

Summary and Conclusion

In the last part of our thesis we come to the conclusion of our research. We do this along with a brief summary of the entire work. It is universally accepted that the rate of poverty in India has declined since independence. This is also true of the state of West Bengal. During the time of conducting this research we noticed that poverty has various dimensions. To us the decrease in the number of people belonging to the 'Below Poverty Line' (BPL) category does not indicate that there is economic development of the people. For example in 1999-2000, the rate of poverty in West Bengal officially was 31.85 per cent. This percentage is quite satisfactory when we consider the earlier figures. But according to a NSSO report, "the percentage of rural households not getting enough food every day in some months of the year was the highest in West Bengal (10.6 per cent) followed by Orissa at 4.8 per cent". How can this situation be explained? Does the above information indicate that the people who live above the poverty line in West Bengal are really living in a good condition? This is certainly not. So we think that considering only the poverty ratio should not be taken as an index to measure the development of the poor. What is more we also notice is that a large number of people are labelled as APL people because they do not have the BPL card. Parthapratim Sarkar, Secretary of 'G-NESEP' and Narayan Pal, President of 'Nishigan Club' in this regard told us an important point. To them, a large section of the rural people is considered as APL not because of their proper living condition but because of their failure to enlist their names in the BPL list.

In this connection we would like to raise one vital point. When we went to find out the official data on the rate of poverty, we found that different data is shown by different departments of the government. The same thing happened with us when we tried to collect information regarding literacy rate or the total population (whether it was of India, West Bengal, or Coochbehar). In a single line we can say that there are different data that are available in this field on different things.

Coochbehar is a backward district if the indicators of literacy, education, agricultural development and industrial development are taken into consideration. Agricultural productivity is very low in case of all the items. So far as the industrial sector is concerned we see that there is enough scope in the district to improve the industrial sector. We think that due to lack of proper planning this scope is not transformed into reality. Furthermore, like any place, Coochbehar district has some weaknesses in the field of industry like, transport and communication facilities, unsuitable climate, shortage of electricity etc.

In the second chapter we looked at the role of the NGOs in eradicating rural poverty in the district and how do the NGOs operate in the district? We have seen that the term 'Non-Governmental Organization' (NGO) is a new phenomenon. Not only that, it is one of those terms which has given birth to a new debate in social sciences. It is difficult to define NGOs we can just say that there are as many definitions as many scholars present in this field. For example, a section of people believe that NGOs are an unclassifiable and amorphous hodge-podge of groups. A group of scholars like to believe that NGOs does not mean that it is only the organizations which are formed outside the grip of government. Sometimes NGOs are deeply attached with the government too. We think that this is one of the greatest examples how politics takes an entry into the arena of GO-NGO relationship. UN charter tells us that NGOs can be called as any international organization that is not founded by an international treaty. According to Weisgrau (1997) NGOs is a term used very lightly to mark any organisation which is not a direct division of a national government. Bindeshwar Pathak, founder, 'Sulabh International' makes an interesting difference between NGOs and VOs. He admits that the functions of both the organizations are almost the same. Then in which point these two organizations look different? He said that NGOs are working throughout the year in service of the common people. But VOs work only in the time of need. And the organisations which are functioning throughout the year in service of the common people are to be called NGOs.

In India, most of the NGOs in pre-independent era and immediately after independence were dominated by the Gandhian ideals. It was the period of 1960s and 1970s when non-Gandhian ideals also helped to set up NGOs. A boom was noticed in the NGO sector during the last two decades of the last century. It was that very time when the Government of India tried to include the NGOs in the developmental process. This boom however brought both good and bad things in the NGO sector in India. A section of people started to form NGOs with a different kind of intention, to amass public money. However it has been established that NGOs have done a tremendous job in India. In the process of development new experiments have been introduced by the NGOs. So, there is no point in over-regulating the NGOs.

The NGOs in Coochbehar district started to expand in the last decade of the last century. From our survey we noticed that it was that very period when the government set its mind to merge the NGOs in various developmental programmes. So, it is not quite difficult to assume that most of the NGOs emerged in Coochbehar district during this period. They saw their prospect in these governmental projects.

Unlike NGOs, the concept of the 'Community Based Organizations' (CBOs) is not a new one in the district. A number of CBOs in this district have a history of more than 50 years. Some of the CBOs who crossed more than 50 years are 'Coochbehar Club', 'Unknown Club', 'Maharaja Jitendra Narayan Club' and so on. These organisations are seen to help the victim of natural calamities (or situations alike) in this district or adjacent districts. We may say in other words that the NGOs in a modern sense were absent in Coochbehar district 40-50 years ago but the activities of the clubs were no lesser than an NGO.

In the third chapter we have discussed the most important thing of this chapter i.e. the functions of the NGOs in this district. Mahesh Barman

(BDO. of Mathabhanga-II block), Kishalay Datta (Coordinator, NYKS), Mani Kamal Gholey (Joint BDO, Dinhat-I block), Branch Manager of the 'Uttar Banga Kshetriya Gramin Bank' (UBKGB) Nishiganj branch and a large section of the GO officials told us that they are happy with the activities of the NGOs they are attached. Debashish Ganguly (District Development Manager of 'NABARD') also gave good certificate to the 15 running NGOs under 'NABARD' in Coochbehar district. But H. K. Roy (Joint BDO of Tufanganj-I block) informed us that he is not satisfied with all the NGOs attached to his BDO office. And we think it is quite obvious because all the NGOs in this circuit cannot be good. Roy mentioned that lack of tenacity and internal conflict of the NGOs are the main reasons behind poor performance of the NGOs. For example; Roy told us that the performance of the NGOs was found to be better in the implementation of 'Total Sanitation Campaign' (TSC) programme than 'Swarnajayanti Swarojgar Yojana' (SGSY). When we asked him to explain why did the NGOs fail in SGSY programme he said that the 'tenacity' or 'firmness' is the main reason behind it. The 'SGSY' programme needed more patience on part of the NGO activists because they have to tackle numerous people of different temper, particularly the women section under this project. A number of meetings are necessary to make the people understand the things. If you do not have patience you cannot become successful in this project. But, the outcome of this programme is really fruitful. The Branch manager of the 'UBKGB, Nishiganj told us that under 'SGSY' programme their loan recovery success was up to 90 per cent. But, the loan recovery rate in other schemes is very much unsatisfactory. So, no one can ignore the social benefits of this programme. Another thing that we notice is that the NGOs of this district have similarities in their functions. The schemes like 'SGSY', 'NABARD' etc. are implemented by most of the NGOs. Beside these, the schemes like running crèche for poor working parents, 'Prevention of Trafficking, HIV, AIDS in Women and Children' (TAHA), 'Total Sanitation Campaign' etc. are performed by most of the surveyed NGOs.

We are surprised to see the advancement that has taken place among the rural women through the SHG movement. The women who used to cast

their votes by asking their spouses 5-6 years ago, the women who were never asked by the male members of their family during the time of taking important decisions within the family have suddenly found themselves independent. And we think that this independence is the reflection of their economic independence. The women of the SHGs are now empowered to such an extent that now they lock the Bank Managers in the Bank if they find negligence on part of Bank officials. Male counterparts of their families are now discussing with them before taking important decisions. Now it is not possible for anybody to sideline them. The NGO activists should be credited for this success. Their contribution in rural development is beyond any doubt and debate.

Finally we think that 'social work' or 'voluntary work' should be recognised by the society as well as by the government. A section of people still think that those who have no work are engaging in social work. Or we can say in this way that the arena of social work is only open for the 'failed' youths. The scenario has changed in the big cities of India where youths join in voluntary sector after completing 'Bachelors in Social Welfare' (BSW) or 'Masters in Social Welfare' (MSW) and run their families by earning from this sector. It is high time that this truth be understood by the people of this region.

The NGOs are to be more cautious and sincere during their work. We found that because of internal factions within NGOs, the objective of social work gets hindered. Because of this the 'District Magistrate' (DM) of Coochbehar is very strict before registering any organization as an NGO. We think this is the narrow mentality on part of the NGO activists and the people who are doing this cannot last into the arena of social work. They came in this field just for fame and leave the arena after making some quick money. So, the Government should take all the measures so that unscrupulous people do not take entry into this arena.

Chapter IV focused on the socio-economic condition of the rural poor in Coochbehar district. The attempt was to look at to what extent the participation of NGOs contributed in enhancing the effectiveness of the delivery system. For the purpose of answering the question we conducted one survey. And during the time of the survey, we choose all the Gram Panchayats (GPs), SHGs and NGOs purposively. This was done keeping in mind that we wanted to reach all kinds of people in this district. In this way we reached the population belonging to the APL and BPL category and included villages for our survey that were away from the national highway and those villages that were situated just beside the national highway. What is more we took both club based and non-club based NGOs in our survey. Even we included both the types of NGOs e.g. the NGO which emerged as Community Based Organisations 30-40 years ago (i.e. club based NGOs) and also included the NGOs which were born just 5-10 years ago. Furthermore, in this chapter we were able to show the difference that exists (in terms of development) among the areas where NGOs are in operation and the places where NGOs is still to start its mission.

In the beginning we faced a difficulty in identifying the NGOs for the purpose of our study. We also found it difficult to give the exact figure of NGOs. We broadly included all NGOs including those which work for prevention of AIDS or run crèche for poor working parents into the list of NGOs engaged in poverty alleviation. If we deeply study the NGOs operating in Coochbehar, we see that a large number of NGOs are engaged in versatile activities. It tells us that the NGOs we surveyed (discussed in third chapter) are doing common programmes like forming and nursing SHGs, anti-trafficking, total sanitation campaign, micro insurance, running crèche for poor working parents etc. To us, the success of the NGOs in Coochbehar district is most reflected in the activities of forming and nursing of the SHGs. We want to call this as 'SHG movement'. Through this movement the lives of the rural women has changed. Their socio-economic condition after joining SHGs has uplifted. They now do not hesitate to enter into the Bank premises or to discuss development issues with the BDO or Panchayat officials. The

most important thing is that they can now feel what independence means. Even inside the family they have achieved dignity. It is very easy to write the above lines and it is easier to read those lines but the people who do not have any touch at the grassroots level cannot understand what revolution is taking place in the rural areas of the district.

From our survey it is clear that landlessness is a major cause behind the poor economic condition of the people in Coochbehar district. We have seen in the first chapter that poverty ratio of Coochbehar district is higher than the state (West Bengal) and national average. But it is important to recollect the fact that out of 462 surveyed individuals, we find only 2 big farmers. Not a single very big farmer was traced in our survey (in 4 'Gram Panchayats'). And 24 farmers belonged to the category of small farmers. In terms of percentage, 45.02 per cent people (out of 462 individuals) are placed in the marginal farmer category. The percentage of the marginal farmer increased to 84.55 if we count them among only the landowners (i.e. out of 246 members).

Not only landlessness, lack of productivity is another reason behind higher rate of poverty in this district. According to the common people, the main factors behind the lack of productivity in this district are rooted in: i) lack of irrigation facility; ii) distribution of poor quality seeds among the farmers and iii) non availability of fertilizers in the market. The views of the expert always differ from that of the layman. And according to an officer of the Agricultural Department, the main reasons behind low productivity are: low fertility of the soil, low intensity of the soil, shorter duration of sunlight and leaching of soil nutrient because of heavy rainfall.

A big gap was noticed between the number of household members and the number of earning members of the households. To us, this is another reason behind the high rate of poverty in this district. The survey reveals that among the 462 surveyed individuals, 48.27 percent households have 5 or

more than 5 household members. But, we found that in 56.28 per cent households, the total number of the earning member is only 1. Two earning members were found in 34.2 per cent households. And only 9.53 per cent members stated that they have more than 2 earning members (out of these 7.58 per cent household have 3 earning members). The survey also found that the annual paddy productivity is not sufficient in 70.56 per cent households. All these are the reasons behind the high rate of poverty in the district.

It was also revealed that only 205 surveyed SHG members out of 462 individuals ever received any kind of assistance under any kind of programme from the government (e.g. 'Indira Awas Yojana', 'TSC' etc.). It means 55.63 per cent surveyed people did not receive any kind of assistance under any programme run by the government. It should be kept in mind that all the surveyed people belong to the rural community. What is more we found in our survey that there are 359 (77.71 per cent) surveyed SHG members those who live below the poverty line (BPL) out of 462 surveyed members. It clearly indicates that a good number of BPL people do not benefit from governmental programmes.

The percentage of people who do not get employment throughout the year in Matalhat GP is 56.07. And in rest of the 3 GPs, these percentages are; 57.66 (in Nishiganj-II GP), 77.31 (in Banashwar GP) and 79.2 (in Chilakhana-II GP) respectively. It was not possible for us to include the programme run under 'National Rural Employment Guarantee Act' (NREGA) into our survey because in the year 2007, when we conducted this survey the programme was not implemented throughout the district. These figures tell us enough about the reasons behind higher rate of poverty in the district.

It is interesting to note that 100 per cent surveyed members whom we asked whether they are satisfied with the activities of the NGOs or not replied that they are satisfied with them. So, here we want to mention one

important point... It is clear that after 60 years of independence, the Government could not grasp its entire targeted people. Hence when they are asking help from the 'Non-Governmental Organizations' (NGOs) to reach them, the targeted population is satisfied with the activities of the NGOs. So, our suggestion is that it will be prudent for the government to incorporate the NGOs in more and more developmental activities. It is true that we are not arguing in favour of all the NGOs. The NGOs which are not working properly or who were found corrupt during the time of actions, we are not suggesting to back them up. But, we are trying to establish the fact that if the government seeks assistance from the NGOs who have good mentality to do the work, it'll ultimately benefit the common people.

In chapter V we made an attempt to know the problems of the NGOs which they face at the grassroots level. We tried to answer the question what problems do the NGOs confront while performing their assigned functions. This discussion was carried out in four different sections. The first section discusses the problems that erupt from GO-NGO relationship. The focus of the second section centered on the problems related to NGO-political party relationship. The NGO-NGO relation and NGO-common people relation are the theme of the third and fourth sections respectively. We came to our understanding on the basis of our second survey. In this survey we interviewed the BDOs and their office staff in different blocks, members of the 'Gram Panchayat' and 'Panchayat Samity', Project Director and his office staff of the 'DRDC', District Development Manager of 'NABARD', Coordinator and his office staff of the 'Nehru Yuva Kendra O Sangathan', Bank officials and staff and many other government staff. In the next phase of our survey we met a number of NGO activists throughout Coochbehar district.

In the first section what we found is that cooperation and non-cooperation both exists between the GO bodies and NGO activists. During the time of completion of any project¹⁷⁴ it is mandatory for both the organisations

¹⁷⁴ Here 'project' means where GO-NGO collaboration is sanctioned.

to show cooperation with each other. But we think that the real problem starts right after the completion of the project. The members of the GO bodies like, members of the GP (or members of the 'Panchayat Samity' or 'Zilla Parishad') try to get full credit of the work. The members of the GP or 'Panchayat Samity' belong to different political parties. Since they are interested in winning elections hence they have to show the record of performance. And NGOs are also trying to get the credit for the same work for their survival. Because they also have to show that they are the best in this sector which, in future, will help them to get more work.

We do not want to repeat all the problems here which we have already stated in the fourth chapter. To us, proper planning before implementation of any governmental programmes is very much necessary. If planning has drawbacks in itself, the programmes cannot be successful. On this point, one can take the fourth problem of the first section as an example. The government itself permitted one SHG to set up piggery within the municipal area which is prohibited under the municipal act. The destiny of the project was written on that very day when it was sanctioned.

Another important thing which is required is change in the behaviour of the GO staff for the development of the society. Their behaviour is very poor. We want to call this in our thesis as the 'mentality factor'. To us, the 'mentality factor' is the most important part in the process of development. If you have shortage of money you can overcome that problem through your mentality, but if you do not have the mentality to do a work, huge amount of money will be useless and hence the work will not be complete. This 'mentality factor' is not only required in the arena of GO-NGO relationship, we think it is required in every aspect of life or in the society. Debashish Ganguly¹⁷⁵ also agrees with us that 'mentality factor' does matter in the process of development.

¹⁷⁵ Distrit Development Manager, NABARD, Coochbehar.

The success of the SHGs in different schemes proves that the collective force is more powerful than individual effort. Keeping in mind the above fact it is the exact time to engage these SHGs in other developmental projects as well. Already the government has taken a decision to include them in the 'mid-day meal' projects in the primary and high schools. Now, they are managing the 'mid-day meal' scheme. We, in this point have a proposal for the government that the supervisory responsibility for schemes like 'NREGA', 'IAY' and so on should be handed over to the SHG members. We think if the SHG members collectively take the responsibility to look after the work under the above programmes, corruption will get reduced.

One thing we should however emphasize and that is if proper steps are not taken, the SHG movement will collapse very soon. The SHGs now require a good market to sell their products. The arrangement of the 'DRDC' to sell the products of the SHGs under the same brand 'Diya' and these products are also exempt from the purview of sales tax. But what they urgently need is publicity. And our proposal in this regard is that publicity should be done in the way the 'UNICEF' publicise their products like Greeting cards. The greetings cards of the 'UNICEF' are not an attractive one in terms of other big house products. In a similar manner, the state government too can publicize that if you are buying the products of the 'Diya' brand you are actually contributing yourself in the process of uplifting the socio-economic condition of the poor. Thus if the common people come to know who the real manufacturers of those products are and what is the actual objective behind this scheme, the SHGs will be benefit more and more.

In case of NGO-NGO relationship, we want to point out that ego problem works between the Coochbehar based NGOs and NGOs which have head office outside this district. In this particular area, we want to mention that the target of all the NGOs' is the same. They all are engaged in social work and want to uplift the socio-economic condition of the common people. So, they have to leave aside their 'ego' during the time of work.

The final chapter deals with the relationship between Government Organisations and NGOs during the time of implementing poverty alleviation projects. To us, this chapter is the most interesting part of the thesis. Because when we went to talk to both the GO and NGO members, in most of the cases they asked us not to write anything which they say. The discussion to them was off the record. We faced one problem when we tried to look at the nature of the 'non-governmental organizations' (NGOs). In a plain eye, to us NGOs are organizations which engage themselves in different kinds of development activities. But, the GO officials are not ready to accept this assumption so easily. To them sometimes NGOs have some hidden agenda apart from development. We have seen that in China, these organisations are called 'anti-government'. On the activities of the NGOs, an interesting observation was raised by Mr. Gojviye, the district police superintendent of Malkangiri, Orissa. He claimed that the money which is spent for development purpose in his area is siphoned off by the Maoists. What is more he added that, by using force, the Maoists are also taking money from the NGOs. That's why Mr. Gojviye appealed to the state government to ban the NGOs in this district.

Thus it becomes clear that NGOs are not receiving a positive look all the time from the part of the GO bodies. But, one question arises and that is whether there is any truth behind this allegation or not. If the NGOs are not engaged in development activities then why the government took the decision to include them in development related programmes along with the GO bodies? So, in this chapter we tried to find out the truth on the nature of the NGOs and the relationship that exists among the two organisations. From our survey we found that the role of the NGOs in development in Coochbehar district is quite satisfactory. It is true that some GO officials and staffs are not fully satisfied with the activities of some NGOs. But, at the same time these officials praised some other NGOs. So, we think that there is no question whether NGOs should be included in the process of development or not. It is necessary to include them in this process. But, emphasis should be given on clarity on part of the NGOs.

One allegation is common among the NGO activists that the staffs of the GOs are not punctual in their work. The same complaint was expressed by the NGO activists as well. To us, any kind of delay not only hampers the flow of the work but at the same time also make an effect on the quality of the work. How is 'time' and 'quality of work' related, this is what we have discussed in the fifth chapter. To overcome this problem our suggestion is that, both the GO staff and NGO activists should show more responsibility and sincerity in their work. The government should fix a time for the GO staff to pass the files or submit the reports. On part of the NGO activists, this should be mandatory that failure in work within the time frame will cause penalty. Actually, two 'P' are necessary for good work culture. One 'P' is for prize and another 'P' is for punishment. We think that the lack of these two 'Ps' are behind the negligence in the work.

How do common people and the NGOs suffer because of the poor performance of one or two NGOs? The answer to this was stated by the President of 'Nishiganj Club'. Narayan Pal told us that earlier they ran only one 'Old Age Day Care Centre'. The project started in 2001 under the sponsorship of the 'Ministry of Social Justice and Women Empowerment' through the Nehru Yuba Kendra. In the year 2002, the government withdrew the project. The main reason that forced the government to back away from the project is that in some places (not in West Bengal) the NGOs who were granted financial assistance, grabbed all the money without running any day care centre. Now who will blame the government for withdrawing this project? But at the same time we must mention that after the government backed out, the 'Nishiganj Club' is still running an 'Old Age day Care Centre' at their own cost. So, two faces of the NGOs are reflected in the above example. Hence we must repeat here that the 'mentality factor' is the main reason behind any kind of development.

We witnessed that businessman, journalist, housewives, and unemployed youth including the government servants hold different posts in the NGO offices in Coochbehar district. We found that a total of 7 government service holders (in 6 surveyed NGOs in this district) are at the same time also holding important positions (like President, Vice-President, Secretary, Asst. secretary, Treasurer or Governing body member) in the NGOs. Almost all the NGOs have a pucca building and own computers. On this point we want to mention the names of some NGOs who are now well known for their good activities but once they started their mission from a wooden room (e.g. 'New Bharati Club') or from a hut (Khatamari Deshbandhu Club). Reviewing this point we come to the conclusion that if anybody has will power in his mind to work for the people, lack of infrastructure cannot be an obstacle.

Finally we tried to understand the motto of the GOs and NGOs and also tried to collect the information on whether there is any chance of conflict or not? If we deeply think, we will notice that 'development' and 'work for people' are the common motto of both the organizations. Then where is the place for conflict? We think the main reason behind conflict is 'mentality' or 'ego'. Who is superior and who is doing better for the common people, these are the two points on which rivalry starts among the two bodies. Keeping aside the 'ego' factor if both the organisations work together for the people, the real objective will be fulfilled.