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A Study on Role of Voluntary Organizations in the Socio-Economic Scenario of Murshidabad (1772 to 1946)

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Abstract:

Voluntary organizations are important for promoting social and economic welfare in both urban and rural areas in India. It has become a significant global influence in recent time. It plays a major role in today's world by helping its members, contributing to the growth of a country, and promoting unity and support within society and the nation. Voluntary organizations offer help to people who are poor, in need, neglected, old aged, or sick. They offer free services to people in urban areas and also to those in rural areas. Volunteers try to begin various programmes to educate the general public. They carry out their tasks during emergencies, such as droughts and floods, on a large scale. The major work of such organizations is to find out what people, groups, and communities need. Then, they start programs and projects to help fulfill those needs, either by themselves or with support from the government. Policy makers are increasingly turning to voluntary organizations as development agencies. These organizations often offer services that are more effective, and fair in many areas compared to public or private agencies. Voluntary organizations are independent groups that do not make a profit. They operate in a democratic way and do not follow any particular religion. Their main aim is the development of the society, improve people's lives, and contribute to the development of the nation. The volunteer organizations in India have slowly changed and expanded their focus to include the overall social and economic growth of society. It is important for both government and non-government organizations to collaborate closely. This teamwork will improve development in both urban areas and rural areas, helping India to thrive.

Keywords: Organization, Voluntary, Rural, Welfare.

1. Introduction:

This project examines voluntary organizations in Murshidabad district during British India. Historically rich and culturally vibrant, Murshidabad was the Bengal capital under the Mughals. This legacy shaped its enduring traditions. However, it has now considered one of West Bengal's



most underdeveloped districts. Before discussing Murshidabad's voluntary organizations, its geography warrants attention. Its current boundaries date to 1879. River Bhagirathi is often called the lifeline of the district. Murshidabad is adjoining Bengal's two main part, the first one is the southern part and the other one is the northern part. The district is residing in the centre Bengal. These areas differ significantly in landscape, climate, economy, religion, culture, and lifestyle. During the colonial rule there were many Voluntary organizations in Murshidabad as well as India. Some of the most significant organizations of that period are- 'London Missionary Society', 'Sargachi Ramkrishna Mission Ashram', 'Maharani Swarnamoyee Samiti', 'Vivekananda Yoga Samiti', 'Murshidabad Swimming Association', 'Murshidabad Red Cross Society' etc. Voluntary Organizations are formed by Individual persons who willingly dedicate their time, skills and resources for the betterment of the society and the needy people. They do it without any intentions of financial gain. "Voluntary organization is a group of persons organized on the basis of voluntary membership without state control for the furtherance of some common interests of its members" [David. L. Sills \(1968\)](#). The term voluntarism is taken from the Latin word 'Volantes' which means 'will' or 'freedom'. The activity of Voluntary Organization is totally controlled by the Volunteer; any other alien force cannot govern the activity of the Organization. The role of various organizations and associations in the developmental process of a country cannot be overstated. Among these entities, voluntary associations, which are an essential component of civil society, make substantial contributions to societal welfare, integration, and cohesion. These associations function as catalysts for social development by working directly with the community at the grassroots level, enabling them to understand the needs and aspirations of the people and establish direct connections with them. The United Nations General Assembly announced the year 2001 as the International Year of Volunteers to recognize the momentous influence of the Voluntary Organizations.

2. Review of Literature:

The literature under review would be depicted the following context development in rural area of India, economy, NGO, Political encouragement towards the Voluntary Organizations. In the journal "*International Journal of Physical and Social Science*" [Adil Altaf Lone \(2017\)](#) mainly focused on the role of Voluntary Organizations for the poor and needy people. He majorly promoted the voluntary actions to fulfill India's development goals. In essence, his work focused on the growing importance and evolving contributions of Voluntary Organizations in sustainable development in India. [S. Rahumath \(2019\)](#) gave us the Gandhian Perspectives and influence in the Voluntary movement in Pre-Independence era. In the Journal "*Advance Research Journal of Social Science*" He mainly depicted the Gandhian Ideology and non-violent approach of developing the society and nation. His actual intension was on the vast influence of Gandhian



ideology in the voluntary sector and their works. He also highlighted the fact that the idea of Voluntarism was still there before the Gandhian philosophy.

Sanjit (Bunker) Roy (1987), in his paper *“Voluntary Agencies in Development: Their Role, Policy and Programmes”* wrote about the Voluntary Agency and the role of Government. He also depicted the initiatives taken by Governments for encouraging such agencies. He also tried to express the social, financial and challenges faced by the Voluntary agencies.

H. R. Chaturvedi (1987) in his article *“Role of Voluntary Organizations in Rural Development”* basically focused on the people of grassroot level. He depicted his reader the condition of rural area and the role Voluntary Organizations in the betterment of rural people. He also promoted social justice, empowerment of deprived communities. He showed us how the Voluntary Organizations influenced education among rural children. He wrote how these organizations contribute to the social, political and economic upliftment of rural areas. Anil Bhat in his *“Voluntary Action in India: Role, Trends and Challenges”* (1995) wrote a critical evaluation of the strengths and weakness of such Organizations. In essence Bhat depicted a more politically aware approach to reach the development goal of India’s social justice.

J.S. Mehta (1987) in *“Challenge and Opportunity for Voluntarism in Rural Development”* depicted on the internal weakness, struggle of Voluntary Organizations in rural area. He also focused on Functionalism in this article. He partially showed his reader about Authoritarianism. He depicted the broader goals of Voluntary Organizations in rural India. We can say based on the overview of the study that issues faced by the Voluntary Organizations is almost same in most of the cases. The working pattern of these organizations are general.

3. Research Gaps:

- i) Organizational Capacity and Sustainability: Although the challenges that most NGOs experience internally, including a lack of finances, poor infrastructure, a lack of skilled employees, and a lack of organization, have been commonly recognized, specific studies about its prevalence and effects are lacking within the context of the Murshidabad district.
- ii) Information Management and Data Utilization: Not many NGOs in the wider region make optimal use of potential information sources like research reports or the internet. There is an existing gap in the knowledge base on effective information management for data-informed decision-making in Murshidabad.
- iii) Role in Disaster Management and Climate Change: Murshidabad is vulnerable to riverine flooding as well as problems of groundwater contamination. There is a lack of studies focused on the specific structured and long-term involvement of NGOs in disaster



preparedness, response, and reconstruction activity in the aforementioned susceptible regions.

- iv) Overall Effectiveness and Impact Assessment: Parashar et al. noted that whilst several pieces of literature do confirm the presence and activities of NGOs, a substantial gap exists regarding comprehensive literature that assesses the impact and effectiveness that NGOs have on the district regarding the problem of poverty or health inequalities, to cite an example.
- v) Intersectionality of Disparities: There exists a certain void in understanding NGO engagement with gender inequality, caste, and class-related disparities in Murshidabad's distinct regional setting. Literature indicates a certain gap in existing knowledge on issues related to educational equity for minority and non-minority sections of students, where NGOs could be efficacious but remain under researched.

4. Objectives of the Study:

The motto behind this is to promote the district Murshidabad in world stage.

- (i) To analyze the contributions of Voluntary Organizations in addressing socio-economic, cultural, and political changes in Murshidabad during colonial rule.
- (ii) To understand the historical context to examine the increasing growth of Voluntary Organizations in Murshidabad against the disadvantages made by colonial policies and Socio-economic circumstances.
- (iii) To Explore the Role of Leadership for the identification of major leaders and individuals engaged with Volunteer Organizations in Murshidabad and their contributions to social change and anti-colonial movements.
- (iv) To Examine challenges and Limitations faced by such Organizations like fund issues, inadequate resources, and limitations of these Organizations.
- (v) To Draw Contemporary Relevance to highlight the rich history and culture of Murshidabad. The district's unforgettable contributions in shaping the socio-political landscape of Bengal.

5. Methodology:

This Study takes a closer look at 'An Evaluation of Voluntary Organizations of Murshidabad (1772-1946)' focusing on life in Murshidabad during the pre-independence period. To build a complete picture, we gathered information from a variety of sources research articles, journals, books, newspapers, government reports, and old periodicals. But we did not stop at written records. We went out into the field, spoke with local historians, met with community leaders, and listened to the voices of everyday people in the district. Along the way, we explored the contributions of several voluntary organizations that have shaped the social fabric of the area,



including the 'London Missionary', 'Maharani Swarnamoyee Samiti', 'Vivekananda Yoga Samiti', 'Sargachi Ramkrishna Mission Ashram', and the 'Murshidabad Swimming Association'. These groups have long been pillars of support, working quietly but powerfully in the background.

Through this research, we hope to not only add to Murshidabad's rich history but also highlight how selfless community service plays a key role in building strength and unity. By sharing stories from the ground up stories told by the people themselves we hope this paper encourages even more voluntary efforts in the district, especially in areas like education, economy, politics, and social well-being.

6. Definition of Volunteers and Voluntary Organizations:

Volunteers are the most vital figure for their respective Organizations. They dedicate their time, energy, resources, and hard work. Every action of volunteers is willful and filled with the intention of upliftment of society and nations. They don't get any financial amenities for their voluntary actions and don't any fame for it. They work as a self-govern bodies without any pressure from outside the play a pivotal role in difficult circumstances like drought, flood, and any natural disaster. They work for the development of unprivileged community. They work on several sectors such as health care, educations, social justice, environmental protections, community development skill development etc.

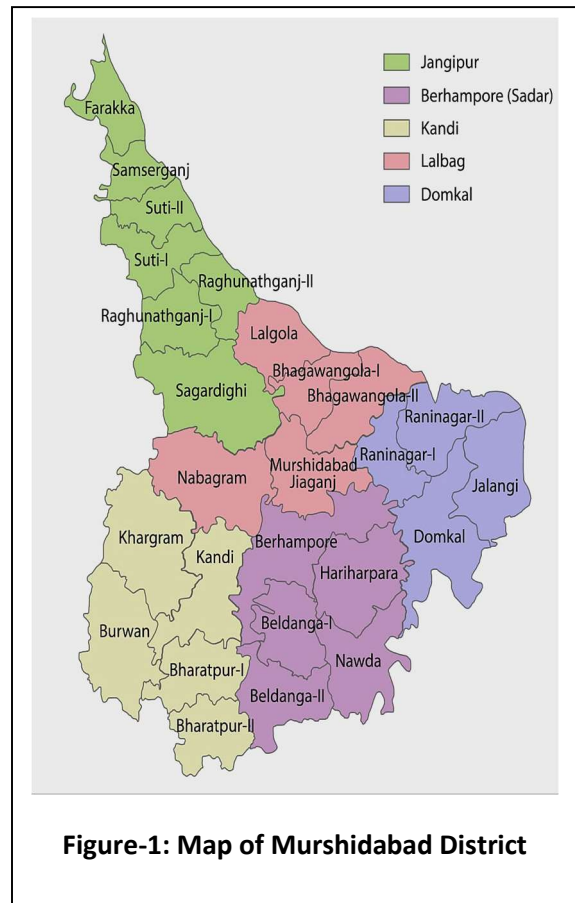


Figure-1: Map of Murshidabad District

Voluntary organizations are made by a number of common folks who comes together for a common intention of developing the society and rural people. Such organizations usually provide the gaps for those facing social problems or requiring assistance. What makes them different is that they operate independently, not for gain, but out of goodwill. These organizations operate mostly with donations or grants and are all about giving back to others. They are democratic in their operation, with each member having an equal say in how operations are carried out. Their activities are secular-based, that is, their intention is to assist all individuals regardless of religion, financial status, or background.



Although they maintain their method to be inclusive and not religious, a lot of them still take their inspiration from varying beliefs or ideals. Bottom line, voluntary organizations are there because people care and they are willing to get together to make life a bit better for someone else.

7. Evaluation of Voluntary Organizations:

It's about figuring out if what we're doing is really making a difference for the people we're trying to help. We look at the immediate stuff, like if more people can read, and the big stuff, like if poverty is actually going down over time. We look at the immediate stuff, like if more people can read, and the big stuff, like if poverty is actually going down over time. Voluntary Organizations set a goal for them and they try to fulfil their target by a certain amount of time. There are a little bit differences between the rural VOs and the Urban VOs. Because the challenges faced by both of them are different. For example, in rural areas the major challenges for Voluntary Organizations are poverty, education, and health issues. But in an urban civilized society the challenges for such organizations are different like they fight against casteism, secularism, social injustice etc. They also face some social issues and financial issues but there is a path to overcome such issues. Sometimes the Volunteers must face some social criticism due to their voluntary service, but they must ignore these things and continue their service for the betterment of the society and needy people. According to Narayan Seva Sansthan *"ensuring funds are used appropriately and financial information is disclosed openly and accurately"*.

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8. Impact of Voluntary Organizations in Developing the Society of Murshidabad:

Voluntary organizations have worked in where government services are limited, particularly in rural areas, slums, remote areas of Murshidabad district. In the district such Organizations provide active and passive help in the following sector: -Education, healthcare, sanitation, and housing, building trust and local needs etc. On improving the weak part of the society, the Voluntary Organizations always play a special role. Such organizations have a vital role in developing women, children, especially abled person, rural people and minority groups. Voluntary Organizations helped the student community with skill training, microfinance, entrepreneurship programmes etc.



Voluntary Organizations also work on healthcare sector. They organize blood donation camp, help the patient family (sometimes financially), Vaccination camp etc. They organize special health camp in rural area with specialized doctor from urban area. Volunteers also care for the nature too. They plant trees in city area, take care of plant until they grow.

These are the major impact of Voluntary Organization. In Murshidabad 'Sargachi Ramkrishna Mission' is serving in educational sector for years. 'Swarnamoyee Samiti' is working on women empowerment sector. 'Vivekananda Yoga Samiti' is working on public health for years. 'Christian Sevasadan Hospital' is working on healthcare sector. 'Berhampore Swimming Association' is working on child development and sports sector. These Organizations have a major role on improving the under privileged areas of Murshidabad.

9. Challenges Faced by Voluntary Organizations:

Voluntary Organizations work freely in various sector of society. Many Voluntary Organizations in Murshidabad heavily depend on grants, are donations and corporate funds which highly unpredictable. Specially the funds issues raise for the smaller NGOs which are not so famous. Sometimes the challenges rise in receiving government grants.

There are many remote and rural areas with low quality infrastructure in Murshidabad district which make it tough for the Voluntary Organizations to serve properly. In most areas of the district except the Urban areas and Zilla Sadar the transportation, electricity, internet connection and inadequate communication make it more difficult for the organizations. Murshidabad has so many social cultural barriers. The Voluntary Organizations face more challenges addressing sensitive problems like gender empowerment or caste discrimination. Voluntary organizations in Murshidabad deal with challenges that arise from the specificities of the sub-region. Such peculiarities need strategic planning, multifarious funding options, capacity building, community engagement, and solid partnerships.

10. Findings:

The study finds that Murshidabad emerged as an early and important centre of organized voluntarism in colonial Bengal, with structured voluntary initiatives developing from the late eighteenth century. Unlike regions where voluntarism expanded mainly during the nationalist phase, Murshidabad's voluntary organizations evolved in response to local socio-economic needs alongside colonial administration. These organizations performed a dual role by providing immediate welfare services—such as education, healthcare, disaster relief, and social assistance—while simultaneously promoting long-term social reform, including literacy, public



health awareness, and women's empowerment. Their activities were particularly significant in rural and flood-prone areas where state intervention was limited.

The findings highlight the role of indigenous leadership and local agency in sustaining voluntary action. Although missionary organizations played an important role, local elites, women-led associations, and spiritual institutions ensured cultural legitimacy and community participation. Voluntary organizations also functioned as intermediaries between the colonial state and local society, helping mitigate the socio-economic effects of colonial policies.

Regional variations within the district influenced organizational priorities, resulting in locally adapted interventions. The study further reveals continuity between colonial-era voluntary institutions and post-independence civil society organizations, indicating that contemporary voluntarism in Murshidabad is deeply rooted in its historical experience.

11. Conclusion:

Thus, the voluntary organizations operating from 1772 to 1946 in Murshidabad showed adaptation to and response towards the changes occurring within the socio-political arena, which offered them an evolution from mere charitable organizations formed at the local level to actual participants in broader social and political movements during the colonial period, thus actively participating in the social development of the region and aiding in the larger cause of Indian freedom.

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