of the experts in this field. Experiments conducted in Chegottukonnom show that the cattle provide more milk to the farmers when they are given proper care and fodder. Officials were interested to adopt the very successful method used by the greatest milk project in Gujarat known as Anand.

“The Chenkottukonam unit of the Nidhi had been organising the rural people since the sixties and encouraging them to solve their problems to an extent through mutual help. This had at best helped to build an emotional relationship among the people of that area.”[Thampi, K.M: 1983: Sep-27]

The Gandhi Smarak Nidhi had also persuaded the women to start backyard gardens by supplying to them seeds and guidance. Manure came in handy here. They were also encouraged to grow whatever little fodder they could in their small plots [ibid].

Today Chenkottukonam is a contented village. A section of the villagers are gradually crossing the poverty line. The financial condition of the poor is also improving slowly. The full credit for this change should go to the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi. It showed through practice, once again that Gandhian ideas are not only quite relevant in the Indian context but also the only hope for the changing of rural India.

4.13.2. Activities the of Kerala Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi (KGSN) in Adimalathura Village

Adimalathura in Thiruvananthapuram district is one of the least developed villages in Kerala. In 1970 people living in this place did not have their own property. Most of the people were illiterate and faced many problems in their life. Fishing was the main profession of the people. Lack of pure drinking water was one of the main problems confronted by the people
here. Almost all places were dirty and filthy. Due to the addiction of drugs and alcohol several families had been broken and had huge debts. This village was in the coastal area. In 1975 Kerala Gandhi Smarak Nidhi had adopted this village. First priority of the KGSN was to start a Grama Sabha here. Gradually the centre had started crèches, nurseries, dispensaries, feeding centres. In short the attempts made by the Kerala Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi were the reasons for the cultural and economic development of the village.[Nair, P.Gopinathan: 2003: pp 47-48]

4.13.3. The Experiment of the KGSN in two Villages-Chowara and Venniyoor

Gandhi Smarak Nidhi had also adopted two villages Chowara and Venniyoor. Unemployment was a great problem faced by the people here. Here the vegetable cultivations have been improved after the implementation of balance farming systems. The adoption process had helped to improve the employment opportunities and overall empowerment of women. Gradually it helped the betterment of financial situations of these two villages.

In 1995 under the initiative of the Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi Chairman, Mr. K. Janardhana Pillai a Grama Sabha committee had formed and started various levels of development activities.

‘The by-laws for both the Grama Sabhas uphold that its main objective is to attain the overall development of the community and individuals, irrespective of caste and politics, in the field of education, public health, constructing houses, irrigation schemes, running nursery schools and industrial units on a no profit no loss basis and bringing about a social revolution’[ibid:p75].

In the beginning people believed that this project was done with the initiatives of foreign funds. So they had not shown any interest in joining the
functions and programmes. Later they understood that the Gandhian Philosophy is incorporated with these social welfare programmes.

Gandhi’s mind was always focusing on the development of the poor, marginalized people living in the villages of India. Gandhi Smarak Nidhi’s attempt helped to introduce Gandhijis principles in a very systematic manner.

Death of Mahatmaji had caused great agony and pain among the common people. Some of his followers had decided to form a Trust, so that memories of Mahatmaji would remain always. Ultimately, this has helped to form an organisation known as Gandhi Smarak Nidhi and it has many branches in several states. The Kerala Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi has been working very extensively among the rural people from the time of its formation. This organisation has providing various levels of assistances to several social organisations working among the rural masses in the state. Interestingly, some prominent people in Kerala had participated with the activities of this organisation.

This organisation’s activities in the field of propagation of Gandhian ideologies, social and economic fields have got great attention all over the state and in National level. They are communal harmony, self employment training and employment generation. Each autonomous grama seva centres had the right to frame the work based on the needs and interests of the common people. From 1990 onwards some of the centres formed Self Help Groups (SHG) among the rural people to generate more employment and self sufficiency in villages. At the same time throughout the last few years and for last few decades this organisation has conducted several experiments with the help of experts in order to improve the life styles of the rural people.
In short, they are always in the forefront to fulfil Gandhiji’s concept of village Swaraj and the development of the last and the least. Success of this organisation was mainly due to the commitment of its members and their emphasis on social justice has been satisfied.

Our objective formulated on the functions of the Kerala Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi through the G.S.G.S.K in Mararikulam has been fully elaborated in the foregoing analysis.

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