
An Analytical Study of Role of Religious Institutions in Social Development

- With Special Reference to Selected Religious Institutions of India

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Abstract

Religious institutions exist all along the various decades. But at present they have their active participation in social, economic and spiritual activities. Among all, its role in societal development is more, because, social development leads to economic development. These two developments are like the two faces of the same coin. It means if religious institutions provide education and health facilities, it contributes to social development. In backward areas, religious institutions establish health and educational institutions even before the Government and thereby contribute to the overall development. This paper leads to study of contributions of some national level religious institutions to social development of India. Among number of religious institutions, only few institutions are selected for study.

Keywords: Religious Institutions, Social Development, Education, Health.

Introduction

Most of the religions originated in India, and others that started elsewhere found fertile ground for growth here. Followers of Hinduism, a varied group with philosophical and devotional traditions, are officially numbered 687.6 million people or 82 percent of the population in the 2011 census. The ancient monastic traditions, Buddhism and Jainism, have had a major influence on Indian art, philosophy, and society and remain important minority religions of the twenty first century. Buddhists represented 0.8 percent of the total population while Jains represented 0.4 percent in a recent survey.

The number of Religious Institutions are working in Socio-Economic Development of India such institutions are Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam (TTD) Religious Organisation, Ramakrishna Mission, Matha Amritanandhamayi Math, Chinmaya Mission, Sathy Sai Baba(SSB) Institution and

Dera Sackhand Ballan (DSB). Adi Chunchanagiri Institution, Tharalabalu Religious Institution and Sri Darmasthal Manjunatheswara Religious Institution(SDM). Jagadguru Sri Shivarathreeswara (JSS) Institution and Mysore Diocese Education System (MDES, St.Joseph)) Institution.

Objectives

1. To understand the concept of religious institutions in general
2. To analyse the role of selected religious institutions in particular.

Methodology

The paper prepared by the use of secondary data. The secondary data have collected through reports, thesis, journals, institutions magazines and internet sources. The analysis is in descriptive in nature. The social variables like education, health and social service are considered for study.

Concept of Social Development

Pandey defined "social Development as a process that results in the improvement of the quality of life of people, an equitable distribution of resources and special measures that will enable marginal groups and communities to move in to mainstream".

United Nations at the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen in 1995, and in subsequent adoption of the Millennium Declaration of 2000, which enshrines the Millennium Development goals. These are comprised of eight broad goals which are broken down in to 18 specific targets, including the reduction of poverty, improvement in school attendance, the promotion of gender equity, reduction in child and maternal mortality and enhanced international cooperation. Today, the Millennium Development Goals exemplify the statist definition of social development.

Religious Institutions and Social Development

Religious Institutions and Social development are interrelated. Social development is the process of improving social conditions of the people in a society. For over decade religious organizations have played a role in social & economic development. Today, however, there is a growing awareness of the contribution that these organizations can make to sustainable development. Religious institutions are among some of the oldest providers of services and care to their communities. There is a growing body of literature highlighting the positive role of religious institutions that can play an eliciting social and economic change.

In the context of very weak state, more attention was focused, in the 1990s on the role of religious organizations in the delivery of health services and in the extension of charity and

relief, as well as the provision of educational services. Former president of the World Bank, James Wolfensohn, was intrigued by the critical role of religious organizations played in the delivery of health in some African contexts. He set up partnerships between the World Bank and religious organizations and helped channel resources to them.

An Analysis of Role of Some Important Religious Institutions of India

The Religious Institutions play an important role in improving the livelihood status of people in general, because in modern days, these institutions are not only performing spiritual activities, but also these are serving the overall socio-economic development of people by undertaking many socio-economic activities and providing large employment opportunities by establishing educational and health centres. The present study explains the role of few religious institutions serving in India. Important religious institutions are:

The Role of Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) in Social Development

Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) is an independent trust which manages the Tirumala Venkateshwara Temple at Tirumala in Andhra Pradesh. TTD was established in 1932 and It is indeed a vast organization with multifarious activities and huge resources. The trust oversees the operations and finances of the richest and the most visited religious centre in the world. It is also involved in various social, religious, literary, health and educational activities within Andhra Pradesh and India. TTD employs more than 9000 employees to maintain the 12 temples and sub-shrines under its control along with the execution of its social activities. The activities of the TTD are not only confined to the propagation of Hindu religion but also launching various schemes and programmes for the social upliftment of the people in the country.

Educational Development

It was in 1943, on the suggestion of V. Raghunadha Reddy the Chairman of TTD Trust Board, the Tirumala Trirupathi Devasthanam committee resolved to start a First Grade Degree College at Tirupati to look after the academic needs of a vast number of students belonging to the Rayalaseema District.

In 1945, Sri Venkateswara Arts College for Men (Popularly known as S.V Arts College) housed has stored in the old Gosala was started with a modest strength of 80 students in Intermediate and B.A courses with History, Logic, Telugu, English, Hindi, Sanskrit, Tamil, Mathematics, Physics and Chemistry as optional subjects. An eminent academician and administrator, Prof. K. Rami Reddy was the Founder Principal. Pushpathota Hostel started was in 1948 to shelter around 200 students from outside Tirupati. Hostel college were

shifted to its new premises in 1951 where B.COM and B.SC degree courses were introduced in the same year. It started N.C.C in 1953. After inception of Sri Venkateswara University in 1954, the magnificent building with the entire infrastructure was magnanimously handed over by the TTD management to the University. The college was shifted back to its old Gosala building.

In the second decade (1955-65), the TTD management constructed another new building for the college in Kapilatheertham Road and had to sacrifice it, this time to the Government for establishing a polytechnic to cater the needs of Rayalaseema students aspiring for technical excellence. The two year Intermediate course was replaced by the one year Pre-University course in 1957-58 and Pre-Professional course was introduced during 1962-64 for the benefit of the students of M.B.BS, B.V.Sc and B.Sc (Ag) B.Sc course with Mathematics, Physics and Chemistry, Botany and Zoology and Chemistry Physics & Zoology as combinations were introduced in 1964. The third decade (1965-75) saw the introduction of Evening Courses in BA and B.Com in 1966 and the Intermediate in 1972. The College was further shifted to its present premises, a magnificent and imposing building in 1967 with a new hostel right behind the college. Silver Jubilee of the college was celebrated in 1970. A study centre of Dr. B.R Ambedkar Open University (then A.P Open University) was started on the campus in 1983, which has now become a Regional Co-ordination Centre.)

Health Development

Sri Venkateswara Poor Home

Sri Venkateswara poor home is a hospital that caters to the needs of leprosy patients. It is one of the largest of its kind in India, and admits persons suffering from various forms of leprosy, from all over India. The hospital is well-equipped, with twenty inpatient wards. The outpatient block has an operation and physiotherapy section. Patients are treated with intensive multi-drug therapy and given physiotherapy. They are also educated about the prevention and care of leprosy. The average duration of treatment varies from six to eighteen months.

TTD set up the Leprosy Rehabilitation Promotional Unit (LRPU) in 1988 in the Sri Venkateswara Poor Home campus at Tirupati under the national Leprosy Eradication Programme of the Government of India. The Government of India provides full financial assistance of Rs.4 lakh annually. The objective of LRPU is to provide reconstructive surgery and artificial prosthetic support to leprosy patients and help them in rehabilitation. Patients are provided several facilities including free food and accommodation. The poor home has set its sights on the total eradication of leprosy in India. It aims increase awareness among the public about leprosy through health education. It keeps abreast with the latest technical know-how by deputing its staff to various medical institutions, and

conducting seminars periodically to focus on the latest trends in the treatment and rehabilitation measures.

Sri Venkateswara School for the Deaf

It was established in 1974 which imparts free general education and vocational training to deaf children, provides placement, and guides them towards becoming independent individuals. The school has 35 teaching and 30 non-teaching staff. Its management governs three schools for the deaf at Tirupathi, Bhimavaram and Warangal. Free boarding and lodging facilities are provided to boarders and free mid-day meals are provided to day scholars. Yoga is taught to help in the physical and mental development of the children. Children are trained in various sports and compete with normal children in inter-school cultural and sports competitions. TTD and other organizations, have provided job securities to a large number of students.

The Role of Ramakrishna Mission in Social Development

The Ramakrishna Mission is a philanthropic, volunteer organization founded by Ramakrishna's chief disciple Swami Vivekananda on May 1, 1897. The Mission conducts extensive work in health care. Disaster relief, rural management, tribal welfare, elementary and higher education and culture.

Educational Work

The Math and Mission run 748 educational institutions (including 12 colleges, 22 higher secondary schools, 41 secondary schools, 135 schools of other grades, 4 polytechnics, 48 vocational training centres, 118 hostels, 7 orphanages, etc) with a total student population of more than 200,000. It is apparent that Swami Vivekananda's conception of a "University" is a centre where 'man-making' and character-building education would be imparted higher values would be inculcated and all-round personalities would be formed. His own conception of a complete, all-round personality was one with "heart to feel, brain to conceive and hands to work"

Swamiji's emphasis on character as the hallmark of an educated person is well known. He emphasized at many times without number that education is not the "amount of information that is put into your brain" but the "life-building, man-making, character-making assimilation of ideas." In 1939, the Governing Body of Ramakrishna Mission took a small step in this direction by starting an institution of higher education near Belur Math called Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira. The name 'Vidyamandira' is Swamiji's own christening of the educational institution he wanted near Belur Math. Then, in 1963, Swami Vivekananda's birth centenary year, the authorities of Ramakrishna Mission submitted a proposal to the Government for the starting

the Vivekananda University. For various reasons, however the university did not materialize at that time. Efforts in this direction were made off and on in subsequent years until finally a deemed university under University Grants Commission (UGC) was established under Ramakrishna Mission's auspices. The Ministry of Human Resource Development Government of India, declared the Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Educational and Research Institute (RKMVERI) later renamed Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University under the aegis of Ramakrishna Mission, as a deemed to-be university.

In 1927, the Ashrama started a small library for the public with about 2000 books. Regular discourses on Vedanta, philosophy and Ramakrishna-Vivekananda were conducted thrice a week. Ramanam Sankirtan, Shyamnam Sankirtan and Shivnam Sankirtan were conducted on Ekadashi, Purnima and Amavasya days and a large number of devotees used to attend the same. In 1928, the Ashrama began its publication activity and 'Ramnam Sankirtan' was the first book to be published. In 1930, 'Sri Ramakrishna Upadesh' in Gujarati was published. Shri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Rajkot has been serving the poor masses of Gujarat for more than eighty years through its various philanthropic services. The ideal is 'Service to man is Service to God'.

The Ashrama hostel was started in 1932 for the education and training of poor boys from rural areas of Gujarat. Attempts are made to educate the deprived children without any distinction of caste, colour and creed. Care is taken for their all round development physical, intellectual, moral and spiritual. At present, boys passing the 10th standard and above are admitted in the hostel. The students get the rare opportunity to stay and study in the serene atmosphere of the Ashrama.

Health Development

Medical Service

The twin organizations run 15 hospitals (with 2182 beds), 125 dispensaries, and 48 mobile units which treat about 8,000,000 patients every year. Besides these, a considerable number of medical camps are organized, mostly in rural areas, where thousands of patients are treated and more than 3000 operated on for cataract free of cost every year. The Math and Mission run a medical research institute and 5 nurses' training centres.

The Charitable Dispensary of the Ashrama known as Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama Medical Centre was started long ago in 1937. The dispensary serves the needy and poor patients of Rajkot city and its surrounding areas by offering medical service. The hospital run by the Ramakrishna Mission was started in 1924, and is located right opposite the Temple. Its aim is to provide quality medical services at affordable prices. The patients are treated without any distinction of caste, creed or community. You will encounter round the clock and unstinted services of the dedicated doctors and other medical staff. There are many among them who serve on an honorary basis.

Poor patients are treated free or given concessions. You can avail on both – allopathic and homeopathic services here. Even today only Re. 1/- for registration and Re. 1/- for one day's scheduled medicines are charged in the allopathic OPD, and the Homeopathy Dept. charges Rs 15 for 7 day's medicines. The Ramakrishna Mission Mumbai conducts a number of health camps throughout the year both in rural areas and on the hospital premises. The purpose of these camps is to enable the needy to access cheap, but extremely high quality medical diagnostic/advisory help.

T.B. Clinic

Started at Chunamandi, Paharganj, in a small rented room in October 1933, "as a philanthropic institution" to serve specially the poorer sections of the community, the clinic was shifted to a comparatively spacious house near Jama Masjid in August 1934. In September 1935, the clinic was again moved to a well-ventilated and spacious building named "Hanging Bridge" near Edward Park in Daryaganj. Ramakrishna Mission had shown, for the first time in India, the efficacy of treating T.B. patients as out-patients. As there were no anti T.B. drugs available during this period, this concept was not in vogue. The statistics during the period 1933-35 proved the advantages of such treatment for poor T.B. patients who could not be admitted in a T.B. Sanatorium. The then British Government appreciated this method of Ramakrishna Mission and encouraged others to start such T.B. Clinics elsewhere also.

When the Government decided to involve NGOs under the Revised National Tuberculosis Control Programme (RNTCP), the Ramakrishna Mission Free T.B. Clinic was selected as the district centre for Karol Bagh. The clinic had adopted Direct Observed Therapy (DOT) in 1996, though the RNTCP was officially launched on 28 October 1998. The RNTCP at Ramakrishna Mission Free T.B. Clinic comprises the following components.

Clinic Wing: The clinical wing of the polyclinic provides consultation facilities in general medicine, general surgery, orthopedics, ophthalmology, pediatrics, gastroenterology, gynecology, cardiology, chest medicine, psychiatry, dermatology, urology, neurosurgery and physiotherapy.

Dental Department: The Dental department having six well-equipped dental surgeries with eminent dental surgeons is functioning well and attracts patients from in and outside Delhi.

Physiotherapy Department: The physiotherapy department is equipped with short-wave diathermy, micro-wave diathermy, ultrasonic therapy unit, infrared unit, muscle stimulator, cervical traction and lumbar traction units, both electrically operated, paraffin-wax bath, electrical massager, interferential therapy unit (I.FIT.), T.E.N.S., and Prometheus laser. Periodic eye camps are organized through a mobile medical unit and persons with cataract are operated with IOL implants free of charges. Latest instruments like the phacoemulsifier ZEISS VISALIS 100 and SIEMENS ACUSON X300 PE (Premium Edition) colour Doppler facilities are available.

Homoeopathic Dispensary: Started in a humble way at Paharganj, the general outdoor dispensary was shifted to 1, Mutiny Memorial Road in January 1933. It began to draw crowds of patients soon. It continued to be here till it was moved to the permanent home of the Mission in

October, 1935, and finally reorganized on a large scale. The foundation stone of the building where the dispensary is presently housed was laid by Shri Shankar Prasad, the then Chief Commissioner of Delhi, on May 1, 1949. A two-storeyed building on the south-west corner of the Mission premises was constructed and it was opened by the then Hon'ble Health Minister, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur on August 27, 1950. While the ground floor housed outdoor Homeopathic Dispensary, the first was used for Library. The dispensary has been serving the people of the neighborhood, particularly the poorer section of society. The dispensary functions in the morning.

Satya Sai Baba (SSB) Religious Institution

The organization which was first started as a small charitable organization in Puttaparthi during the mid-1960s has now emerged to be a well-knit purposeful and service oriented global organization. Under its pan-India umbrella are an enormous array of schools, ashrams, Sai Colleges and various charitable organizations. The main objective includes social service activities such as training children, youths and adults in the human values working in hospitals, prisons, old age homes and similar institutions, and also taking responsibility of the family, neighborhood, community and the state.

Educational Development

In this context, it is worthwhile to mention here some of the important landmarks in the contributions of SSB spiritual movement to the larger society. Programmes are oriental through establishing schools and colleges in various regions. For instance Sri Sathya Sai arts, science and commerce colleges for men and women at Anantapur, Bhopal, Jaipur, Hyderabad, and Bangalore. These college are affiliated to Sri Sathya Sai institute of higher learning, Puttaparthi which was accorded as deemed university status in India and has attained now the status of a university. The main aim of Sri Sathya Sai university is to enlighten the mind while liberating the soul. SSB believes that there are two facets of true education. The first is book knowledge, while the second teaches education in the five intrinsic and universal human values. He has termed this second aspect of education as 'Educare' which means that through education and caring for others, a person's innate human values will flourish.

SSB Hospitals

These hospitals employ western medical practices. The work efficiency of this hospital greater than that of other hospitals. Indeed, the doctors claim to perform successfully operations that would be inconceivable even in hospitals with the most modern technology. Besides establishing hospitals, Sai seva organization arranges regularly the temporary medical camps in rural areas to provide medical services to poor and needy people.

Drinking Water Project

The third major initiative taken by Sathya Sai Organization is Sri Sathya Sai drinking water supply project to the people in the drought-prone rural areas of Anantapur, Medak, and Mahaboobnagar Districts of Andhra Pradesh. As a result of the construction of reservoirs storage tanks and wells, as part of this larger project, the quality of life for these rural inhabitants has improved substantially.

One major aspect of providing social welfare service to the society in the SSB movement comes through volunteerism. According to Sai Baba, those who follow his spiritualism must spend some time every week in the community service activates. As part of this volunteerism, the SSB centers in India and in the Diaspora have taken up initiative to address some of the current problems of society such as childcare, old age care, and the HIV/AIDS awareness campaign. Some of the others are shelter for the poor in a regular basis, blood donation camps, eye screening camps, and village upliftment programs. Apart from this, the devotees participate actively at the time of natural disasters. They collect donations, both in cash and kind and distribute it to the disaster-striken people. The best examples where the Sai devotees have actively volunteered in providing relief to the victims of natural disasters are such as Orissa super-cyclone in 1999, Gujarat earthquake in 2001 and hurricane at Katrina in USA in 2005.

This illustrates work how the SSB movement started and gained momentum, and how the members of movement engaged in social service activates through the Sathya Sai Organizations, which is the ultimate aim of the movement. SSB spiritual movement today has achieved transnational status as a result of its global networking through the SSB centers and organizations across the world, as rightly pointed out by Peter Clarke "despite the ambiguity surrounding its aims in international level India's new religious movements in terms of its social composition and presence in so many countries" the social welfare service activities executed by the members of the movement to the larger society are note worthy. Despite several criticisms, The social welfare service activities of the SSB movement are recognized not only in India but every where which is obvious because of its base, but also in countries outside India where there is no significant number of Indians are present.

More recently the Satya Sai Baba(SSB) Movement achieved similar prominence in the global arena. The religious faith in the SSB spiritualism has appealed millions of people who have surrendered themselves to SSB both founder of the living transnational spiritual movement. Now it claims to have over 12 backgrounds with over 20,000 centres around the world devoted to the promulgation of his spiritual message.

Major Findings and Policy Recommendations

- India's Religious Institutions working for the socio-economic development of the people at Global level are very few such as Ramakrishna Mission, ISCKON, JSS. These religious
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institutions of India are undertaking very few socio-economic development programmes at Global level. And also they have involved in very few areas of human development. So that India's religious institutions in Global level should expand their activities relating to socio-economic field to enhance human welfare.

- The religious institutions functioning in India for the socio-economic development have focus on few areas such as education and health. And here also these institutions undertaking these functions as a commercial venture. So that these religious institutions working in India should provide their services further needy people with minimum service charge.
- Besides, education, health and spiritual activities, these religious institutions have to concentrate providing drinking water, sanitation facilities, toilets and establishing micro credit institutions, etc. for further betterment of livelihood of the people.
- At present most of the religious institutions are involved in health and educational services, now they can focus on the other areas of human development activities where human touch is there.
- These religious institutions should join hands with other religious institutions and have to function collectively for achieving the societal benefit.

Conclusion

Modern education and training have failed to produce men and leaders of character and integrity who can make India attain its past glory. Not only in India, but worldwide, there is a cry for going back to basic values. In order to produce enlightened citizens, Mission conducts Value Education Programs on Human Resources Development, Self-Development, Leadership and Personality Development etc. for students and teachers of educational institutions. These are based on time-tested Indian wisdom. It is proposed to extend the program to rural areas. Several audio visual aids have been developed to make it attractive.

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