

**A STUDY OF RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN  
PANCHAYAT RAJ INSTITUTIONS (PRIs) AND CIVIL  
SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS (CSOs) WITH  
RESPECT TO GOVERNANCE AND  
DEVELOPMENT OF COOCH BEHAR**

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# Acknowledgement

**Civil society**, as it is understood today, is relatively a recent phenomenon in India. The concept was essentially built up to accelerate the spirit of volunteerism among the persons with constructive and philanthropic mind in the society and to help the government to get rid of the difficulties from the crisis of governability.

The activists and the volunteers associated with the **Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)** in India needs to know the history, structure and nature of different civil society organizations present in and around his surrounding. The present work (proposed thesis) is a multi dimensional effort concentrated on the specific areas at the grass root (panchayat) level in the district of Cooch Behar and is intended to cater to a much wider audience.

The chances of all these information, in many cases, depend on a variety of factors, such as, the content on the activities of the organizations, timeliness, and the different actors involved, availability of space, etc.

There are very little or no work of its kind at the grass root level. In this sense, the present work is, perhaps, the first attempt of its kind at collecting all useful and relevant information at one place in the Indian context. It also seeks to present the same in a logical order and in lucid language.

An exhaustive bibliography is given to assist the reader, if he wishes to have a more detailed probe in such area of his interest.

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# Chapter-1

## 1.1. Introduction

In India the review of rural and community development programmes reveal that in spite of the continued efforts made by the government for the upliftment of the countryside, not much headway could be made due to certain strategic deficiencies in implementation process.

The state of West Bengal is a model. Here, the government seems to have been making all out efforts to develop the Panchayat Raj Bodies as instruments of political education and mobilization of the masses and public participation.

That should not lead to any complacency either. The district of Cooch Behar in West Bengal suffers a lot over a period of time due to misbalance and lack of development.

Though conventional approaches failed, since governments cannot be done away with, there is need to redefine the role among the stakeholders, i.e., Community Based Organization (CBOs), people and government.

At present the government seems to have been showing their interest to take the cooperation from the successful civil society initiatives after realizing the need that it can better organize and demonstrate the poorest sections of the rural society into viable groups, at the grassroots.

In the district of Cooch Behar, a number of *Voluntary Organizations (VOs)* are actively taking part in the rural sanitation programme. *Society for Participatory Action and Reflection (SPAR)*, *Sunderban Rural Development Trading Centre (SRDTC)* etc. are the NGOs engaged in rural development in this

district. There are also the organizations of the poor in the form of *Self-Help Groups (SHGs)* in the district.

All the above stated organizations can be taken and explained within the broad frame of *Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)*. The thrust of the study can be developed to understand whether these informal or formal community initiatives run with or without government help, and secondly, whether these organizations have been able to succeed in serving the most vulnerable sections of the society in the district of Cooch Behar.

## **1.2. Conceptual Framework**

Governance and Development are the most dynamic words in the field of Public Administration as well as Development Administration. The essence of these words has always been broadened to keep pace with the changing needs and practical consideration of the people and society.

With regard to political economy approach one may find a definite correlation between governance and development. Better the governance, better the development is. Again, governance is meaningless if under it people attain less development.

Governance is associated with many core values, such as humane governance, democratic governance, effective or good governance, responsible governance, etc.. In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, while British Government proposed to offer effective or good Government to the Indians, the Indian leaders objected to it and demanded no good Government, but '*Responsible Government*'.

In fact, development, decentralization, responsibility, effectiveness, openness etc., are the pillars through which governance are run in the line of '*Democratia*' or '*power to the people*'. That is, there is a basic difference between good and responsible governance. In responsible governance, the authority is accountable to the people.

Governance may be explained at the macro or country level or at the region. At the micro or grassroots level local governance may be either rural or urban governance. Since nowhere micro level governance enjoy enough autonomy, its study has to find its scope on the macro status of governance of the country.

Governance is defined as the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources. One of the distinct aspects of governance is identified as the capacity of governments to design, formulate, and implement policies and discharge functions. (1)

However, governance is neither a mere function nor the sole domain of the government. There is much difference between government and governance. A government consists of a group of individuals who share 'a defined responsibility' under the legitimacy of the constitution in the sense of sanctified authority and right to exercise power on behalf of the others, maintain, protect and adapt the society by making and carrying out decisions that affect the lives of the citizens. But governance as it is explained 'Comprises mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise legal rights, meet their obligations, and mediate their differences'. (2)

It is true that government is the most powerful and coercive institution and continues to be the major element of any system of governance. But in the changing world, a number of key actors like private sectors as well as market or

business activity, Non-Government Organizations (NGOs), Peoples Organizations (POs), Voluntary Organizations (VOs), as a whole the Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) play important role in managing public affairs through providing delivery of essential services, thereby helping the state, promote further development.

Therefore, shifting from its narrow view the concept of governance has been widened into its present broader view. 'Governance is the sum of the many ways individuals and institutions, public and private, manage their common affairs. It is a continuing process through which conflicting or diverse interests may be accommodated and cooperative action may be taken. It includes formal institutions and regimes empowered to enforce compliance, as well as informal arrangements that people and institutions either have agreed to or perceive to be in their best interest. (3)

Under the above-stated broader ideological and political framework of governance, understanding of rural local governance at the district and its below level can be developed in terms of relationship between the functioning of the state, especially Panchayat Raj Institutions( i.e., PRIs) and the empowerment of the civil society, especially the Civil Society Organization.( i.e.. CSOs).

Since a politically conscious civil society is the key to a responsive state, this is precisely the reason why the inclusion of civil society is added to this study of governance. The responsibility of holding the state accountable rests not only with the formal institutions of governance, such as constitutions and legal institutions, it is a part of the social fabric, and it is the substance of civil society. (4)

Civil Society, according to Harry Blair, comprises the collective of those social organizations that enjoy autonomy from the state, and have as one important goal, among others to influence the state on behalf of their members. A

strong civil society directly supports democratic participation, assure the right and probity of the citizenry and contributes towards a deepening of policy accountability.

*According to North-South Institute, “the definition of civil society depends on the vital question that can it be regarded as a mechanism to fight capitalism? ..... Pluralist approaches would lead to counting and classifying organizations. Institutionalism approaches lead to examination of networks and relationships. Behavioral approaches would be questioning of intra-institutional dynamics.”*

According to *Blaney and Pasha*, civil society must be understood from a variety of angles: both as structure (of organizations, social and political space and relationships) and as process (the ways in which the elements of the structure come into being). (5)

According to *Shethi*, civil societies are the locus of action by actors bent on change; whether these are foreign or domestic development groups, charities for relief, action groups devoted to consciousness – raising and mobilization of the oppressed, protest groups, political groups, pre-party political formations and support groups. (6)

While civil society is defined as a structure – the constituent parts of it are organized groups, civil society, by some others has been defined as a pattern of relationships with others. White argues, the use of civil societies “ implies a certain power relationship between state and society such that there are limitations on the state’s capacity to pervade and control society to insulate themselves from, and exert influence upon, the state.” (7)

Civil society enables environment. Blaney and Pasha argue that the starting point is “the stabilization of a system of rights, constituting human beings as individuals, both as citizens in relation to the state and legal persons in the economy and the sphere of free association.” (8)

The term ‘*Civil Society*’ is derived from the Latin word ‘*Societas Civilis*’.

According to *Antoney Black*, the concept of Civil Society was very much prevailed in pre-modern Europe. The term ‘*Societas Civilis*’ was derived from Cicero’s definition of the state (Civitas) as a partnership in law (Societas) with equality of legal status, but not of money and talent among its members. Civil Society simply meant a community, a collection of human beings united within a legitimate political order. (9)

The modern conception of the civil society is distinct from the earlier versions. The conception appeared systematically for the first time in the eighteenth century. In *Locke’s conception*, civil society has two dimensions. It provides redress and security against anarchy and arbitrariness of the ‘state of nature’, and on the other, through the devolution of legislative powers gives the population security against the arbitrariness of the government.

*Hegel’s concept* of civil society embraces the realm of economic interests, labor, private property and class distinctions. Civil society in Hegel’s terminology simply refers to the totality of the material conditions of life.

*Marx and Engles*, as opposed to their predecessors, gave an independent identity to civil society. They refused to concede the fundamental identity of the state and civil society. Marx demanded the abolition of the anti-thesis between political society (state) and civil society through the abolition of the both. This can

be achieved by the introduction of unrestricted means to the fullest extension of democracy, which he broadly equates with the transition to socialism.

Civil Society, according to *Gramsci*, takes on the notion of 'terrain', a place where the state, the people wage war against the hegemony of the market and the state.

*Now*, civil society represents a distinct sphere of human relations and activity; distinguished from the state— it is neither public nor private— but both at once.

*In fact*, decentralization is better helped at the grassroots by the spontaneous work or participation of the civil society in a multitude of activities. The different kinds of 'Unions, Universities, Philanthropic foundations, Urban and Village level clubs, user groups, NGOs, neighbour hood associations influence public performance'. Among other things they can help hold local governments accountable. Such groups are known collectively as Civil Society. (10)

*NGOs* have the advantage of grass-root reach and they stimulate community participation. They are able to mobilize citizens for developmental efforts, which the state through its bureaucratic apparatus has not been able to do, and thereby serve as an efficient and flexible local delivery mechanism. NGO strengthen Civil Society for contributing to a differentiation in political participation; they perform effective advocacy and also lobbying function.

World Bank thinks that 'it can also complement local administration in the search for more responsive and effective governance.'

It is believed that the government may and should encourage the participation of civil society. The involvement of civil society can reduce social tensions and bring social as well as political cohesion.

The active civil society can enrich a sound political environment by acting as watchdog of democracy.

To be clearly identified with the concept of civil society it is better to follow the report of the 'Human Development in South Asia 1999', especially its 'chapter – 7' on the 'Governance by civil society'. Here civil society includes '*all independent voluntary and private sector activities, which comprise: -*

*(i) Individuals and households,*

*(ii) The media,*

*(iii) Business, and*

*(iv) Civil Society Organization (CSOs) which include all remaining groups. (11)*

People-driven civil society organizations have been responsible for advancing political freedom, safeguarding basic rights and furthering social development at a much lower cost than governments. This is reflected in the activities of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), social movements, community-based people's organizations religious groups, peasant associations etc. like Civil Society Organizations.

In the age of globalization, though we cannot avoid pressure or domination, we have to think globally but act locally. The need of the hour is to build an environment friendly human economy. In fact, rural communities possess certain

features, which strongly qualify them as a major constituent of an alternative and sustainable economic order.

*The term 'Civil Society' is defined as 'the broad range of organized groupings which occupy the public space between the state and the individual citizen'.*

In West Bengal, a list of relevant Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) were recommended by the Department For International Development (DFID). (12)

As it includes Non-Government Organizations (NGOs), International Non-Government Organization (INGOs), Community Based Organization (CBOs), research institutions, academics, media, trade unions, co-operatives, collectives, faith based organizations, women's groups and advocacy groups. Phillipa Haden and Madhu Mishra consider the breadth of 'civil society' and claimed the definition as narrower referring mainly to NGOs and CBOs as the most commonly recognized organizational expressions of 'civil society' in the context of development.

However, a large number of NGOs receive funding from Governments Multi-Lateral Aid Agencies and Foundation, which may make them less independent in their programmes and operations. This may also make them susceptible to government and donor agencies. (13)

While multi-lateral agencies favoured withdrawal of the state to let the NGOs or free market a safe room to work, the search towards good governance in the Indian context could be thought within the system to be best suited to the needs and aspiration of the people concerned. Those voluntary organization or

non-government organizations are thus to be favoured by us if it is the result of the people-driven civil society initiative.

The search for a good governance could be developed if a dependable delivery system of services especially agricultural inputs, water supply for drinking or irrigation, medical facilities, infrastructure, education etc could be well provided to the rural poor.

Society, according to **Robert Dahl**—is basically a polyarchy where a large number of minority groups operate possessing a variety of political resources that are unevenly distributed among them and are, naturally used by them with different degrees of intensity and efficiency and hence there is no single elite as claimed by the elitists. In other words, Political power, is determined not by hierarchical, but by horizontal relationship. (14)

There can never exist a true democracy unless there is true participation of the disadvantaged section of the society, especially women, scheduled castes, scheduled tribes etc., both in governance and developmental programmes.

Empowerment could be a planning goal in the sense that the governmental support is extended to the voluntary sectors as well, both in the field of implementation as well as policy formulation.

More upon which the present study can be extended is to highlight those roles of the civil society initiatives or organizations, which can have at least a demonstration effect. Those organizations can alert the communities to the services to which they are entitled, and mobilize the rural people to demand their rights. These organizations can ensure that the delivery system operates efficiently. They can educate the community.

*Since Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)* act as an agent of change, it is hoped that a better Panchayat Raj Institutions and Civil Society Organizations (i.e., P.R.I. – CSO) partnership will promote human governance at the rural level. Since the positive role of Civil Society Organizations help to supplement the undoing or unfinished tasks of the Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs), the suggestions or advices from the Civil Society Organizations can be invited or sought for. Civil Society Organizations are not the competitor, rather they are the friend, philosopher and guide of the Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs), or it may be the vice versa.

While the state like ours today suffers from acute demand of localization or smaller states, the PRIs should attach themselves with the civil society organization in such a manner, from the very beginning, so that the demands of the people cannot linger or flare up or turn into tension or violence rather it is reduced to a peaceful solution.

It is because of the absence of a positive, conscious and patriotic civil society the state either willingly or unwillingly compelled itself to engage and negotiate with the parochial forces of the society.

However, the state has to bow to the genuine demands or forces and it is done because of a strong civil society initiatives or successful social movements. In fact, PRIs always have to be very cautious about the nerve of the society through close attachment with the CSOs. As people's participation in society grows, so does the number of these organizations and civic movements, which compels the government in articulating their demands to respond.

The state of West Bengal has a high credential with regard to the performance of Panchayat and rural development. In spite of the fact the state has

witnessed diverse pressures and it has been compelled to offer extra institutional arrangement (e.g. Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council at the hill area and very recently Uttar Banga Unnayan Parshad for the people of the six districts of North Bengal) in the northern part of the state of West Bengal.

However, a section of the Raj Banshi people in the banner of Kamtapur movement continue to raise their demand for a separate Kamtapur state within the Indian Union. In actual sense, Uttar Banga Unnayan Parshad is the result of a long-foughted movement of several parties at the region who too wanted an immediate solution to the deprivation for the people in North Bengal.

Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) in the district of Cooch Behar has to act them within the ambience of such above-stated situation of political restiveness at the grassroots level and Cooch Behar happens to be the district under the Uttar Banga Unnayan Parsad or the tension affected area caused by the Kamtapur movement.

Moreover, there are acute problems for the district with regard to locational and other disadvantages. Poor communication and irrigation facilities, poverty, frequent soil erosion, flood etc. are the problems that keep the district as one of the backward district in West Bengal.

With this background, the responsibility of the Voluntary Organizations (VOs), People's Organizations (POs), NGOs and PRIs are much important which require a good coordination among them. More is needed to let the CSOs to allow such activities, which can help the process of governance and developmental work in the desired direction. Therefore, the relationship between PRIs and CSOs is a very close one. Any worthwhile Panchayat will certainly maintain link with Civil

Society Organizations to promote a humane, democratic, decentralized governance and development at the district of Cooch Behar.

Panchayat Raj Institutions are to transform themselves from being representative political institutions to being community institutions of direct democracy with support from the civil society organizations at the local level.

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## Chapter –2

### 2.1. Statement of Problem

The district of Cooch Behar still remains backward. The overall situation with regard to development of the rural people in the district leaves much to be desired.

Locational disadvantage, poor communication, traditional production in agriculture, poor irrigation facilities, continuous soil erosion, flood or devastations caused by frequent course change of rivers in the district, poverty, illiteracy etc. were all the constraints that could not be eradicated so far.

Though the government failed, since the Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) cannot be done away with, there is the need to redefine the role among the PRIs and people's initiatives.

Problems lie with insufficient attention and care towards the Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) on the part of the government in the district of Cooch Behar. Herculean Problems lie with the treatment to those people of the district of Cooch Behar where 93 percent population live in rural areas and 52 percent belong to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes who also belong to socio-economically backward class. There is illiteracy, lack of scientific knowledge, therefore, their empowerment are being delayed. People and village Panchayat's representative are not aware of the concept of 'Complete Sanitation' too.

Nevertheless, so many basic problems, needs, demands and also solution to the problems are voiced and reflected by some people through various kinds of civil society organizations in the district but it is rarely consulted with.



Problems at the rural level in the district could have been identified and eradicated if a close relationship was being maintained between the PRIs and the CSOs. But the PR bodies remained ill equipped in terms of manpower and resources to motivate the CSOs.

## **2.2. Objective of the Study**

*The objective of the research has been thought to be concentrated upon the following fundamental items: ~*

(i) To find the present nature of the people's actions at the grassroots level through the civil society organizations

(ii) To find the PRIs- Civil Society Organization (CSOs) relationship at the rural level in the district of Cooch Behar.

(iii) To find the future potentiality of the civil society with a view to help good governance and development at the rural level on a sustainable basis.

(iv) To find the pluralist nature of governance at the rural level in the district of Cooch Behar.

(v) To find the nature of development that keep pace with the latest development imperatives in the district of Cooch Behar.

## **2.3. Review of Literature**

The foregoing analysis is carried out keeping in view the concepts of 'decentralized governance', 'humane governance', 'democratic governance' and 'civic governance', for appropriate fitting into a holistic, diversified and pro-people governance for the rural society. The idea of this study is developed by the

concept of 'humane governance' as enunciated by Mahbubul Haq (1996) and later by Mahbubul Haq Development Centre (1999) in the analysis of '*crisis of governance*' in the '*South Asia*'.

Continuous attempts on the dynamic changes understanding Governance by the World Bank (1994), UNDP (1997), Commission on Global Governance (1995), OECD etc. have been studied to get broader idea of governance.

Besides, the valuable essays, which were written in '*Decentralized Governance in the Asian Countries*', edited by *Abdul Aziz* and *David Arnold* (1996) became the ideal document for studying the rural governance, among which *Alex B. Brillantes, Jr's* comment deserved attention by the researcher.

In his own words: *Governance, as commonly understood, has always been the responsibility of the government, which after all, is mandated to govern i.e. provide leadership in the delivery of basic services to the people, and in the process, exercise predominating influence and legitimacy.*

*However, because of a number of constraints – ranging from limited sources to bureaucratic problems like red tape and corruption – conventional structures and processes of government have become generally ineffective in fulfilling their tasks of governance.....*

*Thus, extra governmental structures – including the private sector, NGOs and POs – have taken on the tasks of governance, more specifically in the delivery of basic services, active development work, and consequently increased influence and legitimacy at the local levels'.*

The above-mentioned line, Alex commented from his Philippine Experience. Many years ago. Public Administration Author like *Mohit Bhattacharya (1981)* supported the theme in analyzing the case of the developing countries.

In '*Public Administration*' Chapter II, he believed, 'the range and scale of government activities have been increasing with more and more involvement of government in the regulation of public affairs and the supply of commodities and services for the benefit of the people. This is particularly true of the developing countries where governments have a crucial role to play in bringing about radical socio-economic changes... Experience shows, however, that government is not efficient as it should be'.

The responsibility of the state is counted by the logistic support while we study *Rehman Sobhan (2001)* 'Planning and Public Action for Asian Women' where his presumption was that 'the state in many Asian Politics accountable for all that happens to its women or indeed its citizens'.

With regard to the development for a rural society, people-centred development with participation of the disadvantaged section is given attention. The concepts of '*Human Development*' by *Mahbubul Haq (1996)*, '*Alternative Development*' by *Rajni Kothari (1998)*, *Rural Development Sector Policy Paper by World Bank (1975)*, *Sustainable Development by World Bank (1999)* etc. have been consulted for.

Political Economy Approach of 1960-70s, have been studied to understand the correlation between governance and development. Critical evaluation on democracy, development and governance as examined in a number of essays in '*Democracy and Development*' Edited by *Adrian Leftwitch (1996)* helped a lot to understand the views of participatory democracy as well as democratic governance from the liberal view.

*B.N.A. (Basic Needs Approach)* to development of the 1970s have been carefully considered for the rural people especially upon those who are affected by

abject poverty. *I.L.O.'s (International Labour Organization) views* and *S.C. Dube (1988)* are thus studied for.

With the rapid change to the politics and society as the demand for redistribution, localization have been the order of these days, the suggestion from *S.N. Ray (1995) 'Communication in Rural Development'* for '*endogamous development*' or '*carefully managed decentralization*' by *World Bank (1999)* provided with '*Civic governance*' as suggested by *Mahbubul Haq Human Development Centre (1999)* and also by *World Bank 2000: Entering 21<sup>st</sup> century, World Development Report 1999/2000 August, 1999* have been valued a lot.

*The theoretical basis for the study is also helped by the content from Neera Chandoke (1994) 'The State and Civil Society', where civil societies are suggested to be reconsidered.*

Since the concepts of governance and development achieved newer meaning with the rapid changing circumstances, the practical application to a developing country like India with respect to the participation of the State by its governmental activities through the Panchayat at the Micro level and the participation of non-governmental activities through the Panchayat at the Micro level and the participation of non-governmental organization have been consulted with.

Major institutional reforms that were undertaken during *1950's* and early *60s* included abolition of Zamindari system, community Development Programme, the introduction of 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendment Act for progressive and constitutional weightage to Panchayat Raj Institutions at the rural level have been examined. Besides, the introduction of Minimum needs programme in the *70's* and the establishment and functions of the *District Rural Development Agency (DRDA)*

*in the 80's* and other development Plans that brought qualitative and quantitative changes in the rural life have also been viewed.

Since Participation is a pre-condition for receipt of development benefits, the recent development of Gram Sansad or Gram Sabha at the Panchayat, the role of a number of *Non-Governmental Organization (NGOs) and Civil Society Organization (CSOs)* through which voice are actively comes (i.e. from the below) and by which the rural people take part in the development process have been carefully analyzed to inculcate better governance for the people at the rural level.

## Chapter 3

### Methodology

The study aims to highlight the participation of the rural people, especially the disadvantaged section in the governance and developmental programmes through Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) with or without the help of the *Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs)* in the district of Cooch Behar.

### Research Questions/Hypotheses:

Based on the problems related to the lack of Coordination between PRIs and CSOs in the district of Cooch Behar, which are sought to be analyzed as objectives of the study, a careful examination has been sought to be made on the following hypotheses:

- a. Do all the people fully participate in the process of governance and have access in developmental programmes at the rural level in the district of Cooch Behar?
- b. Is Panchayat Raj Institutions found responsive to the Welfare, development and empowerment of the rural people?
- c. Is the Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) strong enough to raise voice from the below?
- d. Are the needs of the poor and disadvantaged people in the district met?
- e. Are the needs of the future generations taken into consideration in the district?

## **Research Design :**

The research design used in the study is partly of explorative as well as descriptive or diagnostic research studies.

## **Design of Data Collection :**

After pre-testing, a questionnaire has been formulated to elicit the merits and limitations of both PRIs and CSOs in the district. Both structured and non-structured questions were set for the respondents (i.e., beneficiaries or rural people).

Interviews were held with both the officials and non-officials and had personal contacts to discuss the relevant problems. Participant and non-participant observation techniques were used to supplement the data collected through questionnaire, by attending the Panchayats and CSOs. Data have also been collected from the offices of Panchayats with regard to development for each year since 1995 and also the records of the CSOs with regard to governance and development.

## **Data Analysis:**

Comparative analyses throwing light on all points have been developed in view of the objectives set earlier in the study. Statistical computation has been developed on the interview replies and as such averages, percentages and other statistical tools were used.

## **Sampling/Universe of the Study:**

The target population for the district of Cooch Behar was specified as the adult rural people, especially the poor, disadvantaged section, Women, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Therefore, purposive random sampling method has been used to select and understand them as well.

7 NGOs, which are enlisted in the District Social Welfare Branch under District Magistrate of Cooch Behar and engaged themselves with rural development in the district, have been selected for study.

10 Self Help Groups (SHGs/SGSYs) have been taken from a Block / Panchayat Samity.

20 Voluntary Organizations (V.Os/ Clubs) have been taken which are engaged in rural development (such as Sanitation, Coaching etc. work).

20 Gram Panchayats (G.P.s) have been selected numbering 10+6+4 respectively keeping in view of those specified location/ areas where the above-stated 7 NGOs, 10 SHGs and 20 V.O.s were situated.

A total of 570 interviews were conducted taking 10 beneficiaries randomly each from those organizations, i.e., (7NGOs \* 10 beneficiaries), (10 SHGs \* 10 beneficiaries), (20 V.O.s \* 10 beneficiaries) and (20GPs \* 10 beneficiaries).

*Further more, a few community based people's organizations, peasant organizations, Women Organizations, trade unions, etc. have been selected especially to the selected / above stated Panchayats and carefully examined them accordingly.*

## Chapter –4

### 4.1. The history of civil society initiatives since pre-independence in India.

4.1.1. The importance of civil society organization was never found central to the Indian Polity. The effort to build up good, humane society mainly circled with the voices of the mobile, dynamic social and political leaders or personalities in different times.

4.1.2. With regard to caste system in India, no civil society organizations were found to come forward strongly to eradicate the evils of caste system. Political Parties suffered each other from competing ideologies. The dominant congress party always suffered from dilemma. Later, different organization came into the fore.

#### **Individual Initiative:**

*Kandukuri Veeresalingam (1848-1919)* During the 1870's there was a lively controversy in Andhra Pradesh on the question of educating girls. To propagate his views effectively Veeresalingam started his journal Vivekavardhini in 1874 at Rajahmundry. To ridicule the opponents of women's education he wrote many satires, lampoons and dramas like '*Brahma Vivaham*', criticizing early marriages, Kanya Sulkam and marriage of old men with young girls. To practise what he had preached he started a girls school at Dawaleswaram in September 1874. It was the first institution of its kind in Andhra.

In 1881 he established another school for girls at Innispeta in Rajahmundry. He had also educated his wife Rajyalakshmi, so that she could help him in his

social reform activities. Besides the school for women, he started schools for Harijans and night schools for the working classes. He was the first in Andhra to encourage coeducation. Veeresalingam's pioneering work in the emancipation of the Andhra widows overshadows his achievements in other branches of social reform.

**Jyotiba Phule**, a dalit reformer, organized schools for lower-caste boys in Pune in 1852, recognized the fact of dalit oppression by Brahmins and the upper castes, and yet avoided any confrontation with the Brahmins who ran the Bombay Education Society and supplied textbooks to his schools. In the southern India, in 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Jyotiba Phule's Caste mobilization recognized the lower proportion of the upper castes as Bahujan.

**4.1.3.1** Later, **Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar** – a great pioneer managed to ensure 'reservations' for these people in the constitution of India. In 20<sup>th</sup> March, 1927, in Kolaba Dr. Ambedkar started campaign among the socio-economically backward class telling that everyone had the right to use the water of 'Chowdar pond' of Mahada. Ambedkar opened the new dimension of social justice in India. The day today is declared as '**Social Empowerment Day**'.

**4.1.3.2** However, it was **Gandhiji** who could have been able to bring different aged male or female to the path of struggle to fight for social justice. Gandhiji's call to 'eradicate untouchability' was certainly not a dishonest call for vote banks. Gandhiji's naming of 'Harijan' regarded these people as the important member of the society and polity.

**4.1.3.3** In the pre-independent India, with regard to rendering service through voluntary organizations (VOs), three great Indian thinkers and activists

gave three distinct models. They were: *Swami Vivekananda, Rabindra Nath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi. Models were:*

- i) *Ramakrishna –Matth-Mission Model of Swami Vivekananda,*
- ii) *Santi Niketan-Sri Niketan Model of Rabindra Nath Tagore and*
- iii) *Sabarmati and Wardha Model of Mahatma Gandhi.*

Among these three types, while the Tagore and Gandhiji's inspiration brought the voluntary service into the limelight, Ramakrishna Math and Mission became the World Champion with its growing service and activities to the people. Not only the State or Union Government in India take the help and cooperation of Ramakrishna Mission but many foreign governments do the same in their own countries. The Mission provides service in a large number of fields like education, health, environment, culture, and sports etc. programmes for the service of the mankind in India and abroad.

**4.1.3.4 Rabindra Nath Tagore (1861-1941)**, the famous World Poet and Nobel Laurettée, set up Brahmabha Charyashram in Santi Niketan in Bolpur in the district of Birbhum in 1901.

By establishing his historically famous village development center of '*Sri Niketan*' in 1922, Tagore communicated education with the practical work and service to the mankind. The process of organizing the villages in an integrated manner was started with centring the Sri Niketan.

*The name of Lenard Night Elmhurst – a British is closely associated with the formation of Viswa Bharati, Sri Niketan and the total development work for rural Bengal. Endrews and Peearson were the other foreigners who helped Tagore for such a work.*

*The source of inspiration of Elmharst was Sam Higginbottom. Sam was the principal of Naini Agricultural Institute near Allahabad. The Institute was engaged with the development of agriculture as well as the socio-economic development of the poor farmers.*

*Elmharst* was 'immensely struck by the natural majesty of Rabindra Nath Tagore'. In Sri Niketan, Elmharst was deeply involved to make the dream and plan of village reconstruction, village-service, cooperatives and ideal education of Rabindra Nath Tagore a real success.

*Dorothy Huwitni Straightsht* (Dorothy Elmharst), often extended financial help to Tagore in crisis especially for the successful implementation of the village development project. *Lenard* accompanied with, *Rathindra Nath, Santosh Chandra Majumdar, Kalimohan Ghosh, Goura Gopal Ghosh, Hemanta Kumar Sarkar* etc. persons visited a number of villages to understand the real condition and causes of backwardness.

Surul Samiti, which was truly a Pally Unnayan Samiti i.e.village development Association or centre, was set in 1992.

The cultivation of Zoar and Jute was started. Farmers were provided the technical knowledge of using manure for a prolific agricultural land. In Sri Niketan, besides Scientific Cultivation, they gave importance on rearing of animals and revived the cottage industry.

*Elmharst helped Tagore to plan for such an extension service of Sri Niketan.*

**4.1.3.5 Gandhiji (1869-1948)** taught the Indians to strengthen their backs, to raise their head and to face circumstance with steady gaze.

Civil Society movement in India can not at all be thought without Gandhiji .

In the colonial India, during the British period, the British encouraged the import of cheap machine-made cloth from Manchester and killed the handloom industry of India. Gandhiji repeatedly pointed out that the import of cheap British cloth had rendered the poor unemployed for six months in a year.

With a view to provide immediate relief, as well as to unite the countrymen to fight against the British, Gandhi promoted *Khadi* as a part of the National Movement. The practice of **Khadi** led the people against economic exploitation.

Gandhiji involved his followers for the eradication of untouchability, which was a severe curse for the caste-ridden Indian society. As for example the *Bhangis*, was the most under-privileged class in the Hindu society, condemned to a life of menial and degrading kind of work-handling dirt and human waste. These unfortunate men and women, regarded as ‘untouchables’ by conservative Hindus, lived in abject poverty accepting ‘untouchability’ as a part of their religious tradition.

Gandhi had already given a call to combat “this crime against man and God”. These people were poor outcasts, and had to build their wretched hutments far away from the main village. Shunned by everyone, they had no rights, owned no land, and went to no school. Gandhi pleaded with his followers not to regard the job of the Bhangis as undignified. He, in fact, exhorted his followers to clean their own toilets, by himself setting an example. The campaign of Gandhi to free these men and women from their degrading occupation was called the ‘*Bhangi Mukti*’, or the “*liberation of the Bhangi*”.

**4.1.4. Muralidhar Devidas Amte**, popularly known as Baba Amte was the best student of Gandhiji with this regard. Baba Amte launched effective movement in the northeastern part of the Maharashtra. Amte took up Bhangi Mukti challenge and started cleaning forth latrines a day.

Amte started also effective campaign to help those who suffered from the dreaded disease of leprosy; to rehabilitate them and to remove the horror and stigma which society attaches to this disease. The movement is no longer confined to the problem of leprosy but has acquired many other dimensions.

At Dattapur near Warora, is a colony-cum-hospital for leprosy patients who came up largely due to the inspired teaching of Gandhi who had made treatment and care of leprosy patients' part of his 'constructive programme'.

Muralidhar started living in this colony to learn of the problems associated with leprosy and look for solution. He built a little hut, housed some leprosy patients there, and finally, in 1948, started a centre for diagnosis and treatment of leprosy in his hometown, Warora.

In 1950, Amte founded the Maharogi Sewa Samiti for the care of leprosy patients. He soon saw that what was required was a place for the patients where they could live and get treated, be productive and independent, and get rehabilitated.

Economic independence is the basis of full rehabilitation. Muralidhar aimed at that. He asked for and obtained a piece of land in the Chandrapur forest from the local State government. The forest area near Warora town was full of wild animals and scorpions. With his young wife Sadhana, his two little sons- Vikas and Prakash, six leprosy patients and just fourteen rupees in his pocket,

Muralidhar came here to settle down. He put up bamboo huts, dug a well and started living here. This was the beginning of Anandwan, the '*forest of joy*'.

Muralidhar now came to be called affectionately as Baba Amte or simply Baba. With his fundamental belief that life must be full of joy and hope, *Baba Amte set about bringing joy and hope in the lives of leprosy patients. He strove towards treatment and rehabilitation of the affected.*

With independence, the horizon of the civil society movement gets rapidly wider day-by-day. Let us analyse some of the activities done by the individual, VOs, NGOs, CBOs and other relevant institutes organizations.

**4.1.9.** Likewise, the story of the *SEWA* movement can be traced directly to Mahatma Gandhi. After his successful Champaran Satyagraha in Bihar, Gandhi had settled down in his ashram at Ahmedabad. The textiles mills were an integral part of the industrial revolution in India. The wages of the labourers were poor, the working hours long, the conditions of work exhausting and the living quarters ugly and squalid. The chawls or the slums in which they lived were heavily overcrowded and there was an atmosphere of degradation.

These entire workers were the landless peasants whom poverty had uprooted from their villages and driven to the towns to earn a livelihood. Many of them found work in the ever-growing textile industry of Ahmedabad city. Gandhiji organized this textile labour into a labour union, and called it '*Majoor Mahajan*'.

*SEWA* is an indirect offshoot of this labour union – the Majoor Mahajan. Its founder – a trade unionist and campaigner for women's causes – is *Smt. Ela Bhatt, fondly known as Elaben*. Elaben organized *Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA)* in the year 1969. Self-Employed men and women formed a

major segment of the poor and unorganized workers. They started meeting the women, individually and in small groups. In the group meetings, these women were encouraged to express their problems freely. All of them collectively tried to find solutions to their problems.

*SEWA organized the women for a common struggle. This obviously hurted vested interest of private moneylenders, local slumlords, big traders, alcohol kings or petty politicians. Therefore this agencies or groups were hostile to SEWA. SEWA was started as an urban organization in Ahmedabad city, but the message it conveyed had wider impact to other parts of India to tackle a variety of economic and social issues.*

#### **4.1.10. In the field of environment :-**

- a. *Medha Patekar, Arundhati* etc women stand as ideal and model activists for the people who agitated against the unscientific construction of the big dams to protect themselves from the danger of (unplanned) development. Patekar, Arundhati led the Indian masses in a number of events while the authority hampered ecology and lives. They are also vocal against nuclear programmes, commercial globalization. Medha especially works in several voluntary organizations (VOs) for the slums of Mumbai and was in charge of slum development projects in the 1970's and 80's. She joined the *Normada Bachao Andolan* in 1985 to protest against the construction of the *Narmada Dam*.
- b. *Persons like Bankar Roy of the state of Rajsthan and S.P. Gana Chowdhury of West Bengal won Amden Award for community welfare prize in the Green Oscar category in London in June 2003. Bankar*

*provided solar electricity in 136 remote villages in Himalayas and the credit for reusing of the energy went for S. P. Gana Chowdhury.*

- c. In kolkata, the Jungles is an NGO working for forest and wildlife conservation awards the best guards at national parks. This is a classical example of private-government participation, which both the centre and the state government are backing. Such an effort boost the morale of the guards of the 86 National Parks in the country, which the Ministry of Environment and forest and the state forest departments have approved the proposal.*
- d. Vandana Shiva is a noted environmental activist. She is a pioneer activist in the field of ecofeminism. She received the Right Livelihood Award in 1993 for establishing and defining the connection between the environment and women. In 1982, she founded Research Foundation for science, Technology and Ecology in Dehra Dun. In a very short of span of time, it changed the ecological scenario of Dehra Dun. She launched Navdanya a national movement to protect the diversity and integrity of living resources, especially native seeds.*
- e. Earlier, the Gopalpur and adjoining villages in the Alwar district of Rajasthan were plagued by an acute drinking-water scarcity. Residents left the villages to look for jobs elsewhere.*

*The dark zone of the 1980's is now the brightest spot on the parched map of Rajasthan. The credit goes to a watershed movement by the Tarun Bharat Sangh (TBS) under the leadership and auspices of*

*Mr. Rajendra Singh.* Mr. Singh's reward for his labours had come his way in the form of *Raymon Magsaysay Award*.

*Greenary* in the area has proliferated from a mere seven percent to 40 percent. TBS now has 7,000 volunteers and above 42 whole-timers and 230 apprentices. TBS has built 4,500 small dams and repaired 2,500 others. Reverting to the traditional knowledge they began constructing johads or tanks to store rainwater and the physical labour involved was voluntary.

f. *Sunita Narayan, Editor of Centre for Science and Environment (CSE)- No. 1 Magazine in environment and science in India keeps a genuine watch and agitates for the good environment for all. It is due to her initiative that compelled the Delhi government to use Compress Natural Gas (CNG) in the automobiles.*

g. *The Chipko movement* is a notable movement in the field of environment. Chipko is a hindi word which means 'to hug hard' or 'to cling'. The Chipko movement got its name from the fact that when some men came to cut the trees with axes, the village women of some sub-Himalayan districts in north India clung to the trees and told them, 'we will not let you cut the trees; first cut us down, then you can cut the trees'. These women were ready to risk injury and probably death rather than see the trees in their villages cut down.

h. The Chipko movement grew out of such daring and resolute action of illiterate, poor, rural women who are generally considered ignorant, weak and, therefore, incapable of playing any role in public affairs. The movement, started in 1971 was first inspired by the perception that the

people must organized themselves to save Nature, tress, water, air and the environment from degradation.

Two prominent men in the forefront of the Chipko movement were Chandi Prasad Bhatt and Sunderlal Bahugana and the movement started in the village of Gopewar in Chamoli district in present Uttaranchal.

The Chipko became a movement of the people, especially of the women. Months of mental training had prepared these simple people to offer non-violent resistance to what they considered unjust. It remained above politics, though several local politicians belonging to different parties supported it publicly because the movement had raised a fundamentally important issue. In the border context the movement was concerned with the conservation of the ecological balance in Nature.

#### **4.1.11. Civil Society Movement in the field of Right to Information:**

In Rajasthan, while the political parties maintained responsibility through the Panchayat Raj, an effort was started to fill the gap in the task of Panchayat Raj by the labourers and peasants and was supported by the intellectuals. Primarily, the movement was led by *Majdoor Kishan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS)* – a non-political organization in the 1990's in the remote village of Devadungi in the district of Rajsamund. *Smt. Aruna Roy, a former I.A.S., Nikhil De and Shankar started the movement to ascertain the wage of the labourers engaged in the government relief work.*

The MKSS volunteers began investigation to know the work done and the materials used so far in each governmental work. The M.K.S.S launched public hearing (*Jan Sunoi Abhijan*) campaign to collect the real information from the villagers with regard to money spent by the Panchayats.

*Mrs. Aruna Roy, the Magsesay award winner*, along with her four foreign educated followers started movement in the year 1993 from the district of Udaypur which later spread over other 5 districts of Rajasthan. Her movement consolidated the transparency and responsibility of the Panchayats in Rajasthan. The 'Public Hearing' Campaign checked the unscrupulous activities of some of the Panchayats. At last the government of Rajasthan too admitted the logic behind the right to information and one by one many states, even the central government made laws on the right to information.

The history of Aruna's effort can be a good example of inspiration in the history of civil society initiatives, if it is elaborated. Aruna brought forth the villagers together (of Pali, Rajsamund, Udaypur, and Vilwara, Ajmeer etc. districts that include Bhim, Kotkinara, Surajpura, Bhaoarkhas, Rawatmal, and Vijaypura etc. Panchayats). She published the accounts of these Panchayats in front of these villagers and the officers thereby proved how the corrupted government employees and the political leaders at the rural level had wasted the money in a rampant way.

People in each meeting listened to the meticulous description of account and burst into anger, or laughed, or protested because they never found such a proof between the actuality and the account written by the panchayat offices. Due to the pressure of the people, the district administration was compelled to arrest the convicted persons. The Panchayat Pradhans of Raywatmal and Surajpura

confessed their misdeeds in front of the people in these meetings and returned the money they looted earlier.

In Joaza Panchayat in Ajmeer, the Panchayat secretary went to the houses of each beneficiary and returned the money for *Indira Avas Yozna* amounted to Rs. 1500/- much in advance before starting the proposed *Jan Sunoai* in the respective Panchayat.

The whole operation was not an easy task for Aruna. At the beginning, the administrative authority could not provide the data to Aruna. Aruna and her followers had to sit in Dharna and protest in front of the officers day after day.

Under such constant pressure, the government of Rajasthan had been compelled to pass necessary law in the legislature in 6<sup>th</sup> April 1996. It stated that any person could collect the account of the Panchayat if he/ she can appeal with due process including fees.

Infact, passing of such a progressive law was not an easy task as it went against the vested interest including Mafia leaders and corrupted government officials. But Aruna's people's movement compelled the government to listen to the peoples demand.

Such event might have impact to the other states. In the states like Goa, Karnatak, Madhyapradesh, Maharastra, and Tamilnadu, Assam – the people attained the Right to Information. This would lead transparency of the Panchayats.

#### **4.1.12. Trust helps NGOs and the Government:**

*Aga Khan Foundation of Hyderabad* like a trust works with the government of India in the field of education, health and rural development, micro-credit,

financial services, humanitarian assistance and the promotion of NGOs. The trust has undertaken a variety of projects in the field of education, health and rural development sectors in India, concentrating on the state of Gujrat and Maharastra.

The Foundation has adopted 600 villages in Gujrat for their development. It also works in the field of culture such as restoration of Humayun's Tomb Garden etc.

#### **4.1.13. Government and NGO collaboration :**

Andhra Pradesh Government took up the theme of women's empowerment as one of the main agenda to tackle rural poverty and socio-economic issues. In the state, *MARI* – an NGO played a vital role in mobilizing women and forming *SRUJANA*

*MACS* and bringing government agencies together to access financial and other resources for establishing the unit.

This became a model for the government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) partnership in developmental process. In the state, the NGO mobilized and motivated people to come together and government agencies extended necessary financial, technical, managerial and marketing support to establish an enterprise.

#### **4.1.14. Initiative on the part of media**

In Gujrat, *FULCHAB* is well known regional paper published from Sarasota. It played a role in the people's movement by running a campaign to promote water harvesting. Mark Tully, South Asian correspondent of British Broad Casting Corporation (BBC) in his book 'India in slow Motion' recounts the

contribution of Fulchab towards reviving the traditional methods of harvesting water in several villages or Panchayats.

Because of the people's movement, the villagers turned down any misleading propaganda and they built their own check dams and digged ponds.

#### **4.1.15. In the field of communal harmony**

*Mrs. Teesta Shitalbad, the Editor of 'Communalism Combat' awares people against communal practices.*

#### **4.1.16. In the political field but not politics**

Many civil society organizations in India work in the political field. The dissemination of information about a candidate's background before the polling day is vital, since voters would then be in a position to exercise the right choice.

Eminent citizens, civil society organizations (CSOs) and NGOs came forward together in several states to carry out citizen's election watches. Association for Democratic Reforms, an Ahmedabad based organization, members of which include *Jagdeep Chhokar, professor, IIM – Ahmedabad and S. Trilochan Sastry, Professor, IIM – Bangalore*, Scrutinized the track records of candidates of the main political groups in the Assembly elections to Gujrat in 2002 and Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhatisgarh in December 2004.

Similarly, *'India Initiative'* – an apolitical organisation led by former justice *V.R.Krishna Ayer* etc. persons is sometimes found active to create consensus of the public opinion on some contentious socio political even economic issues through organizing seminars. Once the Bengal chapter of the organization was found to organize seminar to attract foreign investors in Bengal.

#### **4.1.17. In the field of Scientific Awareness and Science Movement**

*Indian Science Congress* started its journey since 1914. In 1976, in its 63<sup>rd</sup> session, under the aegis of *Dr. Swaminathan*, the Congress decided to link between National Interest and the science and technology. Since 1988 the congress was held regularly and it was actively participated by the volunteers associated with science, reputed scientists, technologists, and social scientists. In 1988, with a view to make the congress into an all India and pro-people character, the various science organizations in different parts of the country formed a joint forum – *JANA BIGNAYAN NETWORK*.

#### **4.1.18. Dependency and Culture**

Intelligentsia like *Shabana Ajmi (M.P. Rajya Sabha)*, *Habib Tanbir (Drama)*, *Anand Pattabardhan; Rakesh Sharma (Cinema)* *D. Narayan Rao (producer)* etc. celebrities from different walks of life and Art in India are found very much active to combat against the consumerist culture of the West as well as globalization and enjoined in '*Asian Social Forum*'.

**4.1.19.** Activisms are found at all level, though the strength and width are little. In Delhi, the birth registration data showed that 819 girls were born for every 1,000 boys during the first half of the year 2004. This was an abnormal sex ratio.

Dr. Bedi, a foetal medicine consultant in New Delhi organized a group of doctors and activists who met the Delhi Chief Minister Sheila Dixit in February 2005 to complain that public health officers have failed to track down and initiate proceedings against the wrongdoers. The group, representing the Citizens Against the Prebirth Elimination of Daughters (CAPED), has also urged a social audit and

public hearings to evaluate to extent to which the Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PNDT) Laws have been implemented by public health authorities.

#### **4.1.20. In times of Calamities**

The existing civil society organization (CSOs) is not enough while sudden calamities occur. It needs more people, more organizations. *Rebati* – A female worker of Dream Foundation – an NGO continued its day-night service to help the distressed person affected in the Tsunami of December 2004, in southern India. Round the clock she was found busy to search for dead bodies and helped the victims by supplying medicines in Nagapattanam.

*Md. Younus* – a rich businessman and president of United Islamic Jamat of Kuddalore after losing all his belongings in Tsunami jumped into the social service by taking his fellowmen. Younus earned much respect and love this time which he did never get earlier during his businessmanship or leadership in Jamat.

In Paraya Kadabhu in the district of Kollam in Kerala, Mother Amrita Nanda Moyee took challenge to serve the distressed persons and extended her support to rehabilitation work by contributing Rs. 100/- crores from her Ashram fund.

Shahjahan – a fisherman in Kolachal in the district of Kanyakumari took the charge of 20 Relief Camps out of 50 camps run in the locality for the Tsunami victims. For this, Shahjahan had to perform painstaking work.

#### **4.1.21. Preservation of Heritage**

In Silchar in the state of Assam 'Chandan Bhavan' is regarded as the only historical symbol of the freedom struggle. Mahatma Gandhi, Bipin Ch. Paul,

Subhas Ch. Bose , Surendra Nath Bandhopadhyaya etc. greatmen frequently used to come in the house of late Arun Kr. Chanda, freedom fighter. Now the building is decayed and full of banian trees. The people of Silchar has been found tensed with the issue whether the government declares the building as heritage one and take care of it. In April 2005, the members of the "*Chandan Bhavan Suraksha Samiti*" agitated over the issue.

#### **4.1.22. With regard to National Service Scheme (N.S.S.)**

*Mahatma Gandhi* wanted to make education community based through his programme of Basic Education and Nai Talim. In the post-independence, emerging educational policies, attempts were made to link education with community. *Dr. Radha Krishnan* wanted to establish a linkage between campus and the community on voluntary basis. Pandit Nehru intended to make social service a mandatory provision in undergraduate studies. As per the recommendation of the Education Commission (1964-66), the *National Service Scheme (N.S.S.)* was born at the 100<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of the Father of the Nation on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1969, under the Department of Youth Affairs and Sports, Government of India.

The N.S.S. now remains the biggest voluntary students movement of the country with solid objective of social service programme and personality development through community service.

#### **4.1.23. Voluntary Action in the North East**

The North-East has a rich tradition of voluntary action According to a rough assessment, there are about 50,000 NGOs in the north-eastern region and half of these could be registered societies. Manipur has about 10,000 NGOs, the largest

number for a state of its size. The Young Mizo Association of Mizoram is considered among the largest NGOs in the world and many NGOs in Manipur and Mizoram are involved in sports and cultural activities. A sizable number are also in developmental fields.

The *Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA)*, a Delhi-based NGO, conducted a survey of *Non-Profit Organizations (NPOs)* in Tamil Nadu, Delhi, West Bengal, Maharashtra and Meghalaya. The PRIA report on Meghalaya indicated that there are 8,757 Non-Profit Organizations (NPOs) in the state and only four percent of them are in urban areas. The proportion of unregistered bodies is 41 percent. Education is the main activity of 47 percent of the NPOs in Meghalaya while 36.6 percent are in religious fields. Thus, only a small proportion is in the development fields.

A disquieting feature in the creation of what may be called '*effective political demand*', in the Northeast is the lead role of the students unions. These unions are formal and elected and have been providing an instrument of political action with politicians letting the students take the lead. Students' power has disrupted the university system, gravely weakened the institutions of governance and compelled many students to migrate to academic institutions outside the region.

The NGOs in the eastern region, because of their distrust and impatience, have failed to take any concerted effort towards improving the awareness on many issue including environment issues.

Available information on the quality of NGO activity is also extremely disheartening. In the list of good and valid NGOs prepared by the planning commission, only 23 NGOs of the North-East figure and just seven each in Assam

and Manipur. There are many cases of NGOs serving as private wings of politicians and officials and misutilisation of funds. As a result, the ministry of Home Affairs imposed severe restrictions of funding of NGOs in the Northeast.

### **In India as a whole:**

According to PRIA, India has 1.2 million or 12 Lakhs NPOs divided almost evenly between the registered and unregistered bodies. Promotion of education, sports and culture are the main activities of about 60 percent of the organizations while 26 percent is engaged in religion-based work.

It is clear that a fairly large number of non-profit institutions operate in the country at the present stage. However, the largest chunk of the sector consists of institutions established since the late 1970s. It grew from widely different urges in society at the time.

These institutions are engaged in almost all human endeavours, e.g. education, sanitation and health, environment, welfare activities like looking after the elderly, the destitute and orphans, people's movements, civil liberty and advocacy programmes, and even research. Obviously, the sector is highly heterogeneous in terms of the philosophies practiced by different segments, their areas of activity and the size of institutions.

PRIA Survey showed that there were more voluntary sector institutions in rural areas than in urban areas (PRIA 2003). Where 53 per cent of NPOs were rural, the proportion of such organizations in urban areas was 47 percent. Secondly, half the organizations (49.6 percent) in the sector were not formally registered, though they had an institutional character. The survey brought out that there was a preponderance of very small institutions in this sector. Almost three-

fourth, of the institutions employed one or no paid worker. It was discovered that institutions backed by finances from religions based institutions were predominant in numbers.

Apparently, plenty of charity money was available with religious institutions and there was scope for channeling these funds for the uplift of society. The NPOs involved in community social services as also those in education followed in order of importance, with both types having an equal number of institutions. A reasonably good number of organizations were found involved in activities related to sports and culture.

In India many of the roots of voluntary action can be historically attributed to associations dealing with cultural activities, e.g., traditional folklore, folk dance, religious groups, such as Durga Puja Samitis in West Bengal and Ramlila committees of north India and sports groups such as 'akhras'. It was found that the voluntary sector seemed to play a relatively smaller role in the delivery of health related services.

On the labor front, it was found that overall deployment of the labour force by Non-Profit Organizations in India was estimated by the survey at 19.4 million (about 2 crores) of which 85 percent of these volunteers were working in resident welfare associations, community societies, full-fledged hospitals, in rural areas, with deprived communities educating children, providing health care, looking after the environment and even imparting science education.

Most of these volunteers worked on a part time basis, a vast number of persons also worked on contractual assignments. It was found that the non-profit sector during the year 1999-2000 deployed 2.7 million full-time paid employees

and 3.4 million full-time volunteers, bringing total force engaged in the sector to 6 million persons.

Regarding funds of this sector (non-profit sector), it was showed that less than 30 per cent of the revenues came from grants and merely 7.4 percent of revenues were collected from foreign sources. The share of grants and loans, in total receipts would be only 36.1 percent.

Another source of revenues of the non-profit institutions were the money these institutions raised by themselves, i.e., self-generated funds. According to PRIA surveys as much as 51 percent of the total receipts in the year 1999-2000 was self-generated. A considerable amount of self-generated funds came from fees and service charges, which hospitals and educational institutions registered as non-profits had levied.

#### **4.1.24. Uplift of the tribals**

According to *Mr. J.B. Pati of 'Alternate for India Development'* – an NGO, which actively tried to economically empower tribal woman. “Tribal women could not be economically empowered earlier because of the existence of the barter system in the Jharkhand regions. The Barter system prevented tribal women from possessing any money.” Now because of NGO activities, tribal women in a few blocks of Jharkhand East Singbhum district steadily became self-reliant over the past few years and are actively involved in organizational activities geared towards development.

#### **4.1.25. Civil initiative through the VOs in Arunachal Pradesh (in the Educational field)**

Due to political reasons, the state of Arunachal Pradesh never came under the influence of missionary activity on any large-scale. Hence till today, the tribal identity of the state remains almost intact with Hindi and a broken Assamese being the only means of inter-tribal communication. The non-governmental efforts in educational development are confined to three *voluntary organizations (VOs)* – *the Ramkrishna Mission, Vivekananda Mission and the Dony Polo Mission.*

#### **4.1.26. In Tamil Nadu**

NGO movement in the state is moderately sound. In February, 2003, 'women and child welfare centre' – a Kolkata based NGO was found to make allegation that the sale of infants, particularly female babies, had gone up in several parts of Salem district. A worried administration swung into action that time instituting an inquiry and calling for an emergency meeting of at least 10 NGOs working in the region to eradicate female infanticide.

#### **4.1.27. Anti-drug-drive : An example in Manipur**

The society in Manipur is Matriarchial. Women go outside their home for work to maintain livelihood and the male members stay at home, engage with cooking and domestic work. Male persons like wine as their favourite. The housewives, as a result are found to organize processions to protest against the activities of the government to encourage any sort of arrangement of wine in the state.

'*MARIA PAIBIS*' is such a woman organization, which is vocal against anti-drug campaign for many days. There are other organizations too. These

organizations compelled the Ranbir Sing led United Front Government of the state of Manipur to prohibit license from wine selling at shops from 1<sup>st</sup> April 1991 onward.

#### **4.1.28. In the state of Bihar the role of Bhumika Bihar**

The Bihar, a genuine *BIMARU* state and poverty affected state suffers from frequent trafficking (sales) of women and girls child. **Bhumika Bihar** – an NGO works in this field. The organization works in the zone of Koshi- Mahananda where there are the districts of Kishanganj, Purnia, Katihar and Araria. The socio-economic conditions of the districts are very much vulnerable and it leads to the frequent trafficking of women and girl child. They are sold and supplied to Delhi, Punjab, U.P., Hariyana and West Bengal.

Bhumika Bihar tries to rehabilitate these victims and to bring a permanent solution by solving the socio-economic problems of these women Apart from giving financial help to these women, Bhumika Bihar tries to arouse consciousness among the people of these areas through awareness programmes. As a result, the women had responded to the fruitful work of Bhumika Bihar.

#### **4.1.29. In the field of tribal development in Orissa : The role of ISARA**

Ramgiri in Orissa's Gajapati district, situated in a hilly terrain, is a tiny hamlet that touches the Andhra Pradesh border in southern Orissa. Lush with virgin forests, it is home to one of the oldest tribes of India, the Soura or Sabar. Then people of Ramigiri had little access to information on basic rights such as education, health and government schemes for Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribe communities.

These people are cheated of their ancestral land by unscrupulous officials and are barely able to eke out a living through farming and daily labor to provide an occasional square meal to the family. Regularly beaten up by drunk, frustrated husbands, the soura women struggle to keep the home fire burning while tending to their meager cattle and helping out in the field. Infant and mother mortality rates are much higher here than in other tribal areas.

Inadequate access to drinking water, no electricity and unmotorable roads make this part of world rather unwelcome to the government officials and most non-government organizations.

*On the other hand, at Kurukuru, Tumango, Kamladhia and Larada villages the women are now better dressed and a high degree of sense of confidence. There is a degree of prosperity here that had been missing in other villages. These villages belong to a chain of self-Help groups initiated by a small NGO, **the Institute of Social Action and Research Activities (ISARA)**.*

The organization has successfully generated awareness among tribal women about their own needs and a resolution to bring change in their living conditions. ISARA pursues a three-pronged policy of direct intervention to strengthen adivasi women economically. This is being achieved by upgrading their technical skills to add value to their work and provide them with a social shield by empowering them through self-help activities and micro-credit.

Isara has further reinforced the movement by forming Mahila Mondols in more than 60 tribal villages in Ramgiri and surrounding areas.

#### **4.1.30. Andhra Pradesh: Hyderabad : Protecting Adolescence**

The *Federation of Culture Upgradation and Social Services (FOCUSS)* – an NGO in Hyderabad works to wage campaign against kissing and petting in public places, especially parks. The members of the executive committee of the organization are the ex-servicemen. The organization picks out the errant teenagers in school uniform and counsels them. Such youngsters are often blackmailed and abused by local thugs who catch them getting physical. The organization works under the umbrella of the police, if needed, to nab the culprits.

#### **4.1.31. The need of civil society as stressed on the part of the high incumbency**

At the end of 2003, the then Prime Minister of India while visiting to Nagaland, called upon civil society there to come forward and mobilize the Naga Communities to restore peace and harmony.

It was found, in the country, each year a lot of food are found rotten in the godown of the *Food Corporation of India (FCI)* and it was *A. B. Bajpayee, the then Prime Minister of India called upon the civil society organizations to take the responsibility to collect those foods from the godown and distribute to the right persons.*

Indian President at different times was found to come out their traditional protocol to play a positive role for accelerating the civil society. *As for example, K. R. Narayanan the former first citizen of India was found to be active in voicing about the root cause of the problems. Narayanan in his pre-independence day speech exhorted the haves to spare a thought for the have-nots.*

#### **4.1.32. Initiative from the Non-Resident Indians (NRIs).**

NRI-Investment in India created an avenue for development. The government of India has given them various incentives including tax concessions investment facilities.

The launching of an Indo-NRI Chamber of Commerce and Culture deserves notice in this context. Its programme calls for the 'creation of an NRI lobby in the Indian Parliament.' NRIs have demanded from time to time the right to vote for and be elected to India's legislative bodies, including the two Houses of Parliament.

#### **4.1.33. Government led campaigns encouraged civil society activity**

Different government programmes or national level campaigns encouraged people including different community based organized to be integrated and interacted with this programmes. As for example, *Total Literacy Campaign (TLC)* in the 1990's sponsored by the *National Literacy Mission (NLM)* sensitized the organizations attached to social service. The state of Kerala and West Bengal took the task seriously. Unemployed youth, students, teachers, Professors. leaders of different political parties joined such a campaign and provided all of them their voluntary service to make TLC a real success. The people in the district of Ernakulam in Kerala launched a spectacular campaign with regard to literacy movement and the made it a grand success. The district first in India became a full literate district.

*Pulse Polio Immunization Programme* is another example with this regard which earned success by the effort of different VOs, NGOs etc. initiatives. The Polio Immunisation Programme is the India's largest and longest public health

drive. This is a decade old campaign started since 1995, have engaged the doctors, officials, volunteers of *NGOs, VOs, NSS, NYK* etc. organizations throughout the country. Pulse Polio Immunization programme is a joint initiative by the government. *World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF, Rotary International and the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention*. The fact that the number of Polio Cases has come down from 1,600 in 2002 to 16 till June 2004 speaks of the efficacy of the programme.

Total Sanitation Campaign (TSC) is another government-led programme where the involvements of the clubs, voluntary organizations, NGOs have made the campaign a successful one. The local clubs or the voluntary organizations played the role of Mart to prepare low cost latrine etc.

#### **4.1.34. Initiative of the people for restoring public resources**

Though public resources, such as forests, are under the control of governmental agencies, local communities often are an interesting group for benefit sharing. Much of forests in this country remain under the control of the Forest Department. Since the colonial times, the resources under the category have traditionally been exploited, and managed if at all, by the foresters. It is only in more recent times, with a greater realization that rehabilitation and management of these forest resources can not be handled by the foresters, attempts have been made to involve the forest dwellers into what has now come to be known as '*Joint Forest Management*' (JFM) plan.

West Bengal is one of the states in India where community woodlots under the social forestry programme have achieved some success. This was due to the interest generated amongst the rural communities, and their consequent active

involvement in the programme. In 1972, sal (*Shorea robusta*), an economically important and highly productive timber species, formed the species around which a regeneration project was initiated by the Forest Department in the Arábari area of southwest Bengal. The Forest Department granted to the villagers exclusive rights on all minor forest products, a 25 per cent share of the extracted timber, and supplemental employment programmes. The people in return provided free labor and guaranteed protection of over 600 hectares of sal forests.

The degraded forests regenerated very rapidly. This prompted over a thousand villages in the forest fringes to join and form their own *Forest Protection Committees (FPC)* covering over 15,000 hectares of degraded forests, by mid-1980. Since this protection is achieved through community effort, the cost of restoration of the degraded forest ecosystem was minimal.

Village communities were allowed to collect twigs for firewood, dried leaves of specific tree species for tableware plate making and for rolling bidis (a local cigarette) and medicinal plants. In mutually identified sites, they were even permitted to practice agriculture to a limited extent.

The approach for forest management was truly an integrated one and indeed improved the quality of life for them, providing an income up to about Rs. 3,500 per family (mid-1980 earning), based on access to one hectare of forest per family.

Since the West Bengal experience the concept of JFM has now been adopted more widely within the country, and many neighboring Asian countries have shown keen interest in this approach towards forest rehabilitation and management.

In India civil society includes trade unions farmers organizations professional associations, traditional group, pressure groups etc. Let us have look in this point briefly.

#### **4.1.35. Trade Unions**

There are more than 36,000 trade unions in the country. The *Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC)* the *All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC)*, *The Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU)*, the *Hind Majdoor Sabha (HMS)*, and the *United Trade Union Congress (UTUC)* are the prominent among them. Despite mere appendage of political parties and are busy demanding their rights, these organizations have a broad - based welfare activities for their members sound of these unions act as the agents of mobilization than as articulator of group demands.

There are also numerous federations of unions, not affiliated to any central body of the Trade Unions. Such federations are: All India Bank Employees Associations. National Federation of Railway-men etc.

The Industry workers in textile and hosiery, ports and docks, are comparatively better organized and more powerful.

In spite of various limitations the trade unions have had a voice in the national and state legislation that affect their interest.

#### **4.1.36. Farmers' Organization**

India is primarily an agricultural country and the India peasantry make up above 70 percent of its population. Despite this, there is no all India organization of the farmers. Regional organization are, of course, well established – *The*

*Bharatiya Kisan Union (Punjab, Hariyana and Western U.P. ) Kisan Shabhas of Bihar , Pradeshik Krishak Sabha of West Bengal, Bharatiya Kisan Sangha (Gujrat), Kshetkari Sangathan (Maharastra) led by Sharad Joshi etc.*

Political dissatisfaction of the reach farmer with the re-distributive policies like the land reform, high cost inputs, merciless revenue collection machinery etc. Have led to the farmer's agitations in different part of the country. Their organizations have shown themselves capable of mobilizing million of peasants into militant campaigns. This has awakened the rural reach to realize the importance of organizing themselves into a powerful pressure group.

The country has seen *Sharad Joshi (Maharastra), Mahendra Singh Tikait (U.P.)* and peasant leaders of Punjab waging war on behalf of their newly aroused constituents who have acquired necessary economic muscle.

In West Bengal, it was observed by the researcher that **Pradeshik Krishak Sabha** was involved in constructive training related to scientific farming.

#### **4.1.37. Youth Organization**

**Democratic Youth Federation of India (DYFI)** was found involved at randomly organizing and donating blood in several blood donation camp through out the year.

#### **4.1.38. Professional Associations**

The professional associations, which stand out by virtue of their influence on government, are *Indian Medical Association, Bar Council of India, Federation of Working Journalist* etc. these organizations have extended the scope of fundamental right and develop new tools or remedies for dispensing justice to the

masses through public interest litigations. These organizations also organized many social service programmes on different basic issues.

#### **4.1.39. Traditional Groups**

India, like other Asian and African countries, has large number of community interest groups based on caste, tribe, religion, language and region. *Among numerous such groups the Schedule Castes Federations, the RSS, the Akali Dal, Kamtapur Peoples Party (KPP), the various parties of tribal, and the Muslim Organisations like Jamat –e-Islam, Tablig Jamat , Jamat-Ul-Ulema etc. are significant.*

#### **4.1.40. Insurgent Organizations**

The insurgent organization of the tribals or hill people viz, *National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN), the Peoples Liberation Army (PLA), the United Liberation Front (PLA) of Manipur, the Tribal National Volunteers (TNV) of Tripura and United Liberation Frontier of Assam (ULFA), Kamtapur Liberation Organisation (KLO) of North Bengal, The Greater Coochbehar Peoples Association. People Army (popularly known as Janayudha) in Jharkhand etc. is some of the well-known bodies, which have resorted to pressure politics with considerable militancy and terrorist activities. Among these groups Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) and Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) have attained their goal with Jharkhand state for the former and the Gorkha Hill Council in Darjeeling for the later.*

#### 4.1.41. Teachers' and Students' Union

Teachers and students have numerous organizations in the Indian Union. The college teachers have *All India Federation of Universities and College Teachers Organizations (AIFUCTO)* at the National level; there are *W. B.*

*C. U. T. A., JUTA, etc.* at the state level. The students have the countless students organizations at the national level. The notable among them are ; the *All India Students Federation (AISF)*, *National Students Union of India (NSUI)* and *Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP)* etc.

#### 4.1.42. Some new groups

The decline in public esteem for politicians at all levels of government has led to the growth of some new groups. A number of them are working to check the degeneration of public life in the country. They are fighting for the poor, oppressed and un-represented. Such well-known organizations are as for example *Citizens for Democracy (Delhi)*, *the People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL)*, *Association for Protection of Democratic Rights (APDR)* etc.

#### 4.1.43. Some other social action groups

Some groups are immersed in the country to bring about social reform and social changes. They are: *Gandhi Peace Foundation*, *Blumi Andolan (Bodhgaya)*, *Centre for Tribal consciousness (Pune)*, *Social Work and Research Centre (Ajmir)* etc. These organizations strive for the emancipation of the toiling masses.

#### **4.1.44. Women Organisations**

The women organizations fight for the good cause of the women. They are: *Mahila Mandol (Maharashtra), Shakti Kendra (Kanpur), Ganatantrik Mahila Samity etc.*

#### **4.1.45. Strategic pressure groups**

There are some groups, which are highly organized and well financed. They are: *Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industries (FICCI), Confederation of Indian Industries (CII), ASSOCHAM etc.* make use of seminar formal representations and personal persuasion to wrest concessions from the government.

### **4.2. Historical setting of Civil Society Organizations in the state of West Bengal:**

Once Gopal Krishna Gokhale commented, '*what Bengal thinks today, India thinks tomorrow?*' This is nothing exaggeration. During freedom struggle civil society organizations in the form of moderate, extremist or revolutionary organization, media organization, charity or philanthropic organizations were very much prevalent in and around Bengal. After independence a major upsurge was also found vibrant among the people of West Bengal. In fact, in West Bengal, there has always been a very active civil society. As for example, the year 1959 would be considered a landmark. The people, especially the students and the youths, were able to launch massive protest against the shortage of food of the then government of West Bengal.

In fact, the activism for doing something for the society began with Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore, Iswhwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Raja Rammohan Roy etc. activists and that were started from Bengal.

#### 4.2.1.

Kolkata, capital of West Bengal is the hub of voluntary activities by different organizations. The nobel laurettee *Mother Teresa's* the *Missionaries of Charity* of Kolkata credentially maintains a sustainable tradition of service and care to the poor. Vatican is one of the millions of admirers of the Mother's Organisation.

#### 4.2.2.

In West Bengal, *Ramakrishna Mission, established in 1896 by Swami Vivekananda* on the basis of the teaching and ideology of Ramakrishna Paramhans Deb truly, has laid the foundation stone of social service thereby inspired the civil society activities. It is truly a Federation of *Community-Based Organization. (CBOs)*.

Rama Krishna Mission has been involved in rural development programmes in west Bengal through Lokasiksha Parisad and the Agricultural Training Centre for more than 50 years. In terms of structure and community base, it has a network of more than 1700 active autonomous youth organizations covering most of the districts in West Bengal. It emphasizes the development of leadership capabilities among the youth to act as future change agents in the rural areas.

Ramakrishna Mission considers itself as an '*empowerment Organization*' rather than a service delivery agency, as it concentrates mostly on capacity building though training and demonstration, feed back, meetings, dissemination of information, development of decision-making abilities and cultural and value

orientation programmes. It has a self-help and sustainable development approach based on Swami Vivekananda's ideology.

Beginning with a students Home sheltering poor and meritorious students for their academic, moral, social and economic growth and with a small slum development work in 1952 (then located in Rambagan North Calcutta) the Ashrama (shifted to Narendrapur in 1956-57) has taken upon several responsibilities on its shoulders with the objectives of achieving development for the children, the youth and the community at large.

The Ashrama, through its development unit *Ramakrishna Mission Lokshiksha Parishad* has been engaged in the field of integrated development since 1956 and is presently working in several thousands villages in the state of West Bengal. Lokshiksha Parishad had focused its activities on total development of man from early childhood to his working life.

Programmes had not been arbitrarily chosen but carefully developed to fit in upholding Vivekananda's concept of potential divinity in every man. The extension wing of the Agricultural Training Centre in collaboration with the *Farming Systems Research Unit* of the Parishad had brought about revolutionary changes in the agricultural practices of the adopted areas thus augmenting the income generating capacity of the rural people.

Besides development work in the scattered rural and urban areas, Lokasiksha Parishad had been promoting the concept of area development in a few places like Gosaba area of sunderbans, Arapanch Group of villages in South 24 Parganas, Amarkanan area of Bankura district and about 100 villages in Purulia district. Focus of this area development was mainly agriculture and allied cottage industries like seri culture.

## Role of Swami Lokeshwarananda

*Swami Lokeshwarananda*, who pioneered the *Loka Siksha Parishad* opined that present development models had made the entire country look like a big slum with so much squalor and poverty all around. People had become self-centred and shy of hard work. Lokeshwarananda called this phenomenon *TAMASIKTA* and held it squarely responsible for all social ills. He called for resurgence of individual entrepreneurship and hard work which should be considered the true indicator of development and not intake of calories of power because small horticultural garden or a kitchen poultry farm can generate more social benefits than through big power projects. Lokeshwarananda was a good orator who inspired people especially intellectuals from Kanya Kumari to Arunachal Pradesh for a better civil society. (1).

There are Ramakrishna Mission Pallimangal and Ramakrishna Samaj Sevak Shikshaan Mandir both situated at Belur Math are entrusted with the task of training rural youth in socio-economic development as envisaged by Ramakrishna Mission.

### 4.2.3.

Darjeeling Health care: In Phansi Deowa (near Siliguri) *Balasan Unnyan Samiti (BUS)* – a voluntary organization is engaged with health care activities. It works many times with *West Bengal voluntary Health Association (WBVHA)*. *Darjeeling District Health and Family Welfare Association (DHFWA)* provided Ambulance to Balasan Unnyan Samiti through Siliguri Mahakuma Parishad.

In Alipurduar there is a Malaria Awareness Prevention Diagnosis and Treatment Center in Mahakalguri Mission at Shamuktala. The Institute was setup

jointly by the *Shamuktala Welfare Organization* and Department of Health Government of West Bengal.

#### 4.2.4.

*Rabindra Nath Tagore's thought on the development and the Reconstruction of the villages inspired the later activists.* He was a pioneer with this regard. He popularized the principles of cooperatives among the villagers. The poet first started health cooperatives in rural Bengal. He introduced *Hitoishi Britti* and '*Welfare Britti*' and the money collected were being spent for the development of land of the prajas (subjects). '*Hitoisi Sabha*' was the elected body of the subjects, which took the responsibility to spend the money.

Tagore opened an Agricultural Bank, named *Patisar Agricultural Bank*, in Patisar in Kali Gram Pargana. Tagore deposited for an amount of Rupees to 1 Lakh 8 thousand (the money he earned out of his Nobel Prize) in this bank. The poor farmers were given agricultural loan from this bank. Surul Samiti, then Department of Agriculture after that Sri Niketan was the Tagore's famous historical Village Development Centre which brought a wholistic development in some villages which inspired Kalimohan Ghosh, Rathindra Nath, Santhosh Chandra Majumder and many persons.

Tagore prescribed a set of activities in the field of education so that children going through the process could attain complete manhood. Tagore performed this experiment from 1901 to 1941 with commitment and dedication sacrificing part of his literacy activities and accepting financial constraints. This made Tagore earn the distinction of being one of the greatest experimentalist activists in education the world has ever seen.

*The aim of Tagore's model is harmonious development of individual faculties.* He introduced a better system, which has relevance with regard to psychological, intellectual, spiritual and social factors. It ensured proper development and leads to eternal joy or 'Anandam'. It helps generate self-employment opportunities, develop proper value system, which can skill social evils like dishonesty, corruption and terrorism.

*In the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Rabindra Nath rightly realized that there is immense importance of health in the reconstruction of the village.*

Instead of being dependant on the state he invoked his country men to unite into organized groups to become self reliant

In 1919 at least 51.6 percent people were died of malaria. Rabindra Nath therefore, found it imperative to resist the disease.

In 1922 a number of malaria cases were found in an around Sri Niketan. People wanted to get rid of the danger of the disease. As first step, Health Societies were set up in many villages. At least 12 societies were set up. (2)

#### 4.2.5.

In the field of Literacy and Education, *Iswar Chandra Vidya Sagar* was one of the world famous constructive activists who popularized education among the common people in India. He made the people understand the utility of education.

Vidya Sagar, first in India introduced and started the concept of free mass-education with a view to make a success of the mass-education, Vidyasagar set up 35 schools for the education of women in 1857. While the then British government denied responsibility of these schools, Vidya Sagar himself took the

responsibility to carry it on. In 1853, Vidya Sagar on the basis of the donation taken from the working class people established Night Schools in the villages of Birsingha and Karmatar in the district of Midnapore.

He wrote letter to the then Governor in 29<sup>th</sup> November, 1959 soliciting cooperation of the government on the reason that the schools set up by non-governmental effort could fulfill only while the sophisticated and middle class people failed to understand the necessity of education, how can the utility of education be understood by the working and labour class?

Vidyasagar was against the filtering policy of Lord Macaley. Vidyasagar (whose another name was *Dayar Sagar* i.e. sea of kindness, or highly kind hearted person for rendering heavy service to the people) instead of his hectic social service activities wrote 32 books, of which 15 books were directly textbooks, which activated the education at the field level, both non-formal and

formal. In fact, Vidyasagar's contribution in the field of woman literacy made him great pathfinder in modern Bengal.

#### 4.2.6.

**Rammohan Roy** was a champion of the right of Hindu females to inheritance. He was interested in female emancipation and was the earliest feminist in modern India who revolted against the subjection of women and preached against modern encroachments on the ancient rights of Hindu females in inheritance. (3)

#### 4.2.7.

In the field Education: The activists like **Begum Rokeya** and her husband-**Shakhawat Hossain** took the leading role to imparting education among the people, especially the muslim women –an example is the famous Shakhawat Memorial School. Likewise, Lord Bethun despite being a missionary was the pathfinder in introducing education for the Indians—Bethun school and college stand as the symbol of her true voluntary activity. They were the constructive activists.

#### 4.2.8.

In the Independent India we have a lot of civil society organizations working independently providing service in the field of education, health, environment etc. These organizations bear variety of features in their structure and functions.

#### **Organisation for women and child.**

A) **CINI-** West Bengal is a place of many mother NGOs. As for example, Child In Need Institute (CINI) was established in 1974 with the primary objective of achieving sustainable health and nutritional support for the children of rural Bengal. CINI's health programme focused on reproductive child health. It worked through womens groups set up in the villages and trained local health workers.

Under CINI-ASHA urban programme, in and around Kolkata, it implemented programmes for street children, child labourers, children of sex workers and children out of schools in collaboration with a number of NGOs and CBOs at various locations in the city.

CINI developed a number of sister organizations over the years and a network of a number of NGOs and CBOs in both urban and rural areas.

**B) SACHETANA** - There are a number of womens group operating at different levels. In Kolkata, 'Sachetana' was the first apolitical feminist group among educated women in the early 1980's. Initially the group offered support to victims of violence, later it referred these cases to the NGOs. It organizes seminar and workshops focusing on women issues.

**C) SUNLAAP** is another NGO in West Bengal that focuses the issues related to prostitution. It is engaged with investigation and work to eradicate trafficking of women and girl child.

**D) Durbar Mahila Samannay Samiti.** NGO for the child and women of the prostitutes in West Bengal is found very active for the uplift of these sections. The samiti has a number of branches in all the districts, even at the subdivision level, work for the welfare of these women and their child. brought attention of government and other NGOs to their problem and has made a real movement in West Bengal.

**E) Maitree** is a network of women organizations and individual activists, which has had some success with taking up and lobbying for particular individual cases of violence against women. In terms of membership, it is a good example of an organization cutting across elements of civil society, with academics, media and development professionals joined together.

**F) In Kantai, in the district of Midnapore, Bikram Nagar Udayan Sangha** – a local club organizes 'Sishu Niketan' School for the prostitutes and their children. The sangha also organizes 'Sandhya Tara' – a library comprising of

story, novel, essay etc. based books. Such efforts are continued since 1999. The prostitutes learn stitching drawing handicrafts and basic education in the Sishu Niketan.

#### 4.2.9

Health is the strongest sector in terms of CSO coverage. **Janasashstha Raksha Committee (JRC)** was formed in Kolkata in 1983 with a view to bring a fair health care movement in West Bengal. The committee was integrated and renamed as **Janasasthya Committee (JC)** in 1985. However, initially the committee was not able to bring a wide movement for the people of West Bengal. In 1999, 27<sup>th</sup> March in the Meeting of Bangla Academy, **Janasasthya Chetna Prasar Samanway Committee (JCPSC)** was formed where representatives of the youths, students, women, farmers, labourer organization and all levels of organization including teachers organizations actively participating and now the new committee took a number of health awarness activities. The Samanway Committee became a link and platform of various peoples Organisations (POs). Primarily the main organizations, e.g. **West Bengal Bignayan Manch, Jana Sastha Committee of Kolkata and Shiv Shankar Seva Samiti of Burdwan** took the lead to carry out the responsibilities that were entrusted with JCPSC. The cooperating nodal organizations were **Center for Trade Union (CITU), Krishak Samiti, Association of Health Service Doctors, All Bengal Primary Teachers Association (ABPTA) and FMRI- the organization of the Medical Representatives, Mahila Samiti and West Bengal Voluntary Health Association.**

The (JCPSC) committee organized conventions, jatha, campaign, street cornering, slide show and health care related cultural functions in all the districts

in West Bengal. The activities of the committee took the shape of a movement with the cooperation of the people from all levels. The committee stated movement on the issue why 'Health for All' was not implemented in the Nation an abroad in 2000?'

Therefore, with a view to highlight the above-stated issue a greater network was formed. As a result, National health Assembly was organized in India and the first convention of the Assembly was held in Kolkata. Later, the importance of the Assembly was reflected in the world health Congress in Dhaka.

Janasastha Chetna Prasar Samanway Committee (JCPSC) now is trying to popularize its health movement phasewise and activated the character of the movement in a wholistic manner. Since 2001, the JCPSC publishes a health Bulletin regularly where there are reports of health activities done in the state.

The JCPSC organized seminar in Ganga Rampur (South Dinajpur) and in Kolkata on female foeticide to establish gender equalities. The representatives of all the districts actively participated in the seminars. The committee dealt issues like health of the female child, the problem of safe drinking water and sanitation, the infrastructure of the government health structure, life saving drugs its availability and the problem of use, patent laws etc in its seminars. (4)

#### **4.2.10. Bangiya Saksharata Prasar Samiti (BSPS)**

In the 1990's, inspired by the success of the literacy in Ernakulam District in Kerala, in West Bengal, the Total Literacy Campaign was started with great enthusiasm. Saksharata Samiti was built in different districts with students, teachers, intellectuals, unemployed youths, leaders of political parties etc. BSPS was formed with its districts branches under the patronization of Biman Bose,

Jyoti Basu etc. eminent persons of people's movement. The BSPS is one of the largest organizations in West Bengal having at least more than 50,000 branch organizations at the rural level.

In Midnapore, Midnapore Sakhsarata Samiti and Roag Pratisedh Samiti were tackling the two problems— illiteracy and health— The twin movement was continued spontaneously up to 1995 /1996. In 2000, the Samiti examined about six Lakhs students of the primary schools in the district of Midnapore. (5)

### **Vidya Sagar Fair :**

Since 1992 the fair is organized in Vir Singha Village (the birth place of Iswar Chandra Vidya Sagar in the district of Midnapore). The place of fair was changed to Kolkata in 1994 at Maidan. However, the fair continued simultaneously at Virsingha. The fair had gathered much popularity with the presence of literacy and other activities. Biman Bose handles it, the Chairman of the Left Front Committee and President of Bangiya Sakharata Samiti.

#### **4.2.11. Peoples Relief Committee (PRC)**

It is a unique voluntary organization. It was established on 29<sup>th</sup> September 1943. PRC was formed in the background of Second World War while 35 to 50 Lakh people died of famine. Mainly initiated by Mujaffar Ahmmed, and a non-political representation associated with Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy, Prof. Niren Roy, Kshiti Prasad Chatropadhyay, Nousar Ali etc. PRC aimed to provide public service. The uniqueness lied with the organization with regard to help the distressed persons who are the sufferer from acute natural calamities like earthquake, diseases or man-made disasters like famine, riot, and war.

PRC inspired the people initiatives while providing service to the people, which made a mass footing for the organization. It has led to the opening of many new branches in West Bengal and these branch organizations have been kept busy with providing public service. These are spread in Bijpur – 24 Parganas, Berhampore, - Murshidabad, Uttarpara- Kotarang – Hoogly, There are also branches in Bandel, Chandan Nagar, Chinsura and Hoogly, Udaynarayan Pur, Sankrail, Howrah, Krishangar, Nadia and Nabadweep.

The success to the work of PRC has been proved total in a number of events. As for example, in 1971 when the flow of refugee from Bangladesh was an important event, PRC served those people whole-heartedly. Dr. Laxmi Saigal, freedom fighter, joined the service during these days.

The work of PRC attained such popularity, that it was learnt, the people of other side (in Bangladesh) of the border formed PRC too at their local level.

The service of PRC was notable after the riot in Tripura or Jundice spread in Kalahandi in Orissa.

The voluntanary service by the eminent doctors, and many branches of medical facilities like, pathology, x-ray, ultrasonography, Ecocardiography etc are being found in PRC with a very nominal charge.

#### 4.2.12.

*West Bengal Primary Development Council (Paschim Banga Prathamik Unnayan Parshad)* is an organization, which arranges each year scholarship examination at the fourth standard. It was born out of the protest movment by **West Bengal Siksha O Swadhikar Raksha Committee** in the 1980's, which was

enmass movement to reintroduce English at the Primary level and examination system at the Primary Institutions.

The government of West Bengal later understood its faults and reintroduced English. Though there is no governmental approval behind such organization (WBPDC), the students of each and every family take advantage of such examination with a cost of a nominal charge of rupees 12/-.

There are the arrangements of scholarship for the successful candidates, for which money come from the voluntary contribution of the people. Out of 53000 primary schools in West Bengal, at least 33000 primary schools participated these examinations in 2002. In 2001, the first 5<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> topper candidates among the states were come from the district of Cooch Behar.

#### **4.2.13. Chikitsa Brati Uddog**

NRI activity in West Bengal – A non-resident Doctors organization maintains modern and technologically advanced hospital in fuleswar in Uluberia. The organization intends to provide service for the common people at an affordable cost.

#### **4.2.14. Voluntary Action**

In Kalna in the district of Burdwan , at least 100 tribal families voluntarily came forward to perform rural development work in Dhatrigram—1 village Panchayat. These people built gravel road (Dhatripara to Baghnapara) by their voluntary labour. Local M.P. (Mehboob Jahedi) contributed only an amount to Rupees 50 thousand by which brick was bought. The people contributed voluntary labour.

#### 4.2.15.

In the same (Dhatri Gram-1) Panchayat the villagers of Badha Gachhi voluntarily built up two-storied primary school. This time also local M.P. contributed Rupees 50 thousand only.

#### 4.2.16.

*Bengal initiative* is shaped by a lot of ornamental intellectuals under the ageis of Amiya Gupta, Pabitra Sarkar, Subha Prasanna Sarkar, Saroj Ghosh, Saibal Gupta, Satyabrata Ganguli, Abhijit Sen etc. It visited Sri Lahka with a view to bring investors for West Bengal.

#### 4.2.17. Bharatiya Gana Natya Sangha

It was formed in 25<sup>th</sup> May 1943, whose slogan was 'people's' theatre stars the people'. It made the art as the real organizer for the liberation of the fighting masses.

#### 4.2.18. CSO involvement in the field of Environment

In North Bengal: In Balurghat, in South Dinajpur district '**South Dinajpur Environment Protection and Rural Development Society**', a Balurghat-based NGO is vocal against the deforestation in the locality. In 25<sup>th</sup> Feb. 2004, the organization submitted a memorandum to the south Dinajpur District Magistrate, demanding afforestation in South Dinajpur to counter large-scale cutting down of trees due to the proposed construction of the Gazole-Balurghat export Road under the Asian Development Bank (ADB) project. The NGO said it would itself work towards achieving this.

South Dinajpur has about 16 percent forest cover. Illegal encroachers at various places in South Dinajpur were largely responsible for illegal tree felling. The inadequate forest cover was responsible for the gradual extinction of many animals, such as rabbits, fox, mongoose and various lizards. The NGO demanded proper surveillance for existing trees and exemplary punishment for the tree thieves.

In Jalpaiguri district *Kamellia* – a drama group of the village Satkura consists of unemployed youth. The group campaigned for literacy movement by their drama 'Nidan Chaulia Mansir Katha'. The drama conveyed the message that the expansion of education would not only lead the development of the village but also it would solve their many other problems.

In Raiganj, drinking, local wine, gambling were the regular feature of the locality. *The people* protested the matter to the police through written memorandum but no action was taken.

Rosenara Begum and others of *Ganatantrik Mahila Samity* took Jharu in their hands and went to the risky place and ransacked the wine depot and threatened the anti-socials. After that police took necessary action.

## **Darjeeling**

Helping the destitute women : *Aasha* – the Voluntary Organization (VO) of the police in West Bengal (Darjeeling Unit) is related with 'family counselling' for the married but divorced or destitute women. Aasha investigates the matter and the level of torture and tries to solve the problem amicably. It organizes seminars to convey their messages to the women activities.

## **Presence of CSOs in Health related activities for mental patients**

### **4.2.19. Rehabilitation**

*Anjali* – an NGO carries out rehabilitation programme in Kolkata to those well-behaved and integrated patients of two state-run mental hospitals- Kolkata Welfare, Government of West Bengal. **Shamuktala Welfare organization** got the Ambulance from *GTZ – the German Health Project run in North Bengal*.

### **Malda District: Individual Initiative**

*Dr. Pinaki Ranjan Roy (Veteran eye specialist)* did a commendable service for the people of North Bengal with regard to free eye-examination and operation. Dr. Roy established *Thakur Sitaram Seva Kendra* in Malda where only a minimum cost is being taken for eye treatment.

### **Birbhum : Voluntary Action**

The villagers of Saugram in Dark Gram Panchayat had no road to enter the village. Manirul Islam, the Upa- Pradhan of the Panchayat took personal initiative to help the work financially, while **the villagers** gave their voluntary labour to finish the work of the village road.

The money allotted for the Panchayat was only for an amount to Rupees 2 Lakhs 34 thousand only. But the actual work (including road, latrine etc. works) done in the Panchayat exceeded for an amount to Rupees 10 Lakhs. Wherefrom the money come? It was indeed the villagers of the Panchayat gave their voluntary labour worth for an amount to 50 percent. Panchayat shared 25 percent. The solvent class of the village donated 25 percent money.

*NGOs are not always Kolkata- centred. In the district the NGO activity is noteworthy.*

#### **4.2.20.**

*South 24 Parganas: Vivekananda Seva Kendra O Sishu Udyan (VSSU)* was set up in 1983 in Ullone in Laxmikantapur in South 24 Parganas. It was registered as NGO in 1986. Kalipada Mondol, the General Secretary of the organization has spread its activities in 20 villages Panchayats, there are 20 thousand members in the organization. VSSU provides service in the remote areas of Sundarban.

It planted trees besides 210 villages and set up many inns, culverts and thousands of latrines in the locality. It has earned 8 crores 40 Lakhs Rupees through micro banking in the 1995-96 financial year. VSSU distributes milk, rice, pulse to the poor and old persons and shoulder responsibilities of education for a few hundreds of students.

#### **4.2.21.**

### **Jalpaiguri**

Toto is one of the ancient tribes live in the district of Jalpaiguri. *SAMATAT* – an NGO organized 12 Self Help Groups (SHGS), helped them to generate self-employment and socio-economic development programme.

Since May 2003, 'Toto Kalyan samiti' was also formed as an NGO.

Totos now can cultivate scientific farming on orange, banana, pineapple, spices etc. They have become advanced in animal husbandry and savings.

## **Malda:**

Helping Flood Victims: *Social Welfare Institutes* (an NGO) Stellar work saved the people of Ratua Block -1. The NGO in joint collaboration with the state government had provided relief and medical treatment to the victims of flood in Ratua.

## **Darjeeling :**

**Himalayan Nature and Adventure Foundation** – a Siliguri based NGO organized the North Bengal chapter of the National Bio-diversity strategy and Action (NBSAP) with Ramakrishna Mission (the state's nodal agency for the project). The NGO asserted that illegal felling of trees; excessive use of pesticides by tea gardens and farmers. influx of illegal immigrants was proving fatal for North-Bengal's Bio-diversity. Jan2004. Statesman.

## **South 24 Pargana:**

In Rangabelia. '*Tagore society of Rural Development*' (under the guidance of Tusar Kanjilal) is engaged with a number of rural development activities. The important achievement of the society is to arrange alternative way of earning, building self-reliant to the rural women, to produce crop thrice in a year etc.

Each year the society organizes 'Sunderban Fair' with the people of the surrounded localities.

The society and the government of West Bengal jointly organize 'Banbibi Utsav' each year. The society chooses to reach to the people through the fair.

## **Kolkata: Roopkala**

A sponsored organization of the Government of Itali and the government of West Bengal jointly organize '*Social Communication Festival*' each year with two phases one in Kolkata and another in North Bengal. It allows and encourages the regional culture and producer and directors of creative film at the regional level.

### **4.2.22.**

## **Kolkata: Health**

*Student health Home (SHH)* is the product of the strongest students movement in West Bengal. In March 1949, one post graduate student in the University of Calcutta felt ill due to tuberculosis. He, with the help of his friends, went to Christian Medical College, Madras and got cured. After that, these students thought to build up a health project for the students.

In 1955, in Creek Road, Kolkata, in the house of Dr. Nihar Munsii, Students Health Home (SHH) was set up. Persons like Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy, Jyoti Basu, Triguna Sen, Nirmal Kr. Siddhanta, Rajkumar Chakraborty, Arun Sen, and Biman Bose etc. came forward to set it up in 1957. The proposal for setting up a hospital for SHH was formally approved.

Now different Secondary Schools, Colleges are the members of SHH. It has branches in each district. SHH maintains modern hospital, libraries, cares students either free or at a minimum cost.

### **Kolkata- Health: NRI- (Individual):**

*Dr. Mani Bhowmik, N.R.I., scientist and American dweller*, extended his cooperation to the poor but intelligent students of Bengal. He provided money through his *Dr. Mani Bhowmik Educational Foundation Scholarship*. A public fund was set up to assist brilliant students who belong to poor economic background.

#### **4.2.23.**

*APDR –Association for Peoples Democratic Rights* started its journey in 25<sup>th</sup> June 1972. It is champion with regard to human rights movement. It inspires the people and the other organization to unite and fight for human rights. As for example, in 27.12.2001 (Report of Statesman) at least 10 primary health centers in Banga Sub-division were in a dilapidated condition. Local people, led by the APDR formed a committee and urged the district magistrate to take immediate steps to improve health care in the area.

Earlier, APDR was vocal against the police torture on the Naxal rebels. Later, it concentrated its fights against all kinds of violation of human rights in West Bengal.

#### **4.2.24. Midnapore District:**

*'Village planning by the villagers'* was the popular movement in the district of Midnapore in the 1980's with a view to make it a grand success *'Midnapore planning and Development society'* – an NGO was formed which inspired the movement into each village in at least 40 blocks of undivided Midnapore district. One of the strategies of their work modalities was to survey the households effectively.

The NGO collected data of resources, problems, and the whereabouts of the individuals of each village. The planning taken by the NGO was considered as 'Samanwita Jana Uddog Saha Bhagi Parikalpana'. In Shalbani (West Midnapore) the planning was participated by 108 NGO volunteers of the People's Organizations (POs). (6)

#### **4.2.25. South 24 Pargana**

##### **Voluntary Action**

The population of the surrounded village in Nanda Kumar Gram Panchayat in Mathurapur Block 2 depended on Raidighi Road. In the remote area of Sunderban but the road was rough and incomplete.

*At least 10,000 people* extended their voluntary labour to build 10 Kilometre Road worth rupees about 2 crores.

#### **4.2.26. Howrah: In Uluberia**

*Aal- Amin Mission* Serves to brilliant but poor students of the Muslim Community to make successful candidates in the joint entrance examination. It maintains a Madrasa and two Higher Secondary Schools with a non-profit motive.

#### **4.2.27.**

*Bakreswar Power Thermal Unit (BPTU)* in Birbhum district created a record in terms of consecutive production of electricity not only in whole continent of Asia but for any where. The owner of this unit is West Bengal Electricity Development Corporation.

*The name of BPTU is referred here because this organization is born out of a movement of the left and democratic leaders of West Bengal. Jyoti Basu*

*invoked people to donate blood to raise fund to build up and protect the organization. People responded to the clarion call of Jyoti Basu. Therefore, BPTU stands as the symbol of voluntary action of the people of West Bengal.*

#### **4.2.28.**

**Kalimpong:** The Kalimpong Civic body appealed to resident to extend all possible help to ensure that development work in the municipal area continues.

*The Rotary Club of Kalimpong had renovated the Triangular Park and the Lions Club gave facelift to Dambar Chowk.*

#### **4.2.29. Confederation of Indian Industries (CII)**

*The CII, the State Industrial Development Corporation and Siliguri - Jalpaiguri Development Authority jointly organized convention 'North Bengal Calling' at Siliguri with a view to discuss the potentiality of establishing industries in North Bengal. (April 2005).*

#### **4.2.30. South 24 Pargana : Education : Voluntary Action**

In 21<sup>st</sup> February 2003, Jyoti Basu laid the foundation stone of Sarsuna College. It was reported that the government of West Bengal funded about 10 Lakhs 32 thousand rupees and the people of the locality collected two and half crore rupees.

#### **4.2.31. Darjeeling**

##### **Voluntary Action: Environment**

In Siliguri, January 2003, Siliguri Municipal, Corporation made *an arrangement to pay respect to the sentiment of the civil society of the city of*

*Siliguri* while implementing a proposal of the expansion of the Sevak Road; the corporation had faced trees over the road as the hindrance. The corporation did not take any decision by its own with a view to avoid the debate over the contentious issue to keep or cut the trees. The corporation took *the people's verdict by secret ballot*. Around 2,752 people voted in favour of cutting trees and only 322 voted against the motion. 39 votes were found cancelled.

#### **4.2.32. Jalpaiguri:**

##### **Voluntary Action**

In 23 Jan 2003 in Jalpaiguri in the birth anniversary of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose about **900 villagers** voluntarily contributed their labour and built up four-kilometre canal in Bada Bari Panchayat 2. It provided irrigation for 2100 bighas of agricultural land in the locality.

#### **4.2.33.**

*Muslim V.O. - Amanat Foundation Trust* a Voluntary Organisation works for the eradication of Polio among minority (Muslim) community of Goal Pokhar Block 2 in North Dinajpur District.

#### **4.2.34. Kolkata:**

##### **Health: Peoples for Better Treatment (PBT)**

Dr. Kunal Saha (a United States- based non-resident INDIAN) formed a charitable organisation in Kolkata (51, A.C. Banerjee Road) The Organisation was established as a result of the death of Dr. Saha's wife Anuradha in 1998 who died of maltreatment by the doctor in a hospital in Bombay. The organization is

committed to fight against the corruption in Medical Practice. provides counseling for better treatment and legal advice to litigation related to maltreatment of the patients. The Website of the organization is [WWW.pbtindia.com](http://WWW.pbtindia.com).

#### **4.2.35. Jalpaiguri**

*Culture: Nature and Treckers club* in Jalpaiguri was formed in 1988. It motivates youth to climb to the hill and mountain. Bhaskar Das of the organization won Fluted Mountain 20,200 fit. The organization helped counting of wildlife in Neora

Valley National Park. It organizes workshop and train the local youth.

#### **4.2.36: Howrah: Raod : Voluntary Action**

In April 2003, in Bankra Panchayat Bankra-Mowkhali road was made by the **peoples initiative**. The Public Works Department (PWD) wanted to build up 18 feet. Broad road but it was not possible due to lack of land. The beneficiary committee appealed and made at least 30 sittings with the local people and then the people voluntarily responded to the programme, offered their land without demanding any money.

#### **4.2.37. West Bengal –Post Independent Day: NGO movement:**

In West Bengal- NGOs are found active in evaluating the functions of the governmental bodies.

In Darjeeling, the '*Darjeeling NGO Network*'- a conglomeration of local NGOs, was found holding seminar expounding on the 'development of the Panchayat system under the '*Darjeeling Gorkha and Hill Council (DGAHC)*'.

A representative of *Darjeeling Ladenla Road Prerna*- an NGO working in rural Darjeeling said in the seminar that the rural governances had not evolved under the DGAHC. The NGO noted that the gram Sansads of the hill Panchayats had 'poor track' records.

#### **Darjeeling: Siliguri : Cosmos**

An NGO organizes seminar on integration of non-formal education with *Sishu Siksha Abhijan* in Siliguri in October 2003. It has set up 10 centres in the district of Jalpaiguri and rehabilitated 608 children since the project was started in 1999.

Siliguri Bethgeda, *Damdama* and *Singhjjhora* are the villages, long considered as the most 'trouble zone' are believed responsible for rampant feeling of trees in Baikhunthapur forest. Forest Protection Committees of three villages, the state forest department and *NESPON* – a Siliguri based NGO jointly established 'Eco-Friendly Park' (a project) in October 2003 aimed at weaning away forest fringe dwellers from timber smuggling.'

#### **4.2.38. PUCL: Peoples Union for Civil Liberties**

It is an organization, which fight for the protection of civil rights of the people. As for example, the organization was much vocal against the riots in Bhagalpur in Bihar.

#### **4.2.39. West Bengal Vingyan Manch (WBVM)**

The Manch crossed 19 years of its success period. It was formed out of social demand. The WBVM has published more than 65 valuable books on human and other animal life, such as, Biotechnology and Bio-ethics by Dr. R.N. Basu, the story of Bird by Jiban Sardar – an eminent orinthologist. The Manch organizes

science education for the children, science exhibition, eco-clubs etc. It organizes National Green Volunteers in about 3,000 schools in West Bengal.

The Manch maintains a number of activities for the farmers. These are building houses and a latrine at low cost, soil testing, preparation of bio-fertilizer, crop varieties, warns about the use of pesticides etc. The Manch monitors agricultural counseling centers at different places.

WBVM was established in 29<sup>th</sup> November 1986 with a view to commemorate the departed soul of Acharya Prafulla Chandra Roy, an eminent Scientist and social reformer in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Bengal.

Shaped by the ideology and influence of Acharya Roy, since the inception, the organization acted as the people's science organization. Manch believes to make a stable link between man and science. It aims to help building up a self-sufficient economy for the people with the help of eco-friendly science and technology and superstition-free scientific thinking.

#### **4.2.40. Federation of Scientists and Technicians (FOSET)**

In North Bengal, especially at Kalchini Block (Alipurduar), South-Menal Bari, Siliguri, Malda, FOSET is engaged with different types of development works. A notable work for the organization was to offer complete house for @ of Rs. 45,000/- keeping the needs of regional weather. The organization tries to popularize alternative source of energy in the region.

#### **4.2.41. Uttar Banga Anagrasar Muslim Sangram Samiti – (UBAMSS).**

For the last decade, the organization is engaged to aware the disadvantaged and backward sections of the Muslim community in North Bengal. The

organization recommends Muslim (Backward) people to include and attain the other Backward Class (OBC) certificates. It takes different welfare activities for these communities.

#### **4.2.42. Martyr Shiv Shankar Seva Samiti**

The Samiti Sincerely maintains its voluntary service in the field of public health since 1978 in Burdwan. Late Shiv Shankar Chowdhury was a freedom fighter that was shot by the miscreants in 1971. The people of the locality thus built up the organization to mark a respect to their beloved person. The Samiti has a pathological Medicine Bank, a blood Transfusion Centre for the Thalasamia Patients, a blood bank, and it publishes tri-monthly 'Health and people' regularly. It has a library too.

#### **4.2.43.**

Besides to these activities, it is to be noted that West Bengal, especially North Bengal is a fertile land of movements. *The Tebhanga Movement in 1946-47* deserves special attention in the field of organized agricultural labourers' movement in India. The theme of the movement was to hand over two-third of the agricultural produce to the farmers who yield and to give one-third to the land owner. The centre of the movement was Dinajpur, Rangpur and Jalpaiguri in undivided Bengal and in North Bengal.

Though the movement could not attain any formal legal recognition, the result of the movement accelerated another famous movement at Naxal Bari near

Sili Guri, popularly known as Naxal Movement .The revolted with arms. *Charu Majumdar was the leader. Later, Kanu Sanyal, Jangal Santal and others led the movement.* A few intellectuals supported the movement but the movement could no longer last soon as it was engaged with indiscriminate murdering of people including poor police personnel. The movement ignored the working class in Party activity. The aim of the movement was to attain political power.

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## Chapter - 5

### 5.1. The nature and dynamics of the development of Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) in Post- Independent India:

In V.T. Krishnamachari's words, the functions of Panchayat Raj bodies 'include social and economic development in the widest sense.' (1)

In India the System of Panchayat is a pragmatic form of democratic and decentralized governance. The Nationalist leaders gave importance upon the Panchayat during the freedom movement. Gandhiji's very basic idea on the development was based on 'Gram Swaraj.' Most of the leaders believed in it. However, Panchayat was not included in the Draft Constitution presented in the Constituent Assembly of India. And ultimately, after a long discussion and debate, the provision of Panchayat was included later in an undermined way in the Directive Principles of State Policy in the Constitution of India. (2)

*Article 40 provides: "The state shall take steps to organize village panchayats and endow them with such powers as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self- government."*

A democratic polity involves the decentralization or deconcentration of power in a way that the affairs of the local people are managed by means of their positive participation. Democratic decentralization is a political ideal and local self-government is its institutional form. The advent of independence afforded the real opportunity for materializing the dream of democratic decentralization in our country. (3).

However, the ruling power elite in India because of their lack of political will did not pay due respect to the above-mentioned Article at once.

After a long interval, in October, 1952 community development projects in some selected localities of various states were launched that were manned by a staff trained in the sphere of community development work and that was entrusted with the work of executing the rural development plan with the help of locally nominated popular bodies.

The Second Five-year proposed to cover the whole of the countryside with National Extension Service Blocks through the institutions of Block Development Committee manned by Block Development Officers, Assistant Development Officers. Village level workers in addition to the nominated representatives of the village panchayats of that area and some other popular organizations like cooperative societies.

All these arrangements proved unsatisfactory. The programmes were set from the above and dominated by the bureaucracies. Certainly, the programme could not create the people's initiative.

Hence, the Government of India appointed a committee under the chairmanship of Balabantrai Mehta in 1956 to study the whole problem and suggest ways and means for implementing the scheme of Panchayat Raj on some uniform line throughout the country. The committee, however in view of vast size and varying social, political, economic conditions prevailing in different part of the country recommended *'form and pattern may necessarily vary according to the conditions prevailing in different states.'*

*As a result, the Government of India did not insist that every State should follow the same pattern. It emphasized some fundamental principles of Panchayat Raj as:*

- (1) There should be a three-tier structure of local-self government from the village to the district with village at the bottom and the district at the top with its intermediary link of institutions all organically related to one another.
- (2) There should be a genuine transfer of power and responsibility to these institutions of local self-government.
- (3) Adequate resources should be transferred to these bodies to enable them to discharge these responsibilities.
- (4) All programmes of social and economic development formulated through the network of planning should be channeled through these institutions.
- (5) The new system should be tried and encouraged to facilitate the work of making further devolution and dispersal of power responsibilities in future.

The system of Panchayat Raj in its new form saw its inauguration in 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1959 by Jawahar Lal Nehru in a district in Rajasthan.

The year 1978 was a landmark in the history of Panchayat. This time the Janta Party-led central Government gave a new life to the system of Panchayat.

*Till date scholars call Panchayat Raj as 'a process of governance', 'a system', 'a revolution'. Jawharlal Nehru termed Panchayat as "Raj" i.e., governance. Mahatma Gandhi's idea of 'village swaraj' was the governance of a 'complete republic- the government of the village which will be conducted by the Panchayat of five persons annually elected by the adult villagers, males or*

*females; possessing minimum prescribed qualification, ..... the Panchayat will be legislature, judiciary and executive combined to be operative for its year of office.'*

It was with Mahatma Gandhi there had been a turning point in the conceptual change about the role of the Panchayat. His belief in 'Gram Swaraj and cohesiveness of Indian village inclined him to construct a vision of India around the small village republic, which was to be governed by the Panchayat of five persons. The present Indian leaders too welcome 'Panchayat Raj as the only answer to all problems'.

As for example, *Acharya Ramamurti, a Sarvodaya leader* of Assam-an insurgency prone state, said the panchayati raj system was better placed to solve the problem of insurgency, in the north-east because the people at the grass roots would have their own platform to raise their voice. *"The gun won't be required". According to Ramamurty, Solutions to the country's problems lay in the panchayati raj institutions because representative democracy was no longer able to cure the maladies.*

The Constitution of India itself lies down that the panchayati institutions should develop into units of self-rule. Rammurthy believes *'India can show the way that people handle power more successfully than their representatives'*.

India could become a model for other south Asian countries that were trying to develop their democracies.

In the 1990's the Indian rural local government comprises 232,278 village panchayats, 5905 intermediate panchayats, and 499 district panchayats, making a total of 2,38,682 at all the three levels.

*The 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment* to the Indian constitution has greatly contributed to the political empowerment of the women and marginalized communities in the rural society and has thrown open political opportunities in the panchayats to these disadvantaged sections.

*Clause (3) of Article 243-D* inserted in the Indian constitution by the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act provides that “not less than one-third (including the number of seats to be filled by direct election in every panchayat shall be reserved for women and such seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a panchayat”. Similarly, *clause (2)* of the same article provides that “*not less than one-third of the total number of seats reserved (for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes) shall be reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Tribes*”.

Moreover the provision under *clause (4)* of the said Article which deals with reservation of offices of the chairpersons in the Panchayats for the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes and women stipulates that “*not less than one-third of the total number of offices of chairpersons in the panchayats of each level shall be reserved for women*”.

*Clause (1) of Article 243-D* provides for reservation of seats to the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes in every panchayat. Accordingly, it provides that seats for these marginalized sections of the rural society should be provided in every panchayat in proportion of their respective population in the total population in each panchayat, and further that such seats may have to be allotted by rotation to different constitution in the panchayat.

Likewise, *clause (4)* of the said Article stipulates that the offices of the chairpersons in the panchayats at the village level or any other level should be reserved for the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and women as the Legislature of a state may, by law, provide subject to the condition that the number of such reserved offices should be in proportion to their respective population in the panchayats at each level.

*The 73<sup>rd</sup> constitutional Amendment* could be considered not only historic but also very radical in that for the first time in the history of the independent India. It has made mandatory provisions for the reservation of a minimum number of seats and offices of chairpersons to women as well as to the marginalized sections of the rural community.

All states have incorporated these constitutional imperatives in their respective Panchayats Acts. Elections were accordingly conducted, and in the process a phenomenal number of about one-and a-half million elected representatives belonging to these disadvantaged sections have assumed office in the panchayat.

Such arrangements had improved the awareness and perceptual levels of these sections and had created an urge in them to assert for their rightful share in the decision-making exercise at the local level. Training Programmes are being organized for the members of these sections including women chairpersons of panchayats at different levels. The state Institutes of Rural Development and the NGOs are organizing these training programmes with appropriate curriculums for them.

Another historic step in the development of Panchayat was that the introduction of the 'Gram Sabha' at the village level consisting of persons registered as voters in the electoral rolls of the gram panchayat. Every gram sabha hold two general meetings in each year. There is a provision of quorum for these meeting.

Though there are a lot of good work done by Kerala, Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal, some states lag behind, even in organizing panchayat elections at regular interval. Panchayat polls are not frequent in Assam, Bihar, etc. states. However, situations improved much better today. When panchayat polls were held in Jammu and Kashmir in 2001 after 23 years, people rejoiced in grassroots level democracy.

Through the 73<sup>rd</sup> constitutional Amendment the Panchayati Raj institutions in India has been entrusted with the responsibilities relating to 29 subjects. While Panchayat is an affair of state list, the level and degree of conferring power varies depending on the basis of each state concerned. Centre has thus directed the state to convey this information through the '*Activity Map*'.

Panchayat today supervises the block primary health centers or rural hospitals, water supply system, dig deep tube-wells or simple tube-wells, examines the standard of drinking water, even basic education or animal husbandry etc. However, till date, the gram panchayats lack the technical expertise for undertaking good quality work.

In the scheme of 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment, the Gram Sabha is a deliberative body and the Gram Panchayat is the executive organ. The *Village Development Council*

*(VDC)* now advises the Gram Sabha and the recommendation of Gram Sabha is binding upon the Gram Panchayat.

Panchayat enjoys very little money from its own resources. It has to depend on the grant-in-aid by the state as well as the centre. The taxes it collects are too little to the success of rural development in a number of basic and minimum issues like the primary health care, education, safe drinking water etc. In 5<sup>th</sup> April 2002, it was reported that the then Prime Minister desired to a fresh amendment for such cause.

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## **5.2. The development of Panchayat Raj Institutions in West Bengal since Independence with regard to peoples participation in governance and developmental programmes.**

In West Bengal Panchayat started its journey with the Act of 1956. Panchayat replaced the Union Board. But upto 1963 only 50 percent villages were under the Panchayat. After 1963, no election was held in panchayats for 15 years. In the panchayat election of 1978, the Left Front's slogan was to 'break the nest of the vested interest'. In 1983, Left Front was aware of the vested interest and to resist them by enhancing the development activities and extending democratic rights of the people in 1988.

The workers of the left front were vocal to highlight the success of the left front and the panchayat, the role of the atrocities of the congress, the compromising attitude of the congress party and the anti-people policy of the then central government. In 1993, the left front had to fight against the organized alliance of the *congress— (I), Bharatiya Janata Party*, Jharkhand etc. Parties. In 1998, the slogan of the lefts was concentrated on to combating the communal and reactionary forces and to integrate the positive change of the rural West Bengal.

All the time, the opposition was fragmented. Therefore, the ruling left front has sustained its position both in the state government as well as in most of the panchayats for 28 years consecutively till date (*i.e., 2006*).

However, congress party deserves some credit in many respects. In 1953, Zamindari System was abolished during the congress regime. In West Bengal,

congress government passed Land Reform Act in 1954. But it could not give effect the Act in the true sense. In 1974, congress government again introduced an Act in favour of the sharecroppers.

But this time, too the landlords did not follow the Act. In 1956, it was under the congress government that the introduction of new panchayat was witnessed but the whole thing could not further precede in practice as for the next 15 years no election to the panchayat was held. During 1967-68, only 10 percent of the total 19,662 panchayats could hardly function. Again another Panchayat Act was enacted in 1973, but upto 1977 no election was held in the panchayats by the then congress government.

It was *Rajiv Gandhi*, whose sincere effort for making panchayat into a grassroot administration could bore fruit in 1989. He himself was an adminer of the Panchayat system in West Bengal. In 1993, P.V. Narasima Rao also commented in a report of the *All India Congress Committee (AICC)*, the West Bengal, Karnataka and Andhra under Basu, Hegre and Rama Rao did a commendable job for the success of the Panchayati Raj. (1)

In 1957, West Bengal Panchayat Act was promulgated in the state. In 1963, Zilla Parishad Act was enacted in the state. On the basis of these Acts Panchayat was made at two tiers but nothing was found as viable in practice. The transfer of power did not see a reality due to lack of political will. As a result, those acts as well as the structure of the panchayts were found as dried subject. The power was concentrated at the hand of the state government.

It was the second coalition front government in West Bengal, which tried to decentralize the power. In 1969, they replaced the earlier Acts by introducing new Bill in the state Assembly that opted for a three-tier panchayat on the basis of

universal Adult franchise. But the Bill could not become an Act as the congress opposed the Bill.

The Bill was deferred to the select committee. The Bill, however, was introduced during the congress rule in 1974. But the Act was not effective in practice, as there was lack of political will on the part of the congress government and they could not arrange any election to the panchayats. Elections to the panchayat became a regular feature since 1978 while the left front became in power.

While West Bengal is a fore -runner in doing regular elections to the panchayat, in India, the picture of the other states were rather hazy. It was the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act in 1993, which made election a compulsion to the Panchayats. Therefore the states are doing elections in the panchayat in these days.

Otherwise, in Bihar, election was not held for 16 years before 1993. In Tamil Nadu, no election was held 8 years before 1993, in Uttar Pradesh election was not held 10 years before 1998. West Bengal in comparison with those of other states is matured in dealing with a pro-people structure panchayats.

Though panchayat was introduced as an imperative in West Bengal, it was rather an outcome of the people's urge and movement and also the political will of the left and democratic forces to move the politics in a new direction. Such a spirit can be traced in the statement made by left leaders during the late 1970's.

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Land reform is a *sine qua non* for decentralization of planning and people's participation in the development process through Panchayat Raj Institutions. Panchayat Raj Institutions can be an effective organization for development with a human face in rural areas only if a genuine land reform programme precedes it.

West Bengal has a much higher proportion of the land declared surplus, taken possession of and distributed. It is due to land reforms, large land holdings, forcible eviction of tenants and semi-feudal extra-economic control of the rich over the labour power of the poor are things of the past. Land reform in West Bengal has helped in the transfer of power in the countryside from the hands of the parasitic, absentee and big landlords to the small landowners.

The ultimate credit of land reforms goes to the effectiveness of the panchayats in West Bengal, which by its constant vigil has made the sections i.e. women, scheduled caste, and scheduled tribes in the gram panchayats.

The State Institute of Panchayats, West Bengal has conducted several studies on many thousands of elected members in different years. And it was found that there were adequate representations of panchayats in programmes a success. Panchayat system based on land reform and land reform based panchayats in West

Bengal became complementary to each other. That is, there is a significant representation of the poor people in the rural power structure of West Bengal. (3)

The uniqueness with panchayats in West Bengal is that it has introduced the system of '*Gram Sansad*' at the booth level. All the elected voters of the booths are the members of the gram sansad. The development issues of the villages are decided at the meeting of the gram sansad. It has quorum. It usually arranges meetings twice in a year. Despite the lack of participation, the system made the participatory democracy into a potential success.

In West Bengal, the formation and activities of the *Self Help – Groups (SHGs)* with people's participation, especially with the women from the disadvantaged section of the society have made into a solid movement. The women are earning individually or within the groups. And it is the panchayat at three levels that directly helped and encouraged to build it up and to sustain.

Other than developmental works, panchayats in West Bengal organize and conducts Literacy or Post Literacy programmes. Adult and continuing centers, Sarbasiksha. Abhijan, fair for the mother and child, folk fairs and competitions, self help groups thereby involve people from the disadvantaged section at the rural level.

Panchayats in West Bengal played a leading role in combating the flood disaster through the management of massive relief operation during the flood of 1978. Panchayat in West Bengal, today is entrusted with special task of monitoring the primary health centers for providing good public health care.

Gram Sansad in West Bengal, however, lack attendance by members. Figures made available by government for gram sansad meetings held in May and

November 2002 show the average attendance of 12 percent and 11 percent respectively with the high of 19 percent and low of six percent. The percentage of adjourned meetings was abnormally high. It was 25 percent in May and 18 percent in November 2002. (*Panchayat Raj Samachar, No.2, November 2002 and no.1 and 2. January February 2003, Institute of Social Sciences.*) The quorum is 10 percent of members. In adjourned meetings no quorum is required. Thus with such low attendance a caucus can easily manipulate the outcome of an election with 10 percent or less of total number of votes. (4)

The West Bengal Panchayat (Amendment) Act, 2003 was passed in the West Bengal legislature and became law on 14<sup>th</sup> July 2003. The Act tries to establish through law organic linkages among the various tiers of panchayats.

It creates a block sansad and zilla sansad where representation of lower tiers is adequately provided. It also stipulates constitution of functional sub-committees at the gram panchayat level.

The introduction of Gram Unnayan Samiti is another feature of West Bengal panchayat. The objective of the samiti is to ensure '*active participation of the people in implementation, maintenance and equitable distribution of the benefits.*'

There are the two jewels of the success of the government of the state of West Bengal since 1978 and these are land reform and the panchayat Raj Institution. These are well praised by the different experts team both at the government and non-government level of the abroad (*such as BRACK – an NGO of Bangladesh, and the representative of Bangladesh Team, and the team of Peoples Republic of China – all have praised about the working of panchayats in West Bengal*). Even, recently, the expert like Samir Amin, who is famous for

'the theory of Development and Under- Development', and does not favour the activities of NGOs, praised the working of West Bengal Panchayat and the participation of the NGOs actively helping panchayats in the development process.

However, in 1992-93 the Mukherjee- Bandhopadhyay report on West Bengal Panchayats observed that among the elected members the concept of panchayats as autonomous institutions of self- government was unknown. The government treated panchayats as elected extension agencies of state administration and the elected members felt happy about their role. The position did not change even after the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment, which required that respective state Acts should endow panchayats with such powers and responsibilities as would enable them to function as institutions of self – government.

Even the recommendation of the first state finance commission presided over by *Dr. Satyabrata Sen (1995)* to provide for united funds to them local level functions of the line departments are put in cold storage.

It is observed that the state has not yet developed any one of 29 subjects mentioned in the Eleventh Schedule. The critics opine that the concept of autonomy is anathema to the culture of 'control and command' of the dominant partner of the left front coalition. *However, the Critics believe that different wings of the Communist Party of India (MARXIST) i.e., CPIM controls all the three tiers of panchayats, wherever they are in power.*

The local organizations of the CPIM retain total control of panchayats and decisions are ultimately taken at the level of the panchayat sub-committee of the local party unit or the appropriate party unit of the respective level. As a whole Panchayati Raj Institutions in West Bengal are controlled through the network of

Party organizations. (i.e. Zilla Parishad by Party's district committee, the panchayat samiti by the zonal committee and gram panchayats by the local committee ).

In reply to a number of allegations, it is claimed by the left front that they run the panchayats sincerely. They claim that there is internal audit system run by the Front Committee, which also check the corruption of the panchayats and punishes the pradhan by canceling them from the party.

West Bengal today bears the panchayat system having 36 percent women out of the total representatives at the Gram Panchayat, 34 percent women at Panchayat Samiti and 36 percent women at Zilla Parishad.

The state of West Bengal had the lion's share of women representative out of total women representatives of all panchayats in India. (According to a report made by Annual Report (2001-2002), Department of Women and Child Development, Government of India.)

*According to United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 1999, the reason of the success of the panchayat in West Bengal was that the government was committed about its responsibilities about the participation of women and self help groups (SHGs) in the process of development.* According to report. in case of women panchayat it was the Shimoga in Karnataka and Kultikri in West Bengal that stood as the pathfinder in the country. In West Bengal, 90 percent of the self-help group members are women.

Now- a- days, CPIM, the principal winner and leading political party in the state does not prefer to project teachers for the post of panchayat members. Therefore, CPIM does not give the teachers ticket and the proportions of marginal

labourers are increasing in the panchayats. Moreover, the women members are increasing in West Bengal, which helped to care the child and women health and their problems in a better way.

However in West Bengal there are lacks of infrastructure at the Gram Panchayat level. There was no chartered and cost accountant in the Zilla Parishad to monitor financial irregularities and look after the preparation of utilization certificates for both state and central government funds.

There were the report of the cases of corruption in 2002 in North Bengal for at least 26 panchayats amounted to Rupees 1 Crore of which 12 in Jalpaiguri, 5 in Cooch Behar, 3 in North Dinajpur. 3 in Malda and 3 in South Dinajpur.

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## **Chapter 6**

### **The District of Cooch Behar**

#### **6.1. A profile of the District :**

The district of Cooch Behar having an area of 3,368 square kilometer and 21,58169 population according to 1991 census is an industrially backward zone. Most of the people belong to the economically weaker sections and backward communities who suffer from deep socio-economic misbalance of development.

Situated in the north and north-east of the state of West Bengal in India, the district of Cooch Behar finds itself the gateway to the state of Assam, with two neighbouring countries like Bhutan in the north and Bangladesh in the South.

#### **6.1.1**

The plight of the people in Cooch Behar deserves special attention for more than one reason. The district is washed by more or less 22 rivers, which multiply the sorrows of the rural people as the rivers frequently change courses thereby causing floods and devastations. There is dumping of sand by the riverside, frequent soil erosion wiping the irrigated land and affecting the agricultural economy and dwelling places of the rural people.

#### **6.1.2.**

The district is predominantly rural. 92.32 percent of the population of the district lives in the villages. The people of the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes are 52 percent. Agriculture forms the principal source of income. But the production is traditional. There is lack of irrigation facilities.

There are no large, medium or agro-related industries in the district. Among the people, only 32.15 percent belong to the workers. There is no regulated common market for the farmers producing the principal agricultural crops like jute and tobacco.

*The district suffers a lot from transport and communication facilities.*

For past few years, political and social tensions fueled by the frustration caused by unemployment, economic hardship and other disadvantages has become a menace in the whole of North Bengal.

The fact that political and social tension of the district can be interpreted as a reaction to majoritarian excess is partly true. There are reasons to believe that earlier the people of the backward communities (*Muslims, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes*) were not able to get the employment as compared to the advanced people. Therefore, no development of these people was possible.

The ethnic leaders could not focus the cause of the sufferings of these downtrodden people from the economic point of view rather they became busy with demanding the recognition of a separate state-hood on the basis of Kamtapuri language and culture. A fraction of the agitators went to the extremist and anti-state path.

*Undoubtedly, the success of regionalism in politics all over India is a source of such inspiration.*

Two other contributory causes of frustration are (i) *partisan politics has failed to address the problems that affect the marginalized community* and (ii) *Kolkata- centred politics by- passes the regional issues.*

*Unlike the past, the situation is however, rapidly changing for the better.*

### **6.1.3. Past History of Cooch Behar :**

The district has a glorious past history. About five hundred years ago, the state of Koch Bihar was created with the ascendance over the throne by the King Biswa Singha in 1496. The crown ship was ended during King *Jagaddipendra Narayan* as the state of Koch Bihar was merged with the state of sovereign India in 12<sup>th</sup> September 1949 and it became a district under the state of West Bengal in 1<sup>st</sup> January 1950.

During the period of *King Nara Narayan*, the area of the state was from Manipur in the east to northeast of Bihar in the West and from Bhutan in the north to Tripura at the south. That was the whole of present North Bengal and the district of Rangpur and Sri Hatta (Now in Bangladesh) and half part of present state of Assam and the state of Meghalaya.

In 1772, it was during the period of *King Dhorjendra Narayan* the need was felt to protect the state of Koch Bihar and to make free the king Dhorjendra Narayan who was arrested under the king of Bhutan. A treaty was made between the king Dhorjendra and governor General Hastings of East India Company on condition that the state of Koch Bihar had to pay taxes annually to the company. Since 1772, Koch Bihar, virtually was included under the British domination as Princely State. Under the Act, since then, the responsibility to keep watch and superintendence of the education and betterment of the people of Koch Bihar was entrusted to British official that continued during the reign of the later Kings.

*King Nara Narayan (1533)* can be regarded as one of the pathfinder in bringing out the then Koch Bihar state as a sound state in field of Sanskrit and

Bengali education. In 1955 he wrote a letter to the Ahome King in Bengali, which can be regarded as the first letter in Bengali Prose. It was under the king in 1847 modern and English system of education was introduced in Cooch Behar and at least 390 schools were set up upto 1879.

*King Nripendra Narayan (1883)* can be regarded as the modern builder of Cooch Behar. He was a benevolent, kind- hearted, modern and English educated cultured, directly experienced through domestic and foreign tour, and an enlightened personality. For higher education he established Victoria College (present Acharya Brajendranath Seal College) in 1888.

'*Sahitya Sabha*'—is a centre of antique records of books and culture of the past. *Prince Victor Nityendra Narayan*—a truly cultural person during his brother *King Jitendra Narayan* was fond of collection of rare manuscripts books and ancient idols or historical graphities. In 1916, Nityendra Narayan in a meeting of about 600 intellectuals such as, *Sailesh Ch. Guha, Pundit Kokileswar Sastri, Prafulla Ch. Mustafi, Hirendra Narayan Chowdhury, Sitesh Ch. Sanyal, Khan Amanata Ullah Chowdhury, Satish Ch. Mustafi, Ganga Prasad Dasgupta* etc. established Sahitya Sabha.

For spiritual and ethical uplift of the people of Cooch Behar, King Jagadipendra Narayan- the last king established Siv-Yagya in Khagrabari village.

Many socio-cultural organizations like Sahitya Sabha, Khagrabari Club, Patakura Club, and Folk groups at the villages in the field of Visha Hara, Kushan, and Dotara etc.folk songs were built up under the direct patronage of the Royal Family of Cooch Behar.

#### 6.1.4.

The people of the Cooch Behar state were mainly Koch. (1) The advanced section of the community was known as '*Rajbansi*'. The Kochas believed in Hinduism. (2) The Kochas or Rajbanshis are a mixed people arising out of a Dravidian Stock with marked admixture of Mongoloid Blood.

At present time, the Rajbanshis claim themselves to be the Kshatriyas in the caste hierarchy.

The lengthy development process of the Rajbanshis from Koch to Rajbansi-Kshatriya however ultimately came to an end when they claimed to be the scheduled caste.

#### 6.1.5.

Cooch Behar could not have any permanent royal palace as we find in other kingdoms. Till 1874, the capital of Cooch Behar had few 'mud huts'. Maharaja Nripendra Narayan, with the help of colonel Horton and his commissioners created the 'magnificent palace' abandoning the old dilapidated palace of the former kings. The palace in Cooch Behar town today deserves special attention with regard to potential tourism in the district.

Earlier the name of the kingdom was '*Kamtapur*' and capital was in '*Gosanimari*' – now is situated seven miles North West of the Dinhata Town.

The first king of the Khen Dynasty was *Niladhaja (1440-60)* whose territory was upto Bhutan at the North and border of West Bihar, Moimonsingh at the bank of Padma River now in Bangladesh and Goalpara in the east. Beside a large palace, he built a large Garh (made up of soil) for 15 miles, which after 600 years

is still visible in Gosanimari with a height of 30 to 40 hands (around 360 feet), seemed to a hill – a unique creation of those days.

It was in 1498 Husain Shah attacked the Khen kingdom and destroyed it. Then King was *Chakradhwaj (1480-1498 A. D.)*.

**6.1.6. The popular form of song in the district of Cooch Behar is Bhawaiya. The legendery singer was Abbas Ud-din who brought the music popular to each person in the region.**

**6.1.7.**

For the past last few years, agitations are being spearheaded by section of the Rajbanshis on the basis of the demand for constitutional recognition of the Kamtapur language and a separate state of Kamtapur. *Kamtapur Peoples Party (K.P.P.)* now Kamtapur Progressive Party has led the movement. Though the movement of the K.P.P. stands partly democratic and limited their demand of statehood within the Sovereign Indian Territory. The other groups like *Kamtapur Liberation Organisation (K.L.O.) Kamtapur Students Organisation (K.S.O.)*, *All Koch Rajbanshi Students Union (AKRASU)*, *Greater Cooch Behar* etc. are the allied groups which extended their support to the respective issues and the movement. KLO however went to the extremist and anti-state path.

Their proposed state of Kamtapur is comprised of 19 districts of which Darjeeling Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar, Malda, North Dinajpur and South Dinajpur these six districts are from North Bnengal. eleven districts from Assam, and two districts from Bihar. These groups along with a few intellectuals who support their cause claim that Rajbanshi language was lingua franka in previous days and still it has relevance in the region claiming that anthropologically Rajbanshis are

distinctly separate from the people of southern part of West Bengal and Upper Assam.

As there is the large number of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (52 percent) in the region of North Bengal Uttar Banga Tafsili Jati and Adivasi Sangathan (UTJAS) occasionally called for mass movement with a demand to stop police atrocities on them. The organization formed Swayatwa Sashan Manch (platform for self-rule) to focus their demand of separate homeland on the basis of Kamtapur language and culture in North Bengal.

There are reasons behind the plight of the Rajbanshis. The illiterate poor Rajbanshis used to be hated by the higher caste people and some of them were victims to the exploitation of the Brahmins. The abolition of the Izaradari system could not check 'depeasantization' of the Rajbanshis- Koches. It is in the social context that some social leaders of Rajbanshi communities led by Rai Sahab Panchanan Barma fought for the uplift of the Rajbanshis. (3)

### 6.1.8.

Cooch Behar had a glorious air route. The people of Cooch Behar witnessed a sound-flying route from Cooch Behar to Calcutta upto 1995 (December). Since 1948 (May-1<sup>st</sup>), Bayudoot air service provided 18-seated 'Dornier'. In the 1950's, instead of inclusion of Cooch Behar under India, Indian Airways, Kalinga Air ways, Jam Air, Sofai players, Air carrying between Cooch Behar to Kolkata. In the 60's, when Dacotas were closed Indian Airline maintained its '*Focker Friendship*' Air Service.

Today, the concrete of the runway is more or less in a good condition but there is no air service functioning here. *The Airport is likely to be inaugurated on 15<sup>th</sup> April 2006.*

### 6.1.9. The Rhaassh Mela:

The biggest crowd-pulling fair in the district is the Rhaassh-Mela (fair). This is the biggest fair in North Bengal too. It started in 1812 during the reign of Maharaja Harendra Narayan. The fair begins on Raas Purnima with a Raas (like Tazia of the Muslims) made by a Muslim artisan family brings a good example of the culture of Hindu-Muslim unity in Cooch Behar district.

### 6.1.10.

In 1889, Maharaja Nripendra Narayan established the now existing **Madan Mohan Temple** on the North Bank of Bairagidighi. The idol made of eight Metals was stolen in 1994. It was however replaced with a new one. Both the temple and fair are great attraction of the tourists of the region. The Dom of *the temple resembles with the similarity of symbol of Islam religion.*

### 6.1.11.

There is an *Uttar Banga Unnayan Parshad (UBUP)* or *North Bengal Development Council (NBDC)* for the development of the region. Chief Minister is the Chairperson and a minister from North Bengal is the vice Chairperson of the parshad.

The Parshad was established in 30<sup>th</sup> March 2000, keeping in view to organize development works for 1.5 crore people of six districts (*Malda, North Dinajpur, South Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar and part of Darjeeling*) of North Bengal. It was decided to establish a number of regional directorates of the government branches of West Bengal government in North Bengal. None but the Agricultural Directorate was set up. The Parshad was not able to do major function due to its lack of administrative and technological infrastructure.

### 6.1.12.

The district has a wide border area with Bangladesh. Moreover, there are more than 100 Indian enclaves in Bangladesh. There are also some enclaves of Bangladesh in India. The people of these enclaves do not have basic amenities for life such as education, health care etc, including the right to vote or right to life. But the government has taken no positive action for them.

### 6.1.13.

Since the district of Cooch Behar was once a princely state, it has its own history. It is royal, intellectual and unique in the region. There are many eminent books written on the history of Cooch Behar. Such as, *Koch Beharer Itihas by Bhagabati Charan Bandopadhyay, another Koch Beharer Itihas by Chowdhury Amanat Ulla, the Rajbanshis of North Bengal by Dr. Charuchandra Sanyal, Princes Remembers by Maharani Gayatri Devi, Rajopakhyan of Jainath Munshi, 'Cooch Behar through the eyes of Campbell etc. books are noteworthy.*

It is alleged, there is no systematic effort on the part of the education department of the government to introduce such a glorious history of Cooch Behar in the academic syllabus for meaningful exercise of knowledge of the culture of the region.

### 6.1.14.

In the district as well as in the region, even in a part of Assam, the term Rajbanshi or Rajbanshi language (?) or dialect and culture plays an important role from the ethnic as well as sub-altern point of view. Rajbanshi language or dialect (whatever may be) has a vast bridge territory in Rangpur, Dinajpur

(Bangladesh); Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri, Terai region and Cooch Behar in West Bengal; and Goalpara of Assam.

*In 1901, the term 'Rajbangshi' was first coined in the census of India. However, since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, these people were found busy to search for their Aryan Identity, especially inside the royal family of Cooch Behar. These people took the title of Narayan, accepted Madan Mohan Temple as the God of the state. The people like Goswami and Bhattacharjee were brought from the district of Nadia and other places and made Cooch Behar a centre of Aryan religious practice and culture.*

The person who led such renaissance in the second decade of 20<sup>th</sup> century was Thakur Panchanan Burma. These people got so encouraged that with a view to strengthen their position they enlisted their identity as Kshatriya in the census of 1921.

*The Culture of Activism and Active Organizations in Cooch Behar:* CoochBehar witnessed a number of activists and active organizations along with strong and spirited movements.

*Panchanan Burma was a great social reformer for the downtrodden Kshatriya- Raj Bangshi people of the North- East region. He brought this community before the civil society He was able to give the community a space in the society. In 1891, F.A.Skyne- the then Magistrate of Cooch Behar ordered the Raj Bangshi to write them, as 'Kouch' -the society was brusted into protest. Yadaeswar Tarka Ratna and others opined that Raj Bangshis are Aryan oriented Poundra Kshatriya. Since these people are renegade for several years, these people are worthy to write as 'Bratya- Kshatriya'-such an order was noticed.*

In 1931, with the help of some leaders from other backward classes, five(5%) percents seats were reaserved for these people in the clerical jobs. In 1932, Lord Lothian declared the backward community as depressed classes. On the basis of the term depressed or '*dalit*', he opined that those who are untouchable and having no right to enter into the temple are called as depressed or dalits. The society was again brusted with severe protests.

In fact, at the time of all these protests it was Panchanan Burma who by taking the masses led the protest. Burma gave the reason: if the upper caste Brahmin having no knowledge, education or finance work like a cook rather than priest of a temple, they do not get respect. Therefore, being a Brahmin he (*Thakur Panchanan Burma himself*) recommended *Sir William Prentice* to amend the definition of the definition of the backwaed depressed class and tactically brought an order from Prentice, Panchanan gave a proposal that the term 'dalit' or depressed to be changed by the term *Tafsili*, i. e., '*scheduled caste*'.

In 16<sup>th</sup> Januray 1933, the Government of India accepted the proposal. And also as a result or reaction of his (Panchanan's) movement, in 1937, 'reservation system' was introduced for the expansion of education of these scheduled castes through scholarship and government jobs in the educational institutions. In 1950, the Constitution of India provided reservation for them both in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha.

It was because of Panchanan's efforts, a flow of eagerness in education and induction into jobs, scope of right to be elected as representative etc. were the items for them opened and widened the horizon of the Rajbangshi Community. *Therefore, the Rajbangshi Community is very much indebted to the Great Thakur Panchanan Burma.*

### 6.1.15.

*Shiven Chowdhury* was another activist who led the mass movement against the torture of the Kings in Cooch Behar. In 1945, while the Royal Army of Cooch Behar tortured the students of Victoria College (now Acharya Brajendranath Seal College). Mr. Chowdhury, led the masses, especially the Students.

### 6.1.16.

*Birendra Chandra De Sarkar*, was another famous leader of the people who was deported from the State of Cooch Behar by the Royal Authority on the basis of the allegation of his (Sarkar's) involvement leading the masses against the Royal whip.

### 6.1.17.

*Professor Durga Kinkar Bhattacharya* was another progressive personality of the Princely State of Cooch Behar who was vocal against the Royal torture. Prof. Bhattacharya was the leader of '*Koch Beharer Sangram Committee*'.

In 1947, while India became free (i.e., Independent) the Sangram Committee under the leadership of Prof. Bhattacharya who took a decision to felicitate Birendra Chandra Sarkar, the deported leader. At once, Prof. Bhattacharya was suspended from A.B.N. Seal College –the college where he was the teacher.

### 6.1.18.

*Jiban De* was another great leader of the people of Cooch Behar. In 1962, he became the first elected Communist M.L.A His social service in the region during the Bengal Famine in 1942- 43 is noteworthy; his protest movement against the

Kings in Cooch Behar on the issue of excessive tax taken by them in the Haats (rural markets) made among the rural local people aware about their rights to the concerned issue. He was also a good organizer who along his friends contributed a good impact among the toiled mass (marginal labourers) through creative songs.

#### 6.1.19.

*Kamal Gughu*, (now a leader in Forward Block Party and Minister-in-Charge of the Government of West Bengal) had always a close touch with the toiling people and organized a lot of movements for their interest, e.g. he played a leading role for rural development and reconstruction including the reform of rural haats like Chowra haat in Dinhata—one of the busiest haats in the district of Cooch Behar.

#### 6.1.20.

'*Prajamandali*' was the organization of the agricultural farmers in the State of the Cooch Behar in the Princely State of Cooch Behar. It fought against the Zotedars who were the blind loyal to the Kings.

Such above- stated activities against the Monarchy ultimately culminated and led to the great inclusion of the Princely State of Cooch Behar into the Independent Sovereign Democratic Republic of India as the district of Cooch Behar.

However, there are the dark side also, that though little, dominate the social and political environment of the district of Cooch Behar. As for example, it is the activities and sentiments of a few Rajbangshi leaders who still opt for their separate ethnic identity and often burst into violent movement in the district of Cooch Behar.

### 6.1.21.

Such a flare-up was found by the activities of the '*The Greater Cooch Behar People's Association (GCPA)*' in July and September through two massive movements in 2005. The Greater Cooch Behar People's Association was established in 1998. The major demand it raises are to form the separate state to be established with ranging from the geographical area of part of lower Assam to six (6) districts of present North Bengal. According to the organization... 'a contract was made between the Government of India and the then King of Cooch Behar in 28<sup>th</sup> August, 1949 in which Cooch Behar was declared as '*C*' category state. The Organization opposes the inclusion of Cooch Behar in the Indian Union as a mere district of West Bengal in 1950 rather they want its earlier rank of a '*C*' category state'.

In July 2005, the Organization gathered at least 25,000 people (or agitators) of different age both male and female from the peasants and marginal labourers (of whom, it was observed, most of the people came from different existing political parties) and submitted memorandum before the office of the District Magistrate of Cooch Behar.

The Greater Cooch Behar People's Association again, for the second time, brought more than 30,000 active agitators and was divided into four or five groups, sat in for mass hunger Strike in 20<sup>th</sup> September 2005.

The district administration, on the ground of security, law and order promulgated 144<sup>th</sup> section in Cooch Behar sadar. Therefore, the agitators were assembled at the four or five main entrance-roads nearly outside the Cooch Behar town.

The situation became grave with the death of five persons on both side –two from the agitators by police firing and three from the police personnel including one Deputy Superintendent of Police allegedly beaten up and murdered by the agitators on the spot. As per the report of the News Paper, the version of the respondent agitators was that they were carrying the dream that a separate state would mean more money for them (the people of Cooch Behar).

The leaders (*Bangshi Badan and others*) wore the dresses of the Kings of the erstwhile Princely State of Cooch Behar. Despite death-casualty the road blockade of the agitators continued for three and half day.

#### **6.1.22.**

In the late 1950's, '*Hita Sadhani Sabha*'-under *Satish Sing (later he was reknowned as a Congress leader and Minister)* launched protests on the demand of protecting the interest of the culture and language of the Rajbangshis in the region.

#### **6.1.23. The Folk –Culture:**

The district of Cooch Behar maintains strong and wide culture in the field of folk songs, dances like Vishahara, Kushan, Dotara, songs of Satyapir, Si-tol, etc. are these varieties. Among these, Bhawaiya is the most popular song of the region. Bhawaiya is the song of Bhava (idea)- the language of loving heart, as if, both the male and female lovers started tour on the boat. *Surendra Nath Basunia, Nayeb Ali Tapu, and Keshab Barman etc. a number of artists have made the song popular in the region. Among these Artists, Abbas-Uddin Ahmed – the legend singer has made the song famous in the country and abroad.*

Each year, the department of welfare for Backward Community, Government of West Bengal launches state level competitions of which the venue

takes at different towns of the district rotationally. For the last 14 years, a great enthusiasm is noticed with such a competition. It creates scope to find the new potential in the field of this song. There are many non-government institutions for imparting the song and conferring diplomas and degrees. But there is no government institution in such a field.

#### **6.1.24. Rajbangshi Literary Practices:**

In the region, especially in Cooch Behar there are many Little Magazines written in Raj bangshi Language (or, dialect) like 'Kortoa', 'Raidak', 'Ujan', 'Degar', 'Maskia Uttar Banga' etc. 'North Bengal Academy of Culture' is one of the apex organizations, which patronizes such practices.

#### **6.1.25. The Economy:**

*Jute, known as the golden fibre for the people of Cooch Behar bring a source of earning for them.* But jute farmers do not get due price for their produce. Local market cannot provide the jute farmers. The production cost for jute farmers for 1 bigha is 1800 to 2000 rupees. Average production is 6 to 8 Mon (Mon = 40 Kilogram) per bigha. After a hardship of 3 months, jute farmers can get Rs. 250 to 300 per Mon. While Jute Corporation of India (JCI) or big businessman buy jute at the cost of 875 per quintal (i.e. Rs. 350 per Mon), in such case, the lucky farmers are not those farmers, but these persons are middle men.

Besides, there are scarcities of jute seeds for each year. The weather of the district does not permit for easy seed conservation. Therefore, the farmers had to depend on the seeds exported from Andhrapradesh that the government supplies on the basis of subsidy. But as Cooch Behar is situated in the border district and there is heavy demand of jute seeds in Bangladesh, smuggling on jute seeds bring crisis and heavy price.

In 2002 (August), the district of Cooch Behar has witnessed the production of jute for about 41,000 Hector land, amounting to the quantity of 9 Lakhs quintal. Till date, there is no infrastructure or arrangement for Jute Corporation of India to buy jute at the local level Hats from the small farmers. Only they buy jute at their 13 specific buying centers. Jute Corporation of India for the year 2001 bought jute only about 16,000 quintal. Local level Centres at Sat Mile, Pundibari etc. were not functioned at all.

*Tobacco is one of the principal crops for the region.* The values of this product deserve attention in the national as well as international market. But till date no market arrangement or any research institution is found for the uplift of the product or to help the economic uplift of the farmers related with this crop.

*Patato is another main source of earning to many farmers.* But for last few years, the cultivation of Patato does not suit to them. Because the price of fertilizer is high. So to cope up with the high price, the potato growers take loans from the Moneylenders and sell their potato hurriedly to the stockists to repay their loan. That is, the poor potato grower cannot wait for the demand of the market or for high price in future. On the other hand, the stockists earn the maximum price.

#### **6.1.26.**

*Sitai is the backward block of the district of Cooch Behar with an area of 15,488 hectre.* There are only 60 primary schools, one higher secondary, two secondary and five junior high schools. The people of the block demand more schools.

The people also demand electricity. A numbner of villages like Dhumarkhata, Bajit Chatra, Purba Bharali, Nagar Sitai, Chamta, Adabari garh etc.

are having no electricity. Therefore, it hampers irrigation in these areas. Only a few solvent people can irrigate their land by the shallow deep tubewell. Whereas the area is rich for the species of high quality paddy like Boro, China, Jaya etc. Any shortage of supply of diesel create problem for them.

The people also demand new roads. They got a bridge on the river Ratnai near Madhurghat, which was the result of their long demand and agitation.

*Giridhari and Mansai rivers flowed upon the Sitai Block cause havoc soil erosion in the area in each monsoon season.* In Sitai, the river causes massive devastation as it washed away hundreds acres of agricultural land in the block. Kajlikura, AdaBari Sagardighi, Jhatigara, Barobangla, Silduar, Bajit Chatra, Gabua, Sonarhat, Chamta, Nakarjan Nechamuddin Kuthi etc. villages are the worst victims.

People of these areas have no alternative but to go to other states in search of job or livelihood.

#### **6.1.27.**

Tufanganj, especially Tufanganj Block-1 is the most affected area in the district of Cooch Behar by the flood problem each year. The erosion of the dam of the rivers like Kaljani, Torsa and Gadadhar create problem to the area of Deocharai Gram Panchayat 1 and 2. The river Raidak no.1 affects the Dhalpal Gram Panchayat 1 and 2.

Most of the agricultural land in the year 2002 get inundated and completely washed out.

River Kaljani affects the Panishala area of Nata Bari Gram panchayat 1. More than thousand houses were destroyed in July 2002.

In Tufanganj Block 2, Mahish Kuchi Gram Panchayat 1, Ghana Para and Bhanukumari Gram Panchayat 1 were badly affected. It was caused by the erosion of the dam of the river Raidak and Sankosh.

Such a devastaton are the routine feature of Tufanganj for each year.

### **6.1.28.**

In Gitaldah and Okrabari Gram Panchayats villages are the victims of the Dharala Singimari River. Schools, Mosques, playing grounds, agricultural lands, are mostly inundated under the floodwater of these rivers.

The source of rivers in Cooch Behar is in Bhutan and China. Therefore, the necessity for seting up an International River Commission is urgent to find a meaningful solution to the problem. But no step is yet taken by the state or central government. More over, it is alleged that the indiscriminate lifting of dolomite in Bhutan or the dam built in an immediate distance in Bangladesh rivers cause flood in the district of Cooch Behar.

### **6.1.29. Mekhliganj sub-division:**

Jamaldah rural health centre bears a poor picture of development. No operation theatre, no bed, no latrine, no health related modern equipments, no ambulance, no car and there is no boundary wall. There is a permanent doctor and three nurses the people do not get anti-venom drug in the hospital.

The areas suffer from the compulsions of the rules and regulations of border administrations. Border fencing of wire causes concern to the people of

Hemkumari village as about 13 hundred bighas of agricultural land fall out side the fencing. No development work is done at the border, no road, and no bridge. The bridge over the river Soniajan is broken for a few years.

### **6.1.30. Cooch Behar Block 1 & Block 2:**

The conditions of these two blocks are also serious with regard to flood. In 2004, a number of villages were inundated by the floodwater of river Torsa at Cooch Behar Sadar. In 2005, two villages like Ichhamari and Chapaguri under Cooch Behar Block 2 were being washed away due to the erosion of Torsa River. The inhabitants of these villages had become homeless and were living on the higher level embankments and abandoned roads beneath the open sky adjacent to there areas for long time.

At least 1.6 Lakh people had been affected by the flood and 13,000 were rescue and given shelter in 95 relief camps through out the District of Coochbehar. About 65,000 houses were destroyed.

It is a fact that topography of the district is changing rapidly and many villagers and hamlets are fast disappearing due to the massive erosion. In case of Tufanganj- 2 Panchayat Samiti, Ghoksa— a village was disappeared due to the massive erosion of the Raidak River in 2002. In Nishiganj Gram Panchayat (in Mathabhanga Sub-division) Sonatali village too totally went under water of river Mansai.

Therefore, the biggest problems of the district are natural calamities like floods and river erosion. Each year thousands of people are rendered homeless and helpless. Loss of life, both human and cattle, take place; huge areas of land and crops are destroyed.

But the authorities have been ineffective in rooting out this problem. According to a source, at least Rupees 25 crores are required to manage the problem of flood and river erosion, whereas the district receives just about 8 crores.

Flood is not only a problem of Cooch Behar but also of whole of North Bengal. The elderly of North Bengal can not forget the nightmare of the devastating floods of Cooch Behar in 1954, Jalpaiguri in 1968 and Alipurduar in 1993, in which the people lost many friends and relatives. After the floods in Jalpaiguri in 1968, the state government set up the North Bengal Flood Control Commission with its head quarter at Jalpaiguri. But its role seems limited to giving intimation of water levels of different rivers to the people from time to time throughout the monsoon.

The logic behind the formation of North Bengal Development Council (NBDC) in 2000 was that it would take a regional, rather than a piecemeal view of development projects. But what is ironical, NBDC suffers from inadequate fund, engineering and other necessary departments of its own.

*The North Bengal Flood Control Commission (NBFCC)* maintains a non-planned fund it gets from the state government. Though damage to agricultural land, roads, bridges and a private property varies every year, the problem needs a permanent solution.

The financial position of the NBDC tells the poor picture of the council. In 2000-2001 Fund was allotted for 38 crores. In 2002-2003 it was 23 crores but actually fund was disbursed only for Rupees 18 crores. In 2003-2004 fund was disbursed for Rupees 30 crores. Such a figure speaks inadequacy of fund of NBDC.

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## **6.2. The Status of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in the District of Cooch Behar**

### **6.2.1. Tufanganj Sub-division:**

1. Folimari Gram Panchayat: Population 10,685 Area: 5232.04 Acre; Agricultural Land: 2616 Acre; Main Income – Agriculture.

*“Rampur – Folimari Action Committee”* is an organization built up by the students, youth, farmers, marginal laborers with a view to build up dam in their locality (on the river Sankosh).

### **2. Buxirhat:**

- a) *Disha* – a social welfare cultural organization is engaged with feeding polio to the children of the locality.
- b) *The National Service Scheme unit of Tufanganj College* is also engaged with such a work there.

### **3. Balarampur Gram Panchayat:**

*Balarampur Ganasagram Committee* is active to demanding development of some key issues in the locality. Their agitation was unique as it was led by the ruling left political leaders of the district.

### **4. Chilakhana Gram Panchayat:**

*South Chilakhana Beltala Swarogari Mahila Samiti* was formed in 1996 taking 10 women from the most distressed families. The members now earn Rs. 600 per month.

## **6.2.2. Dinhata Sub-division:**

### **1. In Dinhata Town: - Boys Recreation Club:**

From Dinhata Town it organized a number of socio-cultural programmes. It also played the role of Mart to provide low cost and scientific latrine on the basis of the advice of the Panchayats.

### **2. In Chowdhuri Hut :**

*Ramkrishna Mission Ashram* established in 1950 by Sudhir Kumar Banerjee, a police officer that provides social and welfare services to the locality.

### **3. Matal Hut Gram. Panchayat. :**

*The Godhuli Bazar North East Society for Empowerment of the people (G-NESEP)*— an NGO is engaged with promoting Self Help Groups in Matal Hut Gram Panchayat zone since 1998. It is motivating villagers, mainly women and youths, formed about 200 SHGs in that area. Out of 200 such groups, 149 are women groups.

### **4. In Gitaldah.G.P. :**

In Gitaldah Gram Panchayat (*G.P.*) the formation and activities of the '*Gitaldah Gram Vikash Committee (GGVC)*' deserves special attention as the committee maintains strong vigilance to check child, women and drug trafficking in border area by its network committee built with women at 24 villages.

### **5. In Gitaldah :**

In the village of Dolgovinda the activities of the *Sambyathi Mahila Self Help Group*' deserves special attention. *Hasna Banu* of the organization has won

2<sup>nd</sup> place in the state level Handicrafts competition. The women members of the organization prepare wallet, vanity bag, and cover of dressing tables, toys –all made of jutes.

## **6. In Okrabari G.P. :**

*Nava Pragati Sangha* – it is a dynamic cultural organization, sincerely works for the development of folk songs, dance and other folk relates practices through the involvement of the locally youths. The troops led by the sangh are mainly students and youth who perform stand and folk variety, earned state level prizes several times. In 1994, the organization stood first in the state in bairati dance. The dance is the customs and entertainment popular among the women of the regions in the time of Manasa Worship.

## **7. In Dinhata:**

*Durbar Mahila Samanway Samiti* is very active to keep care for the prostitute women of the locality and to provide them scientific knowledge of health-care and hygiene. The samiti arranges seminars on 'war and the right of women'. It arranges medical workshops to aware about HIV and AIDS and the use of condoms and medicines.

### **6.2.3. In the Dinhata Block 2:**

*Bhekrapole Netaji Sangha* – The Sangha works since 1991. It has 300 active members workers. It monitors 52 SHGS out of which 40

are women groups. It maintain crèches, women hostel, fire clinic, vocational training camp, snitation programmes etc.

#### **6.2.4. Sitai:**

In Sitai Block Spandan Society for Rural Development is actively cooperating to build up SHGs aiming at Swarna Jayanti Village self Employment Schemes. *Spandan* formed 103 women SHGs.

#### **6.2.5. Cooch Behar Sub division:**

1. The bridge on the Torsa River near Pundibari on 31 no National Highway in the district of Cooch Behar, the construction of which was undertaken as early in 1993. is still inbuilt.

Therefore, infuriated locals have formed an organization named '*Pundi Bari Torsa Setu Nirman Sangram Samity*' (PTSNSS) to get road bridge done. It was believed, the bridge once completed, would be lifeline between the rest of India and the northeast. The PTSNSS initiated a movement on the demand of construction and payment of dues and compensation to the people whose lands were acquisitioned and those who supplied materials for construction and worked as laborers. In a bid to draw attention of the authorities and to check out a plan for extensive movement, the PTSNSS organized a mass convention at Pundi Bari on 11 April 2003.

#### **2. Cooch behar Zilla Saksharata Prasar Samiti :**

##### **Cooch Behar Block 2 Panchayat Samiti Unit :**

Thousands of youth rendered voluntary labor for the expansion of literacy under the organization. Therefore, Literacy increased to 74.24 per cent in this Panchayat Samiti, which is a highest record in the district of Cooch Behar.

### **3. Sabuj Swapna Self-Help Group:**

It was set up in *Madhupur* in 2001. People of the locality were rendered homeless due to the erosion of the River Torsa. The youth of the group with a view to keep their existence intact were united and formed such a group. They performed successful business with broiler hen, husking mill, pig farming etc. The success of their group has led or *inspired more than 54 SHGs at the Madhupur Gram Panchayat.*

### **4. Khagrabari G.P. :**

#### **Netaji Subhas Chandra Databya Chikistsyalay**

A charitable dispensary have been run by a group of college students at East Khagrabari at Cooch Behar aimed at improving the health condition of the poor people of the locality. In each week it arranges free treatment by the surgeons and Medical Experts for the people in the locality.

### **5. Vidyasagar Free Coaching Centre:**

In Khagrabari Gram Panchayat the centre maintains different social and welfare activities, like free teaching for the poor students, campaigning science awarness through drama etc. As a mart it prepares scientific smokeless woven, low cost latrine etc.

#### **6.2.5. Cooch Behar Block 1 :**

*'Ashar Aalo'* – A voluntary organization organizes six SHGs for Artisan people engaged in *paati-making*. It provides financial assistance to these people to buy bet (the raw material for pati). It has helped the groups to build up the

workshed and thereby saving them from rain or sun while work. There are the demand of the paati in the country and abroad.

#### **6.2.6. Cooch Behar Block 2 :**

In Patlakhaowa West Bengal State Prati Bandhi Sammilani leads the Gyandeeep Prati Bandhi Vidyalaya and Training Centre. At least 160 students of whom 70 def and dumbs, 40 bone affected, 10 blind, 20 cerebral palsy and 20 are mentally retarded persons. The centre attained Government approval in April 2003.

*Nehru Yuva Kendra* trained 45 persons in cutting and tailoring to make them self-sufficient. The literacy cell of the district trains 20 persons in Pumpset Mechanism. The local panchayat has a special care in managing the institution in better manner.

#### **6.2.7. Cooch Behar Block – Saltia Gore Gana Andolan Committee**

The committee was formed to build up a bridge on Dhepua to stop soil erosion caused by Saltia Canal. Saltia Canal passed through five Gram Panchayats followed Patchhara, Chilkirhut, Chanda Mari, Putimari, Fuleswari keeping river Jhaljhali in one

side and Kodal Khetir. Bami river on the other side. It was the demand of the people of the area to stop unmanageable flow of water of such a long Saltia Canal.

#### **6.2.8: - Matha Bhanga Sub-division :**

1. *Matha Bhanga Social Welfare Organisation* is a busy organization performing free treatment and health care including eye operation. It organized

Health Awareness Camps in Nayarhat Gram Panchayat under the financial assistance of *German Technical Organization (GTZ)*.

## **2.Nishi Ganj Club :**

The Club conducts multi-purpose activities in the Nishiganj Gram Panchayat such as, Rural Sanitation Programme through it's own Rural MART, prepares Smokeless Chullah (Oven), conducts Survey on water pollution, etc.

## **3. Biswanath Deaf and Dumb School :**

In Mathabhanga Block 1 the school attained approval from the department of education, Government of West Bengal. The school was started in 2000 under the management of West Bengal State Prati Bandhi Sammilani. The number of students is 76, teaching and Non-teaching. Financially, the local M.L.A., local G.P. of Shikarpur, MathaBhanga Panchayat Samiti and Local people help it. The school maintains a training centre for the students.

## **4.In Akrahut Village:**

*Dishari* social welfare organization and training centre provided services for the disabled students in association with the community polytechnic cell of Cooch Behar.

## **6.2.9.**

Besides these above-stated different kinds of civil society organizations there are many more other organizations for the district as a whole.

### **1. Abbas-Uddin Swaran Samiti :**

*The Bhawaiya Sangeet Mela is one of the biggest events in the district of Cooch Behar.* The number of participants and the quality of performance has gone up considerably. The final meets are most of times held at Balarampur.

**Abbas-Uddin Swaran Samiti motivates such activity.**

### **2. Anagrasar Nasya Shaikh Kalyan Samiti :**

This is a society for the 'other Backward Classes' for the region of north Bengal. It has the organization in all the six districts in north Bengal with a view to uplift the people who belong to the backward sections among the Muslims. The society primarily aware these people about government loans, provision for OBC quota in different fields with regard to job reservation, admission into educational institutions, if any, etc. The society organized welfare activity for these people.

### **3. Cooch Behar Zilla Byabsayee Samiti :**

As the district suffers from no or little industries, the role of the samiti stands very much important. The samiti responded to the call of the government of West Bengal to expand industrial areas in the district and as a result of the coordinated effort of the samiti, in the early 1990's an industrial area having a few small industries were opened in Chakchaka near the town of Cooch Behar in March 2003. The samiti strongly demanded to the government to declare the district as the '*tax-free-zone*' for the sake of expansion of industrialization at the region.

The other demands of the samiti are 'to resume flying route from the local Airport, and to introduce a new superfast train from Cooch Behar to Kolkata.

#### **4. Community Polytechnic Cell**

The Cooch Behar Polytechnic Institution maintains the community Polytechnic cell. The cell imparts training in different fields of livelihood for the rural youth irrespective of their educational qualifications. The training is free to all (subject to minimum seat capacity on the basis of interview performance) which builds their career in the vocational field like repairing of electrical parts, or knowledge of sewing, stitching or tailoring, but tick embroidery, beautician course etc.

#### **5. Nature and Adventure Society (NAAS)**

Cooch Behar unit – Under the leadership of Arup Guha, NAAS works praiseworthy in the field of blood donation. It organizes trekking tour etc. but had a special care for the Thalasemia Children patients. Therefore, several times NAAS organized blood donation camps in the district.

#### **6. Cooch Behar Cancer Centre**

The people irrespective of political parties and also initiative undertaken by different political parties made the dream of building a cancer centre in the town of Cooch Behar successful. It is the result of the donations of the people in the late 1980's. It cares patients at low cost, if possible.

#### **7. District Library Coaching Centre**

In 2002, in the District Library (Former State Library of Cooch Behar) is organizing free coaching centre for the preparation of civil service and other competitive examination both state and National level. There are competitive books and the college teachers' act as counsellors.

## **8. Madhupur Krishak Unnyan Sangha (MKUS)**

A farmer's club was formed with 206 farmers in Madhupur in Cooch Behar Block 2 in June 2003. The club works for the uplift of the villagers. The club tries to arrange and repay loans for its members. The MKUS is first of its kind in Cooch Behar 2 Panchayat Samiti promoting the concept of Self-Help- Groups providing loan to needy farmers – as against taking high interest loans from moneylenders. There were 39 SHGs at Madhupur up to June 2003.

## **9. Lions Club International (Cooch behar Unit)**

It is one of the largest NGO that provides multi dimensional services. In Cooch Behar and Malda it introduces sex-education for the students of 70 high schools. It is value-based curricula, which is aimed to create, self-confidence of the students. It is also an anti-drug campaign and it enhances the skill and awareness among the students.

## **10. State Agricultural Technologist Service Association (SATSA) – (Cooch Behar Unit):**

It is a fruitful organization for the farmers. It organizes seminars for the farmers; it conveys the technical knowledge of alternate farming, scientific technique of farming, the utility of soil testing, the use of pesticide and bio-fertilizers, the process of

cost-effective management of agricultural production. Such workshops were organized by SATSA from 18<sup>th</sup> October 2004 onwards at Chowdhuri hut (a border area village) of Dinhata, Haribolar Hut, in Sitai, Kodal kethi of Matha Bhanga, KushaBari of Dinhata etc. Villages. The numbers of workshops were 12 and about 1000 farmers attended the workshops.

## **11. Natun Railpath Dabi Samprasaran Samiti**

With a marathon agitation, since 1995, the samiti demands a new rail route from New Maynaguri of Jalpaiguri to Jogighopa in Assam. The samiti consists of leaders and workers irrespective of different political parties from Cooch Behar and lower Assam, which is unique in the region. The Samiti achieved the people's support and made the central government understand the importance of their demand. Work on the above said route is under process.

## **12. Agricultural Graduate Club**

A voluntary Organization formed by Amulya Mitra (Agricultural Scientist of the locality) and others. most of the members are associated with science awareness movement, mainly professors from Uttar Banga Agriculture University, and the others are dynamic district and block level agricultural officers. Their work mainly concentrates with counseling to the farmer on scientific and technical knowledge among the farmers. Though the club was born in Cooch Behar, it expands its work in the whole of North Bengal. In the year of scientific Awareness 2004, the club was invited by many organizations as one of the important 'Resource Person's Unit'. It counsels among many 'Farmers' club' which were formed in the year 2004 in different Panchayats at Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri. The club has popularized the vegetable cultivation and floriculture among the farmers. The club stressed upon storage of potato through the Godown of the Farmers club (keeping in view to help the potato farmers in the region).

## **13. Nehru Yuva Kendra(NYK) (Cooch Behar Unit)**

For the last 15 years, NYK has attained success to extend its work to 835 clubs out of total 1139 inhabited villages in the district of Cooch Behar. NYK

intends to reach to at least one club per village. It works among the non-students youth not only in the field of sports and culture but for the socio-economic development of the community as a whole. In the district, NYK depends not on its paid workers but it motivates volunteerism among the youth of different clubs. It pays attention to the youth employment by skill development or training for them. These are done either by the NYK independently or through the concerted and coordinated effort with other development agencies or units.

#### **14. Society For Participatory Action and Reflection (SPAR)**

It is a mother NGO in the district of Cooch Behar. Upto December 2002, SPAR directly monitored 1708 self Help Groups in the district in different blocks where around 25,000 women are associated with these SHGS. SPAR extended financial assistance and counseling to these groups. Women of these group now find solvency in their family, attained the buying power whose impact is found in the local market.

#### **15. New Bharati Club :**

It is multi faculty social non-government organization (NGO) bearing crèche old age home, counselling centre on AIDS, etc. in the district. It was the only organization, which exercised much on disaster management in collaboration with the district administration.

#### **16. Association for Better Cooch Behar (ABC) and Concern for Cooch Behar**

These are the organizations which keep watch the betterment of the Cooch Behar Town. *ABC* was found to agitate against the decaying condition of the earlier Royal Ayurvedic garden inside the Town in Badur Bagan. Concern for

Cooch Behar is active for the well preservation of the Royal Heritage in the district.

### **6.3. The changing role of Panchayats in the district at present**

There are 128 Gram Panchayats in the district of Cooch Behar of which seven (7) Gram Panchayats have won the 'Nirmal Gram Prize'. These Panchayats include: Bara Sol Mari, Fulbari and Ghoksa Danga 3 Panchayats from Matha Bhangra Block 2; Mahis Kuchi 2 Panchayat of Tufanganj Block 2; Okrabari Panchayat and Petla Panchayat of Dinhatra Block 1; Chak Chaka Panchayat of Cooch Behar Block 2. (Till 30-03-2005)

The prize was conferred by the Department of the Rural Development of the Central Government which the above-mentioned Panchayats attained after their due credit (100 percent coverage of sanitation) to the Total Sanitation Campaign (T.S.C) in the respective Panchayats.

The Panchayat Raj Institutions of Cooch Behar at three levels are engaged with new tasks of development such as expanding of Adult Literacy, Pulse Polio activities, health awareness campaigns, agricultural training, caring for the below poverty line (B.P.L.) people, organizing self help groups (SHGs) etc.

The government of West Bengal is very keen to hand over the responsibilities and maintenance of the health centers, such as Block Primary health centers, primary health centers and subsidiary health centers upon the Panchayat Raj Institutions with a view to bring dynamism in their services. In the district of Cooch Behar, Panchayats already play such a role.

Panchayats in the district today give maximum attention to the following issues:

- a) Protection of the houses, lives, lands and roads from the erosion of flood, or heavy rain, adjacent to rivers;
- b) Water harvesting, watershed development tanks, wells for conserving water for agricultural use;
- c) To supply pure drinking water;
- d) To get rid of epidemic and infections;
- e) Permanent road connectivity and making of essential bridges over the rivers;
- f) To get employment or earning opportunities for the youth etc.

Panchayats in Cooch Behar organize many types of fairs. There are Mother and child fair, raas fairs, folk or cultural festivfals etc to aware the people about meaningful way of life.

Zilla Parishad of Cooch Behar produces films too. As for example, the district has a potential in Muga Sericulture but there is no knowledge about such cultivation among the farmers and the Zilla Parishad rightly handled the matter through film.

Zilla Parishad in 2002 (7 – 8 December) organized ‘self-employment’ fair at Rajbari Stadium for the youth of the district and more than 10,000 youth attended the fair. The fair was equipped with a lot of information with regard to business and employment opportunities.

Panchayat encourages the people to voluntarism to build up road or other work, where fund is little. Therefore, now- a -days. to the Panchayats, other than empowerment, the need to arouse and utilize the *civil initiative* has become one of the prime task that are found in many cases in the district of Cooch Behar.

In 2000, 20<sup>th</sup> July, a primary school was inaugurated in the house of S. Roy in 174 Dhulia Khalisa Village in Uchhalpukhari Gram Panchayat in Mekhliganj Block. There was a demand of permanent school building. The people under the direct inspiration of the Deputy pradhan of Uchhalpukhari (the local M.L.A) and the Sabhapati of the Mekhliganj Block brought bamboo, Tin and payed their voluntary labour to build up the school building in a donated land of Manindranath Roy in the locality in the 1<sup>st</sup> week of January 2004. Prior to this on 1<sup>st</sup> January, the people in the meeting of the Gram Sansad took such a decision unanimously.

The Panchayat Raj in Cooch Behar has encouraged the cultural spirit of the youth too. Zilla Parishad has built up a modern open Manch at Burirhat (Khagrabari Gram Panchayat) for an amount to Rupees 4 lakhs. The Mukta Manch now contributes expansion of folk culture of the region. Here Panchayat plays the role of catalyst in arranging and encouraging the local artists to launch enchanting programme. In 2001, Panchayat spent an amount to Rupees 10,000 for folk festival. Panchayat also spent Rupees 10,000 for the inter sports for the primary students in the locality.

## CHAPTER – 7

### PRI and CSOs relationship

#### A critical evaluation :

*Khilnani and Sudipta Kabiraj* commented that civil society activities are generally found strong and effective where there is strong civil society.

In India and South Asia, such a situation and culture is new and weak. According to many political sociologists, supremacy of civil society is commonly found in the countries like Canada, Britain, and United States of America, Netherlands, where people unite together and come forward to solve their civic problems. However in India, the researcher observed that day-by-day the situation is changing rapidly.

In North Bengal (i.e., in the northern part of the state of West Bengal), it is claimed, the activities of the voluntary organizations in terms of people's movement are something new. The movement led by Siliguri Welfare Organization against TISTA AGRO INDUSTRIES in 1990-1991 can be regarded as the first movement in the field of environment.

After that, in 2002, one Faribesh Banchao (Environment Protection) Committee conducted a dharna and procession in association with Medha Patekar, which protested against the vulnerable conditions of the river PADMA in the district of Malda and also the river MAHANANDA in Siliguri, which created attention towards the conscious public of the region. Later, the protest of a few organizations against urbanization in CHAND-MANI PROJECT in Siliguri Tea Estate also created the attention.

In comparison to these activities, the movement in the form of protest at larger scale is however found less at the rural level. Here the spirit of the movement is concentrated on providing service to the poor by the voluntary and non-government organizations. The formation and growth of the Self Help Groups (SHGs) at larger scale across the state having women members at the core of these activities can be considered as a positive movement for the uplift of the marginalized people at the rural level.

Today, the SHGs constitute a strong part of the civil society, even at the rural level. The number of members of these groups is rapidly increasing (now it is approx. 7 lakhs in W.B.). It is unique because about 90% participants of these SHGs are women. The credit for SHGs goes to the panchayats and the activists having inclination to build-up the SHGs.

It was found from the discussion of the previous chapters that in bringing about a good governance and development for the marginalized sections at the rural level, the responsibilities were shared by the NGOs, VOs, the government, the scientists (e.g. agricultural scientists) and social scientists, the national policy planners etc. for stimulating a real movement from the below. It was found that there had been changes in policies, legislation, pattern of resource allocation and practice of government organizations for a meaningful sharing with the community based organization (CBOs).

And as such in many spheres the government itself is playing the role of activist for enhancing such a process. At center, state or district level, the government, in a number of cases, has built up the societies or committees. These are Sarba Siksha Abhijan Committee, Health Awareness Committees, etc.

The government, especially the third tier of its federal set up (i.e. the Panchayats) sought cooperation of the CSOs for the success of their programmes. In case of mid-day meal Panchayat Samities bought utensils for cooking and handover the responsibilities to the Self Help Groups (SHGs). Women self helps groups cook and feed the children.

*The government especially the Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) organizes many festivals at the rural level, including at the regional level, such as Tista Ganga Utsav organized by Department of Cultural and Information, at North Bengal. In these fairs small producers find a market to sell their products. 'Zilla Parishad' organizes stalls to enhance such a rural market for the SHGs as well as for the artisans.*

It is right to say, the essence of the success of the governance depends on how much and to what extent its units can extend its role in setting disputes, managing problems in a just way. In many districts, Zilla Parishad built up Mukta Manchis and helped the local artists. Their Panchayat felt nothing wrong to take the help of the CSOs.

Because of CSO activities, the people are getting the knowledge of development and better life. CSOs, to some extent, were successful to arouse the non-partisan attitude, therefore, the people are busy to built up the Panchayat not as a puppet of the party but for the whole community. Because of new outlook encouraged by the CSOs, people think only to their top priorities and not politics. People now are not satisfied with temporary relief but want a permanent settlement or solution to their problem through their Panchayats.

There is a misconception about the government-sponsored campaigns that it gets flopped. But with increasing involvement of the NGOs, VOs and other CSOs, the government programmes were able to involve the people fruitfully.

Today one understands the other better. India being a welfare country and having democracy upholds the egalitarian values in many walks of life ensuring the scope of infrastructure for good governance and development. *As Amartya Sen stated, 'it was democratic India', which has been able to pull back from the brink of famine because popular pressures through the media, an active civil society and democratic multiparty political process do not allow government to remain inactive.'*

*In case of Total Literacy Campaign of the 1990s, Sarba Siksha Abhiyan, Total Sanitation Campaign, Pulse Polio Immunisation Program (PPIP) of these days, the role and coordinate efforts between Panchayat and other CSOs have made these programmes near to the success.*

There are difficulties with some NGOs on the reason that these are run and dependant on donations. The viabilities of these initiatives therefore, rest on the will of the others. May be, the development workers have become anti-development. Therefore, with such an observation it is wise to comment that it is not better to depend only on the NGOs for development. There is the Panchayat as the big representative unit and a sweet collaboration between CSOs including NGOs and Panchayats are to be fitted in a proper way.

Today, as it is observed from the above chapters, there are many basic issues that are not focused by the political parties but it is focused by the civil society organisations.

Again, while many panchayats are found guilty of corrupt practices by partisanship or by vested interests, the CSOs on the other hand are found active to fight for the good cause by creating pressure from the below (or, on behalf of) the masses. That is CSOs act as the medium of public action when Panchayat fails instead of being representative governance at the rural level. CSOs, if not able to bring success however, are giving local people to raise voice.

*However, with this success of the CSOs, it is not wise to call the CSOs are the parallel competitors to Panchayat but it is supplementing or complementing panchayat to the role of a vibrancy or peoples action to a definite target. CSO, though not representative body, may be concerned with deciding social priorities for the better, thereby helping people to grow deciding power and speak at the right fora.*

The constitution of India guarantees to citizens the right to form associations of their choice. Therefore, people get freedom to express him. In Panchayat, there are however party compulsions. Through the knowledge of many kinds of associations people understand that they should not behave in such a way that marginalize the importance of their Panchayat, the very essential one.

The introduction of Gram Sansad in the Panchayat in West Bengal has made the scope the rural people to be self-ruler, self-planner, and self-executor and self-assessor with respect to their over-all development process. But the real participation of twelve percent reveals the poor picture of participation.

In average or a little more would not suffice to a meaningful destination. It is observed from the preceding chapters that civil society organizations have successfully encouraged many people to be a good citizen, an active participant of the Gram Sansad too.

And a time is come that the civil society organizations accelerate or enhance such a process further.

There are some Panchayats which are '*jack of all trades but master of none*'. But nothing at the rural level is untouched without the intervention of good or bad Panchayats. Panchayat is a vote catching machinery too. The '*give and take*' policy of panchayat had binded all the villagers into the same knot. In such a dominating presence of the panchayat system, the role of the other organizations, e.g. non- government organizations, civil society organizations are understood as the secondary important organization to the villagers.

*'As Panchayat got tremendous public support, little need was there to opt for NGOs.'* *'Specially in West Bengal the NGOs could not function as well as compared to other provinces in India.'* *It was because in West Bengal 'their (NGOs) scope has been limited or restricted and their entry to rural development got obstructed mainly for the establishment of Panchayat as a strong institution through regular election during the last two decades.'* (1)

The paramount importance of Panchayat to the villagers is established fact. But in the last one and half decade, it is observed, there has been a great impact of the voluntary activities by the civil society organizations in the field of development at the rural level.

While there was no reach on the part of the right institutions at the right place, then any form of organization if it acted as the friend of the people, these were welcomed by them.

*This is a reality. The unique organizations like 'Asha', a social welfare wing of the West Bengal Police including their women grievance cell, the*

*voluntary activities by the Border Security Force (BSF) or the Secret Service Branch (SSB) etc., other than their normal and routine activities with regard to the maintenance of law and order or protecting the Nation from external aggression provides an example of welfare at the rural level. It has made these professional organizations nearer to the people. Therefore a permanent coordination between the panchayat, the people and the security forces are being strengthened at many places in a better way.*

It was also observed that there were certain areas where the civil society organizations contributed a lot of service for the community keeping close liaison with the *Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs)* in the following way as stated below:

- (a) As per the new directives under Constitutional Amendments (73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment and likewise introduced later), panchayats were found engaged with assessing the local needs. Likewise, before starting the welfare activities many CSOs were found engaged with surveying in their target areas of operation. CSOs through their well-experienced team of experts, using survey instruments and tools, investigated the area and tabulated report became the lesson of the respective panchayat institutions.
- (b) Next step of the Panchayat Raj Institutions were to formulate “*Development Plans*” on the basis of the need assessment. Before launching of any programme, it was observed that, likewise CSOs prepared “*Plan of Action*”.

Both the unit of organization was found preparing such plans keeping in view of supplementing each other.

- (c) As regards programme implementation, CSOs were found playing a facilitating role to the efforts of the Panchayat Raj Institutions.
- (d) In accordance with the new Constitutional Provisions, Panchayat Raj Institutions by their Gram Sabhas (or Gram Sansads) involved all their members (though participation of the people at these levels are still not up to the mark) in the decision-making process. Likewise, the spirit behind the CSOs resembles the feature of mass mobilization.
- (e) Apart from these, many civil society organizations were found assisting the panchayats in selecting the key issues or the problems of the localities and the right beneficiaries for different schemes etc. Civil Society Organizations, likewise, in many cases were functioning of the works done by the panchayats, found keeping perpetual vigil on the smooth functioning of the work done by the panchayats.
- (f) It was observed that several times Zilla Parishad were found helping in building rural market through organizing rural fairs and allotting space to the Self Help Groups (SHGs) free shops to sell their handicrafts and other products.
- (g) Panchayat Samities were found depending on the local NGOs and VOs with regard to preparation of sanitary products during rural sanitation programmes.
- (h) Literacy program was conducted at the panchayats under the joint supervision of the panchayats and various civil society organizations present at the localities.

(i) Under the new and changing circumstances, panchayats in many cases were found depending on the CSOs.

It was also observed, CSOs had made the panchayats pro-poor, pro-ethnic, pro-regional, or local, thereby widening the horizon of the panchayat for a transparent, friendly, and meaningful panchayat. As such, the mainstream politicians after enjoying power for a marathon period of years were not in a position to listen to their original heritage or local varieties and needs, but Civil Society Organizations had compelled them to rethink over the situation to bring the marginalized people in the limelight. Keeping in view, the above-stated importance of the CSOs, panchayats were compelled to invite them and consulted for before starting any major government campaigns or programs.

Frequently, in the changed circumstances, panchayats were found organizing a lot of seminars, worksops and training camps for the marginalized people at the remote places where CSOs were invited, not as participants but also as technical experts.

Panchayats and CSOs in these cases are both not only teach each other but also take lessons and exchange knowledgefro each other.

The relation of CSOs with the panchayats stands multidimensional because of their varied nature in terms of organizations and functions. In case of Voluntary Organizations (VOs), the natures of sacrifice to the work done by them were found almost complete. It was observed these organizations bear strong eagerness to follow Panchayat's imperatives.

However in case of the NGOs, this thing was not observed for all the time. It was because of all the NGOs did not bear the similar characteristics Some NGOs

were having both paid and unpaid workers. Some NGOs were found maintaining some reservations, independent attitude and professional outlook.

Therefore, it was observed only V.O.s and a few local NGOs played their role with regard to providing service at the rural level in the true sense of the voluntary spirit and action. These Civil Society Organizations were found acting as pressure groups, successfully drew attention of the concerned authority, the media and the people for the reallocation of the fund or reconsideration to the development activities.

However, professional NGOs were found taking innovative programmes through their own initiative. plans and proposals. Not only that, it also pinpointed the drawbacks of the development done by the concerned authority. Therefore, in the ultimate analysis, these NGOs acted their role not as the competitor but also showed their reservation to maintaining distance from the Panchayats. It was however observed that these organizations played their active and sincere role while the Panchayats sought their cooperation and help.

On the other hand, in each case, it was observed that voluntary organizations came forward spontaneously to shoulder the responsibility at the time of the government campaigns or programs or any social needs. Thus, voluntary organizations were turned as a believable partner of the panchayats as well the friend of the rural people.

The role of the other organizations specially the National Service Scheme (NSS) was completely cooperative with the panchayats or the villagers. Specific villages were adopted by the NSS and regular and special camp activities provided

by Health and other services and even building roads etc., were found as their quite common agenda.

Earlier, a number of training programs were run by the *NSS* under the *TRYSEM* scheme sponsored by the *DRDA* for a considerable period of time. Nowadays, while working and providing delivery of services in their adopted villagers, *NSS* for the degree colleges maintain a close link with the respective panchayat for the whole year.

While observing NGO activities, it was found that some NGOs acted as mother NGOs. It organized a number of *Self Help Groups (SHG)* to run under *DRDC (District Rural Development Cell)*. It was found that NGOs were engaged with specific development programs, some were provided with multi-purpose goals and activities.

Although NGOs are the integral part of the CSOs, (as it is taken in the study), strictly speaking, a little difference can be made between the professional NGOs and the other CSOs on the basis of the following observation.

*Firstly*, NGOs were found to be work-oriented, while CSOs were rather spirit oriented. While the former were engaged with the fulfilment of the immediate needs, the later i.e., CSOs, on the other hand, though unorganized and inefficient, always opted for better society.

*Secondly*, NGOs had their specific goal; the CSOs had their multipurpose goals.

*Thirdly*, NGOs played there complementary as well as supplementary role with the Panchayats. But, CSOs, most of the time, played the role to warn, check, press, assist, guide, influence and redirect the Panchayats to sustain the work for their favour.

*Fourthly*, NGOs were found to be either having with local background or from the outside, but CSOs were found to be strictly with a local, regional or ethnic background.

## References

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## CHAPTER - 8

### Concluding Observation on the relationship between Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)

#### In the District Of Cooch Behar

(A) The Role of SATSA (State Agricultural Technologists Service Association) in the District of Cooch Behar: (Observation during the year 2004)—

SATSA is an organization for the governmental officers in the department of agriculture in the State. In the year 2004, it was observed, the organization offered enough scope for the farmers in the district of Cooch Behar to lead a better livelihood.

*The farmers in the district lead a miserable life due to the following: -*

- (1) *The little or no arrangement of irrigation,*
- (2) *The presence of the acidity of the soil,*
- (3) *The arbitrary impact of the nature,*
- (4) *Unbalanced competition caused by the impact of globalization leading to unfair price and practices with regard to agricultural produce, seeds, pesticides, agricultural inputs etc.*

With these several factors the farmers had nothing alternative but to oscillating with a hope waiting for the good days of the remote future.

In such a situation, in the year 2004, SATSA organized twenty (20) agricultural training centers and provided 1,500 (one thousand five hundred) farmers the knowledge of New Agricultural Policy and trained them about various technologies-related knowledge to the policy.

With a view to concretize the activities of the training programme and also the training camps, SATSA conducted sixteen (16) practical exhibition centers with regard to agro-farming in the district of Cooch Behar. The places of the training centers were at namely, Sat-Mile, Taka-Gachh, Chila-Khana, Talli-Guri, Nata-Fela (in the dilapidated bank of the river Kaljani in the sandy soil of Arampur in Balarampur) etc.

The crops chosen to aware the farmers at the exhibition were namely, mustard, maze, tobacco, nut, sunflower, water-melon, cucumber, the vegetables like Lau, pumpkin etc.

### **Output :**

Jogen Sarkar of the village Katamari in Sat-Mile hoped for better result from the Jatti tobacco—special variety tobacco in the region—the production of which the farmer expected to be increased from four (4) mons to five (5) mons average per bigha to eight (8) mons in 2005. That is, the farmers since then onwards expected to cultivate cropping of tobacco for much more larger area than ever-before.

Bhaskar Kati, another farmer in Takagachh opined, there was no provision for the cultivation of maze in their area since the inception of the locality. Now they (Bhaskar Kati and others) understood the necessity and viability of the maze cultivation in their locality. The active members of SATSA provided the

awareness, knowledge and expertise about the crop cultivation to these farmers at the spot by attending time and again, especially on Saturday and Sunday.

**SATSA**, other than counseling, provided seeds, fertilizers, bio-fertilizers, bio-pesticides, necessary food-items etc. of high standard. Now, the farmers expected twenty (25) mons maize per bigha.

Above all, the contribution that the SATSA provided was to be better narrated as offering a way and knowledge of alternative farming to people in different parts of the districts in a meaningful way.

(B)

#### **A. Work on Total Sanitation :**

**(Observation during the Month of February 2005)**

**The Role of following different actors**

- (1) *Nehru Yuva Kendra (NYK), Cooch Behar District Branch;*
- (2) *Chokiar Chhara Maitri Sangha (CCMS)-a club in Nishi Ganj Gram Panchayat -2;*
- (3) *Nishi Ganj Club (NGO and as a Mart) and*
- (4) *Nishi Ganj Gram Panchayat-2.*

Chokiar Chhara is a village in Nishi Ganj Gram Panchayat-2 having a population of 1528. (male-802; female-726). The number of total family is 347.

At the outset, it is to be stated that prior to the activities of the above-stated actors (e.g., NYK, CCMS, Nishi Ganj Club and the Nishi Ganj G.P.) the numbers of latrine in Chokiar Chhara village were only for 188 families. That is, 159

families had no any latrines at all. After the successful activities of these actors, the village of Chokiar Chhara is fully sanitized.

It was observed, the whole activity was done step by step.

*Firstly*, generally one of the activities of Nehru Yuva Kendra (NYK) is to promote Self-Support efficiency for the clubs at the rural level thereby to help the villages self-reliant and developed.

Therefore, such idea was given to Chokiar Chhara Maitri Sangha.

*Secondly*, Maitri Sangha was advised to conduct a survey of their own village and to make the Participatory Resource Mapping (P.R.M.) of the village.

*Thirdly*, on the basis of the survey report a few problems were identified. Among those, sanitation was given priority.

*Fourthly*, Nehru Yuva Kendra took the responsibility of coordination among the agencies, such as, Nishi Ganj Gram Panchayat-2, Sanitary Mart of Nishi Ganj Club, which is an NGO too, and Chokiar Chhara Maitri Sangha, through organizing several meetings.

*Fifthly*, *Chokiar Chhara Maitri Sangha (CCMS)* was advised to aware the people of Chokiar Chhara regarding the importance of Sanitation in the locality. The awareness programme was conducted through group meetings for one month.

*Sixthly*, Nehru Yuva Kendra scheduled the date and time for three-days programme in consultation with the club (CCMS).

*Seventhly*, CCMS informed all the target villagers, especially those who did not have any latrines to construct the sanitary latrines at their houses.

*Eighthly*, the beneficiaries, that is, the villagers themselves supported the programme, voluntarily took the responsibility of digging the ditch and constructing the lower and upper fencing of the latrines.

*Ninthly*, CCMS organized a picnic like food arrangement or party of which the financial cost was provided by NYK. Nishi Ganj Club as a mart took the responsibility of supplying the human resource such as, trained masons to guide the beneficiaries for installation, supplied materials, slabs, pans, platform and siphon etc.

*Tenthly*, what Nishi Ganj Gram Panchayat—2. certainly drew the attention? The respective Gram Panchayat provided the cost of the materials to the Sanitary Mart under the *Total Sanitation Campaign (T.S.C.)* programme and *Central Rural Sanitation Programme (C.R.S.P.)*.

*Eleventhly*, besides the activities of the above-stated specific actors, there are the activities of other actors too to make the sanitation programme a grand success in the locality.

- (a) *The members of the Self-Help Groups in the locality extended their cooperation to this unique event. They dug the ditch of the latrine for four and half feet deep.*
- (b) *The beneficiaries on their part had enough contribution as they prepared the fencing on the surroundings of the ditch of the toilet both on lower and upper portion. That is, the villagers of Chokiar Chhara get interested and were involved in the programme thinking it as necessary and noble activities for them.*

In such way, *Nehru Yuva Kendra (NYK)* completed a commendable job in Ful –Bari Gram Panchayat and Bara Sol-Mary Gram Panchayat in the district of Cooch Behar.

To conclude, it can be cited ( which is come out of observation) that earlier the people of Chokiar Chhara were suffering from the lack of sanitary latrines not only due to lack of money but due to lack of awareness about the utility of the sanitary latrines in their daily life.

It was observed; Chokiar Chhara is a village in Nishi Ganj Gram Panchayat, which was found fully sanitized with regard to domestic sanitary latrines. And the way the whole process of activities were completed there was unique in the sense that it symbolized a notable example of relationship between *Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)* and *Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs)*.

(C)

## **Gitaldah Gram Panchayat - 2**

### **The Role of Gitaldah Gram Vikash Committee (GGVC)**

Daribos, Bandher Kuthi and Jari Dharala were the three villages taken for studying Gitaldah Gram Panchayat-2. These localities are situated at the adjacent of India-Bangladesh border near Dharala river. Total population of these localities were about three thousands (3000). The main occupation of the people of these localities were agriculture ,mainly paddy, jute and tobacco cultivation. The people of these villages had to maintain link with Gitaldah Bazar or Sub-divisional town of Dinhata by crossing the river Dharala. During monsoon, the situation of stream and water level of Dharala cross the danger level and it causes loss of many lives

including people, domestic animals, the dwelling places, schools, mosques, temples etc. in the locality.

The people of these localities also suffer a lot from other difficulties. *The Border Security Forces (BSF)* does not allow the villagers to cross the river after six p.m. (as per the Order of the Government of India since 2002). This causes enormous trouble and tension to the private and public life of the people of these villages. The economic activities of these people are thus badly disturbed:

Since the localities are situated in the border area there are always the chances of smuggling, trafficking on drugs, women and girl-child, even cross-border terrorism.

Therefore, there is always an imperative to maintain a continued effort to check and combat such things (anti-social activities) despite the normal or special vigilance done by the BSF at these localities. Local Panchayat and the *Gitaldah Gram Vikash Committee (GGVC)* were the actors that were entrusted with such responsibility.

*Gitaldah Gram Vikash Committee*, it was observed, maintains strong vigilance in the locality to check child, women and drug trafficking by its Network Committee built up with women at more than twenty-four (24) villages.

*Gitaldah Gram Vikash Committee (GGVC)* –a mass organization of *Society for Participation and Reflection (SPAR)*-an NGO organized seminars for the members of its *Self-Help Groups (SHGs)* in the month of June in 2003. Locally situated *United Bank of India (UBI)*, it was observed, helped these Groups by providing loan and necessary counseling.

In Gitaldah 234 SHGs were formed in association with the Gitaldah Gram Vikash Committee. The rates of progress of these SHGS were almost positive. Therefore the local *Bank (UBI)*, it was observed, sanctioned sufficient loans to these Groups. The rate of savings and payment of loans of these Groups were encouraging. Out of 234 Groups, at least 55 Groups were provided more loans by the UBI. The amount of such loan taken by the Groups were an amount to Rupees 5 lakhs 50 thousands.

Besides, several seminars were arranged for these Groups with a view to accelerate the speed of work- efficiency and to alleviate poverty for a permanent solution to their many problems. On sixth June of the year 2003, the money amounted to Rupees 2,28000 were provided these Groups as extended loan to recognize their continued success in the desired direction.

Most of these Self-Help Groups were women-led Groups.

Again, in a Seminar held on September 13, 2005 in Dinhata town at Nripendra Narayan Smriti Pathagar. It was observed, the speakers present unanimously praised the activities of Gitaldah Gram Vikash Committee (*GGVC*) to fight against the trafficking of women, girl-child and drug in the locality at the border area. The notable dignitaries present at the meeting were the then Sabhapati of Dinhata Panchayat Samity, two other members of the respective Panchayat Samity and one member of Cooch Behar Zilla Parishad etc.

Inspired by the activities of the GGVC, Local Gram Panchayat started campaign and propaganda in the above-mentioned issue to reach to the desired target. *The Panchayat built up PRAMILA BAHINI* by taking interested and courageous women of the locality, especially the women from the Self-Help Groups. Now, the nature of their activities goes to a certain extent that it

encompasses an all round combing operation against the culprits in connection with such anti- social activities in the localities.

As for example, the women members of the **SHGs** are taking note of or investigating about the persons who are entering in the localities from outside for the purpose of marriage or for any other purposes to be served.

Again, the members of the SHGs are investigating the persons to whom the contract or dealing with regard to marriage or other matters are being fixed up or dealt with. The SHG-members are also keeping watch the places where the marriages are taking place. They do these activities either independently or through the local police stations.

It was also observed, the SHGs under the inspiration of the Panchayats campaigning against Child Marriage and Dowry System in the locality.

(D)

**Locality :**

**Ghegir Ghat in Dewan hat Village Panchayat under Cooch Behar**

**Panchayat Samity-2:**

**The role of Aashar Aalo-an NGO in the Locality.**

**Population: About 500 families.**

**Occupation: Making Patti by patti (a kind of bet) tree.**

About 500 families of the locality are engaged in making cool patti for a few generations. In Ghegir hat these occupational groups reside in a scattered way in

Ghegir hat Kuthi, Pushna Danga, Dhalua Bari, Kalighat including different parts of Ghugu Mari.

NGO working there is—Aashar Aalo. It was observed, Aashar Aalo(AA) organized six(6) Self-Help Groups(SHG) among the Patti workers or artisan families. The NGO(AA) arranges marketing by hiring stalls in the Block or District level fairs, such as Bhaowyaiah song competition, Rhaash Mela, Health or Like-wise fairs which are commonly held in the district of Cooch Behar. Such arrangements open the broad avenue of selling the patties or bet products to the interested customers in and out-side the district.

It was observed, the women artisans play an active role in this field. These women maintain accounts, manages shops, interact with the customers about the quality of the products made by the patti artisans.

*Aashaar Aalo (AA)* —the NGO maintains the links between the members of the SHGs and the different branches of the Government including Zilla Parishad, Panchayat Samity or Block level officers, Banks or Financial Institutions etc. to arrange loans for the patti workers.

It was observed, Zilla Parishad authority bears a soft corner for these workers who belong to the marginalized section of the society, especially scheduled castes and *Below Poverty Line(BPL)* families. Therefore, Zilla Parishad allows its own stalls or jointly extends the cooperation for providing necessary arrangements for them.

### **B. Plight of the patti(mat) workers:**

It was observed, the collection of the raw-materials for bet tree are tough and it is beyond the capacity of the poor patti workers. The forest of Assam is the rich

source of the raw-patti bet. But due to insurgency in the State of Assam for past several decades, the supply of raw became uncertain and virtually stopped. Then the artisans had to depend on the meager availability of about 100 bighas of land used for such purpose (i.e., the cultivation of bet or patti in the locality). However, the requirement of land for patti cultivation is needed approximately 250 bighas.

Therefore, *first*, the deficit remained 150 bighas to fill the gap in the cultivation of patti in the locality. Due to scarcity of the bet tree, the artisans had to pay high price to get the raw bet.

*Secondly*, due to lack of better rail and road connection (as the meter gauge connection between Alipur and Banarhat is defunct), the local merchants try to compensate the transportation cost by giving low price to the patti workers.

*Thirdly*, Government loans are not frequently available for them.

*Fourthly*, the standard of infrastructure of patti-making environment was not up to the mark. There were no work-shades to save the workers and their materials from the monsoon rain. They thus were stopping works at the time of rainy-season.

In such a situation Aashar Aalo and the Zilla Parishad, as it was observed in the preceding analysis extended their fruitful cooperation to the patti artisan—denotes the example of better relationship between PRI and CSO in the locality.

### **MORE ABOUT AASHAR AALO (AA)**

The NGO in Dewanhat Village Panchayat organizes some SHGs (all of them are women-groups) and was able to generate the income opportunities for the members of these groups through different economic activities.

a) One such a group is *Dakshin Balasi Yuva Self-Help Group*. The group cultivates flowers (nursery) for two (2) bighas of land the respective group also maintains rearing of cattle engaged with the business related to paddy and rice-making.

b) Another group is *Dakshin Balasi Banstala Mahila Kalyan Samity*—The group has a Broyler-Chicken farm. Goat farm, Paddy and rice business. Each of the group members earn Rupees 1500/per month.

c) *Dakshin Balasi Panditgarh Mahila Kalyan Samity*. The group has a nursery for an area above 12 kathas of land. It has a scheme of rice business. Each group members earn Rupees 1000/ per month.

To conclude, the notable feature regarding *Aashar Aalo* was that it (AA) provided education and training, arranged Bank loans, encouraged the group members through proper counseling, thereby brought a major change (both in attitude and physical or material uplift) to these women members.

*Moreover, AA had the credit of forming the groups with a hope to build up a viable society in the respective locality.*

Now the women members of the above-mentioned SHGs, it was observed, can financially help others in their locality especially who are in distress. SHGs became such a source of inspiration to the people of the locality that now a day all the rest of the villagers became active members of the SHGs.

### **C. The role of Panchayat:**

It was observed, the local panchayat representatives relentlessly tried to inculcate the scientific knowledge and values with regard to the evils of the dowry system, gender inequalities etc. among the members of the respective SHGs.

## **(E) Cooch Behar Block-2:**

### **An Observation:**

(I) *The Byabsayee Samity* of Takagachh- Rajarhat was anxious about the poor conditions of their local market. Such a concern and tension got multiplied as soon as the Silbari Ghat Bridge was opened in the locality. Such opening up of the new bridge widened the potential expansions and opportunity of their market in near future.

The local *Gram Panchayat and the Panchayat Samity* responded to the demands of the *Byab Sayee Samity* as well as the locality.

*The three above-mentioned partners were assembled in a meeting and joined hand with each other and purchaged ultimately four and half bighas of land at the west of National Highway Chowpathy towards Pundi Bari Road.* Out of estimated Rupees 58 lakhs, local businessmen contributed Rupees 17.33 lakhs. Out of 174 stalls, 151 stalls were distributed to local businessmen at a minimum cost amounted to Rupees 32.5 thousand only.

### **(II)**

In Cooch Behar Block-2 at least 250 agricultural workshops were arranged by the **Panchayat Samity** to aware the local farmers about scientific farming.

*West Bengal Vignyan Manch, Cooch Behar District branch, Uttar Banga Krishi Vishya Vidyalay, Agricultural Graduates Club, etc., were the organizations that acted as the chief resources and expert organizations.*

As a result, qualitative changes were noticed in all thirteen (13) Gram Panchayats.

Earlier, only Aman paddy was produced. Now a day, paddy like *boro paddy* and different vegetables are produced in a massive way. That is, multipurpose cultivation (with a large number of crop variety) is encouraged in the respective Panchayat Samity.

Due to Non-Governmental and Cooperative effort Potato production in the Block was placed highest position in the district .The setting up of two (2) cold Storages one at Sonari and the other at Chakchaka are the example of such effort.

The cold storage at Chakchaka can store fish, meat,egg and vegetables.

In this Block, the cases of frequent leaving the dwelling places in search of job on the part of the rural poor and marginal people are comparatively lesser than that of the people of other Blocks in the district of Cooch Behar. The Block topped in the district in agricultural productivity due to positive advantage of irrigation.

### (III)

#### **The role of Zilla Saksharata Samity**

*In this Block the role of the Zilla Saksharata Sammittee was commendable one.* It could rightly mobilize the right persons to make the *Total Literacy Campaign (TLC)* a success. Thousands of youth rendered their voluntary labour for the expansion of Literacy. Therefore, it increased to 74.26 percent, which is a highest record in the District of Cooch Behar.The Government of West Bengal, felicitated the respective Panchayat Sammittee.

At present 127 Continuing Education Centers are holding the success at different localities of thirteen Gram-Panchayats.

## (IV)

### **Madhupur Gram Panchayat**

#### **The role of 'Sabuj Swapna'-a SHG in the locality:**

The distance of Madhupur from Cooch Behar town is eight (8) kilometer. Madhupur Dham is a well-known tourist place present at the locality.

Each year a large portion of agricultural land gets inundated and decayed due to floodwater and soil –erosion by the Torsa River. Some inundated places, while get dried and is turned into sandy and barren land. Obviously it becomes useless for agriculture and ultimately it becomes the places for the homeless people of the locality especially those who lost their home due to the flood caused by the same Torsa River. These are the routine feature of the locality of Madhupur for last few decades.

While most of these families suffer from backwardness and a lot of other disadvantages. the young people bear a small hope to raise their head high.

*Sabuj Swapna Self-Help Group* is the result of such a desire for ten (10) youths who formed the Group with a view to earn something and lead a more or less viable mode of life. The SHG was formed in the Month of May in 2001. The youth namely. Subhash Das, Fani DAS, Ratan Gore, Suya Das, Tapas Das, Swapan Das. Mridul Das, Arjun Das, Ranjan Roy, and Haradhan Basak were all from Scheduled Tribes and the villagers of Haripur Village. These youths started their business with Broiler Hens—but they were failed to get profit due to lack of electricity at their locality.

In 2002, they started the pig farming. Such alternative business provided them the way of earning. They were provided counseling from the *department of*

*Animal Husbandry.* Now, they can earn and deposit money to the local banks as savings. They maintain cordial relation with the *District Rural Development Cell (DRDC)* and are helped by a good financial lump sum through revolving fund of which greater portion was treated as grant-in –aid. They got loan for an amount to rupees two (2) lakhs from the local bank out of which DRDC contributed an amount to rupees one (1) lakh. They purchased one (1) bigha land and decided to launch one husking mill. The mill was treated not only a source of earning to them but also a source of animal food which helped them to continue a better business in the locality.

*The success of Sabuj Swapna Self-Help Group inspired the people of the locality. As a result, more than 54 SHGs were formed one by one in the respective Village Panchayat of Madhupur within a very short period.*

(V)

**(I)Dinhata( Block –2):**

### **The role of Bhekrapole Netaji Sangha—an NGO**

Bhekrapole Netaji Sangha (BNS) in the respective block works since 1991. It has 300 active members-workers. It monitors 52 SHGs out of which 40 are women groups. It maintains crèches, women hostel, free clinic, vocational training camp, sanitation programmes etc.

It was observed, Bhekrapole Netaji Sangha was fairly able to change the life-style of the anti- socials of that locality.

## **(II)Dinhata (Block-1):**

### **The role of Godhulibazar North East Society for Empowerment of the People(G-NESEP)-an NGO.**

*G-NESEP* is engaged in promoting Self-Help Groups (SHGs)in the Matalhat Gram Panchayat since 1998.

About 200 SHGs were formed in that area by motivating villagers,mainly women and youths.Out of total 200groups,149 groups were women-led groups.It was observed. these groups were able to bring a major change in the economic profile of the people of the locality . Moreover, the law and order situation of the respective locality had been improved under the direct supervision and influence of these SHGs.Earlier, a large number of people of the locality took up criminal activities as their source and means of livelihood due to economic backwardness and unemployment.

*G-NESEP* opened innovative means of self-employment by exploring new sectors in the locality on village-based industries.Apart from agriculture and animal husbandry such effort widened the scope of earning for the poor people in the locality.

In the respective Gram Panchayat, the role of the Panchayat, it was observed, not found satisfactory due to following reasons: A) the village Pradhan was changed for four times within the period of five years and the Panchayat was ruled by bi- party coalition. In such situation, the inter-party conflict hampered the development of the region.B)Different kind of corruption in the Panchayat were the other causes of underdevelopment. As for example, the people of Kharija-

Boradanga alleged that their two (2) kilometers of village road was not built up due to the negligence of the Panchayat.

Therefore, as a protest, the villagers of the respective village themselves built up the road on a voluntary basis in the presence of the then B.D.O. of Dinhat Block-2. The road is Jongra to Abalar Hat.

The communication at the respective Panchayat is very bad. There are at least 42 bamboo bridges, eight (8) bamboo-wire bridges present as the principal means of communication in the region.

It was observed, tube-wells in the locality are much less deep than that of normal requirement.

On 1<sup>st</sup> week of June, 2003, a *NABARD*-sponsored workshop on SHG was organized there to sensitize and motivate the rural population on how Self-Help Groups would be used for economic uplift. The villagers including the members of the SHGs, the officers of different Government departments and Bank officials were present at the workshop. The officers invited people present at the workshop to focus on behalf of themselves about the possible and potential means of self-employment opportunity available to their locality.

Now a day, the socio-economic condition of Matalhat, it was observed, had been improved considerably well. The recovery rates of loans have gone up considerably and the non-performing assets are reduced.

G-NESEP is trying to improve the development scenario of the locality further by promoting a number of workshops among the SHGs in the locality with the presence of a number of right resource persons both at the government and non-government level.

### **(III) Tufanganj Block –(I &II) :**

#### **The role of SRTDC(Sunderban Rural Training and Development Centre) NGO.**

#### **D. Observation during February, 2006**

In 1993 Cooch Behar got under severe attack of flood. During those days the then District Planning Officer (DPO) of Cooch Behar invited the NGOs outside of Cooch Behar to extend their cooperation for the flood victims.STRDC, SPAR etc,NGOs were among the main NGOs who responded the call or situation and entered the district of Cooch Behar.

*SRTDC*, permanently settled in Cooch Behar in 1995 and was registered under the Society of Registration Act in 1996.It (the NGO), earlier was not favored by a section of ideology-based political parties. Their allegation against the NGO was manifold. Now the situation has been changed. The NGO have more or less been able to prove its role positive.

There are 13 NGOs registered under the District Administration of Cooch Behar through the District Social Welfare Department and SRTDC belongs to one of them. At present, there are 7 permanent members, 16 field workers and 10 pay –volunteers engaged in the daily work of SRTDC. The donor agencies of SRTDC are Netherland, UNDP, Central Government and State Government of India etc.

SRTDC basically concentrated its activities in Tufanganj Block I and II.The Camp Office-Cum-Training centre of the NGO is situated at Harirhat-NayarHat village.

The prime task it performs is Group Formation and Strenthening. It deals 3 kinds of groups- a) Swarna Jayanti Village Swa-Rojgar Yozna ; b)APL-NABARD

related groups and c) Micro Finance or Credit. The number of groups that the NGO formed during the financial of 2004-2005 was 167. There were at least 25 groups for APL people and 97 Micro-credit arrangements during the financial year.

From the camp office it facilitates the Panchayat Raj Institutions and different Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in the district. The NGO trains the people of the surrounded villages and the ICDS(Integrated Child Development Scheme) workers on HIV/AIDS etc. Moreover, the NGO arranges many awareness camps or programmes on the related issues.

The NGO was more or less successful to extend knowledge of fruit processing in the locality. It aptly took the help and cooperation with regard to technical counseling of the professors of the agricultural university present at the locality (i.e., the Uttar Banga Agricultural University situated at Pundi Bari in Cooch Behar Block II ).

The role of the University is more or less successful with regard to imparting expertise knowledge on these issues like soil testing, use of eco- friendly bio-fertilizers and pesticides, crop variety etc. However, it was found that a section of local leaders and politicians claimed much more contributions were essential to be performed by the University in the future days for the successful development of the region.

SRTDC strengthened its activity on the philosophy and reason that sooner the better it is essential to diffuse the information in many fields to the local poor villagers so that they realize the better means to lead a civilized and scientific life. Therefore, the NGO promotes to build people's organizations, arranges workers

meetings, and trains the local people specially the farmers on the updating of information, legal and health training for the women the concept of sustainable development etc. for the villagers.

The NGO extended its work with SUNLAP-a Kolkata based NGO on women and child trafficking to offer a better socio- economic environment for the poor farmers to combat migration among the marginal labourers in the respective blocks.

The NGO believes to concentrates its development work based first on the individual, then family, then locality then the village with a view to develop the personality and potentiality of the people properly.

*Let us focus one of its task observed on 11-02-2006.*

*Aalu Dhowa* is a remote village near Maruganj in Tufangaj Block. It was found that a poor couple was residing far away from its original dwelling village for several months. The couple was renegade from their neighbour and relatives and was given a small place to live at a remote corner and end of an unused field.

It was also found nobody speaks or transact any thing with the couple. It was simply because the couple was identified as HIV/AIDS patient.

The matter was somehow brought to the knowledge of SRTDC workers. It was also found that Panchayat was not able to bring any solution rather its role in the specific case was negative. It came in the field very late .It failed to persuade the villagers.

The SRTDC came forward to solve the issue. The NGO told the villagers that nothing to be worried from the disease excepting the connection in some specific ways like attachment of blood, hormone etc. with the patient. At the beginning the educated people of the village understood the advice and after that most of the villagers realized their misdeeds. They supported the SRTDC and brought back the couple in their original home.

## **Conclusion:**

The District of Cooch Behar, as it was observed in the preceding chapters, can be described or characterized as the backward district due to its locational and other disadvantages.

Following routine features are present and found prominent in the district for many years and till date. They are:—

From the Natural viewpoint, there are reports of devastation and heavy loss of lives and properties caused by monsoon flood and soil erosion at the bank of a lot of rivers that flowed in the district.

There are reports of leaving of a bulk of marginal labourers to the other States each year in search of livelihood.

According to a research report, in the North Bengal University, there is male domination over the women Panchayat members in the district of Cooch Behar.

There is the problem of unemployment in the district. Woefully poor people in the district can not afforded to be employed. They therefore end up doing low productivity jobs in agriculture and informal service sector.

However, all the citizens including the poor, especially the disadvantaged sections like the women, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in the district are also entitled to an equitable share of basic public resources. A welfare State generally tries to provide these services in the field like education, health, roads, safe drinking water, sanitation etc. Entitlement also includes a basic level of social

security for the old, disabled and infirm, for children and those who are unable to get any work.

The modern and civil society of Cooch Behar cannot let its citizens starve and suffer from chronic hunger and the Government must come forward to provide food and shelter to the destitute. The democratic society of Cooch Behar must go further and empower the poor who cannot afford to pay for the education of their children.

Access to information is an important element of empowerment. The poor people of Cooch Behar must have the right to information relating to the expenditure spent for their development by the Panchayat.

The district of Cooch Behar has enormous potential for entrepreneurship, innovation, and creative development. Here in Cooch Behar, there are very much presence of the people, their diverse form of activity and associations such as Cooch Behar Byabsayee Samity, Agricultural Graduates Club, Farmers Club, different clubs, societies, cooperatives, Trusts and Other NGOs etc. (as enumerated in the earlier chapters prevailing at Cooch Behar). All these actors must be allowed and encouraged to play their due role.

Certainly, a paradigm change is needed to achieve the goals and objectives (as enumerated in the earlier chapters) for the development of Cooch Behar. Otherwise, the failure of the Government may be revealed as much more pervasive than the failure of the market. That is, the Government may be treated as the part of problem and not a solution.

Let the researchers be described such an event that can be treated as one of the darkest day in the history or daily life of the people of Cooch Behar.

In the district of Cooch Behar, the mass-dharna of the *Greater Cooch Behar Peoples Association (GCPA)* in the end of the year 2005 raised unique question mark in front of the Government . The GCPA demanded review of the historic Act by which Cooch Behar was included Under the Union of India.The Government had no immediate alternative to persuade and prevent the GCPA at the moment. Therefore, the stalemate continued for three days at a stretch, which disrupted the transport and the civic life of the entire district of Cooch Behar.

What was the lacuna on the part of the District -Administration? It was simply because that the District Administration had no any prior information of such vigorous movement or the sentiment of the GCPA regarding the issue. It may be also true that inspite of getting the information relating to the demand of the GCPA; the Government was apathetic to their demand. What was the ultimate result? It brought enormous casualty bearing the death of five persons on the part of both the agitators and the policemen including a Deputy Inspector of Police.

*Such an incident clearly indicates that there were some gaps in the feedback - mechanism in the political system. It was alleged by the Forward Block –a major coalition partner and important party in Cooch Behar under the Leadership of Kamal Guha on the indifferent attitude of the Government relating to the activities of the GCPA. Kamal Guha personally too repeatedly*

warned the Government relating to the activities of the GCPA but the Government did not found to bother or respond to the situation.

It was claimed if there was a better relationship between the Civil Society Organization or Civil Society as such and Panchayat Raj Institutions at the rural level, the District - Administration certainly could get earlier information of such a movement of the GCPA. The question is not whether the demand of the GCPA is right or wrong, justified or parochial; the question of the hour is to understand the nerve or the sentiment of the society.

It is claimed that it is wise decision to understand the problem of the social-political groups and to come forward with a package of amicable solutions for the future generations. And the Civil Society of Cooch Behar may or can explore the alternative in a better way .The Civil Society of Cooch Behar may or can fight against any illegitimate or genuine demand, if so, any kind of gathering on these issues. Let the Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) or the Civil Society be come forward to offer meaningful solutions to various problems for the people of the District of Cooch Behar.

And it is necessary to give a better passage to the CSOs to shoulder the responsibility to carry out the social, cultural, economic and political development of the people of Cooch Behar and the region of North Bengal as a whole.

From the preceding analyses of the present work the researcher is confident to believe that at the present moment there is enough examples of good rapport between the *Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and the Panchayat Raj*

*Institutions (PRIs)*. There must be many more researches further to ventilate the possible and justified areas in which such relationship can accelerate the good, humane, responsible and civic governance for the people of the district of Cooch Behar.

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