CHAPTER 6
Summary and Conclusion

This study aimed at looking into the role that NGOs play in the developmental process in Punjab. There is enough literature on the role that the NGO sector plays in the development domain of India. But as far as the state of Punjab is concerned one hardly find any substantive work on the role that the NGOs perform in the development of the people of Punjab. The purpose of this work therefore was to bridge the gap in literature by providing a regional map of the NGOs working in the state.

NGOs today are much discussed in the development debates. They gained importance as alternative vehicles of change during the 1980s. It was the time of realization that the mainstream model of development led by the state had failed to achieve its purpose. This was followed by the gradual withdrawal of the state from the development arena during the early 1990s. Both these factors encouraged the coming up of the civil society actors to fill this lacuna created by the shifting of the state to envisioned managerial roles in welfare. One of the many institutions which were seen as taking up the new role of development was the NGOs that were looked upon as sensitive to the needs of the people relegated to the margins of the society.

The rolling back of the state from its welfare functions was seen as a threat to the interests of the poor who in the process of liberalization, privatization and globalization were feared to be marginalized further. It was in this scenario that the NGOs with their on-goings agendas and present requirements of sustainable and inclusive growth gained a formidable position as potential actors in development. Of course, not as replacing the state but definitely complementing its role in the process of development. They were preferred both by national as well as international funding agencies as hallmarks of development which had to be just and egalitarian. The influence of NGOs gained so much force that by the end of the twentieth century the alternative development model had largely been converted to the mainstream. This was largely due to the fact that the growth as envisioned by the NGOs did not propagate a model which was manufactured by the West and professed to fit all. Perhaps, the best part of the NGOs is that it gave due credit to the local conditions which are always present in any development intervention made over a given
geographical area. These local conditions represented the conditions of the people living therein. This meant the involvement of the people in the process of their development.

The cognizance of the people was the very condition that had been lacking in the previous state led model of development which provided for top-down tailor made solutions to all the problems in the field. People could not assume responsibility of their development overnight. It was here that the role of NGOs became important. They helped in bringing to the front the voices which had been marginalized along the way and also made them build capacities to take part in the process of development. The roles of NGOs too underwent massive changes and they became professional and specialized agencies responsible for development than their predecessors who were mainly interest based philanthropic, relief and welfare oriented groups.

India too has had a long history of voluntarism. Charity and social service are embedded in its culture. The role of NGOs underwent changes according to the political and social conditions of the country. In pre-independence times, these agencies were engaged in mitigating social evils prevailing against the women and the other vulnerable sections of the society. As the movement for freedom from the colonial rule gained momentum, many NGOs came up to support in the struggle for independence. Many of them were influenced by Mahatma Gandhi and after India became independent they continued to work with his ideals. They were engaged in providing relief to the people in times of emergencies and also carried on welfare services. They did not have much role to play in the development as right after the independence the state assumed the mantle of development. On its part, the state which had seen their immense participation in the times of freedom struggle continued to recognize their importance in the development process of the nation. It acknowledged their role in the five year plans as well as built institutions to assist them. They continued to be registered under the Societies Registration Act which had been enforce since the 1860.

It was during the late 1960s that the state model of development started showing signs of weariness and failing of in its purpose. By 1970s there came a period of confrontation between the NGOs and the state. While the non-state actors blamed the state for failed development goals, the state in turn accused them arbitrary activities detrimental to the interests of the nation. The chief reasons were the state accusations on the NGOs of using foreign funds for anti-state activities and the
opposition put up by the Gandhian agencies rallying behind J.P. Narain while opposing the emergency. As a result in the year 1976, the government came up with the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) to keep a check on the flow of foreign funding into the nation. The NGOs saw it as a move by the state to exercise control over them and vehemently opposed any code of conduct regulations. However, in the wake of the state withdrawing by the early 1990s from the field of development saw an increased role being attributed to the NGOs in the developmental process.

Much attention was attributed to NGOs, the ways the function and many contrasts were made to the earlier development model followed by the state. They were often accused of mismanagement of funds and arbitrary nature of actions. While theoretically they were seen as responsible to the people for whom they worked yet it did not always happen that way. They were seen as bending to donor agenda and the channel of foreign funds through them led to accusations of their being part of imperialist agendas to promote western interests. While these shortcomings can not be negated yet NGOs continue to enjoy much limelight in the development debates not just in India but all over the world.

In contrast to this position of NGOs in the world it is surprising that the NGO movement in Punjab remains submerged. Punjab too has a long tradition of sewa and shramdaan which is embedded both in the religions of the land as well as its history. There are numerous accounts of charity being undertaken both by its people and the various institutions that exist in the state. However, the NGOs have not been able to evolve in terms of the roles being performed by their counterparts all over the world. One of the main reasons for the same has been the perception that the local conditions are not conducive for the growth of the NGO movement in Punjab. While being economically well endowed it is also felt that citizens here do not require support due to the many local religious and political institutions providing the same.

Despite all these understandings it also is true that there are a large number of marginalized voices in the state who are living in absolute ignorance of their conditions. Amidst prosperity, pockets of deprivation exist. While the state had undergone tremendous growth yet its benefits have not been distributed equally. There might not be the dominant factor of poverty which has been the point of intervention of NGOs in many of the states in the country but the rich economic status itself has presented certain peculiar problems. The women have suffered
discrimination, problems like those of educated joblessness, degrading environment and many others exist in the state.

In light of the above, this study made an attempt to understand the role that the NGOs are playing in the development process of Punjab. It was seen that the growth of NGOs in Punjab is fairly recent. They either came up before the 1980s or in early 1990s. The period of 1980s was marked by turbulence in the state and it had an adverse effect on the growth of organisations working for development. Due to the rich economic profile of the state and the confusion which prevailed in the state, these organisations remained weak in nature. They still undertake welfare activities which do not help in achieving long term development goals. They have not been able to turn the religious and charity functions that they perform into a development resource. Due to the lack of investments which are diverted towards the state, these organisations are dependent on government for support. As a result their objectives remain largely funding driven, broad based and wide in scope and generalised in nature. Their staff is project based and due to the low investments the NGOs are not able to attract adequately qualified staff.

Today developmental agencies, including NGOs are highly specialized and professional organisations. They have clearly demarcated areas of interventions, extensively planned programmes of action, pre-decided time frames to achieve their goals and they employ highly trained professionals to do so. They are supported by a myriad of funding agencies and carry out very detailed local area based and participatory research for any interventions that they might make. In contrast to these, NGOs in Punjab lack complete exposure to this kind of NGO culture. They do not have the necessary funding and as a result, do not have the crucial professional or technical capabilities to bring about development. Few of them have state-of-the art development plans and also suffer from a lack of vision. Those who do have vision tend to suffocate it in the race for projects and programmes made available by the government. As a result they tend to remain welfare oriented and their interventions limited to the development which the government envisages for them.

The relationship between the NGOs and the government also remains cold. The government has not come up with any special policies to encourage the NGOs in the state. The NGOs therefore have no terms of reference and suffer from a lack of framework in the development that they undertake. The first policy made by it in the year 1999 is also much diluted in terms of role of the NGOs. Going by it, the
government favors a single NGO as the main agency for disbursing all its funds thereby discouraging an environment of healthy competition. Instead it favors a policy of handing out projects to them. On one hand this leads to a lot of duplication and repetition of efforts and on the other hand, to overlapping of services. There are a variety of programmes being implemented by various governmental agencies simultaneously. None of them have been especially trained to do so. Funding leads to monitoring and in the wake of non-specialized agencies monitoring is reduced to a process of fault finding rather than constructive criticism. Given the Indian system, the government by virtue of being a donor assumes a superior position to the NGOs and the NGOs with so many trying to win projects are in turn, automatically reduced to a subordinate position. Today when NGOs all over the world are playing complementary roles to the government, NGOs in Punjab are acting as channels of service delivery. They are helping in extending the outreach of the government and still are not able to facilitate change at a greater level.

For development to be long term there is a need to synergize various agents working across many layers of the society to bring about development. The NGOs driven by personal agendas (who can bag the maximum government projects or at best those which involve maximum funding) are immune to such factors. They have not been able to organize themselves on a common platform to voice their interests. Their networks if formed remain diluted, anomic, opportunist and adhoc. As individual weak organisations they are unable to adopt a scientific as well as humane approach to development. Lessons from the field are not derived. No action based research is undertaken. Field experiences are not documented which again is due to the lack of professional capacities of the NGOs. There are no collaborations to develop a specialized outlook. Without the inward and outward assessing exercises the interventions of the NGOs remain short term in nature.

Besides lack of meaningful alliances and capacity building of the NGOs, they continue to provide critical services in isolation. Interventions being fund driven are not conducive to sustainable development. Beneficiaries under one project are not linked for any other activity to induced integrated development. The most immediate drawback with such project based interventions is that as soon as the programme comes to an end and the funding agency withdraws the whole venture comes to a standstill. Being fund driven the interventions are not able to support the community in long term perspective. No articulation of the citizens’ interest takes place and hence
no local community based organisations are formed for overseeing the development. In some cases where they are formed they remain ad-hoc in nature therefore as soon as funding is withdrawn these institutions also die. No efforts have been made to link these organisations to the Pantheist or any other such institutions. This is very harmful for development.

Carrying out projects on such a basis makes the people insensitive to their own cause. It makes them habitual to acting as active receptors of services being provided by the state thereby becoming passive to real development in the process. On the one hand, it instills in them an attitude of being on the look out for benefits provided by the state; on the other it does not encourage them to challenge the established norms of the society thereby sustaining and supporting the prevailing clichés which leads to their further marginalization. NGOs on their part, being funded by the state fail to encourage the people to develop an attitude of confrontation to the state or at least organize them to place demands on the state. Lack of any attempt to organize people means no stake for the beneficiaries in the development. No stake for the beneficiaries means no cost sharing by them which in turn means that they have no ownership in their development. It implies that they have nothing to gain and nothing to loose in the development being promoted by the NGOs. Hence the NGOs have inherent apprehensions about the people not coming forward to contribute for their own development because the people have not been conditioned to do so. All this together encourages a compartmentalized approach to development leading to lack of integrated and holistic development.

The NGOs therefore continue to depend on the government projects for their interventions as well as survival. Since an attitude of non-confrontation prevails therefore the programmes of NGO receive tacit support from the local social and political organisations. Efforts remain piecemeal. Community participation and involvement is not on a large scale. Both parties; the NGOs as well as the beneficiaries know that the interventions are short term, therefore there is no talk of any long term and permanent development.

Today, consistency of aims, ownership of people, capacity development and institutional development are expected to be inbuilt in the developmental interventions made by the NGOs. However, this case study of Punjab shows that it does not always happen that way.