

Chapter V

Social Institutions And Their Impact On Urban Life

Siliguri, one of the most diversified cities in the state of West Bengal so far as social composition of its population is considered, has developed north of river Ganga in West Bengal and provides an interesting insight into the activities of the social institutions present in the city.

It is noteworthy to observe that number of social institutions have come up over the decades based on different religious groups or castes which have been studied for having an idea about the behaviour and attitude of different communities of the city. The survey has been made on the basis of personal interviews with the Head of the institutions/organisations or with some other active members of different institutions/organisations. Journals or leaflets published by some of them have been of considerable help in making such a study.

In this connection particular importance was attached to the history and development of the institution or the organisation and on the major activities of each of them. More or less 50 institutions/organisations came under the study as discussed in the following pages. They may be grouped into a few broad categories in terms of their activities. Such as (a) Social Organisations, primarily engaged in social

services; (b) Religious Organisations, representing different religious faiths. Some of them also including social services in their list of activities; and (c) Cultural Organisations interested in cultural performances.

(A) Social Organisations

(1) Terapanth Yuva Parishad

The Terapanth Yuva Parishad was established in the city on 9th November, 1979. The Parishad is run by the Jains, most of whom belong to the Marwari Community. The total Jain population of the city at present is approximately 1200, comprising about 300 families. The office of the Parishad is located at Station Feeder Road, a five storied building owned by the organisation.

The trust of the Parishad is maintained by the members of the parishad. At present there are 100 life members and 117 annual members.

The major activities of the Parishad are as follows:

(i) A charitable Homeopathic clinic is maintained by Terapanth Yuva Parishad functioning for the last 12 years and about 14,000 patients are treated annually.

(ii) The Parishad provides financial assistance to the poor students by giving four annual scholarships. Besides, it provides books free of cost and free Computer training course for 72 students for a duration of 3 months.

(iii) The Parishad also comes to the aid of people at the time of natural calamities. For instance, it provided dry food during Alipoor-duar flood in 1993, Raiganj flood in 1995 as well as in Ganganagar, Siliguri, besides providing a free clinic for medical treatment at all the said areas.

(iv) Lastly, one of the major activities of this parishad is to spread the idea of Jainism.

The head office of the Parishad is located at Ladrwon, Rajasthan.

[Source: Mr. Rajeeu Jain,
Secretary,
and Mr. Mahindra Daga,
President,
Terapanth Yuva Parishad.]

(2) Uttar Banga Maheswari Sewa Trust

The Uttar Banga Maheswari Sewa Trust was established in 1976. Maheswari is a subcaste of the Marwari Community, hailing from Marwar in Rajasthan. The Maheswaris form a Hindu buisness class of Marwar.

The trust housed in its own four-storied building in Khalpara has following membership.

(a) Life Member	- 128
(b) Founder Trusty	- 11
(c) Electoral Trusty-	10

Trust Board (Total)- 21

The major activities of the Sewa Trust are as follows:-

(i) It runs a charitable Homeopathic clinic in the city treating monthly 500 patients continuing for the last five years.

(ii) It arranges for Polio Vaccination for 25 children on an average in a week continuing for the last 2 years.

(iii) It offers relief in the cases of accidents and natural calamities etc.

[Source: Maheswari Bhavan, Khalpara, Siliguri]

(3) Harijan Kalyan Samity

The Harijan Kalyan Samity was established in 1977 and having gone through certain modification since then has devoted itself to different activities from 1993 onwards.

The membership pattern of the Samity as available from their records is as follows:

12,000 in Siliguri Sub-Division
22,000 in Northern part of West Bengal
and 7,000 in Siliguri Town (approx)

The office of the Samity is situated near the stadium on Bidhan Road (Fig.5).

Their major activity as stated by the Samity is to improve their social status. And two other important activities are cultural and educational development termed by them as 'Social, Cultural, Literacy'.

[Source: Mr. Anil Prasad, Secretary,
Harijan Kalyan Samity]

(4) Marwari Yuva Manch

The Marwari Community in Siliguri city came from Rajasthan, Hariyana and part of Madhya Pradesh and membership is restricted to this community only.

The Marwari Yuva Manch was established in 1985. It has 105 annual members and thrives on annual subscription and donations realised from the members and sympathisers.

The major activities of the Yuva Manch are as follows:

- (a) Any kind of Social Service.
- (b) The manch has been supplying oxygen cylinders to the patients when required free of cost, running for five years.
- (c) For four years they have a van for carrying deadbodies, the only one of its kind available with any such private organisation in North Bengal.
- (d) The Manch helps poor people who are physically handicapped by supplying artificial limbs. For instance, in 1994-95, 300-350 patients were treated by the Manch and 180 out of them were provided with artificial limbs free of cost.

The Manch has 230 branches in India and 31 branches in West Bengal alone. A building is under construction on Sevoke Road, in Siliguri where a large hospital including an orthopedic centre will come up under this project.

The Manch extended its help and co-operation at the time of natural calamities eg. flood, landslides etc. The major cases where the Manch has provided relief, so far, are as follows:

- (i) Alipoorduar flood in 1993.
- (ii) Balurghat Flood in 1996. Here the Manch served 2000 packets of food

through helicopter within 12 hours after getting message from S.D.O., Siliguri.

(iii) The Manch participated in other relief programmes also at the period of Kalimpong Land Subsidence Tragedy in 1995 and at flood in Bindu in 1995 and in Siliguri flood in 1995 supplying free medicines and food.

(iv) At the time of communal disturbance connected with the issue of Ramjanmabhumi and Babari Masjid in 1993, the timings of different trains coming from other parts of the country to N.J.P. railway station were completely upset leading to a chaotic situation. The stranded passengers at the station were provided by the Manch with baby food and medical care at that time.

[Source: Mr.Niranjan Agarwal, member.
Miss.Jyotsna Agarwal, President.
Marwari Yuva Manch.]

(5) Siliguri Tailik Baishya Sahu Samaj.

The Samaj was actually established in 1965-66, then known as 'Snehi Samaj', later, after 1970, it was renamed and today is known as 'Tailik Baishya Sahu Samaj'.

The Tailik Baishya are actually Teli by caste. Originally they came from Bihar and parts of Uttar Pradesh, comprising mainly the Bhojpuri linguistic group. They have nearly 400 members in this organisation. The total population belonging to this particular caste, 'Tailik Baishya' in Darjeeling district is nearly 10,000 of which in Siliguri it is nearly 5,000.

They are concentrated in Khalpara area of the city and the Alupatty (potato whole sale market) of Hill Cart Road, mainly making business in vegetables, potato and onion.

Apart from looking at the interest of the people belonging to this community in particular, the Samaj does not seem to have anything to do in particular as social work.

[Source: Sri Rupchand Prasad, Secretary.
Sri Vishnu Prasad, member.
Siliguri Tailik Baishya Sahu Samaj.]

(6) Madhyadesio Vaishya Seva Trust.

Established in 1980-81, the trust is run by the members found in the following manner.

1. Founder = 11
2. Trusty = 35
3. Life Member = 35

The Trust has a Yuva Manch called as 'Madhyadesio Vaishya Yuva Manch' with 300 members and has a Mahila Manch as well.

The interview held with the office bearers of the Trust did not yield information on any specific social activities in which the Trust takes active interest.

The Madhyadesio Vaishya are popularly known as 'Kanu' community of Bihar.

[Source: Mr. Motilal Gupta, member.
and Mr. Bipin Kr. Gupta, Secretary.
Madhyadesio Vaishya Seva Trust.]

(7) Bhojpuri Sewa Trust.

This particular trust has a membership of about 100 and has no such major activity. The majority of the population of Madhyadesio Vaishya coming from Bhojpuri linguistic division of Bihar and U.P. are associated with this trust.

[Source: Mr. Nanda Kr. Singh, President.
Bhojpuri Sewa Trust.]

(8) Jaiswal Biyahut Sewa Trust.

The members forming this trust also belong to a business community coming from Bihar. By caste Vaishya, they are popularly known as Kanwar. The trust does not seem to have any major activity.

[Source: Mr. Ramanand Prasad, Secretary.
Jaiswal Biyahut Sewa Trust.]

(9) Agrasen Bhavan.

The Agrasen Bhavan situated at Agrasen Road of Khalpara, was established by the Agrawal group of the city in 1971. It is a four storied building comprising 8 blocks and 2 big halls. Generally, the hall is used for meetings or occasionally rented out for marriage ceremony which forms a major source of income for the organisation.

It has an Executive Committee consisting of 25 members.

The group keeps itself involved in a number of social activities as follows:

(i) It maintains a charitable outdoor clinic for the last three years open for two days in a week attending to about 100-150 patients.

(ii) A charitable Homoeopathic clinic is also maintained by the Bhavan attending on an average to 35 patients regularly.

Besides, it offers relief in the cases of accidents and natural calamities such as that in Alipoorduar flood in 1993, in Kalimpong land slide in 1994 and distributed utensils, clothes etc. in 1995 at Siliguri Junction area after the breaking out of a severe fire.

[Source: An official of Agrasen Bhavan.]

(10) The Shilpanchal.

The Silpanchal, a Social Organisation of non-Bengali Communities was established in 1955 and constructed its own building in 1986 which is situated at Burdwan Road. The Building is four storied.

It has 11 elected members and 39 life members. The Trust of the Silpanchal is maintained by donation from the members and the rent of hall given on hire.

It is primarily involved in some activities, like, it offers the hall of the building on minimum charge allowing concession for any kind of social activities such as marriage ceremony etc.

It manages a Homoeopathic clinic engaging one Doctor and one helper in which 20-30 patients are being treated regularly for the last

five years. The clinic is charitable.

[Source: Mr. Shovaram Dalmia, President.
and Mr. S. Saraf, Secretary
The Shilpanchal.]

(11) Deokota Sangha.

Deokota Sangha is a social and cultural organisation established in 1963 at Ashram Para by the Nepali population of the city and got registration in 1966. Later on the Sangha was shifted to Pradhan Nagar at S.N.T. Godown Road in 1975. It has its own two-storied building with a library in it. It has 300 general members, 15 Executive members and 20-25 life members.

The Trust is primarily dependent on donations and monthly subscriptions from the members. It has a 'Dharmashala' (Rest House) which seems to be a source of income.

The main objective of the Sangha comprises social, cultural and educational activities.

(i) Educational Programme: In 1964, it has established a small library meant primarily for students.

The Sangha founded a Girl's school in 1970 teaching upto standard VIII. The school got recognized in 1996. Since the beginning one of the major activities of the Sangha has been the publication of a quarterly magazine in Nepali named 'Baruli'.

(ii) Social and Cultural Development programmes: From its inception the Sangha has made it a regular feature to stage two to three plays a year. It maintains an Art Teaching Centre for the last 2 years established for students and young people, giving free training.

For the last five years a free 'Karate Lessons' class has been organized which is held every week coaching about 25 young men in a class.

A Sewing class for women is being conducted by the Sangha for over 10 years free of cost. About 50 persons are taking facility of this vocational training at present.

It also has a co-operative society for women.

Over and above this, a music class is held twice a week, having started teaching violin among others. Ten students are enrolled for this class which is also free of cost.

All the programmes mentioned above have the objective to make young men and women self dependent as far as practicable.

Apart from this, the Sangha takes keen interest in helping people at distress and takes part in relief programmes during natural calamities like floods, land slides etc. as are common to this region. For instance, they actively joined the relief programme in 1993 in Alipoorduar flood and also took part in the relief programme and rescue operation in Kalimpong landslide in 1996.

Some other Nepali organisations having almost similar activities in the city may be mentioned here.

(a) Yuva Barga: Located at the second Mile on Sevoke Road, Siliguri, its main activities are as follows:

- (i) It observes Bhanu Jayanti and Deokota Jayanti.
- (ii) It holds classes to assist poor students.
- (iii) It participates in operations and relief programmes at the time of natural calamities.

(b) Nepali Sahitya Pracharani Samity : Located in Mallaguri area of Siliguri, its Head Office is 'Sahitya Academy, Delhi'.

It conducts examination for both Nepalis and non Nepalis named 'Nepali Sahitya Exam'. The successful candidates get the award 'Sahitya Bhusan' in Nepali.

[Source: An Official of Deokota Sangha, Siliguri.]

(12) Lions Club of Siliguri Greater.

Established in 1981 at Sevoke Road, second Mile, Siliguri, the 'Lions Club of Siliguri Greater' has 56 members. The female organisation of the same called 'Lioness Club of Siliguri Greater' has 20 members.

In 1981-82, it started activity by establishing an Eye Hospital including O.P.D. facilities and in 1983-84, the facilities were extended further by introducing Eye operation camp, providing 35 beds for patients.

The medical service is offered free for all castes except taking some nominal charges for registration only.

More or less 100 patients are taking facility from the hospital daily. And annually 3000 operations (eye operation) is being done since 1984. The hospital is assisted by 35 staff members and 3 eye surgeons.

It further organises at least ten eye checkup camps in a week at different places surrounding Siliguri city besides organising eye operation camps in villages in winter.

Among other activities, the club takes a wide interest as mentioned below:

- (i) It runs a charitable Homeopathic clinic 3 days a week and more or less 150-200 patients are taking facility from this clinic.
- (ii) It organises mobile check up camp.
- (iii) It organises vision screening camp in schools.
- (iv) It provides facility of oxygen cylinders supplied as and when required.
- (v) Lioness subsidised X-Ray centre.
- (vi) Lioness Tailoring centre.
- (vii) Lioness Adult Education centre.
- (viii) Lioness Family Welfare Camps.
- (ix) Recently the Lions Club organised the Community Marriage Ceremony on 4th April '97 which was quite successful.

However, their main objective is 'Sight Conservation'.

The Trust of the club is run by "Fund raising Programme" eg. lottery, collecting advertisement and sponsoring at the time of different programmes of the club.

[Source: Mr. Suresh Sinhal, P.R.O.
Lions Club of Siliguri.]

(13).Siliguri Welfare Organisation.

The organisation was established in 1977 with its office located at Rabindra Angan near Siliguri Sub-Divisional Hospital. It is a voluntary organisation.

(a) Health Service.

- (i) A charitable dispensary is maintained where about 100 patients are treated weekly (on Sundays only).
- (ii) It has a pathology unit in which 60 to 70 reports are prepared daily on an average.
- (iii) An X-Ray and an E.C.G. unit are also run by the organisation where 30 to 40 patients are getting low-cost service facilities daily.
- (iv) Some other health services offered by this organisation would not be out of place to mention here. They include running a physiotherapy unit, an immunization programme, a blood pressure check-up clinic and an orthopedic outdoor clinic. Altogether 10 doctors are engaged in maintaining these services offered free to the people.

(b) Blood Donation and Motivation

Besides, the organisation arranges Blood Donation Camps, at least 4 in a year and also motivates different clubs to donate blood. The collected blood is usually deposited to Blood Bank of North Bengal Medical College.

It also helps in solving local problems of the city, such as drawing

the municipality's attention to the poor health services, environmental pollution and raises its voice against any kind of unfairness which affects the urbanites.

The cremation of unclaimed dead bodies is also a major activity of the organisation.

The membership pattern of the organisation is as follows:

- (a) General members : 208
- (b) Executive members: 15

The trust of the Committee is run by donation and fund raised through different fund-raising programmes.

[Source: Sri Barun Mallick
Secretary
Siliguri Welfare Organisation]

(B) Religious Organisations:

Besides, Social institutions, there are some religious institutions and organisations in this city, in many cases associated with different types of activities cutting across various social groups and thus getting involved in offering services to the people.

(1) Anandamayee Kalibari, Siliguri.

One of the oldest Hindu temple in the city is Anandamayee Kalibari situated near Mahabirasthan. The temple was established in 1915. In 1925, Mr. B.A. Hallow, the then Sub-Divisional officer of Siliguri extended his help and co-operation to reform the building of the temple.

(2)Mahabir Mandir.

Mahabir Mandir of Mahabirsthan is also an old Hindu temple in the city established in 1895. The land of the temple is under D.I.market Fund of Mahabirsthan.

(3)Sree Satyanarayan Mandir, Mahabirsthan,Station Feeder Road,Siliguri.

Established in 1894, it contains some valuable idols with evidence of fine sculpture. The trust of the temple has been formed from the local businessmen.

(4)Mahananda Kalibari.

It is another Hindu temple established in 1930 by the side of river Mahananda.

(5)Shyma Math , Salban.

It was established in 1952 by a person known as Swami Arunananda for the Hindus.

[Source: (1) to (5): Mr.Kamala Prasad Sribastav, Secretary,
Managing Committee, Mahavir Mandir, Mahavirsthan.]

(6)Arya Samaj , Siliguri.

The Arya Samaj, a Hindu establishment, at first was established in 1875 in Bombay by Swamy Dayananda Swaraswati.To establish it in Siliguri city the first conference was held on 9-3-1965 and it was finally established on 13-6-1965. The organisation as claimed is based on pure Indian philosophy.

It has got the following memberships:

- (i) Number of members: 211
- (ii) Executive members: 25
- (iii) Board members : 12

Over and above this nearly 3000 people are associated with this organisation from the northern part of West Bengal.

The head of the Samaj is designated as Pradhan. The next designation is Upa-Pradhan. The female members of the organisation are also associated with different kinds of activities.

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The major activities of the Samaj lie in the following areas :

(i) It runs a charitable dispensary open daily except on Sundays attending to 40 to 50 person everyday. There is also a Homeopathic clinic run by the Samaj.

(ii) It organises from time to time widow remarriage and encourages inter-caste marriages.

(iii) Religious Conversion: i.e. from Islam or Christianity to Hinduism called as "Suddhakaran" is another function of Samaj.

(iv) Besides, provision of scholarships for poor and meritorius students is made by the Samaj. For instance, 3 to 4 students learning Sanskrit were awarded with scholarships every year for the last five years.

[Source: Mr. Ratiram Sharma, Pradhan.
Smt. Usha Gupta, Secretary.
Arya Samaj.]

(7) Sant Nirankari Mission.

The Sant Nirankari Mission of Hindu faith was established at Lahore in 1910 by Baba Buta Singh. But the activity of the mission was started actually in 1929 at Lahore by Baba Avtar Singh .

At present the Mission maintains 706 branches in India and 80 branches abroad. The number of such branches situated abroad are as follows:

U.S.A	- 19,	U.K.	- 18,	Thailand	- 3
Iran	- 1,	Iraq	- 1,	Japan	- 1
Jordon	- 1,	Australia	-4,	Austria	- 3
Srilanka	- 1,	South Africa	- 1		

In Siliguri, their activities started in 1971 and it owns now a two-storied building on S.N.T. Godown Road, Pradhan Nagar, Siliguri. Besides, the Mission has its activities all over the northern part of West Bengal, Bhutan and Sikkim and their regional branch office covering those areas has been established in Siliguri at Pradhan Nagar in 1983.

The nature of activities carried on by the Mission may be found in the following areas:

(i) Flood Relief - In 1993 it took an active part in helping people in Alipoorduar affected by devastating flood.

(ii) It provides medical aid in emergency. For three years it is organising annual blood donation camps.

(iii) The Mission comes to the aid of needy students by awarding them with scholarships etc. for the last 5 years. (3 scholarship at Siliguri and 3 at Binnaguri)

(iv) Besides, the Mission has taken direct initiative in establishing many schools, colleges and hospitals in various parts of India. Recently they have started a Sewing class for women in Siliguri where 25-30 women are given lessons free of cost. They have purchased a land to build a school in this city. They have also a plan to build a General Hospital.

They are conducting religious classes with the help of Religious Teachers (or Gyan Pracharak). At present they have 2 religious teachers in Siliguri, 2 in Darjeeling and 1 in Bagdogra. The zonal incharge of the Mission is called 'Branch Pramukh'.

[Source: Mr.K.M.Chettri,
Br. Pramukh,
Sant Nirankari Mission, Siliguri.]

(B) Ramkrishna Vivekananda Ashram, Sahudangi.

The Ramkrishan Vivekananda Ashram, a Hindu Institution was established in May 1958 by Swami Dhruvananda⁴. Swami Dhruvananda was an eminent personality with an M.A. in Philosophy from Benaras Hindu University. Later, he did M.A. in English and also M.Sc. from Madras and Calcutta Universities respectively. He had also exceptional knowledge in Homeopathic treatment. He settled at Sodpur in Bangladesh and after Independence came to Ramkrishna Mission Ashram in Kalimpong. Finally he came and settled down in Siliguri and started teaching as an honorary professor at Siliguri college.

In 1958, he established the Ashram at Siliguri which in some ways reflects the image of Santiniketan Ashram of Bolpur.

(i) A school was started from beginning of the Ashram with a hostel which was later closed in 1978. At first the school taught upto the level of VIII. But from 1987, it was converted into a primary school. At present there are 520 students enrolled in this school named "Swamy Vivekananda Academy" studying with a nominal fee of Rs.5/- per month.

(ii) A charitable Homeopathic dispensary is also run by the Ashram since its beginning. The clinic is open daily for the patients from 9 a.m. to 12 a.m. except on Sundays. On an average 40-50 patients are treated daily by the clinic.

(iii) The Ashram distributes 60-70 blankets to the needy people in every winter and some clothes in the Puja Festival every year.

(iv) The Ashram Committee is constituted in the following manner:

- (1) Executive members - 15
- (2) Life members - 4 (Maharaj)
- (3) General members who are giving monthly subscription.

The Ashram spreads over an area of about 24 acres, a part of which is utilized for agriculture and some portion has been kept under woods.

The trust is maintained by donation, subscription from the members and the small income derived from agriculture.

[Source: Partha Maharaj,
Ramkrishna Vivekananda Ashram,
Sahudangi.]

(9) International Society for Krishna Consciousness (Iskcon), Siliguri.

The Iskcon at Siliguri, another of Hindu faith, was established in 1985 at Gital para, near Haidarpara, Anchal Road. It has its own building. Another large building and a large temple are under construction. The Society has acres of land. The temple which is under construction will be 121 ft. high with a length and breadth of 150 ft and 75 ft. respectively.

The society is composed mainly of two types of members.

(i) Life member: 900 (giving donation annually).

(ii) Sudama Seva member: 300 (they are paying a small amount as monthly subscription).

It has an Executive Body comprising 12 members for the management of the temple. The major source of income is in the form of donations.

The society has some social activities as follows:-

(i) Food for life:- The Programme was initiated to develop the spiritual inspiration among the people and to make them vegetarian. Food relief programmes are organised for the poor people of the city at least once in a month for the last three years.

(ii) A charitable Homoeopathic clinic is also run by the society which is open on Saturday only. Two doctors are there and on an average 150 patients are treated by the clinic every day. It is functioning for about a year.

[Source: Braja Raj Das.
Br. Temple president.
Iskcon, Siliguri.]

(10) Bharat Sebashram Sangha - Siliguri.

This is a Hindu religious organisation based on old hindu philosophy, having organisations all over India. At first it was established as 'Hindu Milan Mandir' in 1960 in Siliguri where a regular conference used to be held at 'Arya Samaj', Deshbandhupara. But actually the 'Bharat Sebashram Sangha' was established at Subhaspalli in 1964 by 'Swami

Atmanandaji- 2nd' and they started their activities in 1968 . Some important activities of the Sangha are as follows:

(i) The Sangha runs a Bengali medium and an English-medium primary school and a hostel providing accommodation for 50 students among whom 25 are free from making any payment. The remaining 25 are paying charges for food etc. except electricity and accommodation. It is functioning for nearly 12 years.

(ii) During the last 10 years the Sangha is maintaining two charitable dispensaries, one for homoeopathic and other for allopathic medicines. On an average 25-30 patients daily get treatment at these clinics which provide free medicines and consultation.

(iii) Besides, it has a Mobile Clinic which is very useful for villages around the city. It makes its rounds once in a week.

(iv) The Sangha collects money for the poor suffering from illness and in many cases send them for a better treatment to any renowned hospital of India eg. C.M.C., Vellore etc. bearing all the expenses involved in such cases.

(v) The Sangha is a household name at the time of natural calamities like floods, epidemics etc. Its services in the recent period, namely for operations at Alipoorduar after a severe flood in 1993 and the services offered to people of Jhalong and Bindu by giving blankets, food etc. after a major landslide in 1994-95 will be remembered for a long time.

(vi) The Sangha also organises different cultural programmes, competitions etc. for encouraging students and youth in developing self confidence etc.

All the activities of the 'Sangha' are dependent on private collections in the form of small subscriptions and donations.

[Source: An official of
'Bharat Sebashram Sangha', Siliguri.]

(11) Hans Bela Ashram.

It is an Ashram of the Hindu faith named 'Manab Utthan Sewa Samity', established in 1970 at Anchal Road, Hyderpara. It is housed in a two-storied building and has nearly 5 acres of land.

It has a membership of over 60,000. The members are mostly residents of Darjeeling Hill, Sikkim and Dooars areas. It has an Executive body comprising 30 members. The Head office of the Ashram is situated in Delhi.

The Ashram is interested in a number of social and religious activities :-

(i) It takes interest in popularising the spiritual knowledge among the people based on 'Bhagavatgita'.

(ii) For the last two years a Charitable Homoeopathic Clinic is run by the Ashram, which is open for 2 days in a week. An average of 150

patients are treated by this clinic every week. The clinic provides one doctor and one compounder.

(iii) The organisation participates in different types of programmes and rescue operations following natural calamities like flood, landslides etc. offering wearings, food, manpower and financial help.

(iv) It assists the camp organised by Lions club, Siliguri for eye operation every year.

(v) It makes free gifts of fruits to the patients in different hospitals on such occasions as 26th January or 15th August etc.

Direct participation in the following programmes may be noted.

- (a) Bijonbari fire in 1992
- (b) Alipoorduar flood in 1993
- (c) Jaigaon flood in 1995
- (d) Malda flood in 1995
- (e) Kalimpong fire in 1996

Siliguri is the Head quarters of the organisation covering whole North Bengal, Sikkim and Bhutan. The trust of the Ashram is run by donation.

[Source: Mahatma Sunita Baiji,
President.
Mr. Jit Narayan Chettri,
Secretary.

Hans Bela Ashram, Siliguri.]

**(12) Mother Teresa Branch Institution : Missionaries of Charity
(Roman Catholic), Pradhan Nagar, Siliguri.**

The Institution of christian faith was established in 1972 in this city with two more branches in the same year in Tindharia near Kurseong Sub-Division and in Darjeeling. The orphan home of the Institution is situated in Tindharia. It has got its own two-storied building at Pradhan Nagar.

The major activities of the Missionaries of Charity are as follows. There are 9 sisters attached engaged in performing different social activities.

(i) One General Charitable Dispensary and a Mobile Clinic are maintained by the organisation.

(ii) There are 35 beds at the institution for the sick children and for the poor patients. Children suffering from T.B. and malnutrition are taken care of who are kept at the home i.e. at the centre and treated as long as it is required, finally sending them back to their own home when fully cured.

(iii) Dry food is supplied through a rationing system to the poorest people who fall sick.

(iv) Adoption of orphan girls is one of the activities of the Missionary kept at Tindharia's orphan home and also providing education for them.

(v) Sewing class is conducted for the poor girls and on an average 35 to 40 girls are taught.

(vi) A school for the slum children has been established at "Chandmoni Tea Estate".

The Missionary obtains monitory help from the Head quarters in Calcutta.

[Source: An official of 'Missonaries of Charity', Siliguri. and Father Joe of Santi Sadan.]

(13) Santi Sadan, Roman Catholic, Gurung Basty, Siliguri.

It is a christian religious training centre for the Roman Catholics. They teach the boys successful at the Higher Secondary level (+2) and also provide accommodation for them. The students are also permitted to take further education. The boys come from different parts of India. The main aim of the institution is to prepare a student who has a good moral character for serving as a priest for Roman Catholic Community.

Originally it was established in 1977 known as Jesu Ashram. Later on the Jesu Ashram was shifted to a place near Matigara close to Siliguri. The Ashram was run by Brother Bob. At present there are 21 students at Santi Sadan. The Ashram has a branch at Mallaguri. And it is famous for its Leprosy Centre treating leprosy patients and for some other social activities.

It also maintains a hostel for girls known as "Holy Cross", situated at Pradhan Nagar. There are about 10-20 girls staying in this hostel and it is run by 3 sisters. It also has a Charitable Dispensary and a Mother and Child Health Care Unit.

Jesu Ashram, a part of Santi Sadan, is situated on the National Highway near Matigara close to Siliguri which is a Missionary organisation. It spreads over a total area of about 6 acres. It is purely a charitable organisation run entirely on donation which was established in 1971. It looks after the destitutes especially people suffering from Leprosy. It also looks after T.B. and other general patients including mother and child health care. This Ashram is run by a Director named Brother Bob assisted by four sisters who are well trained in nursing. Altogether there are thirty members engaged in different types of activities of the Ashram. It has built a large hospital with 320 beds and an operation theatre used for surgical cases in leprosy. A nursing course is offered for a duration of two years. The sole objective of the Ashram is to treat the destitutes suffering from leprosy and after recovery they are given loans to start earning. It also has an outdoor clinic near Mallaguri where patients are treated free.

[Source: Father Joe of 'Santi Sadan'
and Brother Bob of 'Jesu Ashram'.]

(14) Roman Catholic Church, Pradhan Nagar.

It was established in 1958 in Pradhan Nagar, Siliguri. The christians of the city regularly come here for participating in Sunday prayer and on different occasions.

[Source: Father Joe of 'Santi Sadan'.]

(15) Church at Sevoke Road.

It was established by Father Francis in 1927. But the existing Church building was built by George Mahbert in 1948. The christians participate in prayer on every sunday.

[Source: Father Joe of 'Santi Sadan'.]

(16) St. Joseph's Missionary High School and Church at Bhaktinagar.

It was established near Gate Bazar of Bhaktinagar by the christian Missionaries. At present there are 900 students and 20 teachers in the school.

[Source: Father Joe of 'Santi Sadan'.]

(17) The International centre for Buddhist studies and Research

Buddhist communities following 'Thero' and 'Mahajan' philosophy are found in the city. After independence the 'Barua' community, Buddhists in religious faith hailing from Chattagram district of Bangladesh, came and settled down in the city. They are the followers of 'Thero Philosophy' written in 'Pali' language.

The Gurung Basty, Pradhan Nagar and Salugarah area of the city are the places where the major part of the Buddhists are concentrated. They are the followers of 'Nyingma -pa' philosophy which is a part of Tibetan Mahajan philosophy. Some of them of Gurung Basty and Pradhan Nagar are the followers of 'Hinajan' philosophy.

The followers of 'Thero' philosophy, however, are more active and they have established a number of institutions based on 'Buddhist philosophy' such as 'Buddha Bharati', 'International centre for Buddhist Studies and Research', 'Bidarshan Dhyana Ashram' and 'Boudha Samaj'. The 'Buddha Bharati' was established in 1961 and registered in 1964. It is the centre of festivals and place of worship for the 'Barua Community'. The 'All India Conference' in the memory of 'Atish Dipankar' was held here in 1983. The inaugural address was given by Hon'ble Dalai Lama.

The International centre for Buddhist Studies and Research was established in 1983 at Gurung Basti and was inaugurated by Hon'ble Dalai Lama. They are the followers of 'Hinayan' philosophy of Lord Gautam Buddha. It is housed in a two-storied building owned by the Society and it maintains a teaching centre for languages, like 'Tibetan', 'Pali' and 'Sanskrit'. The Pali college also comes under this research centre. Quite precious books on Buddhist philosophy are kept in the library of the centre. It is the only library of its kind in North Bengal where the 108 volumes of 'Kanjur', the holy book on Buddhism written in Tibetan are available.

A school named 'Dr.B.R.Ambedkar Sishumangal Ashram School' came under the roof of this centre in 1991. Students from backward classes like SC/ST are taught here. At present there are 105 students who are also staying here getting food and lodging facilities including dress materials etc. The school is recognised by the Central Government. The

centre and the school receives financial assistance from the Central Government since 1987-88.

The Bidarshan Dhyam Ashram was established in 1981. It is famous for the teaching of 'Dhyan' of Buddhist philosophy.

The Mahajan community has also two institutions, one is 'Tamang Buddhist Society' at Gurung Basty and the other is 'Nying-ma-Pa Society' at Salugarah. Each of the society has a temple.

[Source: Vishkhu Progyananda.
International Centre for Buddhist
Studies and Research, Gurung Basty,
Siliguri.]

(18)The Gurudwara of Sevoke Road.

The Gurudwara of Siliguri belonging to the Sikh community was established in 1947 at the Junction of Sevoke Road and Hill Cart Road. But in 1975 it was shifted to another spot on Sevoke Road near Panitanki. The land for this large Gurudwara was purchased by 'Guru Singh Sabha'.

Regular meetings and discussions about 'Holy Grnatha Saheb' take place in the Gurudwara. An Alms-house is also organised by this Gurudwara. The Sikh's New Year's day, the Birthday of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobindo Singhji are celebrated with great eclat. The expenditure for maintaining the Gurudwara is met by taking rent from different shops sublet by Gurudwara on Sevoke Road.

[Source: An official of 'Guru Singh Sabha'.]

(19)Bari Masjid, Mahavirsthan.

The land for the construction of the mosque was donated by a person named Mirza Samsuddin Ahmed. Later on it came under 'Wakf' law.

The building of the mosque was built a hundred years ago, and the design of the floor indicates chinese influence. It has one salaried Moulabi (Priest) and expenditure for its maintanance is met by a statutory trust.

(20)Chhota Masjid, Alupatti.

It was established at the end of 19th century, mainly through the initiative of two persons, namely Khan Mohammad Khan, and Hakim Abdul Gafur. However, the new brick building was constructed in 1952-53 and made two-storied in 1967-68. The Muslim Community of the city makes use of it on all occasions for religious purpose.

[Source: (a) and (b)- Moulabi, 'Bari Masjid', Mahavirsthan.]

(C) Cultural Organisations.

Besides social and religious organisations, there are some organisations in this city particularly taking interest in cultural activities.

I. Theatre Groups and Drama clubs.

At present there is no professional theatrical group in the city, but the role of different non-professional groups is very important.

The main objectives of the different theatre groups are

- (i) They consider to have a social responsibility for fighting against all social evils.
- (ii) They aim at educating the people through their performance on the stage portraying life revealing socio-economic and socio-political problems.

The name of following theatre groups are to be mentioned here for their wide range of activities.

1.Uttal Natya Gosthi

The 'Uttal Natya Gosthi' was established on the 7th August 1977. The office is located at Deshbandhupara. They have, so far, staged 35 dramas and also participated in the 'Nandikar National Theatre Festival (1995)'. Seven members of the 'Gosthi' have been selected for a project of 'Paschim Banga Natya Academy'. The project is for young directors, who will be supported by financial help to stage new plays. This organisation was awarded for the best production prize in West Bengal in 1988.

However, all the activities of the 'Gosthi' are dependent on the member's subscriptions and the sale proceeds of the shows.

[Source: Mr.Pradeep Lahiri.
Secretary.
Uttal Natya Gosthi]

2. Damama Natya Gosthi

The 'Damama' was established on the 5th July 1973 and located at Saktigarh. They have staged, so far, 31 one-act plays and 17 long-duration plays.

The organisation participated in 'Assam Bangla Natya Protijogita' held in Bongaigaon, Assam, on several occasions. It has received the 'Disheri' and 'Rittik' which are prestigious awards of West Bengal in the field of drama.

They have a membership of 35, who are active members participating in the plays. The fund of the 'Gosthi' is run by member's subscription, donations and from sale proceeds of shows.

[Source: Mr. Partha Chowdhury
Secretary
Damama]

3. Kornic

'Kornic', a renowned theatre group of the city, was established in 1969 at Deshbandhupara. 'Kornic' have staged at least 105 plays among which 50 are one-act, 10 are street-dramas and 5 are for children. Over and above that it has staged 20 full-length plays.

It participated in Assam-Bangla Natya Competitions in 1969. Kornic did participate in Assam-Bangla Natya Competition in 1971 at Bongaigaon, Assam and received awards for best production, best director

and best music director. It also participated in competitions held at Lucknow(1973), Allahabad (1974) and Kanpur (1982) on several occasions. It had been awarded with 'Disheri' and 'Rittik'.

Kornic has a speciality in staging plays in the light of social movement, such as plays on operation barga, adult education and on environmental pollution which need mentioning.

It has a membership over 100 among whom 25 are very much active, participating in all kind of dramas. The child membership of the theatre is also a very encouraging feature.

The organisation meets its expenditure through tickets sold at the time of shows and collection of subscription and occasionally donation from the members.

[Source: Mr.Rupak Chowdhury,
Secretary and founder member
Kornic.]

4.Siliguri Rittik Natya Sangstha.

Siliguri Rittik Natya Sangstha was established on the 1st May'1984 and is now situated at Bharat Nagar.

It has staged 24 dramas among which 9 are full-length, 14 one-act and 1 is a street-drama. 'Rittik' is also the recipient of different awards like 'Rittik' and 'Dishari' etc.

It has a total membership of 48, 35 of them taking part in acting. Collection of donation, member's subscriptions and the sale proceeds of shows are the only source of sustenance.

[Source: Mr.Moloy Ghosh
Director,
Siliguri Rittik Natya Sangstha.]

5. Balaka Natya Gosthi

The 'Balaka Natya Gosthi' was established in August 1977 at Deshbandhu para.

The Gosthi has staged 47 dramas till date among which 15 are full-length, 25 are one-act plays and 7 are short-dramas.

The group was awarded with different prestigious prizes eg. 'Dishari' in 1984 and 'Rittik' in 1986. It is also the recipient of different other awards on its participation in drama competitions such as at Jalpaiguri and Belacoba on several occasions from 1987 to 1994.

It has a membership of 23 and depends on its own resources for financial requirements.

[Source: MR. Bachhu Nandi
Secretary.
Balaka Natya Gosthi].

6. Ingeet Natya Sangstha.

The 'Ingeet' was established on the 24th July, 1977 and is situated on Bidhan Road.

It has a membership of 24 and so far produced 44 dramas of which 12 are full-length plays and 32 are one-act plays.

The main motive of the organisation is to make people aware of the current socio-economic and socio-political situation.

[Source: Mr. Mantu Majumdar, Director
Mr. Ananda Bhattacharjee, Director
Ingeet Natya Sangstha .]

7.Thoughts Arena.

'Thoughts Arena' was established on the 21st February'1988, situated in east Vivekananda Palli.

It has staged 5 full-length dramas, 1 one-act play and 6 street-dramas. The group is also associated with publication work and have broughtout several issue of a little magazine entitled 'Thoughts Arena'.

Now the group is going to stage two plays based on the writing of Rabindra Nath Tagore.

[Source: Mr.Amit Basu
Secretary]

8.Siliguri Mukta Manch

The 'Mukta Manch' was established on the 27th May'1979. The Manch includes different theatre groups of the city eg. Uttal, Damama, Rittik, Balaka etc, which have been discussed above.

The Manch started staging dramas since beginning on every sunday at Road Station More (Junction). After that, from 1983-84 onwards, it was made fortnightly, becoming a monthly event later on at New Cinema ground, Siliguri. At present it organises a Drama festival every 3 or 4 months in collaboration with different groups, as mentioned above, participating in the shows which run for 3 to 4 days.

[Source: Mr.Prodeep Lahiri.
President
Siliguri Mukta Manch]

Besides the theatre groups mentioned above, a few more groups are there having come into existence very recently producing quite a number of good dramas. The groups are-

- (i) Siliguri Theatre Academy
- (ii) Srejan Sena
- (iii) Darpan.

In this connection the two existing stages need mentioning. They are the state-sponsored and constructed, Dinabandhu Mancha, and Mitra Sammilani Hall.

9. Dinabandhu Mancha

The Mancha was opened on the 1st November, 1987. It is a big 4 storied building where different cultural programmes, dramas and film shows are held regularly. The hall of Dinabandhu Mancha is fully air-conditioned, and has a sitting capacity for 900. A film festival was also arranged in this hall in 1999.

The Mancha is managed by 65 staff members. Some casual staff is also provided from outside as and when required. There is a big auditorium with modern lighting facilities and necessary gadgets along with a small library in this Mancha.

[Source: Mr. U. Upadhyay
Officer-in-charge.
Dinabandhu Mancha.]

10. Mitra Sammilani

The Mitra Sammilani' is another theatre hall in Siliguri established in 1909. The Sammilani is a two storied building situated near Hill Cart Road. The hall has a capacity for 700 seats, 456 of them on the ground floor and 244 on the first floor .

It holds, at least, two cultural programmes a year not associated with any play. Besides, different cultural competitions are organised. Another important activity of the organisation is to organise the 'Bidhan Chandra Chess Competition' since last 29 years sponsored by 'Darjeeling District Chess Association'. The district championship for chess in 1999 was also organised by Mitra Sammilani.

The hall is also rented out for Rs.1000/- with a discount for group theatres or any charitable performance for a show which makes a source of income.

Altogether there are 220 members in this 'Sammilani' set-up, and 15 of them form the executive body.

The maintenance is derived from the (i) rent for the hall, (ii) member's subscription, (iii) bank interest and (iv) rent from shops as tenants on Hill Cart Road.

[Source: Mr. Uday Dubey
Social Secretary,
Mitra Sammilani.]

II. Libraries

1. The Bangiya Sahitya Parishad- Sub-Divisional Library

The said library was established in 1964 behind Siliguri Municipal Corporation and the building was expanded further in 1987.

The collection includes good number of old very valuable publications, old manuscripts and some rare collections of silver and copper coins. The total number books available in the library is 20,751.

The parishad has a membership, at present, of 3832.

[Source: Librarian
Bangiya Sahitya Parishad]

2. The Additional District Library

The Additional District Library was established on the 21st April'1990 near the 'Bangiya Sahitya Parishad'.

The total sanctioned strength of the staff of the library is 10. The library has a membership over 4239 at present and the total collection amounts to, about 21,000 books.

[Source: Librarian
Additional District Library]

Besides, there are quite a number of libraries in the city but those two mentioned above are really important. However, the following libraries have also earned popularity in the recent years.

- (i) Arya Samity at Deshbandhupara.
- (ii) Sailendra Smriti Pathagar at Saktigarh
- (iii) Udayan Memorial Sports Library at college para.

III.Sporting clubs.

1. Deshbandhu Sporting Union

The Deshbandhu Sporting Union was established in 1948. At first the club had a name for football and participated in different football tournaments. At present it has earned a wide reputation in table tennis, though its participation in football and cricket tournaments still continues.

The name of Smt.Bharati Ghosh would not be out of place to be mentioned here who became district champion for 5 times followed by Assam State championship in table tennis. She started the coaching centre for table tennis in 1981 at Deshbandhu Sporting Union, from which Sri Ganesh Kundu became Sub-Junior National champion in 1981-82, while a girl trainee, named Mantu Ghosh had become National champion on two occasions in 1990 and 1993 and won Sub-Junior National championship in 1988. Besides, the National championship in table tennis has also been won by a few more trainees of this club.

Another important activity of the club is organising programmes for Polio Vaccination of 50 children on an average in a week, continuing for the last 2 years.

[Source: Sri S.Bhattacharya
member.]

2.Ramkrishna Byam Sikhsa Sangha

The Sangha was established in 1948. At first its major interest was in physical exercise and Bratachari (a particular type of physical training). Later it has expanded its interest in the field of boxing, weightlifting, table tennis, badminton, football and volley ball. A karate lesson's class is run regularly for about 100 participants. One member of the club came 7th in the National championship for weight lifting competition in 1989.

The main earnings of the Sangha comes from rent from different shops sublet by the Sangha on Sevoke Road.

[Source: A member of
Ramkrishna Byam Sikhsa Sangha, Siliguri.]

3.Dadabhai Sporting Club

The Dadabhai sporting club was established in 1958 at Deshbandhu Para.

The club takes interest in football, participating in different tournaments and offers coaching to players.

Two members of the club became National champions and runners-up in the Atheletic meet of the Physically handicapped in 1988-89.

[Sources: Mr. Champak Bhattiyacharya
Secretary,
Dadabhai Sporting Club, Siliguri.]

4.Siliguri Table Tennis Academy.

The 'Siliguri Table Tennis Academy' was established on the 29th July'1993, having 70 students now receiving coaching from Mr.Amit Dam, a National coach. The activity of the academy is very satisfactory. Fourteen members of the academy participated in National championship. The academy has bagged National championship in table tennis for 16 times which includes Kasturi Chakraborty winning 8 times between 1992 and 1997, barring 1996 and most remarkable aspects is that she won the top National positions even twice in some of these years.

The structure of committee of the Academy is as follows.

- (i) Office bearers - 5, and
- (ii) all the guardians of the students are the members of the committee.

The expenditure on maintaining the academy is met through the collection of donation from guardians of the students or from the players who are serving in reputed concerns. The academy also collects 20% of prize money from the students who are awarded in different competitions including National championship.

[Source: Mr.Amit Dam
National coach
and Mr.Dipak Ghosh
Secretary
Siliguri Table Tennis Academy, Siliguri.]

5.Kanchanjangha Krirangan (Stadium)

This is the only stadium offers sport facilities in the city since it was built in late eighties.

'Tilak Maidan' an important and large playground was converted into 'Kanchanjangha Krirangan' on the 12th January 1988, having a sitting capacity for 35,000 people.

This beautiful stadium is claimed to have been made as per International standard. Many National and International football and cricket tournaments were organised here. The 7th Nehru Gold Cup, an International football tournament was also held from the 17th January to the 4th February 1988 in this stadium.

The office of the 'Sports and Youth Welfare' and the regional centre of 'Sports Authority of India' are situated here. It has a big hall with some rooms used for meetings or occasionally rented out for marriage ceremony which forms a major source of income for the State Government. The stadium is a Government property and the same is maintained by the 'Board of Stadium Management'.

[Source: Board of Stadium Management
Kanchanjangha Krirangan].

Some observations

There are altogether more than 46 organisations belonging to three different categories on the basis of their origin, such as, social, religious and cultural patronised by different communities. Those grouped under the social category, numbering about 12, form the second largest group, taking a greater interest in social services in true sense of the term than the other two groups and in spite of owing allegiance to the community they belong to, many of them offer services to all in an unbiased manner. Their activities vary widely, ranging from academic,

medical to religious. A close scrutiny may reveal interesting facts in this regard. For instance, the institutions or organisations set up by the Jains or the Marwaris usually take a greater interest in welfare services in the form of providing medical care through charitable hospitals, material help at the times of distress like flood, earthquakes, student aids with scholarships etc. All these services are made available for all ignoring caste and creed and from that point of view the institutions set up by the Marwari or Jain community seem to be very much open-hearted in their general outlook.

This is however not the case with some of the institutions set up by some other sub-communities belonging to the Hindu society- such as the Baishya Sahu Samaj, Vaishya Seva Trust, the Bhojpuri Sewa Trust etc. whose activities are difficult to define and never spread beyond the community.

In comparison to this the religious organisations or institutes forming the largest group with a total about 20 in the city, in general put a greater stress on religious activities though it is not the case for all of them. As a matter of fact different welfare activities also feature prominently in the work list of such organisations like Arya Samaj, Ramkrishna Vivekananda Ashram, Iskcon, Bharat Sevashram Sangha and Hans Bela Ashram. Each of them belong to Hindu faith with a strong religious base but it never interfares with the wide range of social services they offer in a systematic manner all through the year. Besides providing medical aid and care through hospitals established by some of

them, their support includes academic and financial help of various types offered even far beyond the city-limits.

In this regard, a highly laudable record is also held specifically by the christian missionary establishments, such as the Missionaries of Charity and Santi Sadan, offering medical facilities for patients suffering from leprosy, malnutrition etc., running orphanages, sewing classes and giving other vocational trainings.

The social/religious establishments of the Sikh community equally takes great interest in welfare services including vocational training for women.

A number of organisations have come up in recent years at the initiative of the Nepali community in the city taking particular care for the youths of the community and coming to the aid of people at times of natural distress like floods, landslides etc.

The Lions Club, the only non-community and non-religious establishment, has a wide field of activity serving all the communities and has already developed a very strong and large base in Siliguri. It maintains a large area of operation in terms of the nature of services offered without which the city-population as well as people coming from the surrounding areas would have been poorer.

As a small religious community, the Buddhists have formed an organisation to serve the interest of Buddhism and Buddhist children, establishing a school for the latter.

In sharp contrast to the activities of all these different communities taking a keen interest in the welfare of the society as a whole, the Muslim community has so far remained aloof from the general trend the reasons for which remain to be investigated further.

There are at least 14 organisations engaged in cultural activities and they fall into three separate groups like drama, sports and libraries. The city seems to take a keen interest in both drama and games, particularly, table tennis, holding a very commendable record in the latter which holds big prospect for future depending on availability of funds from public sources.

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