



NGO'S ROLE OF PRE AND POST-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD IN INDIA

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The NGOs may be termed 'voluntary' in strictly limited sense, these are however, organized by others concerned about the needy people or people of some 'distant community' or 'disadvantaged group(s)' with some perceived problems. Disadvantaged groups for us here are essentially weaker sections of the society, who are factually at the lower echelons of the society waiting to be uplifted or empowered. They need not wait in true sense, but can genuinely participate in the programmes of empowerment. In a way this is nothing but involving themselves for emancipation of themselves and in turn empowerment of their folk. However, we can cognize that, there is a fine distinction between 'People's Voluntary Action' per-se and NGOs. The NGOs are groups of some persons working 'for' the people or at best 'with' the people. These organizations are formed, founded, organized, some managed and maneuvered by the people themselves, around some urgent problems. This bracketing of the NGOs with some such concept oriented bodies is unwarranted and hence it is decided to put forward the discussion on NGOs.

It is generally perceived that, citizen's lack of ability to resist the hegemonic power play of the state paves the way for other conscience-keeping agents to combat the state monopoly. This is understood and known as 'secondary power' that falls within the ambit of the civil society. Voluntary association can be seen as manifestation of this 'secondary power' (Oommen, 1975) these voluntary entities inspire people to get organized and form an alternative force to keep the state machinery on track (Patnaik and Panda, 2005).

The term NGOs is really a catchword for enormous variety of structures, pursuing diverse strategies, of widely different sizes, aim or mission. In a study, it is observed that NGOs is a term used rather loosely to refer to any organization that is not a direct division of national government. Formal use of the term derives from its recent incarnation and has become highly significant. Dhanagare (1988) considers the size and growth of action groups (i.e. NGOs) and their efforts in uplifting the vulnerable sections as the 'striking feature of contemporary social reality in India'.

Literature on the third sector uses terms like voluntary development organization (VDOs), voluntary organizations (VOs), action groups (AGs), and people's organizations (POs) to refer to NGOs. These are also being clubbed under a broad sector- the 'third sector' the public and private sectors being the first and the second respectively. It is believed that NGOs sector is bestowed with noble feature such as less bureaucracy, sprit of voluntarism, non-profit making, and effectiveness



in reaching out the masses, ability to operate in remote and inaccessible areas, in the forefront of the hour of needy. As put by Lewis and Wallace (2003:P.X) NGOs are effective channels for donor to provide funds to low-income countries, and are also seen as vehicles for privatizing foreign assistance. NGOs are seen as strongly associated bodies with grassroots action to make less developed people powerful in their realm of action.

The importance of NGOs is also growing because of shift in focus from the traditional approach to economic growth and human development (UND-Report, 1993-2000) Recent literature in the priority area coupled with deliberate attempts by international agencies like UN, World Bank, ILO and others make it inevitable that more and more attention is turned to activities of NGOs as the real resources to aid development are also being channeled through them. (Tandaro, 1997).

The attempts to roll back frontier of State and the general tendencies leading to privatization and globalization are creating serious poverty gaps that cannot be filled by other types of organizations and further contributing to enhancement of the role of NGOs in the process and development and empowerment of underprivileged and weaker sections. (Edwards. and Hulme. 1992) The importance of NGOs in area concerning the lives of communities and groups most affected has increased.

The preceding paragraphs clearly brought out the meaning, importance of the NGOs and their general and specific role in the contextual situation for needy, underprivileged and weaker sections. These are evidences of the role of NGOs, which made efforts by making the people to participate themselves and ultimately empower. It is worthy to recollect and record the yeomen services made by different organizations at deferent periods, which promote us to make a historical sketch of the endeavor of NGOs from times memorable. NGOs in India have a long historical legacy, as Voluntary/Non-Governmental organizational work has been an integral part of human service.

Pre – Independence period

Responsibility of society towards individuals in distress and groups in need was shared adequately by the community and the rulers. In the Arthashastra there is mention about the existence of workshops for destitute persons. The Hindu religion laid down emphasis on charity, and religious institution were the centers of social service on a large scale. Philanthropic activity was the part of the religious activity with humanity. During the ancient and medieval times Non-Governmental action carried out freely in the fields of Education, Medicine, cultural promotion and even succour in crises like droughts, floods, epidemics, etc. Though humanitarian actions, philanthropy was wide spread they could not militate the social inequities of the rigid caste system.



The dawn of the nineteenth century witnessed enormous Non-Governmental activity, which promoted humanitarian philanthropic activity. Rajaram Mohan Roy, Eshwarachandra Vidyasagar, Swami Vivekananda, Mahathama Phule, Maharshi Karve, are some of the important personalities who brought social change in India, through voluntary agencies. Brahma Samaj established by Rajaram Mohan Roy in 1828 opposed the belief of orthodox Hindus and opposed Child marriages and propagated widow remarriage. It also vehemently fought against the practice of Sati and it was banned in 1925. Esvara Chandra Vidyasagar also supported widow remarriages and succeeded in bringing Hindu widow remarriage Act in 1856, He had also worked for the spread of education among girls. Ultimately Hindu Balika Vidyalaya was started in Calcutta in 1849. Swami Dayananda Saraswathi founded Arya Samaj in Bombay in 1875, which fought against idol worship and caste discrimination which again ultimately helped for the spread of education and cause of depressed classes. Mahathma Phule fought against many hurdles for the removal of the untouchability and welfare of sudras and ati-sudras. He founded Satya Sodhak Samaj in 1873. Savitribai followed the footsteps of her husband Mahatma Phule, and started a school for the girls and women, which is first of its kind in the world meant for female education. Maharshi Karve started a home for the widows at Pune in 1886. He also started a number of primary schools, and encouraged education for women. Swamy Vivekananda made contributions to the making of modern India by propagating the ideals of service. He had boundless compassion for the down trodden for the suffering and gave a new interpretation to the idea of service as Manava Seve Madhava Seva and this motto was propagated enormously. He preached that service to the daridranarayana (poorest of the poor) is highest form of religion.

A part from religious bodies a number of Non-religious organizations, took cause of social welfare in the early decades of twentieth century. Besides relief and rehabilitation activities these organizations were engaged in the field of education, health and welfare activities. The birth of servants of Indian Society (1905) laid the foundation of secular voluntary action in India. A few women's organizations like the Women Indian Association (1926). The All India Women's Conference (1927) and the National Council of Indian Women (1927) were established. The spirit of 'self-help and help others' motto was promoted during the period of national movement. Village self sufficiency promoted by Mahatma Gandhi, give a fillip to the voluntary action and organization. Gandhi also initiated constructive programmes for securing justice for the under-privileged sections of the society, setup Harjana Sevak Sangha in 1932.

It is worth noting that voluntary organizations have proliferated and worked actively during the British regime. The first known voluntary organizations according to the records maintained the Nation archives of India were friends in need society in Madras. The enactment of societies Registration Act of (1860) has a land mark in the history of Voluntary organization in India. The Christian missionaries have played a significant role in the growth of voluntary organizations



in India. Some of the educational and medical institutions particularly in the south were started by foreign and Indian Christian missionaries, who demonstrated a good deal of commitment to the causes they were striving to serve. Besides, other voluntary organizations in the field of education, health, welfare of the destitute, handicapped, chronically ill, etc, came into being and started working in the community. Although, every caste had its own mechanism of funding and organizing welfare programmes, yet the Muslim - British Period history does not seem to have sufficient record of voluntary action.

Post Independence period

The post independence period recorded a phenomenal growth in the number of voluntary agencies, while changing the approach and structure. The issues covered by the voluntary/organizations during this period were also of different type even the parties involved in NGOs sector were also different after independence India was declared to be a welfare state.

The planners recognized the importance of the role NGOs in first five-year plan (1952) itself. The government took into account the services rendered by voluntary/ Non-Governmental organizations and gave maximum co-operation to strengthen their activities. An autonomous body Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB) was setup especially to serve in the field of women and Child welfare. The setting up of CSWB (1953) proved to be a milestone in the history of NGOs. One of CSWB's main aims was to provide funds to NGOs in order to develop and strengthen them. Besides up to 1960, it also, gave grant-in-aid to setup new NGOs. As a result, there was a rapid increase in number of NGOs during 1950s. The number this rose by 117 percent during 1953-61 (Lalitha and Khol, 1982) Further a study of the growth of NGOs reveals that among 6000 organizations added by the Board, as many as 3000 were commenced after the Board was setup. In the succeeding plan, the government put more inputs into NGOs sector.

The Sixth five-year plan (1980) admitted that the success stories in the field of voluntary action are many and it stated that considering the vast pool of motivated individuals available in the country what has fructified so far by way of organizational effort is not even a fraction of the potential, important objective of the plan was to meaningfully tap this potential. (Sixth five year plan, 1980 - 85.) Later during 1983 Council for the Advancement of Rural Technology (CART) was setup and later on it was upgraded in to Council for Advancement of People's Action and Rural Technology (CAPART) in 1986, to coordinate and catalyze the development. It was realized that people's initiative and participation must become the key elements of the whole process of development and hence focus of attention was on developing multiple institutional options for improving the delivery system by using the vast potential of the voluntary sector. (Eighth five-year plan, 1992-97). While the government can create a climate conducive to such organizations, the government by itself cannot organize people and hence the role of NGOs becomes inevitable. During the past several years NGOs have left an indelible mark with



coverage and conviction, with dedication and perseverance and with commitment to the welfare and development of needy in general and weaker sections in particular. We can enumerate scores of success stories, where majority of them have concentrated in providing Livelihood, Employment and Income Generation (LEIG) activities, Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA), Ananda Niketan Ashram in Gujarat, Social Work and Research Center (SWRC), Comprehensive Rural Operation Society (CROSS) etc in Andhra Pradesh, are some of the living examples of successive service organizations, who have done commendable action for upliftment of poor in their respective areas and fields.

We can emphatically note that last two decades have been witness to tremendous growth of NGOs, both National and International. A rough estimate reveals that more than 1.2 million (12 lakhs) NGOs exist in India. According to Ministry of Home Affairs, in 1985-86 there were only 700 voluntary organizations under Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) account, which have increased more than threefold to 22924 in 2001. Besides there is also phenomenal increase of voluntary / Non-governmental social formation which are non-registered and also very active at local level. Recent trend reveals that, yet umpteen numbers of NGOs are mushrooming into the main stream with their life, variety. However if an attempt is made to comprehend the nature and functions of the NGOs, it can be easily understood that majority of the NGOs are carrying their activities in the fields of development and growth and personal related aspects, towards beneficiary participation and overall aspects of empowerment of weaker sections in terms of health, nutrition, education, income generation, participation in decision making etc.

NGOs vary in numerous ways including their (1) Composition (2) Size (3) Mission or Purpose (4) Sources of Funding (5) Focus on specific arena (6) Providing innovative models in technology, research methods or institutional arrangements (7) Manner of Day-to-day functioning including decision making.

It is observed that the NGOs, forms from small-scale single-village ones to large multi leveled national and international level. Now a day many are involved in trying to provide loan schemes for self-employment, medical services, funding for smaller NGOs, etc. However there are these are ways of looking at NGOs Organizations and their function. These include

- (1) their relationship with various other social movements,
 - (a) The Women's movement
 - (b) Movements against oppression of race, caste etc.
 - (c) Environment movements against tree felling, building dams (Chipko, Narmada Bachavo etc) and other such movements.
- (2) The effect on poor villagers due to structural adjustment policy of the waste and the drive towards market oriented economic systems and the NGOs responds to these policies.



NGOs have been and can be proactive instead reactive to National and international policy and they can focus devise survival needs. There is not always a clear dividing line between types of NGOs, and some do more than one thing. The net effect of activities of NGOs might be to strengthen the status also. Instead some traditional NGOs have seen this as their main function, i.e. making some improvements which at the same time not altering power relations.

Sometimes an NGO that was only concerned with economic issues suddenly finds its members talking about social action. Some NGOs that were only focusing on advocacy find themselves having to help members get micro credit loans or help establish micro-enterprise for steady development; NGOs also try to provide employment for numerous people.

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