Chapter-V

SOCIO-POLITICAL FACTORS INFLUENCING THE RISE OF NGOs IN WEST BENGAL

In the context of social, economic and political crisis, NGOs have always been appearing as change agents since British regime. When colonial exploitation was on the peak and imperialism was the policy for development, welfare activities for impecunious & stymied people were embarked on by non-profit organizations that were extraneous of the British Government. During last hundred years, these non-profit agencies have increased by leaps and bounds and spread out in the form of social organizations, cultural organizations, sports organizations and so on. They are formed either as development agents of the community or as a result of specialized technical knowledge or induced by the government. In the post independence era, freedom fighters, philanthropists, trained social workers, sociologists, anthropologists, development experts, planners, architects, etc. have contributed to promote NGOs (Kapoor et. al, 1997).

In fact, unique socio-political forces of the state influence rise of NGOs (Sarkar, 1998):

The socio-political forces of West Bengal are very unique. It is proved by the Renaissance of the Nineteenth Century, annals of series of movements of the Twentieth Century, more than 25 years rule of the Left Front Government and so on. These conspicuous socio-political traits of West Bengal, as usual, have caused NGO’s emergence. Therefore, the
present chapter makes an effort to understand how the socio-political factors are influencing the rise of NGOs in West Bengal.

It is indeed impossible to spell the date of inception of NGO in West Bengal, but the initiatives pertaining to NGO development have been reinforced in Bengal in the wake of freedom. Hence, attention is paid in this chapter to understand the socio political factors influencing the rise of NGOs after independence. The chapter, in the last part, also examines whether these factors have any contribution in case of health care.

Socio-Political Factors Influencing The Rise Of NGOs In West Bengal After Independence

There are several diverse socio-political factors. These are as follows:

1. The Christian Missionaries:

   In the last quarter of Eighteenth Century, the Serampore of West Bengal was the head quarters of the Missionaries delegated from the Europe, for the purpose of converting the natives of Hindustan to the Christian religion (Basu, 1985). Their main target was fulfilled for first time in the year of 1800, when a Bengali carpenter of the Serampore named Krishna Paul became Christian. Till 1817, Missionaries motivated almost 700 people in and around Serampore and converted them into Christian. Along with the conversion of religion, they started charitable work and fight against social evils. In different parts of Bengal, they founded orphanages, opened hospitals, started schools, literacy centres, vocational training institutes, etc. (Basu, 1985). In fact, that was the
starting of voluntary action on the part of the Missionaries in Bengal. In 1937, number of hospitals and dispensaries led by Missionaries were respectively twelve and fifteen in Bengal. In 1947, these numbers came down to nine and six. A major reason for closing down hospitals and dispensaries could be due to the financial crunch faced by these institutions because of cutbacks in funding from foreign churches. There may have also been problems in administration and availability of manpower, especially after the Foreign Missionaries handed over institutions to Indian Missionaries (Baru, 1999). However, after independence, many Christian Missionaries have promoted Voluntary Organizations to serve the vulnerable people by means of improvement in education, health care, nutrition, income generation, etc. in urban slums, remote villages and hill areas. For instance, Cathedral Relief Service (1974), Palli Unnayan Samiti Baruipur (1978), St. Joseph’s Rehabilitation Centre & Relief Services (1985), etc. They receive financial support from the foreign churches.

2. Movement Against Casteism:

In West Bengal, movement against Casteism gives very less evidence in promoting NGOs but it is an important landmark and should not be ignored in this regard. After independence, role of this movement to form caste organizations in Bengal cannot be discussed in isolation. It has a close nexus with the pre independence era and movement of other parts of the country.

From 1870s, many organized societies initiated caste movement in different regions of India. For instance, Satya Shodhak Samaj (1873) in
Maharastra and Arya Samaj (1875) in Northern India started raising voice against the oppressions of lower castes. The Non-Brahmin movement in southern provinces also became prominent. The Conversion of Mahars, a low caste in Maharastra, into Buddhism under the leadership of Ambedkar in the 1940s was another way of addressing the caste oppression (PRIA, 1999).

Before independence, all India trend of this movement led to form a couple of NGOs in West Bengal to fight against untouchability and caste discrimination. Some of them were Humanity Association (1924), Harijan Sevak Sangh-Bengal (1932), Harijan Kalyan Sangha (1946), etc. After independence, those organizations and some more newly emerged societies like West Bengal SC/ST council (1970), Harijan Nav Jubak League (1970), Vivekananda Adivasi Kalyan Samity (1971), Adarsha Harijan Jubak Sangha (1973), etc. continued harijan Welfare. In West Bengal, these organizations are of two types due to ideological difference i.e. Gandhian group & non Gandhian group. Gandhian group never followed inter-caste marriage or taking food with higher caste people but non Gandhian group did the same. After 1947, Bengal made various landmarks in history. Tebhaga movement, Naxalite Movement, Land Reform Movement of Left Front Government, etc. were the evidences. Poor, exploited and lower caste people were always the centre of attention in every movement. Again, the present Government is supported by these working class people & has been continuing for more than 25 years. Hence, Casteism problem in West Bengal is not as visible as in other parts.
of the country. Thus, number of NGOs, emerged after independence to fight against casteism, are very less in West Bengal.

3. Scouts and Guides Movement:

The term ‘Scouts’ in the Military is used for the party of soldiers who go into the enemy territory to find out antagonists whereabouts and report back to their own army officers for attack or defense. Robert Stephenson Smyth Baden Powell used the term ‘Scouts’ for boys who could be given training in small groups under responsible leaders for games, journeys and competitions. He applied the word ‘Guides’ for girls to attempt the same objective. In fact, Baden Powell was the father of Scouts and Guides Movement which was introduced in 1907. Main purpose was to counteract, if possible, the physical, moral and spiritual degradation of boys as well as girls and to train them to be more efficient and characterful citizens. The movement had National, International and Universal Character. It was National as it worked through National Organization; it was International as it recognized the National Barrier in the comradeship of the Scouts & Guides; it was Universal as it insisted upon Universal fraternity between all Scouts & Guides of every Nation, Class or Creed. Baden Powell rightly pointed out that there was no enough scope for boys & girls training and therefore focus should be given on character building & general intelligence, skill of handicraft, services for others and for the state physical development and health knowledge, etc. (Singh, 1993).

In the above paragraph we have tried to understand the Scouts and Guides Movement. We do not know anything about Baden Powell. In fact,
he was born in 22\textsuperscript{nd} February 1857 in London. From the paternal side, he was the descendent of a Minister on the one head and an adventurous as well as loyal colonist of the world on the other. From the maternal side he belonged to the mobile and loyal men of the British Navy and the North American Army. He lost father at the age of three years. His eldest brother Warrington became the leader of the Patrol of four brothers. All the brothers used to go for hiking, camping, tramping, canoeing and sailing round the coast of Great Britain and even across the North Sea to Norway. He was an all rounder but not an outstanding sportsman. Though he was not good in mathematics or French or Greek, he was an enthusiastic. He was learner of ‘How to do things’. In 1876, he joined in Army and at the age of 26 became a captain by his hard work. In the army Polo Horseback, Pig sticking, Shooting, Scouting and Acting in the Theatricals were his favourite hobbies. He initiated Scouts and Guides movement in 1907 in England. January 8, 1941 was his last day on the earth (Singh, 1993).

Now we need to find out the nature and extent of Scouts and Guides Movement in West Bengal, which directly as well as indirectly led to the formation of NGOs. The first scouting camp (i.e. The First Gilwell Wood Badge Course) of India was held in Calcutta at Tolly Gunj from 3\textsuperscript{rd} to 12\textsuperscript{th} February 1922. Sir Alfred Pickford, Dy. Camp Chief acted as the Scoutmaster and Mr. I.S. Wilson, Dy. Camp Chief as Asstt. Scoutmaster. The second scouting camp was also held again at Tolly Gunj, Calcutta, from 19\textsuperscript{th} to 30\textsuperscript{th} January 1923 by J.S. Wilson as Scoutmaster. The Bharat Scouts & Guides - West Bengal, was established in 1924 to organize many camps to train the youth. On November 7, 1950 the Bharat Scouts
and Guides formed its headquarters at Delhi. Thereafter, activities of the Bharat Scouts and Guides, West Bengal have increased. It extended programmes to almost all the districts of West Bengal. It inspired young people to be involved in relief work during natural calamities; social service projects like patient’s libraries in hospitals; voluntary service on various occasions like free eye-operation camps, flag days for several humanitarian causes, Red Cross hospital sweeping, crowd control in religions gatherings; Scouting and Guiding in refugee homes, tea gardens, slums and industrial area, etc (Mishra, 1982). These sort of activities influenced the youth to form club related organizations in their own locality with a purpose of service to humankind.

4. LIONS Movement:

'The International Association of Lions Clubs' began on June 7, 1917 as the dream of Chicago insurance man Melvin Jones. Its slogan was 'Liberty, Intelligence, Our Nation’s Safety (LIONS)." Various business and professional leaders participated in this association to promote civic life, education, health and international amity. Association became “International” with the formation of the Windsor, Ontario and Canada Lions Club in 1920. Clubs were later organized in China, Mexico, and Cuba. At present, there are 187 countries with the membership of 1.5 million people under this association. Helen Keller, the great international crusader against Blindness, attended two International Lions Conventions and appealed to the association to work for 'Sight Conservation'. From that period, Lions Clubs International is involved in Blindness Control
Programme. ‘Lions Sight First Programme’ was introduced at the ‘1990 International Convention’.

This LIONS movement has influenced the NGO sector of West Bengal. Especially after eighty’s decade, the well-known business families like Agarwal, Khaitan, Surana, Mehta, Jain, Jaiswal, etc were interested by the message of Lions Clubs International and promoted a good number of NGOs. Right at this moment, there are over 120 Lions Clubs who are working in different corners of West Bengal. More than 80 of these clubs are situated in the Calcutta since promoters live there. Lions Clubs of West Bengal run programmes like free homoeopathic dispensaries, free health check up camp at school, free eye operation camps, adult literacy centre, vocational training centre, civic welfare (eg-tube well sunk), relief work during flood, etc. Though a wide range of activities are covered by them, majority of these clubs mainly pay attention towards prevention and control of blindness at the community level with active participation of the masses. In West Bengal, Lions Clubs have become more relevant and significant to achieve the goal of VISION BY 2010 AD, which will enable the community to lead a socially and economically productive life. They conduct eye screening camps at the community to find out defective eyes and thereafter, if operation is required, patients are referred either to the own eye hospital or treated at the community level having organized eye operation camp. These clubs come across the problems like cataract, refractive errors, aphakic blindness, glaucoma, corneal opacity and trachoma as the major causes of Blindness (Choudhury, 2000). Cataract contributes more towards eye problems and hence awareness camps are
initiated by Lions Clubs in schools as well as in community level as preventive measures. Having realized these gigantic roles and appreciation of the common people, numbers of Lions Clubs are increasing in West Bengal.

5. **Gandhian Movement:**

M.K.Gandhi was a revolutionist and reformist in Indian society. His ideas pertaining to reconstruction of society were manifested through social struggle. His movement, during **1920s & 1930s**, aimed at the welfare of all human beings and the creation of a stateless and classless society by means of ‘Swaraj’ and ‘Sarvodaya’. In this regard, Gandhi initiated various programmers like Khadi & Village Industries, abolition of untouchability, village sanitation, basic education, tribal & labour welfare, women welfare, etc. The movement wanted to make village communities self-reliant, self-sufficient and free so that they would stand up for their own rights. Gandhiji made his movement strong with the formation of ‘Shanti Senas’ (Peace Brigades) in cities and towns to promote communal harmony in 1938. The individuals, who had interest, joined these groups as volunteers. It was the most systematic attempt towards development of moral and spiritual values among the people (Dayal, 1986). Another important aspect i.e. Bhoomdan, initiated by Vinoba Bhave in 1951, reinforced this Gandhian Movement after Gandhiji’s death. The object of Bhoomdan was to effect a voluntary transformation in the distribution of land in rural India according to the principle of equality (Radhakrishna, 1987). It used neither ‘force’ nor ‘blackmail’, but simple logic to share with one another in order to coexist.
The above-mentioned nature of Movement promoted NGO sector in Bengal. ‘West Bengal Sarvodaya Mondal’ and ‘Gandhi Seva Sangha’ were established in Kolkata in 1948 and 1951 respectively in order to bring change in society as per Gandhiji’s dream. Gandhi Vichar Parishad (GVP) was formed in Bankura District, 175 K.M. from Calcutta, in the year 1956, when Vinoba Bhave visited the place to propagate Gandhiji’s message. Late Prof. Sudarshan Singh, Shri D.N. Banerjee (a Judiciary Officer), Prof. S.N. Chakraborty, Prof. Rathindra Mohan Choudhury, Shri Sambhunath Chakraborty (Freedom Fighter) contributed to run GVP at the preliminary stage. Initially, they organized seminars, conferences and meetings to spread the social, economic and political ideas of Mahatma Gandhi. After 1968, having understood the concept of Gram Swaraj of Gandhiji, GVP formed village level committees and with their help community activities were initiated to make the villagers self-reliant. During the violent days of Naxalite movement in Bengal, GVP engaged in mobilizing peace force. Like GVP, innumerable NGOs have been developed in West Bengal with a view to serve the community as a result of Gandhian movement specially in the 1960s and 1970s. Some of the popular organizations among them are Gandhi peace Foundation (1960), Sarvodaya Karm Mandir (1961), Sarvodaya Siksha Niketan (1961), Gandhi Memorial Committee (1971), etc. Till the end of 1970s, in West Bengal, Gandhian organizations more or less would initiate agriculture and animal husbandry, irrigation, adult education, extension service, appropriate technology, removal of untouchability, sanitation, medical care, skill formation and relief oriented activities. Since 1980s, when state
policies were made favourable to non-profit sector, environmental NGOs have been emerging in West Bengal with Gandhian philosophy. They use the concept of non-violent action to control depletion of natural resources. Thus, Gandhiji’s idea is still active in developing new NGOs in West Bengal.

6. Women’s Movement:

This movement was initiated formally in 1920s when the All India Women’s Congress (AIWC) came into existence, the first women’s organization at the national level, to fight for status and rights of women as well as to extend support for freedom movement (Karat, 1997). Its formation coincided with Mahatma Gandhi’s call to the nation. Gandhiji too emphasized on women’s empowerment. After independence, the failure of the state to eradicate gender inequalities gave impetus to this movement. Self Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) – a trade union of women vendors, established in 1972, raised voice for first time in independent India to address issues like gender discrimination at the work place, unequal wages and the domestic labour (PRIA, 1999). The first report on Status of Indian Women was produced by Government in 1975 on the occasion of International Year of Women. This report too helped the Indian women’s movement to seek support from the International Women’s Movement. The social oppression of women in the form of dowry, rape and bride burning have galvanized the women’s movement again in the late 1970s and early 1980s (PRIA, 1999). In fact, after 1947, women’s multiple struggles – in national development, in polities, in their
own families and lives – have shaped the Indian Women’s Movement (Karat, 1997).

In West Bengal, root of this movement is older than the all India scenario. Raja Ram Mohan Roy fought for abolition of child marriage, removal of sati practice, widow remarriage and women education through ‘Brahmo Samaj’ in 1828 (Lalitha, 1975) Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar started campaign in favour of widow remarriage & women education in 1850s. Keshab Chandra Sen too advocated for better women status. In fact, R.R. Roy, Vidyasagar, K.C. Sen played the role of advocacy and active involvement of the women was very limited. During 1905 to 1946, as a result of women’s movement at the national level, women’s movement in West Bengal became very strong with women’s active participation. This situation led to the formation of huge numbers of NGOs in Bengal in order to uplift the social & economic status of women. Some of these organizations are West Bengal Council for Women (1919), Saroj Nalini Dutta Memorial Association (1925), Mahila Silpo Vidyalaya (1940), Umasashi Nari Silpo Siksha Mandir (1940), Serampore Mahila Silpasram (1942), Nari Seva Sangha (1944), Vivekananda Nari Karma Mandir (1945), Sandhani Mahila Samity (1945), etc. In the preceding paragraph, it is mentioned that women’s movement intensified at the national level in 1970s and 1980s as a result of state inability, to maintain gender equality and to control domestic violence. The same flow of the nation wide women’s struggle did affect the Bengal. Various bourgeois liberals, left women, autonomous groups as well as NGOs in West Bengal became interested to address women issues at that time. Therefore, after

7. Tebhaga Movement:

The Tebhaga movement (1946 - 47 & 1948 - 49) was a major peasant upheaval in Bengal in the 20th century. The main objective of this movement was to establish the rights of the Borgadars on two thirds of the total agricultural produce (Bandyopadhyay 2001). In the villages of North Bengal the Borgadars were known as Adhiyars. Small landowners used to live in the villages, but the big Jotedars lived in towns and were involved in money – lending as well as other commercial activities. These urban Jotedars were totally different from the rural Adhiyars. Most of the lands in the rural areas were under the direct control of the urban Jotedars and the Adhiyars were sharecroppers who cultivated these lands. The entire crop cultivated by the Adhiyars used to be taken away by the Jotedars. The Adhiyars received a small share of the yield, most of which had to be again handed over to the landlord for the payment of interest on the loans.
they had taken in the kind during the pre-harvesting season. The land owners/Jotedars always exploited the helplessness of Adhiyars. Even the bodyguards of Jotedars used to sexually exploit the womenfolk of Adhiyar families. The Rajbanshi Adhiyars tried to set themselves free from such type of exploitation of the Jotedars by organizing the Tebhaga movement. Small farmers, landless labourers, petty artisans, factory workers and the urban middle class extended their support in order to reinforce this movement. In fact, this was one of the few struggles in the land of West Bengal where different oppressed people’s voices can be heard.

This movement led to form many voluntary groups, in the late 1940s, as Kisan Sabha, Depressed Classes League, Small & Marginal Farmers Club, etc. in Jalpaiguri, Malda, Midnapore, 24 Parganas and Mymensingh districts. These groups could be treated as NGOs. Their common slogans were “Tebhaga Chai” (We want two thirds share) and “Nij Khamare Dhan Tolo” (stock the paddy on your own threshing floor and not, as earlier, at the joteder’s house). These organizations fought for: no eviction, two thirds share, right to stock harvested crop in the Bargadar’s farmyard, and reduction in the exorbitant interest rates on advance and elimination of all illegal exactions. But these organizations could not run the movement in the same way they dreamt off. It was derailed not because of people’s failure but because of Communist Party’s strategic retreat or hobnobbing with Congress / Muslim League. Later on, these farmers & depressed classes organizations added fuel during Naxalite Movement and Operation Barga (which was a showpiece land-reform package of the Left Front Government of West Bengal).
8. Freedom Fighters:

In West Bengal, several freedom fighters have promoted many NGOs during 1950s, 1960s & 1970s in order to combat sufferings of the poor people. They were involved in freedom movement to make the Indian people free from Britishers control and suffered imprisonment for a long period. After independence, when it was impossible for the country to address the wide range of social problems, having considered the woeful condition in remote villages (i.e. poverty, illiteracy, ill health, pressure of refugees from East Pakistan, etc.), these freedom fighters promoted social organization. Their social, humanitarian and philanthropic ideas helped to organize people and to extend services at the community level. Few examples can be cited in this regard. Late Sachindra Lal Kargupta promoted Gram Seva Sangha (1949); Sri Sambhunath Chakraborty helped to promote Gandhi Vichar Parishad (1956); Late Pannalal Dasgupta helped to promote Tagore Society for Rural Development (1969), Institute for Motivating Self-Employment (1973), Rural Development Consortium (1974), Kirtipur Agradut Samiti (1976), etc.

9. Naxalite Movement:

In the late 1960s, social oppression was more in West Bengal and its political atmosphere had a burning phase. About 60 percent of the rural households were either landless or owned less than 2.5 acres each. Since the big peasants manipulated the laws to hoard the food grains and sell them at a higher price, the food shortage aggravated malnutrition and starvation among the rural poor. The poor peasants were least protected by
the laws and subjected to pay exorbitant rent in the form of crops produced to the big landlords. The agricultural labourer’s wages were very low and insufficient. As a result, people used to borrow money from the village moneylenders at a high interest rate in the lean season when they failed to find work elsewhere. The expected non-payment led many of the poor people to work as bonded labourers for the rest of their lives.

The Naxalite movement sprang up first in West Bengal to address the above-mentioned social issues pertaining to poor peasantry. It began in a small village named Naxalbari in the Darjeeling and quickly spread to 24 Parganas, Midnapore as well as Birbhum districts of West Bengal. The movement was led primarily by the youths who wanted to make an exploitation free, classless society, by means of violent action. Student’s hostels and university campuses were the breeding centers of Naxals. There were full time cadres among the students and they used to go to spread Naxal ideology in rural areas during holidays. Police attack at hostels, clubs and residences during night time to arrest young stars was a common phenomenon. Most of the parents and housewives of the activists would be under great tension and many of them had fate to carry loving one’s dead body from the police station (Sengupta 1997). The ideological orientation of the Naxalite movement mounted a vociferous attack against the state and problematised the very basis of relationship between the democratic state and its citizenry. Since the movement took a more militant turn, it was forcefully suppressed by the state (PRIA, 1999).

The State Government banned the Naxalite movement and issued order to arrest leaders who were directly involved in violent action.
Activists absconded in the remotest rural areas of West Bengal where police would not reach. Few of them left the state and went to other Bengali speaking areas like Silchar (Assam) and Agartala (Tripura); few reached Bihar, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala to add extra fuel in the on going movement of those areas. Activists did hide in big cities like Delhi, Bombay, Madras, etc. to earn their livelihood. Since Naxals had an ethical orientation and they developed a strong resentment against government rules & government services, these activists preferred to find jobs in the NGO sector. Many of the Naxal leaders who escaped in rural areas of West Bengal, promoted people's organizations (NGOs) with a dream to rebuild the society. The promoters of the organizations did not disclose their identity and initiated activities like income generation training, health care unit, farmers co-operative, adult and non-formal education, interest free loan, etc. At the same time, occasionally those organizations provided leadership to intensive mass movements, mass mobilizations, meetings, processions, etc. against the social, political and economic oppressions in rural areas (Institute for Motivating Self-Employment, 1981).

10. Devastating flood:

West Bengal covers a part of India in the east stretching from the Himalayas in the north to the Bay of Bengal in the south. Many big rivers like Ganga, Bhagirathi, Mayurakshi, Damodar, Ajoy, Tista, Torsa, etc. flow through it. Again, the Bhagirathi, called Hoogly in its lower reaches and is itself a branch of the Ganga, provides Kolkata its link with the sea (Manorama Year Book, 1999). Therefore, flood is not an exceptional issue here. After independence, devastating floods have occurred time to time in
West Bengal. **1959, 1978 & 1980** are the years when major floods have occurred. The flood situation, which causes havoc and demands relief, directly or indirectly led to the forming of many NGOs. There are basically four distinct ways, as we find in West Bengal, who are responsible for the promotion of NGOs during post flood work.

Firstly, a group of like-minded enthusiastic people congregate to mitigate the sufferings of the flood victims. They start emergency relief work removing the people to the safe place; distributing medicine, food, halogen tablet, cloth & blanket, polythene paper, cooking utensils, etc.; making necessary arrangement to reduce the further loss of lives and properties. Relief giving necessitates close contact with local panchayats, block development offices, outside voluntary as well as religious organization, etc. to mobilize external resources. To expedite this process of post flood activities in a sustainable manner and to bring a long lasting socio-economic change in the flood affected villages, sometimes these enthusiastic people get interested to form NGOs. For instance, ‘Village Welfare Society’ situated at Kolkata.

Secondly, sometimes workers, on behalf of other NGO, come to the flood affected area and make relief-giving camps on an emergency basis. This camp focuses on medical care and runs mobile health care unit. After three to six months, when mother organization would like to terminate the camp, local people oppose it and demand their service continuously. Then, with the on going medical care Programme, mother NGO initiates economic programs side by side in the flood affected villages. Having understood the dedication and gigantic role of this NGO, local people ask
for its permanent existence. As people donate land, new branch of the mother NGO is set up. After a couple of years, when new branch auspicates multifarious programmes, separate legal identity is made to manage its whole affairs. Thus, a new NGO emerges. For instance, CINI Moyna Rural Health Development Centre situated at Midnapore.

Thirdly, during flood, when external resources in the form of cash and kind reach to the local NGO, staff members may follow unfair means at the time of relief distribution. Workers who are honest, dedicated and have good ideological orientation cannot tolerate such type of malpractices. They feel embarrassed and compel to leave the organization. However, zeal of social work persists among them and thus they promote new NGO to cherish their dream. Ashurali Vivekanada Smriti Sangha situated at south 24 parganas district is an example of his kind of NGO.

Fourth, flood brings many outsiders like religious workers, foreigners, NGO workers, government employees, etc. to the affected area for relief work. Unique nature of dedication and enthusiasm for voluntary service, which are expressed through their activities, bring drastic change to the local people’s mind. Local people understand the importance of voluntary work and feel to promote NGO. An example can be cited in this regard. During the flood of 1978, Brother Gaston Dayanand (from Switzerland) came to Howrah district for relief work. He was moving by boat to rescue people as well as to distribute food, water, cloth and medicine. Mr. M.A. Wohab was impressed by his work and met him to know the mechanisms of charitable work under the banner of an
organization. Later on, he (M.A. Wohab) promoted an NGO i.e. Southern Health Improvement Samity (SHIS).

11. Environmental Movement:

Conflicts over land, water and forests are not new in India. The previous contentions over land would revolve around the question of inequalities germane to productive relations. The contemporary environmental movement does not discard these questions but address injustices with regard to development, ecological degradation and survival of nature dependent people (PRIA, 1999). Guha (1994) says: “In contemporary India, conflicts over nature, .... raise important questions about distributive justice and economic efficiency.” This environmental movement pays attention to conflicts arising from a wider range of issues such as commercial use of forests, mechanized fishing, loss of livelihood of poor people, displacement caused by dams, mines, industries, etc. The movement also criticizes the top down, centralized and bureaucratic developmental planning that leads to environmental loss. The Chipko Movement (in UP) and Narmoda Bachao Andolan (involving the states of MP, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Rajasthan) are two well-known movements those stand out the poor people’s voice and occupy some important portion in the entire spectrum of environmental movement in India.

In West Bengal, environmental movement raises a gamut of interrelated questions on economy, ecology, society and politics. This movement has gained momentum since 1980s as a result of emergence of the new definition of development, i.e. Sustainable Development, at the international level. ‘Sustainable Development’ emphasizes that
development should be environmentally non-degrading, preferable enriching, economically viable, technologically appropriate, equitable and culturally acceptable (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). Since 1980s, several NGOs have been promoted in West Bengal only to reinforce the environmental movement. Environmental education through camp, seminars and workshops; controlling deforestation; afforestation; promoting biogas; sustainable food preservation; sustainable agriculture; pollution control; save the wetlands; wildlife conservation; protecting river embankment in the Gangative islands; etc. are the concern for these NGOs. Friends of the Trees Calcutta (1980), Alipurduar Nature Club (1981), Conservation of Nature and Ecology Cell (1986), Punisole Environment and Rural Development Samity (1997), Save the Environment, etc. can be cited as examples of environmental NGOs.

12. Concern to Reduce Poverty Through Economic Upliftment:

The systematic treatment of India as a poor country is more than a century old. The leading personalities such as Dadabhai Naoroji, R.C. Dutt, M.G. Ranade, G. Subramania Iyer, G. K. Gokhale and Gandhiji pointed out that poverty in India was a result of British exploitation through trade and transfer (Kurien, 1987). Therefore, after independence, poverty alleviation has been an important issue before the nation. Governments after governments and five year plans after plans have been promising to alleviate poverty, but the target date for removal of poverty has been shifting and one does not know how many more years would be needed for removing poverty altogether (Prasad, 2000). Few studies
(Ravallion & Dall, 1996; Sen, 1996) on the long term trends of poverty in India indicate that the period from 1970 to 1990 is characterized by a reduction of both urban and rural poverty, since National HI* falls from 53% to 37%. The incidence of poverty has declined from 54.9% in 1973-74 to 36% in 1993-94 (Sivasubramanian, 1999). In fact, reduction in poverty during 1970s and 1980s was the result of activities of the state in various forms (Franco, 1999). One of these activities was to give recognition and importance to the NGOs. They would work at the grassroots level and impart income generation training to the poor, treat credit as a resource to fight poverty (Thakur, 1995) and extend this facility, emphasize empowerment of the poor women and thereby form self-help groups, etc.

The same policy of the Government of India, i.e. preferring NGOs for poverty reduction, has also been observed in West Bengal. Therefore, during 1980s in West Bengal, while existing NGOs were taking up anti-poverty programmes, uncounted new NGOs have emerged only with a view to ameliorate the economic conditions of the poor by means of various programmes such as income generation training, micro credit, self-help group formation, etc. Agradut Pally Unnayan Samity (1984), Barabari Srikrishna Seva Sangha (1987), etc. are the examples of this kind of NGOs.

*HI: HI refers to Head Count Ratio or Index. It is defined as the percentage of population living in households with average or mean consumption expenditure below a specified level.
13. **Youth Force:**

After independence, in West Bengal, various interests of youths and ideologies of renowned religious leaders, social reformers as well as freedom fighters time to time have brought the youngsters together, organized themselves and led to form many Clubs or NGOs with a view to serve the poor, destitute and exploited community people. These common causes for emergence of youth organizations can be discussed in details.

*Youth's interests:* At the tender age, people get interested towards sports, games, gymnastic, cultural activities, etc. Very often, they meet to exercise body building, football, cricket, Kabadi and so on; to organize various tournaments; and to celebrate some puja (Kali, Saraswati, etc.), Rabindra Jayanti (Rabindranath Tagore’s birthday), Republic Day (26th January), Independence Day (15th August), etc. In order to maintain youths interest pertaining to indoor as well as outdoor games and to perform well in celebrating programmes, contribution is collected from the group members, local people and sometimes from outside the village. But entire money is not used for the scheduled programmes. Some funds remain. During natural calamities like floods, droughts, failure of crops, youth members try their level best to help people from their previous accumulated extra funds. Thus, voluntarism starts to help the helpless. When youth members come under one umbrella and think of helping people to get rid of social crisis, lack of funds create problems. Collecting huge amount of money becomes difficult due to lack of seal, pad, registration, etc. Thus, the question of registration of the organized youth society comes into focus and they get the same registered. This is how
numbers of NGOs, as youth organization, have emerged in West Bengal. They continue various social development activities along with their original programmes i.e. sports, games, gymnastics and so on. Mass Welfare Society, Saraswati Samity, Ratulia Palli Bikash Kendra etc. are the examples of this kind of NGO.

Ideologies: Culture of Bengal is very rich for the contribution of Rabindranath Tagore, Swami Vivekananda, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Netaji Subash Chandra Bose and so on. Especially, ideals of Vivekananda and Netaji have influenced the youths to a greater extent than any other section of the society of West Bengal. ‘Service to man as worship to God’, ‘Let the poor and distressed Indians be our deity’, ‘Let us start work, now and at once’, ‘Let the giver kneel down and give thanks, let the receiver stand up and permit’ – these words preached by Swami Vivekananda have inspired many youths to promote organization to fight against ignorance, illiteracy, untouchability and ill health. Ideal of Netaji too has encouraged the youngsters to come forward in order to raise voice for inequalities and exploitations in rural areas. This has also led to develop youth organizations. Vivekananda Swasthya Seva Kendra, Atma Shakti Sangha, Pallishri Sangha, Swamiji Netaji Ideal Youth Society, Patdaha Netaji Sangha, etc. are the examples of this kind of NGOs who stand for an ideology. Apart from the youth’s interests and influence of ideologies, few of the youth organizations have been developed by the help of NYK.
14. Social Problems of Handicapped:

As a result of disability, when a person experiences certain disadvantages in life and is unable to discharge the functions as well as obligations in the society, he is termed as 'handicap' (Park, 1995). Persons affected by polio, muscular dystrophy, contracture, arthritis, cretinism, epilepsy, mental retardation, cerebral palsy, deafness, blindness, lathyrysm and so on problems are treated as handicapped (Werner 1996). They are categorized as orthopaedically handicapped, mentally handicapped, visually handicapped, speech and hearing handicapped, etc. There are different roots of the organizations working with disabled in West Bengal. Firstly, many disabled persons have promoted quite a few NGOs after experiencing difficulties in their personal life. In day-to-day affairs, they have found helplessness everywhere, starting from the family to social environment. Exploitation and deprivation of the parents & relatives; neglected attitude of the friends in public places like schools, colleges, restaurants, social functions; indifferent attitude of the politicians; and bureaucratic policy of the govt. (which does not make the service easily accessible) have given impetus to start this kind of organization in order to help the handicapped. For instance, Bankura Zilla Saririk Protibandhi Kalyan Samity, Adarsha Protibandhi Samity, etc. Secondly, persons having specialized knowledge and curiosity (eg. Child specialists interested towards mentally retarded children), training and working exposure (attended some training programme and thereafter worked with handicapped) have felt to promote NGO for treatment and rehabilitation of handicapped considering the lack of service in and around the district.
They have a purpose to make it reputed service organization in the whole state. Indian Institute of Cerebral Palsy (1974), Alokendu Bodh Niketan Residential (1978), etc. are the examples of this kind of NGOs. Thirdly, physically handicapped find very minor scope for job opportunities. Employers neither feel them competent nor feel capable to carry out responsibility. Their disabilities make them dependent upon others. This deprives them to exercise basic rights and increases psychological stress. Many NGOs (eg. Nadia – Murshidabad Pratibandhi Samaj Kalyan Union Samity, Nadia Zilla Pratibandhi Kalyan Samity, etc.) have been promoted by dedicated people with a view to run income generation programme, vocational training centre, etc. for handicapped in order to make them independent, tension free and to run smooth life finding a life partner. Fourth, many government institutes like National Institutes of Orthopaedically Handicapped, Regional Institute of Mentally Handicapped, Regional Institute of Speech & Hearing Handicapped, etc. are situated at Kolkata. Their contribution in making the technical facilities available, trained manpower generation and awareness creation for handicapped welfare have developed favourable conditions in West Bengal to promote new NGO as well as to start work in this field for the existing grassroots level NGOs.

15. Health Care Motive:

Voluntary initiatives in order to reduce squalor, illness and death are not new in the history of Bengal. This motive has given rise to many health care NGOs. Of course, these motives are of different types. Firstly, in order to enrich general health care facilities, by means of free
medicines, surgery facilities and low cost treatment, for poor and marginalized sections in rural as well as in urban slum areas, a considerable number of NGOs have emerged. Secondly, ‘Blood’ cannot be manufactured in industries. It has to be donated regularly by generous compassionate people to save lives. Again, ‘Eyes’ cannot be produced in factories. It requires awareness for eye donation, collection of posthumous eyes and systematic preservation of the same. Having understood the importance of blood as well as human organs collection and utility for their preservation, a few NGOs have emerged completely based upon voluntary initiatives. Association of Voluntary Blood Donors – West Bengal (1980), International Eye Bank Calcutta (1980), West Bengal Voluntary Blood Donors Forum (1989), etc. are examples of this kind of NGOs. Thirdly, Leprosy and Tuberculosis are stigmatized communicable diseases. In past, persons with these difficulties would have been thrown out of the community or treated with cruelty. Having taken into account the dismayed conditions of these patients, to reduce incidence and prevalence of these diseases, and to implement National Disease Control Programmes (i.e. TB & Leprosy) a scanty number of NGOs have been developed. For instance, Mahakuma Kustha Nibarani Samity (1974), Greater Calcutta Leprosy Treatment & Health Education Scheme (1975), Jhargram Leprosy Project (1977), etc. Fourthly, a deep social concern, for truck drivers, helpers and migrant workers to improve their sexual health; for alcoholics, drug addicts and their family members who are searching inner peace; has led to develop a few NGOs (eg – St. Joseph’s Centre, Bharukha Public Welfare Trust, etc). Ultimate purpose is to make the
victims alive, active, responsible and useful in the existing society. Fifthly, apart from the voluntary initiatives, professionalism has also contributed in this regard. Few NGOs, associated with highly qualified professionals, have been developed to extend training and consultancy service (pertaining to health) to the grassroots organizations.

16. Other factors:

The major socio-political factors influencing the rise of NGOs in West Bengal have been illuminated above. There are also a few factors, those can never be ignored, contribute or contributed in increasing a scanty number of NGOs. For instance, to run an NGO, finance is one of the most important factors and therefore good connection with sources of funds, ruling party and the bureaucracy is very much needed to sanction a project proposal. Government officials, political leaders, etc. know this procedure of obtaining funds because of their working experience. Hence, after retirement, government officials or political leaders get organizations registered to pass their time through welfare activities.

Again, in order to cater relief, rehabilitation and settlement for East Pakistani refugees after ‘Independence’ as well as for Bangladeshi refugees after ‘Bangladesh War of Liberation’, a couple of NGOs have emerged. For instance, Madhyamgram Kalyan Samity (1952), Cathedral Relief Service (1974), etc.

The ethnic flare up of the early 1990s in the state of Manipur created tribal death and destruction. The fall out was beyond description between 1991 and 1995. More than 700 people were killed, 6000 houses were burnt and 11000 families were homeless. Many wives lost their
husbands and hundreds of children became orphan. The destitution of the holocaust even landed up in West Bengal, Bihar, Delhi, etc. To work with these helpless migrated tribals with a view to provide emotional and economic rehabilitation, several Tribal Welfare agencies emerged in 1990s in West Bengal. For instance, Tribal Welfare Society (1994).

Few Rotarians to improve health, literacy and awareness in backward areas; some teachers to promote science awareness among the students; and several doctors to provide ambulance service on an emergency have also promoted quite a few NGOs in West Bengal.

*Role Of Socio-Political Factors In Initiating Health Care Activities in NGOs*

The term 'Health Care' refers to services, provided by any institution (may government organization or private institution or NGO), to alleviate pain and suffering caused by a variety of diseases. Under the study, it indicates to NGO's service or intervention, those are provided by the health personnel, in order to promote, maintain and restore health. This part examines how far the above-mentioned socio-political factors have contributed to initiating health care activities.

Christian Missionary Organizations initiated health care programme as an aspect under wide range of services towards vulnerable section of society. They would offer free treatment facilities and run health prevention programme at the community level. In the activities of 'Bharat Scouts and Guides – West Bengal', health care was a small component. It
would provide curative services like medical treatment during natural disaster, free eye operation facility at the village level camp, etc and preventive services such as maintaining cleanliness in hospital campus, giving awareness on personal health & hygiene to the youths and so on. LIONS movement intended to promote civic life, education, health and international amity. Health care was also one of their major concerns. Health care, under LIONS movement, mostly insisted on ‘Sight Conservation’ and ‘Blindness Control by 2010’. Gandhian NGOs wanted to make the village communities self-sufficient and exploitation free. Improving environmental sanitation and creating health awareness were a part of overall village development work. Women organizations fought against dowry, rape, bride burning and wanted to gain social as well as economic empowerment of woman. Improving Mother & Child health was an ingredient of their entire activities in order to increase social empowerment. NGOs led by freedom fighters aimed to address problems like poverty, illiteracy, illness, refugee’s pressure, etc. Health care was extended by these organizations under an independent programme. NGOs, promoted by Naxal leaders, wanted to rebuild the society through income generation training, health care unit, farmers co-operative, adult and non-formal education, interest free loan, etc. Health care was only one of the inputs in their initiative. NGOs, whose origins were closely connected with devastating flood or some other natural disasters, had health care unit or community level health programme within the wide range of activities since their initial days. Environmental NGOs were concerned mainly in preventive aspects of health. For instance, they were involved in
controlling pollution, creating sanitation awareness, making smokeless oven to reduce women health hazards, etc. Youth organizations emerged to serve the poor, destitute and exploited community people by means of removal of ignorance, illiteracy, untouchability, ill health and so on. Setting up free treatment centres, creating awareness on personal hygiene, improving sanitation system in the locality, etc were various components of health care programme under youth organizations. NGOs offering service to the handicapped had two types of activities i.e: treatment and rehabilitation. All NGOs would not provide treatment facilities but had rehabilitation services (Physical rehabilitation, economic rehabilitation, social rehabilitation, etc.). None but health care NGOs were exceptional. Their all the programmes contributed, either through curative or preventive or promotive approach, in order to improve health status. Some of the NGOs, those emerged as a result of Tebhaga movement, movement against casteism and concern to reduce poverty, did not have any health care aspect at the time of starting.

Extensive discussion in the preceding paragraph show, health care is a fraction of wide range of services under almost every root. Except 'Health Care Motive', no other root is entirely meant for health services or health development. Again, those NGOs initiated health care programme as a part of their overall work, many of them preferred to provide preventive, community based and temporary health services. Permanent institutionalized treatment facilities were found in very limited number of NGOs.
In brief, the chapter has divulged the socio-political factors influencing the rise of NGOs in West Bengal. These factors include Christian Missionaries, Movement Against Casteism, Scouts and Guides Movement, LIONS Movement, Gandhian Movement, Women's Movement, Tebhaga Movement, Humanitarian Attitude of Freedom Fighters, Naxalite Movement, Devastating Flood, Environmental Movement, Concern to Reduce Poverty, Youth Force, Social Problems of Handicapped, Health Care Motive, Welfare Tendency of Retired Officials and Politicians, Refugee Welfare Tendency, Minority Issue and so on. It is true that one particular factor is responsible to develop an NGO, but sometimes a few factors have synchronized to shape an NGO. The Chapter also declares the role of these factors in health care. Except Tebhaga Movement, Movement Against Casteism and Concern to Reduce Poverty, all other socio-political factors contributed in initiating health care activities. Health care programme is found as a part of entire activities under most of the NGOs.

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