

THE ROLE OF SPEED TO ELIMINATE THE FEMALE INFANTICIDE IN DHARMAPURI DISTRICT OF TAMIL NADU

Dr. A. Abdul Jameel,

Assistant Professor, P.G & Research Department of History, C. Abdul Hakeem College, Melvisharam, Vellore District, Tamil Nadu.

Abstract

Female infanticide is a great social evil of the nation. The modern practice of sex-selective abortion is often discussed as a closely related issue. The dowry system is one of the major causes for female infanticide. It has become embedded in Indian society. This paper highlighted the remarkable service of SPEED (Society for People Environment and Economy Development). It is playing a very important role in the elimination of female infanticide in Dharmapuri district of Tamil Nadu.

Key Words: Rescue, Female Infant, SPEED, NGO and Cradle Baby

Introduction

SPEED which means **Society for People Environment and Economy Development** was one of the most popular and very active NGOs of Dharmapuri district in Tamil Nadu. It was registered under Societies Registration Act XXI of 1860 and Act 27 of 1975 of Tamil Nadu, on 26th April 1993 at Office of Register of Society of Dharmapuri. On the 18th August 2000, it was registered under section 6 (1) of the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act 1976 and was allotted the registration no 075870046. The important activities under taken by this NGO are rescue the female children, medical camp, medical advocacy, field activities like survey, education and treatment, rehabilitation of leprosy, economic activities housing, education, etc. The areas covered by this NGO for the implementation of the project are Pennagaram, Nallampalli, Dharmapuri and Karimangalam Blocks of Dharmapuri district in Tamil Nadu. It has twenty five trained staff and animators.

The main aim of SPEED is to improve the socio-economic conditions of the downtrodden and weaker sections of the society by providing material and technical services and particularly by playing a facilitator role in their total development on an integrate approach.

Rescue the Female Children

SPEED a popular registered NGO has been functioning effectively at Bedarahalli in Dharmapuri District. The Deputy Director of this organisation is G. Perumal and the Coordinator is K. Arivazhagan. It has been playing a pivotal role in reducing the crimes of female infanticide. It has set up 28village committees for the protection of new born girl Children in the area. It seeks help of women self help groups in this regard. Seven clear cases which were likely to be killed were rescued. The reluctant parents are made to understand the evil consequences of this inhuman practice. Some children are admitted in Children Homes and provided good education. The mindset of the villagers is slowly changed, initiative of SPEED which is supported by Rotary Club and Tamil Nadu Science Society. In Indoor village near Dharmapuri, an awareness camp was organised and all the activities of SPEED were highlighted.

In Nadappanhalli village near Indoor, Madesh (39) and Kaliammal (36), the landless labourers had two daughters and one son, the fourth issue which was a girl child, was disliked by the parents. SPEED adopted this child at the instance of Dr. Elizabeth which was later sent to Ananda Ashramam at Hosur. ¹Perumal, the Deputy Director of SPEED was mainly responsible for rescuing and safeguarding the child.

C.K. Saravanan, the founder Secretary of SPEED of Perumbalai is an active social worker fighting against female infanticide and foeticide. In a special meeting organised by SPEED, Rotary Club and Vivekananda Welfare Manram at Bedarahalli near Dharmapuri, he condemned the termination of foetus with the help of modern technology. He pointed out that 25% of female children die before 15 years of age and 12% before one year. This sad state of affairs has to be changed. It is

¹ The Dinamalar, Chennai Dated 6th June 2002

painful to note that there are only 900 females for 100 males in Dharmapuri. NGOs, Self Help Groups, Government authorities, local bodies –all should join together for the eradication of this social evil completely. ²

Another effort of SPEED in rescuing the two new born babies was appreciated very much by Mr. Balachandran, IAS, and the District Collector of Dharmapuri. In Gudlumarampatti village near Pennagaram, Anand, an agricultural labourer was living with his wife Chandra. They had one daughter and one son. Again Chandra delivered twins one male and the other female baby. Due to poverty, the parents decided to kill the babies. The intervention of the animators and Child Protection Committee of SPEED under the initiative of its Secretary Mr. C.K. Saravanan and the support extended by Rotary Club of Dharmapuri, the children were rescued. The District Collector arranged for admitting the children in Cradle Baby Centre and named them Sakthi and Barathi. He praised the efforts of SPEED and Rotary club in a special function.³

Another child rescued by SPEED was from Perumbalai. Chinnaraj and Kamala, the workers cutting stones for construction, had 10 children. When the eleventh child was born at the Primary Health Centre, the parents expressed their displeasure over the birth of an unwanted eleventh child. Tavamani of Child Protection Committee of SPEED, Arivazhagan, the Coordinator tried to protect the child from being killed and handed over it to Sun Michael Child Home, Bangalore.⁴

On 18th February 2001, the couple Peryasamy and Sagunthala delivered a girl-child for the fourth time. They lived at Thirunappatty village near Nallampalli union of Dharmapuri. Similarly another Madesh and Planiammal of Nagathasampatti village near Pennagaram delivered a girl-child as third issue. Both the families were very poor and they attempted to murder their new born babies. C. Kaliarasi, a nurse working in the Primary Health Centre of Nagathasampatti informed this matter to the Child Protection Committee of SPEED. G. Perumal, Joint Director and Arivazhagan, Coordinator arranged for sending one child to Mathagiri Anand Ashramam and another child to Sun Michael Child Home of Bangalore. Thus, SPEED plays a pivotal role in rescuing the girl children and in helping for their developments.⁵

An awareness procession was arranged on July 20, 2001 at Nallampalli in Dharmapuri in view of the World of Population Day celebration under the chairmanship of subramaniam, Chairman of Nallampalli Panchayat Union. The purpose of the grand procession was to highlight the evils of female infanticide and the need for the protection of the girl children. The students from government higher secondary school, Nallampalli, the animators of NGOs of Dharmapuri and nurses from all primary health centres participated in the procession. Nazeer Ahmed, District Field Publicity Officer, Dharmapuri and Block Development Officers attend the procession.⁶

It is reported that Merku Emanoor village in Nagameri Tharappu near Pennagaram, Chendrasekar (26) and his wife Saradha (18) married couple working as agricultural labourers had a son and a daughter. When a third female was born, it was buried in a land near their house stating the child was dead. Some people of the village suspected the nature of the death of the child and reported to the police secretly. Natarajan, the Tahsildar of Pennagaram, Sundaramahalingam, Inspector of Police, Eriyur enquired the matter and arranged for the post-mortem of the child. The post-mortem report revealed that the girl child was killed due to the feeding of calotropis latex. The police arrested the couple.⁷

On June 27, 2002 Saravanan, Secretary of SPEED and his assistant Tavamani identified a child born to a couple – Venkat and Thangam in Vellamankadu village of Kandayanahalli Panchayath in Pennagaram block and persuaded the family to hand over the child to cradle baby centre of Dharmapuri instead of inhumanly killing the child. Being the third girl-child, the parents were unhappy. However the couple was convinced and SPEED officials approached the District Collector Mr. Siddiq, IAS, who ordered for providing health care and adoption by the District Cradle Baby Centre. R. Moothy, field Publicity Officer, T.Manohar, Public Relations Officer, Neelakandan, Coordinator, Nehru Yuva Kendira and G. Vimala, the nurse of Perumbalai Primary Health Centre played a very important supportive role to the NGO in rescuing the child.⁸

In Errappatty village near Dharmapuri, a unique effort was taken to prevent female infanticide by the Forest Department in a special function organised by SPEED, Forest Department, Field Publicity Officer and Jayam Engineering College. K. Rajamani, Rural Development Officer pointed out that it is a disgrace to Dharmapuri district that it has become notorious for killing children. Women self-Help Groups should take a lead to prevent the crime. **The Forest Department with a view to prevent the crime, distributed freely 200 teak saplings to 92 families of Eraappatty village.** K. Mani, Assistant General Manager, NABARD also participated in the special meeting to create awareness among the villagers.⁹

² The Malai Murasu, salem dated 10th November 2000.

³ The Dinamalar, salem dated 13th November 2000.

⁴ The Dinathanthi, Salem dated 23rd August 2000.

⁵ The Dinathanthi, Salem dated 19th February 2001.

⁶ The Dinamalar dated 21st July 2001.

⁷ The Dinamalar, Chennai dated 27th April 2001.

⁸ The Dinamalar, Chennai dated 28th June 2002.

⁹ The Dinathanthi, Salem dated 17th February 2003.

Cooperation of nurses is highly essential for eradicating this evil, according to the District Collector Ms. Apurva, IAS. On 2nd May 2002, a conference was organised at Dharmapuri on the eradication of female infanticide in which Mr. Balasubramaniam, Joint Director of health, Mr. Sambath Kumar, Deputy director of health, Periaayya, the Superintendent of Police and Ms. Apurva, District Collector participated. While addressing the gathering of nurses, Ms. Apurva, IAS, pointed out that in the year 2000 there were 79 cases of female infanticide for every 1000 in Dharmapuri.¹⁰ It was reduced to 69 in 2001. Efforts were being taken to reduce this below 40. She also highlighted that in Eriyur area in Pennagaram, there were 157 deaths of children in 1999 and in 2002 it was reduced to 47. She appealed to all nurses to evince keen interest in looking after the pregnant ladies sincerely and also to counsel them periodically. It was pointed out during the conference that women who had 13 children in Pennagaram area and another woman had 9 children in Nallampalli refused to undergo sterilisation. The district collector requested the NGOs of the district organise awareness programmes among the villagers.

She assured the nurses and the animators of NGOs that timely action would be taken against those who attempt to kill babies, if the information is given to the authorities well in advance. She pointed out that 182 cases were registered by the police in 2001 and 17 cases in the first quarter of 2002. She envisioned that Dharmapuri should emerge as a district without any case of female infanticide shortly.

Mr. Balasubramaniam, Joint Director of Health Services stressed the need of imparting education to prevent this crime and also said that early marriages are also to be avoided. In 27 Primary Health Centres and in 13 Sub-Centres of Dharmapuri, cradles are provided where unwanted babies could be handed over.¹¹

On 11th July 2011, Ms. Apurva, IAS, the District Collector, Dharmapuri, inaugurated a procession of the students of Adhiyaman Higher Secondary School as a part of celebration of the World Population Day. Then she addressed a large gathering of women self-help Groups at Anjehalli village near Pennagaram. She exhorted all women Self-Help Groups to play an active role in preventing female infanticide and to explain the villagers about all Government schemes in this regard.¹²

On 29th May 2002, Ms. Santhi of Elagiriakottai near Adhiyamankottai delivered two babies who were handed over to the District Centre for Cradle Babies at the instance of the Block Development Officer Mr. V. Thiagarajan and Ms. Vedalakshmi, the Nurse of the Primary Health Centre.¹³

Realising the importance of the conferences on prevention of female infanticide organised by the Joint Director of health services, it was unanimously resolved in the Dharmapuri District Project Committee to appreciate the excellent work being done by health Department and also requested that the leaders of all local bodies are to be invited to participate in these programmes for curbing the social evil, as it was felt that the participation of local body leaders would further strengthen the movement. Project Officer Mr. Murugesan and a large number of Presidents of the Panchayaths participated in the programme.

The District Collector Ms. Apurva, IAS, appreciated wholeheartedly the Thadangam panchayath of Nallampalli union for passing a **resolution unanimously condemning and banning female infanticide in the panchayath**. She appealed to others Panchayaths to follow the example of Thadangam Panchayath.¹⁴

On 29th September 2000, a seminar on the 'Prevention of Female Infanticide' was organised at Bedarahalli village by Rotary Club, Vaniyambadi, SPEED, the popular of NGO and Vivekananda Welfare Association. Mr. Suresh, the president of Rotary Club presided over the seminar. The Joint Director of SPEED Mr. Perumal welcomed and coordinated the discussions. The strategies to be adopted for preventing the crime were discussed and explained. Further, at the end of seminar, the leading personalities like Mr. Tavamani, Mr. Subramani and Mr. Arivazhagan were appreciated for their excellent work in the prevention of the killing of girl children.¹⁵

On 17th February 2001, child protection procession was organised in Nallampalli union of Dharmapuri District. It covered the villages of Bandahalli, Ummiampatty, Mademangalam and Adhiyamankottai which was spear headed by Mr. M. Subramaniam, the chairman of Nallampalli union. At the end of the procession, Mr. Arivazhagan, the coordinator of SPEED explained the inhuman nature of the crime and exhorted on its preventive measures. The commissioner of Nallampalli block Mr. Sivabaggiam, Block Development officer Mr. Venkatachlapathy, Self-Help Groups and thousands of people participated in this awareness programme.¹⁶

¹⁰ The Dinamalar, Salem dated 3rd May 2002.

¹¹ The Dinamani Coimbatore dated 3rd May 2002.

¹² The Dinathanthi, Salem dated 12th July 2001.

¹³ The Dinamalar, Salem dated 30th May 2002.

¹⁴ The Dinathanthi, Salem Dated 3rd May 2002.

¹⁵ The Dinamalar, Salem dated 30th September 2002.

¹⁶ The Dinathanthi, Salem dated 18th February 2001.

On 24th January 2001, a conference against female infanticide and foeticide was held at Amanimallapuram in Palacode block. It was organised by Gandhiji Sevaalaya, Palacode, one of the famous NGOs of Dharmapuri District. It was supported by Palacode Sugar Lions Club. Mr. Govindasamy, the President of Mallapuram Panchayath presided over the conference. It is reported that more than one thousand people participated in the conference including the animators of NGOs bank officials, Self-Help Groups and the voluntary organisations. They constituted a protection of Girl Child Committee. The cradle scheme of Tamil Nadu Government and the procedure for adopting the child were explained.¹⁷

On 11th January 2001, a seminar on the need for the prevention of killing female children and also foetus was arranged at Adhiyaman Higher Secondary School by Lions Club of Dharmapuri and the NGOs, SPEED of Perumpalai. It was presided over by Prof. Dr. Krishnappa and inaugurated by Mr. H.J. Salomi, the coordinator of World Vision India. Mr. Balachandiran, the District Collector **warned the doctors not to inform the parents whether the foetus is male or female.** He appreciated the committee for the protection of girl child functioning successfully under SPEED. The District President of Lions Club Mr. J.P. Nagarajan, Deputy General Manger of NABARD Mr. K. Manimaran and other dignitaries spoke on the occasion highlighting the issue.¹⁸

In Boothanayakkanpatty near Pennagaram, there was a married couple by name Gopal and Chinnappa. During the course of ten years of their married life, they had one son who is eight years old and two daughters who were said to be dead. But later, Gopal was absconding and Chinapappa developed illicit contact with some other person from the same village. This led to the birth of girl child. Chinnappa handed over the child to Self-Help Group called Vaira Nila, which with the help of SPEED of perumpalai sent the child to Anada Ashramam, Hosur. In fact, the ashramites take care of the child. SPPED did a wonderful work to rescue the child and arranged for its development.¹⁹

These activities of SPEED have brought a transformation in the socio- economic life of the rural population of Dharmapuri district. The most commendable activity was the prevention of female infanticide and rescue of female babies.

Conclusion

SPEED i.e. **Society for People Environment and Economy Development.** It was established in the year 1993. The target areas of this NGO are Pennagaram, Nallampalli, Karimangalam and Dharmapuri blocks of the district in Tamil Nadu. It concentrates on the improvement of the socio-economic conditions of the downtrodden by working as facilitator in their total development on an integrated approach. The main social activities of SPEED are rescue of the female children and elimination of female infanticide and foeticide. The District Collector gave Best NGO Award during 2010-11. Consequent upon its passionate service to the marginalised section, it emerged as a role model for other NGOs of the district.

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¹⁹ The Dinamani, Chennai dated 21st March 2001.