

Educational, Cultural and Social Contributions of Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram to the Development of Tribal People in India

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ABSTRACT

For the ordinary citizen of this society are well aware that a society in which injustice and exploitation prevail cannot hope to become strong and prosperous. It is always subject to internal stresses and strains, which might well tear the social fabric apart. In fact, a touchstone for judging the health of a society is its ability to render justice and security to the lowest and humblest member within its fold. In our own society, the one most neglected and exploited section is undoubtedly that of the vanavasis, who are subject to every kind of abuse and injustice. These tribal people living in the forests are deprived of education and government benefits of ordinary citizens. Recognizing such a community, a non-governmental organization called 'Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram' is doing a lot of activities for their Securing land-rights to tribe's, freeing the bonded labour's, to the succour of poor labour's and farmard, Educational, cultural and social implifment of tribal people. Therefore, the study of its activities is very important.

Keywords: Vanavasi kalyana ashrama, Social, Health, Projects, Cultural, Education developments, Land Rights, Flood Relief, Bonded Labourer's

INTRODUCTION

The tribal communities in India suffer from a lack of both education and proper health care facilities due to various factors including government neglect. As a result, the communities often have a sense of alienation from present-day India which is being rapidly urbanized and modernized. To bring them into the mainstream with economic development but with their cultural moorings intact is an extremely important task. Akhil Bharatiya Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram (ABVKA) is dedicated to empowering these communities, by providing quality education, women's empowerment and economic development programs, as well as conducting health programs and medical camps.

Objectives of Studies:

- 1) To understand the history and cultural activities

of the tribal community.

- 2) Analyzing the educational and economic conditions of tribal people.
- 3) To understand the struggle for social rights of tribal people.
- 4) Understanding the basic objectives of Vanvasi Kalyana Ashram.
- 5) To review the activities of Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram for the all-round development of the tribals.

History of Vanavasi kalyan Ashram:

The Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram was founded in 1952 by Balasaheb Deshpande, an ex-official of the Madhya Pradesh State Department of Tribal Welfare, with the support of the State Government and the RSS. After Independence, Balasaheb was appointed by the then Ravi Shankar Shukla Government to work in tribal-dominated

Jashpur area as ‘Regional Officer’ of the ‘Tribal Development Scheme’. Its aim was to counter the appeal of Christian missionary schools to the tribals. Based in Jashpur (214 km from Raigarh), it established schools in Raigarh and Surguja districts - areas with large tribal populations. The Ashram grew rapidly and a permanent office was established in 1963, inaugurated by the RSS chief M. S. Golwalkar.

In 1977, it acquired national status (expressed in its new name, Bhâratiya Vanavâsi Kalyân Âshram). From 1978 to 1983, the number of its full-time volunteers rose from 44 to 264 (56 of whom were tribal). In Jashpur, a hospital was established, and schools, hotels, and centers for an apprenticeship in manual trades were also established in 40 villages. The programs are presently located in 312 districts throughout the country and are supervised by more than a thousand full-time workers. While most districts have primary schools, many other places have residential schools, hostels, libraries, and health centers. Important annual events include establishing medical camps, playing traditional sports, and celebrating tribal festivals.

Who We Are -What We Do:

Vanvasi's are the Tribal people living since long time away from cities; especially they live in jungle, hilly mountain areas and valleys since so many decades. “Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram” works for upliftment of these people. Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram (VKA) is the only pan-India social organisation, endeavouring for total upliftment of the tribal brethren. The organisation, founded on Dec 26th, 1952, by Sri Ramakant Keshav a.k.a. Balasaheb Deshpande has spread its wings across the country over last 72 years. Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram actively works on Educational, Agricultural, Medical and Cultural, Spiritual fronts for development of Vanvasi brothers and sisters since beginning. Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram is providing dedicated services in the areas wherever there is Vanvasi population. As per the policy of Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram, nearly half of the volunteers (including men and women) are Vanvasis. Presence of VKA can be prominently felt in all tribal-majority states of India in the form of various initiatives project and program spanning various dimensions like education, health, sports, sustainable agricultural development, religious reinforcement, and awareness of rights. It has also made a significant contribution in improving the living standards of the tribal.

Educational Activities:

Education is the right of all children and there is a special need for education in remote tribal areas. Even today, due to less number of schools, janjaati children have to travel far away for education. Quality of the education is another challenge amongst the limited number of available schools. Along with the government, many social organizations are also working in various forms for education in the janjaati areas. Due to the ideas propounded by the British in our country, many people feel that education is a matter of governance. But in reality, Indian thought process says that it is the responsibility of the society that everyone should get good education easily.

Special Project: Ekal Vidyalaya is a project that will inspire not only any janjaati youth but also all social workers as well. In a village where Ekal Vidyalaya is operational, youngster from the same village gathers children studying of different grades for 3-4 hours every day in the courtyard of any house, or in a temple or under a tree and along with formal education, tries to inculcate Sanskar as well. At present more than 2000 such Ekal Vidyalaya are being operated by Kalyan Ashram.

Cultural Activities:

Vanvasis (tribal communities) are an integral part of the broader Indian society. Their daily lives are deeply connected with their religion and culture. To ensure steadfastness in their faith and beliefs, the Shraddha Jagaran initiative is actively working. Bhajan and Satsang centers are operational in various locations, and religious events such as Yajnas (sacrificial rituals), Dharmasabhas (religious gatherings), and Padyatras (pilgrimages on foot) are organized. In these events, saints and spiritual leaders provide guidance to the community. As a result of these efforts, the awakening within the Vanvasi community has led them to reflect on what is beneficial or harmful for them. Efforts are also being made by the community to bring back those who had drifted away from their traditional faith. When Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram began its work, it started with a small hostel. However, the awakening among the Vanvasi communities around Jashpur that followed can be attributed largely to the focus on faith awakening.

Efforts such as establishing Hanuman temples in several villages, organizing the Vishnuvay in Jashpur, starting Bhajan-Satsang centers in villages, and facilitating rural visits by saints and spiritual leaders have significantly

contributed to societal awakening. These initiatives have also helped curb the problem of religious conversion.

The primary aim of the Shraddha Jagaran initiative is to make Vanvasis aware of their identity and existence, fostering a sense of pride and self-awareness about their cultural and spiritual heritage.

Sports:

Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram specifically Vanavasi Kalyan Karnataka (VKK), actively promotes sports among tribal communities by organizing sports meets, identifying talent, and training athletes in various disciplines like athletics, Kabbadi, Kho Kho, Volleyball, and Archery. They also conduct annual Vanavasi Kreed Mahotsava, a sports event where young Vanavasi athletes participate, and many athletes from these events have represented India at international events. Vanavasi kalyana has sports facilities and centers in tribal areas, particularly focusing on archery.

Arogya Rakshak Yojana:

Arogya Rakshak is the backbone of Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram activities, he/she is the one who faces all types of problems in the Tribal areas like a bhartiya sainik deployed at the borders to protect our Nation. An arogya rakshak is a young man/woman who is more educated than the rest of the rural village, he is given a medicine kit along with training for first aid treatment of the people living in the village. He also serves as a go to person in the village who conducts Shraddha Jagran activities, gram vikas activities as well as khel-kud activities. As part of Urban population it is the duty of Nagariya Samitis to provide strong supply and support lines to our rural volunteers.

Aarogya Rakshak Yojana, There are 866 arogya rakshaks in Paschim Maharashtra Prant. As Diwali is approaching, Kalyan Ashram plans to give a small gift item (Shirt and pant piece with a packet of Diwali Faral) of Rs. 500 only to each arogya rakshak. Funds need to be raised of worth 866 (no. of arogya rakshaks) 500 (gift amount), which comes to around Rs. 5 lakhs.

Social Activities:

Securing Land-Rights to Tribe's People:

The condition of tribe's in Bihar is far worse than in some other province- what with foreign missionaries, Muslim agents, greedy contractors and businessmen, government and police officers, all of them playing their

part in fleecing them. the vanavasi have also been often subject to the scourge of drought. They are then forced to mortgage their small land-holdings to Muslim money-lenders; and until the capital with interest was cleared, they could not touch the crops. It was taken away by force by the Muslims who went there in large numbers at the time of harvesting.

The vanavasi kalyana workers moved from villages to village, held meetings, roused the vanavasis against these injustices and indignities and gave a call for their massive protest demonstration on 13th November 1986 at Lohardaga. In the meanwhile, the workers mobilised the vanavasis in groups of 2-3 thousand to go and harvest the stranding crops on their lands. then, all of a sudden, the politicians and the government officials became active, in defence of the usurpers. They unleashed a counter-campaign against the demonstration and called upon the vanavasis to boycott it. Every single truck and bus carrying the vanavasis was stopped far away from Lohardaga. But the resolve of the vanavasis was no less firm.

Hundreds of vanavasis armed with their traditional weapons pressed forward. Soon the mass swelled into over 2,000. The senior police officers held hurried consultations. When one of them suggested resorting to force to disperse the agitators, another cautioned: "Remember, if we have lathis and firearms, they have deadly bows and arrows and javelins." "That settled the issue. The police withdrew, and granted permission to hold the rally. Needless to say, the procession and the meeting went off peacefully. Immediately thereafter, results began to appear. The police called the representative of both vananchal Jagaran Parishat and the Muslims and saw that the rights over lands were restored to the vanavasis.

Kerala and Kodagu Flood Relief:

The incessant rains and nature's fury led to severe land-slides and heavy floods in Kerala and some part of Karnataka. Vanavasi Kalyana came forward to extend a helping hand to the affected families. In a short timeframe a team was formed under the leadership of Sri Prem Kumar and Sneha Jonnalagadda, who spearheaded the collection of relief materials from all over Bengaluru. Sri Prem Kumar not just participated in collection of relief materials but went to Waynad to hand over one truck load to Vanavasi Kalyan Kerala. 15 VanaMitra also came forward and opened collection

centers in various locations in Bengaluru. Several VanaMitra, their friends and families came forward to contribute Ku. Sneha directly through cheques to Vanavasi Kalyan Kerala account as well. Vanamitra team went to Machhur and Aanemaala villages of H D Kote taluk where they distributed basic relief material like rice, daal, candles etc to 2 Haadis (hamlets). These villages were more vulnerable being located in vicinity of Nagarhole Forest and the flooded river Kabini. The rains and floods have subsided, and effected people are moving back from relief camps to their home. The larger challenge is the rebuilding of mud houses destructed in floods and re-arranging household items washed away in flood. A significant rehabilitation work remains. All Vanavasi Mitra are requested to join hands and donate.

Freeing The Bonded Labourers:

The reasons for proliferation of bonded labour among the vanavasis in Maharashtra are many and deep-rooted, the traditional system of marriage also being one among them. Even among the poorest, a young man getting married Will have to arrange a feast for the entire village to be followed by a drinking orgy. The young man, left with no alternative, goes to a moneylender and pledges himself as a bonded labourer in lieu of the loan which runs into not less than four to five thousand rupees. Thus the newly - wed couple begin life as bonded labours, this serfdom sticking to them all their life and extending to their children a come to bless the new couples. Amidst auspicious mantras and music, the district collector Smt. Joyce Shankaran and her husband blessed the new couples. All partook of community meals, but without the flow of liquor. That occasion not only bade good-bye to bonded labour; many even vowed never to touch liquor again. The Lion's Club of mulund, as if justifying its name, took the lions share in meeting the expenses of the function. Government too made a fine gesture by giving mementos to the newly -wed couples. The collective marriage ceremony taking place simultaneously at one place naturally brought down the experience to a bare minimum.

When the vanavasis kalyana ashrama mooted the idea of marriage sans money and tears, the tribe's could hardly believe it. They even smelt some ulterior motive behind the move. The village elders of chalatvad in thane district, Maharashtra - the place where the vanavasi ashram had decided to start the experiment-said that it was against their vanavasi tradition and threatened to

boycott such couples. However, the Ashram workers did not yield; they succeeded in convincing the would - be bridegrooms and brides. 38 pairs came forward to set a new precedent, unheard of in the vanavasi tradition. The couples were all dressed and decorated in the royal vanavasi style. Several hundred invitees from thane had come.

Projects:

With an aim for all-round development of Vanvasi (Tribal Communities) across India, Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram works under many different categories – known as Aayams. On this page, you will be briefly introduced with the Aayams, alongwith some of the ongoing as well as finished projects in recent times. Presently VKA is running 18 hostels for Vanvasi children. Apart from the hostels, there are 3 schools, 3 Nurseries or Balwadis, 113 agriculture development centers, 5 dispensaries, 54 spiritual congregation centers and 804 allied projects are being managed. VKA is also implementing more than 500 social projects through full time dedicated volunteers. The Ashram has presence in 2000 of 5600 Vanvasi villages and hamlets in Maharashtra.

Conclusion:

The tribal society residing in the remote forests and mountains of the country is the true custodian of Indian traditions and culture. Despite being an integral part of India's heritage, unfortunately, the tribal community has suffered severe neglect. To eliminate this neglect and bring the light of development to the society, strengthening the sentiment of the Akhil Bharatiya Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram is actively working across the nation.

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