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ROLE OF VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATIONS OF SCHEDULED CASTES IN THEIR DEVELOPMENT IN KISHTWAR (J&K)



Dr. Anoop Kumar

Assistant Professor , Department of Sociology,
Govt. M.A.M PG College, Jammu (J&K)

ABSTRACT

In democratic societies people's organizations play an important role in strengthening democracy. In development societies where democracy has a recent history, people's organizations also have a recent past and emergence. Though people organising for some common goals following some saints and preachers have a longer history in India but for attaining secular objectives organizations coming in between the state and the people as voluntary organizations is largely a phenomenon of democratic era. During the period of more than last half a century numerous such organizations have emerged as voluntary organizations. Such organizations have been formed by specific groups or initiated by individuals. In case of the downtrodden groups like the scheduled castes, the emergence of such organizations is comparative new. In states like Jammu & Kashmir where scheduled castes population is (7.6%) much less than the national average of (16.6%), such organizations have also started emerging. Such organizations at grass root level in such situations, is a recent phenomenon. The present paper seeks to explore emergence (establishment), aims, functions and actual role playing of a voluntary organization of scheduled castes at local level in Kishtwar district of Jammu & Kashmir.

KEY WORDS : Non-Government Organizations, Voluntary Organizations, Socio-economic upliftment, Scheduled Caste, Downtrodden.

INTRODUCTION

In democratic societies people's organizations play an important role in strengthening democracy. In development societies where democracy has a recent history, people's organizations also have a recent past and emergence. Though people organising for some common goals following some saints and preachers have a longer history in India but for attaining secular objectives organizations coming in between the state and the people as voluntary organizations is largely a phenomenon of democratic era. During the period of more than last half a century numerous such organizations have emerged as voluntary organizations. Such organizations have been formed by specific groups or initiated by individuals. In case of the downtrodden groups like the scheduled castes, the emergence of such organizations is comparative new. In states like Jammu & Kashmir where scheduled castes population is (7.6%) much less than the national average of (16.6%), such organizations have also started emerging. Such organizations at grass root level in such situations, is a recent phenomenon. The present paper seeks to explore emergence (establishment), aims, functions and actual role playing of a voluntary organization of scheduled castes at local level in Kishtwar district of Jammu & Kashmir. The case study is analysed in the frame work of the theory of voluntary organizations. The aims, conditions, of emergence, the role played by the organization and its manifest and latent functions are examined in order to depict the nature of such organization which has emerged in a specific situation and formed by individuals of a specific group namely the

scheduled castes.

In the following section a conceptual frame work, typology and functions of voluntary organizations presented. In the next section the case study is described by focusing upon its conditions of emergence, aims and objectives and actual role played for their own people. The manifest and latest functions are also noted. Lastly the findings of the case study are analysed on the conceptual dimensions of the voluntary organizations.

CONCEPTUAL FRAME WORK:

In general the term voluntary organization or association means an organized group of persons (1) that is formed in order to further some common interest of its members, (2) in which members is voluntary in the sense that is neither mandatory nor acquired by birth and (3) this exists independently of the state. In this board sense voluntary associations include all labour unions, foundations, private school societies, universities, cooperatives, political parties and religious organizations (Sills, 1968: 364-5).

Recent writings (e.g. Oommen, 1975:163-80) on voluntary organizations indicate that these develop in two specific contexts. First, in the problem of dehumanization as manifested in the disappearances of primary groups, resulting in creation of emotionally starved and socially uprooted individuals. The second is the context of increasing concentration of power in the hands of central authority with its monopoly on press and propaganda apparatus, creating a vacuum between the state and the citizens, offering a fertile ground for demagogues and ideologies to manipulate the masses thus paving the way for totalization regime. In such contexts there come to exist or emerge a number of "secondary powers" i.e. the voluntary organizations which are independent of state (Tocqueville : 1892 quoted by Oommen: 1975). These associations, along with autonomy of local bodies (e.g. municipalities) serve to prevent authoritarianism of centre-state and help to stabilize democracy. Thus the voluntary associations are believed to act as instruments of pluralism as they play a critical role in democratic system in making it possible that citizens influence the government.

The socio-cultural, historical and structural contextual situations of different societies vary from each other. Despite all this they may have to be democratic to provide ground for the emergence of voluntary organizations. The structure and functioning also vary from society to society and also vary even within one society. Thereby social science scholars have given various typologies e.g. in American context voluntary organizations have been classified into eight types. (1) civic and service association, (2) lodges and fraternal, (3) churches and religious, (4) social and recreational, (5) economic, occupational and professional, (6) veterans, military, patriotic, (7) cultural, alumni (8) political and pressure groups. This typology indicates various fields of action where organizations have emerged due to interest of various groups and citizens have a very high degree of freedom in regard to the formation of associations. Other classification includes the size as a basis and thus major, minor and medial associations are depicted as types. Major type of voluntary organizations include like the national associations of business, professions, scientific, labour etc. Minor associations are such as of minorities, small groups, clubs, ethnic associations etc. The medial type are those which mediate between major segments or institutions in a society like teacher – parent association which mediate between family and school system, or social welfare organization which mediate between state and citizens. Another classification focuses upon "social influence type" and "expressive type". Social influence type are those which act as interest groups or pressure groups, offer a platform for community influentials to further their goals including political interest thus acting as dispersal of powers in the society. Expressive type organizations cater to the emotional needs of its members, perform the role of primary groups.

An important typology is suggested in terms of functions of these organizations. The 'instrumental' and the 'expressive' type. Instrumental type includes those which are designed to maintain or create some normative conditions or change those which seem to realize the goal outside the organization. The instrumental type may further be divided into those which (1) serve predominantly economic interest and (ii) which serve predominantly political interest. The Expressive type caters to the emotional needs of members and thus satisfy the need of primary group, personal touch and sharing. There is also mixed type, instrumental cum expressive type.

In the Indian context, other than instrumental and expressive types, if viewed from the perspective of

origin, we find (1) those which are extensions of traditional structures such as religious caste associations and (2) those which are newly inducted into the system such youth clubs, cooperatives, trade unions, the first type tend to modernize or secularize traditional structures to fit into the modern structures and the latter type of get traditionalized while performing modern functions (Oommen, 1975: 163-80). Thus the voluntary organizations in a traditional society like India, appear to play an important role by acting as link or bridge between tradition and modernity. These associations / organizations appear to accelerate the process of differentials and effect structural integration by combining instrumental and expressive functions simultaneously. They play a vital role in social progress of society in various fields of social life. They prove to be means by which a nation makes full use of resources. In this sense they play a role in creating a welfare state. India has long history voluntary organizations emerging in the works of rehabilitation, relief and social work in the fields of health, education, rural development, women's upliftment and anti-untouchability programmes etc. (Sachchidananda, 1988: 194-95).

Various functions are said to be performance by voluntary organizations. They may be manifest or latent. Several functions for society and others for individuals have been noted. For society (1) mediation – they mediate between primary groups and the state (ii) integration of subgroups – like minority groups, ethnic groups, (iii) affirmation and expression of values in patriotic societies and political parties (iv) perform governing functions by participating in the decision making or acting like pressure groups. For individuals they are said to provide (1) integration through participation, removing loneliness, learning norms, acquiring information etc. (ii) provide training in various skills of organization by membership of committees, writing proceedings, reports, discussions etc. and (iii) acting against dehumanization by cultivating and integrating emotional feeling or members.

The voluntary organizations also provide for social influence and also fulfil expressive functions. Further the instrumental type of voluntary organizations act as catalysts in achieving collective social, economic, and political goals of the members. Other functions are political educational, mobilization and formation of interest groups, promoting various types of development works like rural development (Natrajan, 1980: 158-61), and facilitate the gigantic tasks of the government (Rao, 1984 : 22-24). In some cases voluntary association also promote entrepreneurship (Pundir : 1998).

Thus it may be briefly stated that

- i) Voluntary organizations are organized groups of persons and generally (a) are formed to further some common interest of their members, (b) in which members is voluntary in the sense that it is neither mandatory nor acquired through birth and (c) that they exist independently of the state.
- ii) Voluntary organizations are broadly classified as (a) major (b) minor and (c) medial depending upon their size and area of operation.
- iii) Voluntary organizations are said to perform various functions for the individuals as well as for the society.

These functions are further classified as manifest and latent functions. For individuals they serve the function of social integration, training and act against dehumanization. For society they serve to provide for mediation, integration of subgroups, affirmation, governance and initiating social change. They play a crucial role for political/ education and mobilization aimed at creating small and big pressure groups. By acting as link or bridge between state and people they facilitate community services and development and welfare programmes.

It is in this conceptual frame – work, typologies and functions a voluntary organization of the scheduled castes which has come into existence during the last few years in Doda district of Jammu and Kashmir is analysed.

VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATION OF SCHEDULED CASTES : A CASE STUDY

A voluntary organization "Youth Welfare Association" was established by a few scheduled caste educated youth in 1991 at Kishtwar, at tehsil level in district Doda in Jammu and Kashmir. These were some college students who organized youths of their community and then formally established this organization. They felt that they constitute a group, with certain common feelings, did share that their community members were deprived of the status and facilities that other groups were enjoying. They felt difficulties in getting benefits

which provided by the state for them as scheduled castes, and they were felt that those difficulties could be lessened if in a group and asserted collectively.

The known aims of the voluntary organization, as projected by the members are (1) to fight for the upliftment, betterment and socio-economic gains for scheduled castes peoples of the area, namely Kishtwar (2) To look at the implementation of the state policies and programmes of rural development initiated for the scheduled castes by the state, (3) To enhance and facilitate education among the scheduled castes, (4) To see the proper distribution of scholarships to the scheduled castes students, (5) To undertake any other activities and works which may be necessary and facilitating for the socio-economic development of scheduled castes.

The "Youth Welfare Association" became a registered body before 1997. As per their memorandum the organization holds election for the executive body. The executive body consists of President, Vice President, General Secretary, Secretary, Treasurer, Publicity Secretary and members. Among the members, besides the office bearers they nominate two active members from every scheduled caste majority village, thus the structure of organization consists of President, Vice President, General Secretary, Secretary (organizer), Publicity Secretary, Treasurer and twenty two active members from the nearby scheduled castes majority villages around Kishtwar. Kishtwar is the head quarter of the organization. The written decisions / resolutions are conveyed to the officials at Block / Tehsil, district and state level. They hold meetings frequently. Till 1997 majority or most of the decisions about activities have been taken unanimously.

The voluntary organization, 'Youth Welfare Association', of Scheduled castes, has been playing its role in several activities which they feel may help in socio-economic development of scheduled castes in general and the youths and students in particular in the area of Tehsil Kishtwar. Some of activities have been observed are –

1)The organization had got prepared one thousand certificates of the scheduled caste students, as belonging to caste and of income, which necessary for scholarship. Whatever little expenses, incurred were born by the organization from its funds.

2)A MNC company was working in the area, undertaking the construction work of a Hydro Electric project. They observed that scheduled caste people were not given any employment in this project. This organization contacted state level and local authorities, complained to them that no place was given to their people, no reservation was followed in the employment. They also protected against, has relay strike and a hunger strike for fifteen days. The organization also demanded reservation quota in small contracts of the projects given to the local people. By all these efforts and modes of action they succeeded in convincing the authorities upto the state level and as a consequence 8% in employment was given to the scheduled castes.

3)The members of the organization keep a close watch on the programmes of the rural development which are implemented. They watch it by visiting the Block office frequently. Whatever programmes are going on the members act as a means of communication for their rural brethren. In taking benefits they helped the actual recipients at different stages like giving information, filling their applications, approval from the Block Development Office and sanctioning by bank and other communities.

4. Several contracts of the government are given at the block level in the garb of development programmes. They asserted and much of time forced the block officials to grant contracts to scheduled caste people in scheduled castes majority villages. They stopped the officials from granting such contracts to non-scheduled castes people.

5)Some of the members of the organization have also been able to procure contracts of development work for themselves.

6)At the wider level the organization has been able to establish direct contacts with DRDA at district level and the Director (Rural Development) at the state head quarter.

7)The organization holds weekly meetings in villages and take note of the problems their brethren are facing in different arena, particularly in making use of the programmes of rural development and education of the youth. This is how they take feed back and organize their further activities.

8)The members of the organization have been particularly active in looking at and providing insemination of information, helping in getting certificates and papers required from lower officials for use in any case of making use of facilities initiated by the state like loans, subsidies, admissions and scholarships to youths and in their employment.

9) The organization has acted to the extent that its representative is invited at the Tehsil level when applications of scheduled castes for loans and small development projects are examined. At the block level they work so actively that their recommendation in scheduled castes cases' is given importance. The block officials do not send any such proposals without their knowledge.

ANALYSIS OF THE CASE AND FINDINGS :

The case study suggests that the voluntary organization of scheduled castes has emerged get established when a group of scheduled castes felt deprived, feeling of low status and deprivation was commonly shared by a number of individuals. Education, being youth and feelings of deprivation when shared promoted the emergence of the organization. The availability of a number of such individuals, occasions – the college life in a town, observations of difficulties on their part as well as on the part of their guardians / parents in the rural and urban area, specific difficulties in tackling the officials in their educational matters for getting facilities meant for them (scheduled castes) appear to be important promoting factors. In addition to that growing awareness about their rights and facilities available but difficulties in getting them also added to the conditions of emergence.

Every organization for recognition needs to get approval of members to form a group and formal recognition from a group and formal recognition from the offices of the government is also required. The exposure to the urban situation, growing awareness and acquiring knowledge made up the organization as a registered organization.

The formal requirements of memorandum were fulfilled by members who initiated, they being educated. The objectives listed indicate that the world view of the organization show that the organization is meant for a specific section of society, namely the scheduled castes.

Looking at the role of performance i.e. activities undertaken by the organization also shows that their role is confined to the welfare of their own group i.e. the scheduled castes in general and of the members of the organization in particular. Getting a thousand certificate issued for their younger brethren and ensuring the contracts of work and reservation for their community are the works done for the social group or community as whole. Further getting place in committee for speedy processing of small development projects of individual beneficiaries and helping them at different stages from information to filling of application forms, obtaining certificates etc. are added to the community welfare and developmental work.

Individual members of the organization from among the founders and office bearers also got contracts in their names. Thus surving their own individual gain goes against or away from the manifest objectives of the organization. These individual members also act as middlemen in the process of getting benefits by individual beneficiaries. Thus they are coming out to be their leaders. They also get support of the individual beneficiaries to whom they have helped. On the committees at block level and tehsil level office bearers or members got nominated for processing of individual beneficiaries' applications. Thus select members of the organization have achieved certain level of authority and influence which they neither experienced earlier nor were supposed to get such right with out making such as organization.

Thus there appear to be different functions being fulfilled by the organization – for the community as a whole, for individual beneficiaries, and for the individual members (leading members) of the voluntary organization.

On the basis above analysis we may depict the findings from the case study as follows –

- 1) The voluntary organization appears to have emerged due to the apprehension of conditions of deprivation – and its shared awareness. This is perfectly voluntary in the sense that members themselves come up voluntarily. This has also a traditional basis – belongingness to the same social group i.e. scheduled castes.
2. It appears like a minor organization, made up of a specific group in a specific small area of operation for taking care of the welfare and development of a specific group.
3. The organization appears to serve a community or a group not the whole society. This also appears to serve the individuals, and individual members of the organization.
4. It has manifest functions for the community members, but benefits going to a few leading members, their

socialization in creating influence, thus training for leadership etc. appear to be latent functions of the voluntary organizations.

5. The organization appears to bring integration among members of scheduled caste as a community simultaneously segregation from other groups thus serving the subgroup. It appears to be playing some role of political education and mobilization and creating conditions of a pressure group atleast at the local level and of course it played a mediating role between the state functionaries and the people of scheduled castes.

The above seem to be the positive aspects of a newly formed voluntary organization. But the time span has been very small, in its infancy it appears to work smoothly and positively but still some cases of development schemes could not be completed till the information was available. Similarly some individual beneficiaries projects were also not reached the final stage of getting benefits. Thus view from another angle the achievements are still limited and longer time shall speak of the final gain and affirmation of the role of the voluntary organization. The beginning has taken place.

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Dr. Anoop Kumar

Assistant Professor , Department of Sociology, Govt. M.A.M PG College,
Jammu (J&K)

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