

**A SELF-SUSTAINABLE CIVIL SOCIETY THROUGH RISING
CONSCIOUSNESS: A STUDY OF SOLIGARA ABHIVRUDHDHI SANGHA
(SAS) IN INDIA**



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Immediately after independence the challenging task before the political leadership was to lead the Indian Nation towards social and economic prosperity. Political leadership in independent India felt that political independence without the economic independence couldn't improve the standard of living of the teeming millions.¹ Thus the Government of India, immediately after independence, laid emphasis on a thorough social and economic development.² At the time of her independence, following several decades of economic stagnation under the British rule, India was economically weak. Government had to choose a plan for economic growth and social development from the alternatives available at that time.³ The choice was to be made between the two models of development namely, the Gandhian and the Nehruvian. The Gandhian model of growth greatly relied on traditional skills, indigenous resources, and a participatory approach. The Nehruvian model with features like large-scale industrialization, central planning, the application of advanced technology and huge capital investments drew heavily from the experiences of the West and the Soviet Union. Though the Government of independent India preferred the Nehruvian model, importance was also given to cottage and village industries. Such a model of development created an impression that India's development relied upon both Nehruvian and Gandhian thinking. The model of growth embraced in independent India had in it the seeds of a Capital-intensive economy that characterised the centralization of power, the use of advanced technology, and connection with the world economic circuit of the contemporary period. From the plans for economic development of India, we can infer that industrialisation in India is more or less a derivative of the Western Enlightenment Project and Development as understood and practiced by the West. The model of development adopted in India facilitated the expansion of networks of exchange throughout the world economy centred upon Western Europe.⁴ This was natural as the Indian economy was already connected to the

¹ Pranab Bardhan, *Political Economy of Development in India* New Delhi: Oxford University Press 1984

² Paul R Brass, *The New Cambridge History of India The Politics Of India since independence* Second ed. London: Cambridge University Press 1997

³ Sukomay Chakravarthi. *Development Planning: The Indian Experience* New Delhi: Oxford University Press 1987

⁴ Anupam Sen. *State Industrialization and Class Formation in India: A Neo-Marxist Perspective on colonialism, Underdevelopment and Development* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul 1982

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world economic circuits through the British Industrial Empire in the pre-independence period.⁵

Nehru believed that industrialization and material progress through large-scale industrialization would automatically eradicate the evils that plagued Indian society.⁶ Nehru is said to have believed that the modernisation of the Indian Economy would automatically wipe out the old outdated structures hindering the advancement of the modernization process. Nehru's dream of building a strong industrial base and healthy democracy was expected to put the people at the centre of the nation, unlike the traditional society.

Nehru supported the creation of a new institutional framework that could embody the spirit of progress or its synonym 'development'. To replace the traditional framework with the modern scientific one was the first step in realizing this vision. The principles of the Enlightenment Project namely those of individualism, democracy, capitalism, scientism, secularism and stability, believed to be the basic tenets of modernization were promoted through a rational, scientific planning under the banner of Five Year Plans. Centrally planned development was set both for long term and short-term priorities to the entire nation through a systematic, careful and conscious design by technical experts. The central planning commission designed the road map to the socioeconomic development of the country. Though it was done in a democratic manner, a close look at the planning process shows that there has been many instances of superimposition of the national will over the local will. The centralized policies failed to take cognizance of the geographical variations, cultural diversities and a wide variety of ethnic professions and skills of the people and the whole range of indigenous knowledge. In an over emphasis on scientific planning, creation of wealth, and centralized planning, the diversities in dialect, language, culture and climate, and resources, were excluded. Centralized planning invariably failed to respond to the basic needs of the local communities. It is in this context that a need to establish a link between the

⁵ Rajanarayan Chandavarkar, *Imperial Power and Popular Politics - Class, Resistance, and the State in India, 1850-1950* London: Cambridge University Press 1998

⁶ Jawaharlal Nehru. *Jawaharlal Nehru's Speeches*, 2 New Delhi: Govt. of India Publication Division 1954

State and the civil society through community-based organizations arises. It is in this context of exclusivist nature of planned development in India, the problems of ‘Soliga Tribe’ are discussed.

I

Soligas who live in the foothills of Biligiri Rangana Betta (BR Hills) and Male Madeshwara Betta (MM Hills) of Chamarajanagar districts is one of the rare tribes of India.⁷ They are also found in Hunsur and Bandipur area are of Mysore District.⁸ Solga Abhivrudhi Sangha (SAS) is a central organization of this tribal community in the Kollegal Taluk of Chamarajanagar District. According to SAS the total population of the tribe in Kollegal Taluk is 20417, which is spread in the 80 villages, constitutes approximately 6% of the total population. 92% of this tribe lives in rural areas.⁹

Soligas Tribe, which lived in isolation in and around the forest under the foothills, is one of the most backward tribes. Forest is the source of livelihood for them. They collect forest products and exchange the same for other commodities required by them with the non-tribal. Hunting is another occupation of the tribe. With an age-old tradition of shifting cultivation, the tribe used to lead a semi-nomadic life in the forest area.¹⁰ Generally fifty to sixty huts form a settlement, which is called ‘*podu*’, which literally means shifting cultivation. In each ‘*podu*’ they have a well-organized *Nyaya* system of community administration. Under the *Nyaya*¹¹ system *Yajman*, *Kolukar* and *Chaluvaadi*¹² in consultation with the senior members of the community take important decision to resolve

⁷ Thurston E. “Castes and Tribes of Southern India Vol. VI” Government Press Madras 1909 pp 379-386

⁸ Bhat H.K. ‘Soliga’: *Encyclopedia Profile of Indian Tribe* Sachidananda and B.R. Prasad Ed. Discovery Publishing House New Delhi 1995 pp 937-943

⁹ Interview with Jadeswamy and Madappa of Sligara Abhivrudhi Sangha 21st October 2005

¹⁰ Soliga of Biligiri Rangana Betta, <http://hulk.bu.edu/misc/karnataka/districts/mandya/biligiri/biligir.html>

¹¹ *Nyaya* is a local administrative system, which the tribal community has been practicing for ages

¹² *Yajman* is the village headman, *Kolukar* looks after the law and order, and *Chaluvaadi* helps in organizing meetings.

any crisis. The social system of this tribal community was guided by self-sustainable eco-friendly, use-value based production and exchange. Accumulation, planning, and individualistic ideas were not valued much in the community. They lived in close association with nature. There was a wide gap between the culture, life style, social values of this tribal community and the mainstream population in the district. However, the community lived with difference for over centuries.

The five-year plans in India lead to the construction of large dams, setting up of huge mining projects, construction of roads at the cost of large-scale deforestation in many parts of the country. The need to preserve the forest wealth was strongly felt at the same time the development projects had to be taken up as the Nehruvian policy reposed utmost faith in large-scale industrialization. Rising concerns for the protection of environment and maintaining an ecological balance by the environmentalists reinforced the position of State about the conservation of forests. In this context, the State thought it fit to ensure the judicious use of forest wealth. There are several central and state acts passed to conserve the forest wealth. In this respect Karnataka Forest Act of 1963, Karnataka Forest Rules 1969¹³, and the Forest Conservation Act of 1980, severely affected the livelihood of Soliga tribe. The centralized planning by the federal government could not understand the impact of such policies on the tribal community like Soligas, whose main source of livelihood was forest. When the Indian Forest Act was implemented by the State government the Forest Department prevented the tribal community from entering the forest and those lived inside the forest were thrown out. State sovereignty for this tribal community sounded the death knell, as they had no alternative sources for livelihood. This was traumatic for the Soligas as they were ignorant of making a way to life. Displacement of this tribe from their traditional locations forced them out of the forest to the 'unknown' destinations in the surrounding villages. Soligas who lived in isolation from the mainstream for centuries were innocent and ignorant of the ways of the world. Such ignorance on the part of Soligas made them an easy prey to the exploitative practices of landlords, forest department and other trading class. Soligas who now forced out of the forest found it difficult to reconcile with the outer world, which did not share their culture and value system. Tribal people were made bonded labourers for their incapacity to repay small debts borrowed from local landlords. Though

¹³ Renuka Prasad H.S. *The Karnataka Forest Manual* Premier Book House Bangalore 2003
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some of the members of the tribe cultivated small-holdings; they never felt the need for legal ownership of such property. Fertile and irrigated small-holdings, which the tribal people cultivated for years were taken away by local land owning class.¹⁴ Experience with the mainstream proved to be very bitter, deceitful, and exploitative to Soligas. Consequently, Soligas were traumatized so much so that at the very sight of the forest department officials, policemen, and landlords they used to disappear into the forest.

Tribal Development Department at the Central government had plans for rehabilitation and development of the tribal community. But there was no comparability between what the Tribal Development Department offered and what the tribal community needed. The government offered Soligas' agricultural implements and manures in huge quantities, but they had no land, to use manures and implements given by the government. What the government offered was sold for a pittance to the landlords and local merchants. The development plans of the government were shaped in total isolation of the needs of the Soliga community. Nationalized Banks and Co-operative Banks offered various types of loans to the tribal community. On record loans were availed under all the development schemes planned for the tribal people. But in reality non-tribal people in connivance with the bureaucrats and Bank Officials used the funds and Soligas were totally unaware of these frauds. As per the official data the displaced Soligas were rehabilitated and helped by the state through a number of development programs. However the reality was strikingly different from this. Soligas were totally incapable of explaining their agony to the outer world. It is understood that situation like this offers a good ground for the spread of armed struggle against the repressive state as the last option. ¹⁵To ease out the tension of melting pot calls for an intermediary organization to act as a link between the Soligas and the State.

Dr. Sudharshan's initiation of Vivekananda Girijana Kalyana Kendra (VGKK) was a first step in this direction. Efforts to redress the agony and trauma suffered by the Soligas drew the public attention. An exploration into the causes for the suffering of the tribal people

¹⁴ Ajay Skaria *Hybrid histories: forests, frontiers and wildness in Western India* Oxford University Press Delhi 1999

¹⁵ Bela Bhatia "Competing Concerns" *Economic and Political Weekly* XL (47) 2006 pp4890-4893

revealed that Soligas had to bear only the brunt of the development programs without being the benefits of programs. VGKK attempted to bring the Soliga into the mainstream by providing them health care, education, housing, employment opportunities and the like. However, Sheena and Krishna, two young men, who started their career as social workers at VGKK, soon realized the need for a social change with deeper impact towards the development of the community. Sheena and Krishna wanted the Soliga community to come together and form themselves into a community-based organization and work towards the welfare of their own community.¹⁶ Such a realization could make a striking change in the life of Soliga people through the formation of Soligara Abhivurdhi Sangha (SAS). Soligara Abhivurdhi Sangha is a community-based organization organized, and managed by the Soliga people. The process of formation and functioning of SAS offers itself as a model to cultivating democracy and development. The SAS experiment reflects as to how values of democracy cultivated within the community would take care of the socio-economic development. The Soliga Community that had shattered due to the forced displacement from the traditional foothold within and around the forest had low self-esteem, withdrawal attitude and were not open to any type of organization. Organizing community in a democratic manner to ensure a decent and dignified life for this marginalized community required an innovative strategy. Driven by the strength and resources of Soliga tribe the Volunteers succeeded in designing a strategy that could empower the community that lived in isolation for long. The process of organizing the community, strategies adopted and outputs of the same are discussed in the next part.

II

3502 families of Soliga Tribe spread over in 80 villages of Kollegal Taluk were not an organized group though the bonding was strong within the *podu*. Organizing Soligas was not an easy task for anyone outside the tribal community, as they already had bitter experience of exploitation from the outside world. Entering into a dialogue with this community in order to understand their problems and improve their life was very much

¹⁶ Sheena and Krishna joined VGKK as Social Workers. Their interaction with the Soliga Community inspired them to accept the challenge of empowering this marginalized community. In this paper Sheena and Krishna are referred to as Volunteers/Social Workers/ intervening agency.

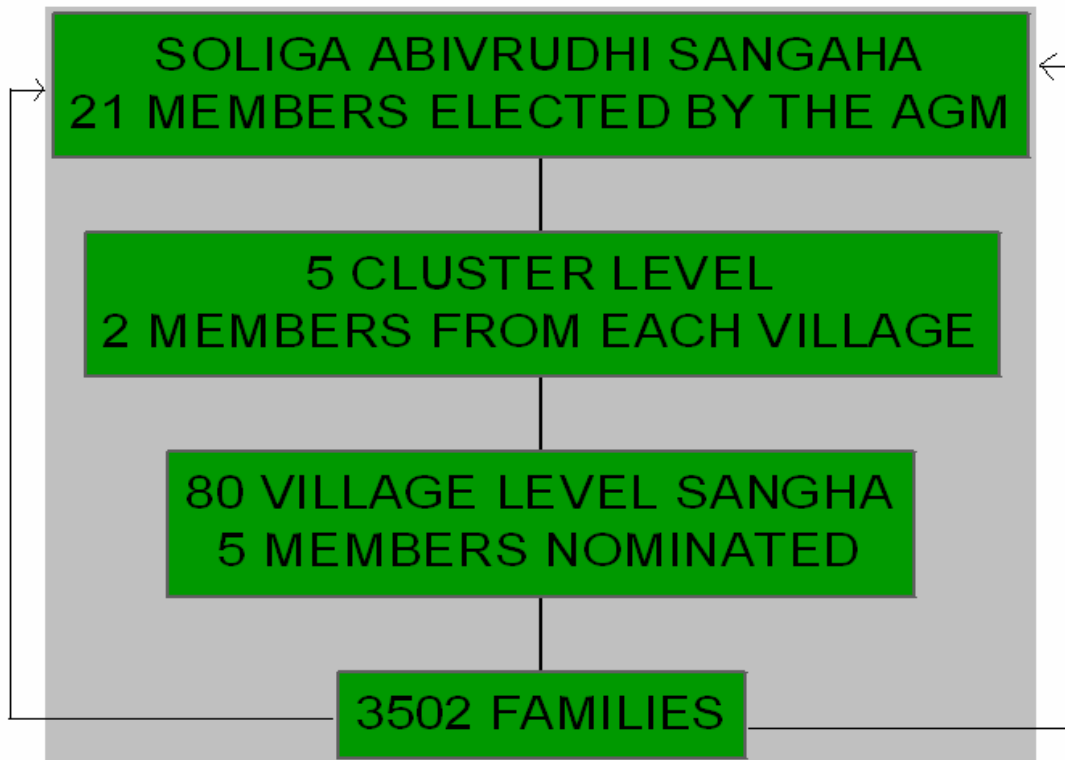
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essential. Slowly but steadily volunteers developed contacts with the members of the *podu*. Medical treatment to the ailing members in the tribal community, educating them on the changes taking place in the external environment, appreciating the culture of Soliga tribe, dining and dance with the members of the community, drove the volunteers to the inner circle of the tribe. Close encounter with the tribe enabled the volunteers to understand and analyse the problems. It was understood that building bridges between the various *podu* to form a strong local organization was thought to be essential to make the voice of this marginalized community heard. In a democracy of electoral politics the numbers are always important. Therefore, a strong organization is a pre-requisite to make ones presence felt. No sooner had the problem of the Soliga community was located, than the strategy was developed to organize people. People in one of the *podu* were thoroughly trained on the cause of their problems, ways to solve them, through a SWOT analysis. Once people in the *podu* were convinced, they assumed the role of leaders and educating people in other *podu* and the movement spread to the entire 80 villages of Kollegal taluk.

People were organized at the village level, Block Level and finally at Taluk level. In the village level associations, in addition to the members of the traditional Nyaya system, representatives from women and youth were selected to make the association broad based. 10 to 15 villages were made into a block. Two representatives (one woman+ one man) from each village were elected or nominated to the Block Level association. The members nominated/elected from the village level association in turn amongst them, elect a President and Secretary. Association would have an office in one of the villages under its jurisdiction. Soligas living in 80 villages in Kollegal Taluk formed a central association and registered it in 1993 under the Karnataka State Co-operative Society Registration Act. The Association is called the Soligara Abhivrudhi Sangha (SAS). SAS function through 21 executives elected by the members in the annual general body meeting. The executive members from amongst them elect a President, Vice-President, Secretary, Joint-Secretary, and a Treasurer. In addition to this executive body, a Coordinator, assistant coordinator at the central office and five field workers to coordinate the development work at the block level are appointed. The organization structure of the association is shown in the following diagram.

ORGANIZATION STRUCTURE

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The organization started functioning with the total participation of people at the village level. The traditional leaders and the inclusion of women and youth made it more inclusive. Ideas were generated with the participation of all the members. Traditional songs, dance, and other practices were used to communicate the new messages, which could appeal the masses. Soligas needed right of use over the forest land, permission to enter the forest to collect forest products and firewood, employment in the government supported programs carried out by the forest department inside and on the outskirts of forest area, end to the practice of bonded labor, granting of land rights over the land they enjoyed over the years etc. Soligas were unaware of many of the frauds committed in their name, and they wanted such practices to be ended. In addition to this, priority to tribal community in the general development program to Soligas was also one of the demands. They determined to achieve the objective by designing a unique strategy, which they call as Five P Program. Five P's are

People's Organization, petition, public contact, press and protest. The five P program would operate in the following manner.

Once the association gains strength a representation through the association is made to the concerned departments. Representation is followed up. If it fails to create the required response, members of the organization in large numbers would meet the concerned department and officials and seek explanation from the concerned persons regarding the claim they made through representation. If the response were not adequate, members would inform the larger population and the elected representatives through the media (press). If nothing works, then they would launch public protest. Protest in the Gandhian way of sathyagraha. Collective action was the major strategy adopted by SAS in voicing the concerns Problems due to Forest Policies, misuse of the tribal development funds, and improper implementation of the development programs. People led protests demanding the government to respond to their needs rather than forcing them to accept what the government wanted to provide. The strategy to assert the civic rights in a democratic manner yielded good results, and this is evident from the following list.¹⁷

List of Collective Action and their Outcomes

<p>1995: The Soliga people through the <i>Sanga</i> learnt that the tribal development fund is mismanaged by civil servants within the <i>Kollegal taluk</i> tribal development offices. Around 5,000 Soliga people gathered in <i>Kollegal taluk</i> and had a procession/demonstration demanding solution.</p>	<p>The State government decided to suspend a civil servant who was accused of the mismanagement. The civil servant later on lost his job. Interviews with the <i>Sanga</i> leadership and current civil servants who are in charge of tribal development funds indicated a significant improvement in the allocation of the funds. It was stated that <i>funds are 90 to 100% properly allocated compared to previous 20- 30%</i>. This is a personal estimation of the interviewee. It may be very subjective and inaccurate but reflects the value attached to the <i>Sanga</i>.</p>
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¹⁷ Ephrem Tadessee, *Social Capital, Local Organizations and Development Performance: A Case Study of the Soliga Development Association in India* Masters Thesis Development Studies and Development Management Ruhr University Bochum Germany University of the Western Cape South Africa 2004

<p>1996: More than 6,000 Soligas demonstrated against the forest department in <i>Kollegal</i> town and demanded access to land.</p>	<p>This led to the distribution of fruit and orchard land and ownership rights to tamarind trees (<i>tree-patta</i>). This has enabled the Soliga to collect fruits and orchard produce, and sell them in the market without ownership of the land. In the case of <i>tree-patta</i> they are entitled to ownership of the tamarind trees</p>
<p>1998: Traditionally, the Soligas do not drink alcohol. With the opening of alcohol shops in the villages, men folk of both tribal and non-tribal took to alcohol. This resulted in reduction in money they used to give to their wives for household expenses. In response alcoholism of men folk, around 6,000 tribal people under the leadership of women gathered in <i>Kollegal</i> demanding the ban of alcohol sales in the tribal villages.</p>	<p>10 Alcohol shops in the Soliga villages were closed and their licenses cancelled by the local government.</p>
<p>2000: In 80 villages (which, comes under 15 <i>Gram Panchayats</i>), the Soligas demonstrated in request of separate <i>gram panchayat</i> for the Soliga people.</p>	<p>This protest did not succeed, as it required basic policy change at National and State level. However, SAS focuses its attention on educating the tribal people about their political rights, helped them to run for government offices and occupy seats reserved for tribal people. The struggle also continued with the demand for a status of scheduled area within Karnataka.</p>
<p>2002: Around 2,000 people gathered in <i>Kollegal</i> to protest the suspected murder of two tribal by non-tribal on accusations/rumours of theft. The SAS took the case to the court.</p>	<p>The issue is in the court case. The SAS has appointed a lawyer to plead the cases in the court of its members. The lawyer appointed by SAS follows- up cases where the compensations to be claimed from the State</p>
<p>2003: During the visit of the chairman of the Buria Commission in <i>Kollegal</i>, around 7,000 people gathered to submit a memorandum. 1997 They demanded that their tribal area be identified as a Scheduled Tribal Area by the Indian government. In other parts of India where the concentration of tribal people</p>	<p>The outcome of the petition is still being awaited. The leadership of the <i>Sanga</i>, however, feels that the claim requires policy change at National and State level, which cannot be achieved easily. The tribal bill brought out recently is the result of such pressure exerted on the State by the tribal people all over the country.</p>

<p>is higher, the tribal areas are classified as Scheduled Tribal areas with special privileges of self-governance and ownership rights and greater access to forest areas. Since 1996, the Soliga people have also been requesting the status of primitive tribes.</p>	
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The SAS succeeded in bringing the tribal community together and instilled in them a hope about their future in a democratic state. Many of the leaders who played a key role in this movement entered into electoral politics and got elected to the local governments. This was no mean achievement considering the state of this population a few years earlier. Some of the developments instrumental in changing the landscape of the Soliga society is stated below¹⁸;

- Right to use the forestland 375 families received land for or nursery, orchards, and cultivation.
- SAS got to its fold the puppet associations (created by middlemen and landlords for appropriating the benefits extended to the tribal communities) and empowered the same
- Permission to the SAS to collect forest products is obtained. Self-employment training for 50 Soligas in bee keeping, organized with the help of Department of Commerce and Industry of the Government. These trainees were given beehive boxes for starting their venture. SAS has also initiated 'Bamboo Craft', the making of articles made from bamboo, in M.M. Hills
- End to the practice of bonded labor and to all other atrocities committed earlier against the tribal community. 100 members were given buffalos to carry on dairying, and ploughing. Under land development schemes 25 tube wells were provided for providing water for irrigation and drinking.
- Ration cards are issued to the members of the Soliga Community and there are six fair price shops run by Soliga people. There is awareness about health, education and various programs sponsored by the state and central government. Yellow Cards (A

¹⁸ Annual Report of the SAS 2005 submitted at the Annual General Meeting held on 21-10-2005 held at Hanoor in Kollegal Taluk.

- special type of ration card for the Poor and the disadvantaged), for 3196 families were distributed under ANTHYODAYA (Scheme meant for the poorest of the poor)
- Housing facilities to nearly 2731 families out of 3502 families. Major housing project with a budgetary allocation of Rs 2 Crores is executed through the Association.
 - In as many as 76 villages out of 80, Government and other development agencies depend on SAS for the information necessary for planning and implementation of development programs.
 - Education has received due attention. There are as many as 20 single teacher schools, 10 Boarding schools, 05 Secondary Schools with boarding facilities. The State Government is meeting 50% of the educational expenses of the students from this community. Residential schools, hostels were started at Malemahadeshwara Hills and Nakkundi.. Adult education program of the State has been implemented effectively in this tribal area too. Soliga youth were given training in computer education too. Mass literacy campaigns were pursued by SAS during 95-96, nearly 500 houses were covered and another 730 houses are in the process of being covered
 - Solar lighting is provided to six remote villages, which could not get electricity connection.

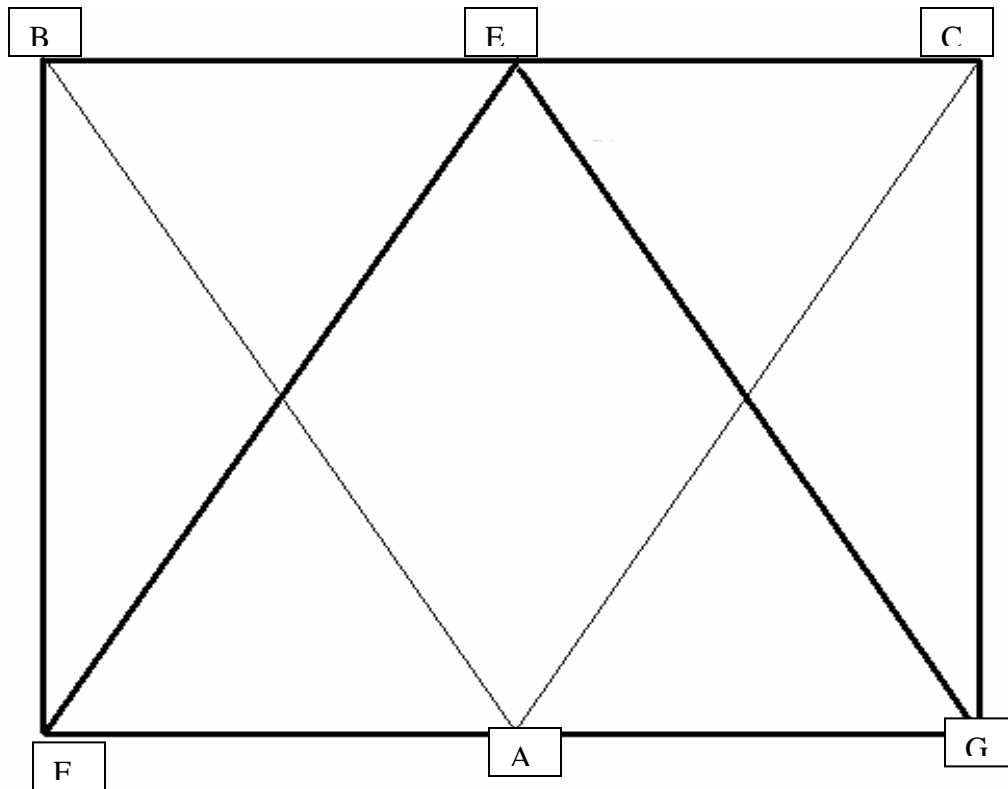
The development Model adopted by the SAS stands out for the reason that it could be accepted as a reference point in designing the empowerment program for the marginalized communities like some of the other alternative models.¹⁹ It is accepted by the State that tribal communities, bore the greater burden of development in independent India. It is to give justice to this deprived community that the Forest Rights Bill 2005 is passed. The Bill aims to grant legal entitlements to forest land, right of use over the forest land, rights and access to minor forest produce. Rights of tribal/adivasis go with the responsibilities of conserving the forests and protection of wildlife. The Bill seeks to end the exploitative hold of the forest department over tribals. Interestingly, the Soliga People long ago through their local organization achieved what the Bill could do to tribals in other parts of India.

¹⁹ Kalima Rose Where Women Are Leaders: The SEWA Movement in India Vistaar Publications New-Delhi 1992, Jaya Arunachalam/ Brunhild Landwehr (eds) *Structuring a Movement and Spreading it on: History and Growth of Working Women's Forum (India)* IKO-Verlag Interkulturelle Kommunikation Frankfurt 2003

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Any development program needs to reflect the aspirations and expectations of the local community. Failure to respond to the local needs exclude local community, which would naturally weaken the democratic character of the development programs. To outlive such a disadvantage, local communities need to be a part of planning and implementation. However, involving local community that hardly shares the values of modern democracy needs a situational approach carefully crafted out of own experience with the community. The experiment may be explained with the help of the following diagram.

Diagrammatic Presentation of Development Model Developed in SAS



In the first stage the social workers or volunteers had to do everything on their own. This was the stage of creating awareness. Once the awareness was created, the tribal community started participating in a passive manner in the organizational activities. However, with the increased involvement they were able to get exposed to the life outside the community, alternative ways of making a living, and the citizenship rights that could be

asserted in a democratic manner, and the democratic means of establishing a claim over the state or the bureaucracy. In the following diagram ABC shows the involvement of volunteers. Volunteers gradually but steadily made the members of the community take up their cause. This has multifaceted influence, and enabled people to get empowered. Simple lessons in building democracy and civil society were taught step by step. It is reflected that in the initial stages the involvement of the community was very less or rather was absent. In the diagram the role played by volunteers is reflected by BC; everything was done with the least participation of the people. But BC, which reflects the involvement of the social workers, gets narrow down to A. The growth of civil society and participatory methods at the micro-levels in the community were usually proposed as the mechanisms by which empowerment takes place.²⁰ But with the passage of time the involvement of the members of Soliga community started increasing. If A-E is considered as the path of progression of the movement, in the initial stages (at the apex) we find the involvement of people very little. As the movement spread, the level of participation increased and became broad based. This is reflected in the progression of curve from the point E towards EF and EG. Thus it is evident from the diagram that the empowerment process gained strength as the level of involvement started extending from E towards G and F.

III

Sheena and Krishna²¹, the social workers instrumental in the setting up of the SAS withdrew from the movement once the involvement level reached point A. The SAS is run with the involvement of first generation reformers and younger generation that followed reform. Expertise of the reformers is used in guiding the organization. It is understood that the Soligas were made the agents of change through their active involvement in the mass movement is support of their claim for a dignified and decent life. SAS is headed by a generation of leaders. The enthusiasm and rigour of the initial years has slowly faded away. The SAS is confronted with a new set of challenges.

²⁰ Friedmann, J. Empowerment: *The politics of alternative development* Oxford: Blackwell 1992

²¹ Co-authors of this paper, and who played a catalytic role

The community-based life of Soliga people was responsible for the close bonding between the members. Because of such bonding they were able to build a strong organization at the local level. However, with the implementation of the development programs, it is observed that there has been a drift from community-based life style towards individualised life style. The basis for allocation of funds for various development purposes has been the household or family. This has paved way for some kind of competitive spirit among the families within the community in availing such benefits. The development process has made way for a change in the life style of people. A huge contract for building houses to the members of the tribal community is executed through the association. There has been some problem in the implementation of the project. Finally the problem had to be set right by the volunteers who were instrumental in the setting up of SAS. Consequently, the office bearers of SAS were drawn more towards the authorities sanctioning grants and the lethargic bureaucracy, unknowingly distancing them from the members. This trend of distancing of office bearers from the members has been the root cause of many discontentments among members. Consequently, there has been increasing communication gap between the office bearers and the members of the association.²² Members of the community, who lead the struggle in the initial stages feel left out and are not consulted. The SAS by being resource centre for the state, members, and other development intermediaries, been assuming the characters of a power centre. These developments have the risk of weakening of the bonds within and between the *podu* or settlements. This is mainly because of the strong attraction towards the consumerist culture to which the younger generation has fallen a prey. At this juncture, the members of the community felt the need for analysing the problems and putting the organization the track again. Accordingly, Sheena and Krishna had to intervene and rejuvenate the activities of the association.

IV

State lead development programs failed to make it all-inclusive. Failure of the modern institution like the State in India called for alternative strategies to redress the

²² Observation during the field visit to the area and the proceedings of the Annual General Meeting of the Association held on the 21st of October 2005.

grievance of the marginalized. In such a situation culture as a capital played a key role in mobilising the marginalized community. It is the identity as tribal or Soliga that brought them under one banner. The community legitimately established the claim over share in the development of the nation. It is to be observed that the claims of this marginalized community was admitted by the welfare State, which has an obligation to extend the basic needs to all its citizens. However, the role of State is getting eroded, more and more social responsibilities are replaced by the market mechanisms. Influences of marketing forces are deepening in a significant manner, as witnessed by large-scale privatisation, and liberalization in India. This has been one of the reasons for the widening gap in the earnings of people, distribution of wealth, and deterioration of democratic virtues.

The SAS was able to make its presence felt because of the process of democratisation. It is not SAS as an institution but the process that created the SAS lent credence to the claims of this community. The role played by the intermediaries bore fruits because of the presence of the democratic State. The experiments by the soliga community with the help of volunteers stand testimony to the powerful role that a civil society can play in the empowerment of the community. But one should not lose sight of the context in which the experiment bore result. It was the democratic system, presence of welfare State, and the presence of a strong civil society, that enabled people to empower themselves. In the absence of such a situation, SAS would not have been able to make significant changes in the life of the marginalized. Therefore, a democratic structure, and a strong State especially where the majority of the people are socially and economically weak, is a precondition for the sustained growth of local organizations and civil society.

The concept like empowerment, local self-government though projected as viable alternative to fill the gap created by State's withdrawal is not rooted at the local level. The empowerment package more or less falls in line with the centralized, top-down characters of the economic policies that were followed in the initial years. This is evident from the poor allocation of resources to local bodies, essential for the implementation of the programs in a

concrete manner.²³ If one goes by the findings of the 55th round 1990-2000 NSSO survey results, the benefits of economic growth has flowed into the pockets of selected few leaving a large chunk of population in trouble.²⁴ The gap between the haves and have-nots has been widening despite the success of empowerment programs, local-self governments and efforts to reduce gender disparities. Empowerment, Local-Self governments, Micro-Credit, and other programs in the package appear to be diversified products of the capitalist development model. The major strength of the organization is its ability to take tradition and modern power centres together, though there has been some problem subsequently. It is only through emphasis on ideas like sustainable and community development, that SAS can keep the tempo of socio-economic growth, which was responsible for their emancipation.

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