

“NGOs and Development: History and Role in India”

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History of NGOs in India

India always had culture and an enriching history in the concept of the Daana (giving) and Seva (service). To understand the History or the formation of the ideology of NGO, it is imperative to talk about the evolution of the concept of Voluntarism. Voluntarism in the ancient and medieval era was presumed as charity, relief activities for the needy and philanthropy. Generally, the concept of Voluntarism, apart from the religious contributions was predominantly used in the fields of education, health, and mainly used to provide support to the people affected by natural famines like flood, drought and epidemics. During the pre-independence era, various leaders like Mahatma Gandhi himself believed in the ideology of voluntarism and self-reliance which propounded the concept of Swadeshi that led innate model of voluntarism. With the said model, he used the essence of voluntarism and focused on economic efficiency through small scale productions and decentralised the political authority which is called as The Gram Panchayat. Therefore, in the 19th century, with concept of voluntarism emerging rapidly into the grassroot level of the society, there were various Voluntary Organizations or the Non-government Organizations that were established that helped in revolutionizing and shaping the participatory democracy of the country. Analogically, Voluntary Organization and Non-Government Organization are differentiated on the basis of geographical areas covered under the preview. Therefore, all Voluntary Organizations can be said to be NGOs but not vice versa.

Types of NGOs

Non-Government Organizations or NGOs are recognized by the government as a non for profit voluntary organizations that seek to protect health, education, persons with disability, sanitation and various other departments by facilitating the role of activists, advocates, research and most importantly as service providers.

NGOs can classified into various types which mainly are:

- 1) Charity NGOs: They focus on collecting funds and providing the basic amenities to backwards classes.
- 2) Rehabilitation NGOs: They focus on rehabilitating an individual so that can he feel comfortable within the society. There are lot of school and education centres that are supported by the NGOs to rehabilitate mentally disabled students and provide support.
- 3) Empowerment NGOs: These seek to empower people who are from backward class, scheduled caste and scheduled tribe. In recent times, with enactment of person with disability act, 2006, many NGOs have been established to empower persons with disability my arranging funds and using the same for social and moral upbringing of the person.

- 4) **Service Providing NGOs:** These directly provide services by employing people with different kind of expertise like teachers being hired for teaching visually impaired students or psychologists being recruited to counsel students with mental disabilities.

In recent years, after visiting to various NGOs providing support to the education institutions and schools with the persons with disabilities, I have experienced that different types of NGOs mentioned above collaborate with each other to support schools and institutions to support the persons with disability. Like Charity NGOs providing funds whereas empowerment NGOs keeping awareness campaigns enlightening the general public with the acts, rules and regulations for persons with disabilities. In my personal opinion, it is a step forward in the development of the society if different types of NGOs start engaging on common root cause in the particular geographical area.

Characteristics of NGOs

NGOs cater to large types of issues arising in the country, but all the NGOs have certain common factors and characteristics that bind them together and make them a community as a whole. While discussing the same I will also compare how they are different from the government in their approach, policies and vision. Some of the main characteristics of the NGOs are:

1. **Flexibility:** NGOs are generally not bound to any bureaucracy or any type of red tapism that is faced by the government. Moreover, they don't have an hierarchy to follow and can act on a need to need basis.
2. **Prompt decision making :** NGOs have the autonomy to make quick decision and act spontaneously if the need arises. Unlike the government where approaching them for the same is a task, this makes people in need to seek redressal at a faster pace.
3. **Independent :** As NGOs do not necessarily have to abide by the government rules makes them quite independent in the said front.
4. **High motivation:** The volunteers in an NGOs are highly motivated to make a change in the society or the project that the NGO is based on. The government employees on the other hand, takes it as a means to earn livelihood which makes a stark difference in the intent.
5. **People Oriented:** I believe that people are the core purpose of why the NGOs are incorporated. So they work relentlessly to bring a change into the lives of economic or socially weaker sections of the society.

Development of NGOs in India

Societies Registration Act, 1860 gives the NGOs a legal status under the eyes of law but various states governments have made amendments as it falls under the purview of the state list under the constitution. Although it is not mandatory for the NGOs to get registered under them but registration helps them in getting various exemptions and benefits from the government which are discussed further in the paper. After there was a rapid increase in NGOs, in the mid 1980s a new approach was developed that focused on particular areas in which the society was seeking disparity.

This devised the way for a professional approach within the NGOs which involved planning of funds, management and coordination within the organization. This also meant that the public participation increased which led to new innovative ideas and exposures in which the NGOs could work. There paradigm shift of the interest in the objective of NGOs from initially targeting upliftment of communities or beneficiary groups to empowerment of people and generation of more employment caught the eyes of the government. Government seeing the development has also undergone various changes in the department from Ministry of Welfare to Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment which launched various schemes and centres pertaining to disability and empowerment of like Budgetary Support to National Trust, Indian Sign Language Research and Training Centre (ISLRTC), District Disability Rehabilitation Centres (DDRC). As we all know, that NGOs is a voluntary initiative that immensely relies on the donations and funds from different members of the society. Therefore under Section 80G of the Income Tax Act, the person can claim 50% tax rebate from the amount donated, which is up to 10% of the his income. This is one of the most widely used tax benefit regime used by large corporate businessman and corporations. Another section, that was recently incorporated under the Companies Act,2013 is of Corporate Social Responsibility which indirectly helps NGOs seek support and funds from Multinational Companies registered in India. Large amounts of monetary benefits from the government also led to bogus organizations claiming various funds from the government which led to enactment of National Policy of Voluntary Sector 2007 that identifies 4 main objectives:

- Creating an environment for the NGOs so that they can perform their functions effectively and efficiently
- Helping the organizations to mobilize funds that are received from foreign organizations
- Adopting various principles and systems wherein the organizations and the government can work amicably with mutual trust and shared responsibility.
- Last but not the least having transparency with the government of accounts and projects that are performed by the NGOs.

As we have noticed above, people participation and vigour to support the society led the government to make intensive measures for the them. Without the arduous work and of the organizations showering interest in the key development of the country not only reduced the work for the government but also helped them together to achieve greater results That is to say that one cannot do without the other.

Role of NGOs in Development

In the paper we have talked about a lot, as to how NGOs are scattered into different issues pertaining to poverty, education, upliftment of weaker section of the society. This section illustrates as to how the NGOs have brought about development in different sectors in India. Education among the youth has always been one of the major projects of various NGOs in India. In a country, where majority of the population has solely been dissatisfied with the promotion schemes of the government NGOs have always taken initiative in making education accessible to children of every caste, religion and sex. In the practical scenarios, government has never been able to promote

education at the grassroots level due to lack of implementation of the laws but with the support of the NGOs, India has seen a significant increase in the literacy rate.

Women have always been perceived as the weaker sections of the society in India and NGOs have taken arduous measure to remove this stigma. It is commendable to note the changes brought in by NGOs in rural areas of the country. There have been several initiatives by NGOs in women empowerment and one of such is establishment of Women Self Groups in the remotest areas of the country. The said approach focuses mainly on income generation opportunities such as establishing cottage industries etc. Other initiatives were establishment of Works Rights Advocacy NGOs by the strong women leaders with feminist ideology to give workshops and lectures to address women rights issues. They mainly focus on women abuse and gender equality and how women can bring in the society as in the rural part of the country as these ideologies are still very relevant. They partner with local media to spread awareness on women rights issues which is easily accessible to the young youth to gain interest of the volunteers.

Mental health has always been considered a stigma rather than a psychological disorder in India but in recent years, it is commendable to note the NGOs progress in spreading awareness and creating various models of mental rehabilitation for different sectors of disability. There have been various Foundations like The Hans Foundations been created to support NGOs who are mainly focused on disability. The main aim of the said NGOs care and rehabilitation, advocacy for the persons with disability, awareness and empowerment for the disabled in the minds of the society.

These were some the instances, where NGOs have been helpful to the society. But is hard to overlook, there progress and the organizations that have been formed to tackle various issues like human rights violations, domestic violence, Environmental and rural development to name a few. Having said that, there dedication towards the deprived sections of society in India has always been seen as a development in the eyes of UN and foreign NGOs.

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