WHERE DO GIRLS STAND IN THE BUREAUCRATIC MAZE?
A Case Study of the collaborative relationships between Girl Children, NGOs, and Government In West Bengal, India

by

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Dedicated to my Mom, Dad, Granddad, Monipishi, Pishimoni, Jethun and Mamani

"Abstract"

This research titled *"Where Do Girls Stand In The Bureaucratic Maze? A Case Study Of The Collaborative Relationships Between Girl Children, NGOs and Government In West Bengal, India"* is meant to find out how the situation of the girl child can be improved through a collaborative approach between the most prominent participators in most development projects, that is the government, the voluntary organizations and the girl children/women themselves in West Bengal, India. The research also tries to capture the experiences and feelings of the girl children, as expressed by them to gain knowledge that can be utilised for the feminist work of changing women's peripheral position in development planning.

Based on DAWN's theory to integrate women into development assessment and action plans so that it can address women's needs and issues more effectively, this study proposes a feminist model of collaboration that is integrative as well as holistic. Under this model diverse organizations would come together involving various women's groups as well as women/girl children to make the collaboration more stronger and transformative.

Inclusion of girl children will help develop policies that are women-friendly, where women/girl children would become active participants, agents and partners of projects.

Srabani Maitra
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Despite the progress made on many of the goals set at the 1990 World Summit for Children, girls and women continue to face disaster that infiltrates all sectors of society in every country. In any gendered society, a woman is necessarily relegated to a very low strata, and this is even more acute in the case of the girl child due to her identity both as a girl as well as a child. Gender discrimination, so entrenched in social norms as to escape notice, keeps young girls from school and women from active and equal involvement in their communities. This discrimination is at the base of many of the violations of women's rights, including the physical duress of domestic violence and the strategic use of rape and forced pregnancies as weapons of war. And where women's rights are at risk, girl children's rights are too. There may be as many as 60 million 'missing women' in the world who, except for the gender discrimination that starts before they are born and continues throughout their lives, would be alive today (United Nations Population Division, 1996). In fact the entire life cycle of the girl child from birth to the threshold of adulthood is riddled with pitfalls that are likely to pull the society down from its potential of capability building. Girls and women who are expected to suffer and be still are not expected to articulate their physical or mental discomfort, and the process begins very early (UNICEF, 2000a).

Although discrimination against girls and women is found on every continent, for the sheer scale of population and cultural strictures against gender and class, few regions compare with South Asia, where every year millions of girls are born into poverty, debt, servitude and dehumanizing birth castes. Poor pregnant women, worried about the future

dowry costs of a daughter, increasingly seek the services of travelling 'sonogram doctors' to abort a girl child.

These girls - 'children of poverty'- often begin their lives passed over in favor of their brothers for food, medical attention and schooling. At the mercy of the men in their families and communities, they suffer the isolation of ignorance and illiteracy, the agony of beatings. A particularly cruel burden falls on the children, especially girl children, as parents take out meager loans in exchange for consigning or selling a child to a factory or plantation owner. An estimated 20 million, and perhaps as many as 40 million girls and boys in South Asia toil in this debt servitude (Human Rights Watch, 1996), hunched over looms, making bricks, or rolling cigarettes by hand. Countless others spend their childhood and adolescence in domestic servitude, sweeping floors and scrubbing pots and pans. There is no way to calculate the exact number of young girls and boys whose lives are endangered by their sale and trafficking, by debt bondage, serfdom, forced or compulsory labor, forced recruitment into armed conflicts, prostitution, pornography and drugs. Efforts to eliminate these gross violations have been ongoing and have been energized by the 1999 Worst Form of Child Labor Convention (International Labor Organization, 1999). But, according to estimates by the International Labor Organization (ILO), some 250 million children between the ages of 5 and 14 work in developing countries and some 50 million to 60 million children between the ages of 5 and 11 work in hazardous circumstances (ILO, 1999). The challenges of preventing and eradicating these extreme violations of children's rights illustrate the layers of discriminations and exploitation that drive humanity's poorest children - the girl children - into obscure and dangerous worlds (UNICEF, 2000b).

The need for an analysis of these advances is further motivated by the belief that in realizing her entitlements the girl child gets the rights she has been promised by the Convention on the Rights of the Child that the United Nations adopted in 1989 and to which India is a signatory. Another important step in this regard was the SAARC (South Asian Association For Regional Cooperation) Conference held in 1987 that made an "urgent call for the improvement of the mother-child life cycle starting with the girl child" (Devasia, 1991, 2). This desire for the development of the girl child took a concrete form in the decision taken at the SAARC Summit held in 1988 to declare 1991-2000 as the Decade of the girl child. Consequently the Government of India proposed a National Plan of Action focusing on three major goals: survival, protection and development of the girl child in the country (Devasia, 1991). It was also suggested that this Plan for the girl child would help sustain consciousness aroused all over the country about the needs to give special emphasis to the girl child and achieve to the goals set for a brighter future of the girl child in India within this decade. There were lots of promises made. Only a few were really kept and girls in Indian society continue to face discrimination in all spheres of life.

As a child I too experienced personally the wide range of discrimination that a girl has to go through in India. As a woman, I am particularly sensitive to the discriminating forces and the social and gender discourses of power that perpetuate severe constraints on every moment of a girl's life right from her formative years. Usually such discourses took the form of a kind of social morality, which perpetually dictated almost every aspect of my life- including my behavior, gesture and speech. The rationale was always that such a technique of exclusions and prohibitions were necessary, as I was a girl.

My parents, particularly my mother, were a fountainhead of support, encouraging me to take decisions for myself that normally would not be regarded as the privilege of a girl. Coming to Canada to do my Masters in Women's Studies was just such a decision which I would never have been allowed to take but for the support of my parents. I came at an age when I was expected to "settle down in life"- a standard rhetoric, that was strutted again and again, where, settling down usually means getting married and domesticized properly.

Breaking the norms was not easy, but once being able to do it, the interest in doing research on the girl child – research that would address her material condition vis-à-vis development, was once more kindled in me. Its aim would be essentially to provide the girl child a voice to break the vicious cycles of dogmas and exclusions in a society that is very patriarchal. Its aim would be to 're-turn' the male gaze of power that has always sought to mould the women in conformity with what the custodians of social patriarchy demand. My thesis is an attempt at dismantling the aura of dominance and subordination that traumatized the lives of so many women.

I chose Kolkata (previously known as Calcutta), my home city in India, to do my research as I have known the distinct nature of societal norms and code that function there. It was in Kolkata that I decided to find out how the situation of the girl child could be improved through a collaborative approach between the most prominent participators in most developmental projects, that is:

- the government

- the voluntary organizations

- the girl children/women themselves

I traveled to Kolkata to conduct my interviews. The interviews were an exhilarating experience as new depths of realization about the condition of women that began to unfold before me. As the most vital participators, the girl children began talking to me about their hopes, fears and beliefs and also of the increasing awareness and insights they had of their situations; they made me realize the fact that they were breaking the barriers of reticence imposed by social pressures in expressing their options while trying to be independent about taking their own decisions. The experience was something special to me as this was what I had always wanted to capture through my thesis, and after speaking to the girl children I thought I would be able to do justice to their opinions by revealing their voices of an awakened confidence to the world through my thesis.

Coming back to Canada, and finishing up the first draft of my thesis, I was satisfied with the fact that I have been able to talk of a collaborative approach that can be successfully implemented if both the government and the voluntary organizations take the endeavor of coming together and implementing their actions jointly. But there were surprises waiting for me. After a meeting with my thesis supervisor Dr.Linda Christiansen-Ruffman, my sense of satisfaction proved to be misplaced as I realized that the focus of my thesis has undergone a paradigmatic shift as I had focused on only part of my proposal. My conclusion had become more patricentric rather than being in accordance with a feminist approach. This was because the first draft of my thesis had in the course of its formulation made the voice of the girl children inaudible, and girl children had become

invisible- both conceptually and practically. I was stunned. Here I was trying to develop a feminist notion of collaboration, a holistic approach with a particular focus on the girl child and what I ended up doing was just merely emphasizing a government – NGO collaboration that is moreover essentially patriarchal, denying the girl children any possibility of an active agency and a role in deciding the course of their development. The role of the women themselves had become so diminished so as to be nearly invisible in the draft[1] although I had intended to place their voice in the center of my thesis. Instead of advocating women's rights as the central issue of my thesis, I had relegated them to a peripheral position by talking about only one aspect of collaboration between the government and the NGOs and not including women/girl children in that collaboration.

The irony of the situation made me receptive to an exceedingly important realization about how easy it is to be mediated by the patricentric codes emanating from many of the development participators themselves and thereby making women invisible. No wonder for ages women have been marginalized from an active role in planning which has severely hampered the development of the women themselves.

One of the reasons for this invisibility of women in my thesis was because of all the literature I had read so far that shaped my conception of collaboration. This literature was written mainly by male scholars, who lacked a feminist perspective, and when they discussed collaboration, they only spoke about two powerful and resourceful male-stream organizations- NGO and the Government. The powerless, the women and the girl children, were left out. The reason behind this exclusion is obviously the very nature of the development process, that is too patricentric and does not care about integrating women

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[1] In the first draft of the thesis the words girl child, women or feminism perhaps did not appear more than

into the process. There were few comments in the literature about involving women, but the emphasis was on achieving an NGO-government alliance, something that Peggy Antrobus would call "horizontal relationship" rather than a "vertical relationship" where the powerful attempts to collaborate with the powerless.

As a woman myself, I too fell into the same trap of patricentric modes of thought which forms the basis of most practices and discussions of development. Indeed, the development paradigm itself is essentially controlled by men, though not always in a direct manner, where women are not centrally its creators and either merely passive, docile recipients of such development or exploited victims of it.

My analysis of a feminist concept of collaboration became more sharp as I started reading DAWN's (Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era) concept of development which emphasizes that development processes be planned from the point of view of the marginalized- the women and girl children. This theory made me realize that to formulate good policies for girl children, the girls themselves cannot be left out of the collaborative model. Therefore, it is up to us, the women, to adopt new forms of collaboration.

One of the most important aims of feminism is the expression of the concerns and interests of women. Therefore, a feminist concept of collaboration cannot just talk about two bureaucratic organizations coming together that negates women's experience. Feminist collaboration is that which is responsive to the "needs and concerns of different women, and defined by them for themselves" (Sen and Grown, 1987, 19). It is this very concept of collaboration that has the feminist potential to change. Therefore, programs

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10 times.

that are created by NGOs and government for the development of women should pay attention to the women's voices in order to design people-centered approaches (Sen and Grown, 1987). As DAWN (1987, 40) scholars clearly specify, one of the main criteria of that kind of approach is "linkages between people, bureaucrats and intermediaries (e.g. non governmental organizations) in project choice, planning and implementation". Women and girl children must enter at the stages of policy decision and actual implementation to make the projects more self-reliant and accountable. Only then it can be defined as a genuine, integrative collaboration. Respect for the power of dialogue is crucial to this coming together (Sen and Grown, 1987).

The realization helped me to criticize my own assumptions and to rewrite my thesis now conscious of the pitfalls of the play of marginalization that seeks to impose on the women the role of recipient only and never the planner of development. I believe that in this regard my thesis is crucial, as it will help others to become aware of the mistakes that I have confronted and thus become more careful while dealing with women's issues.

I thus welcome my readers to this journey for the discovery of a new feminist vision towards collaboration that takes the girlchild, not as an incidental issue, but as full and equal partner at all levels of planning and decision-making.

Chapter 2

Role of Voluntary Organizations in Development

In today's developmental scenario, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or voluntary organizations are major contributors. The work and experiences of NGOs have received particular visibility especially during the last decade. Whatever may be the issue- women's rights, health, education, gender discrimination- NGOs have contributed a lot to bring these issues to the center-stage of the development debate and on the agenda of planning for programs (PRIA, 1991). Now issues that have been hitherto neglected like deforestation, sustainable development, indigenous health issues have also been added to the development dialogues and planning because of the continuous work of NGOs in these areas (PRIA, 1991; Clark, 1991).

This growing visibility of NGOs has provoked a series of responses, the most important being that many important international and national development agencies and planners have started becoming interested in the variety of roles that the NGOs can play to help them. Many bilateral and multilateral institutions as well as institutions such as the World Bank and UNDP have started including NGOs in their framework. Even national governments all over the world have had to include the NGOs in their planning and programs (PRIA, 1991; Clark, 1991). Donors also find NGOs attractive for various reasons: NGOs can act as a complement to the state; they can respond to failures in both the public and private sectors; or they may be from the donor's country that heightens trust and national interest (Clark, 1991). Clark summarizes the main reasons for NGOs becoming the main actors. Firstly, because of their scale which is evident in the fact that in 1989, they contributed U.S.$6.4 billion to developing countries (including $2.2 billion of

official funds) representing some 12% of total development assistance (Bebbington and Farrington, 1992a and 1992b). Secondly, because of their style of work, many NGOs have demonstrated an ability to reach poor people who work in inaccessible areas and achieve things, which are difficult for official agencies (Tendler, 1982). Lastly, many of the NGOs try to represent the grassroots, the masses, and have closer links with the community, thereby emphasizing participatory approaches (Bratton, 1988, 1990).

India is one the major countries where NGOs play an important role in development planning. They have been able to establish a significant presence from the local to the national as well as the international level (Bratton, 1988, 1990). In fact, NGOs have a long chequered history in this country as they played a significant role even in the pre-independent era. Various reform measures to stop practices like child marriage, sati, the dowry system, the caste system, discrimination against the widows and girl children, as well as several political movements like Swadeshi, Quit India, Student movements, Trade Union (although these were not considered as voluntary organizations in the sense we use it today) - all have derived assistance and strength from voluntary initiative or voluntary action thanks to the efforts of leaders like Mahatma Gandhi. Even the movement for the liberation of the country was also supported by the voluntary movements in India.

In post independent India, the NGOs (as we understand them today) became active in the 1960s and 1970s when the then government was not able to fulfill its promise for the desired development of the country. Pandey (1990, 40) provides us with 3 explanations for the failure of the development policies in the post-independent era: First, "inappropriate planning and implementation" second, "the existing inegalitarian social structure, and third "western concepts of science/technology and development."

Removed from local conditions, centrally planned projects were often found to be unrealistic, alienated from the grassroots and operated top-down by a bureaucratic structure that failed to reach the weaker, poorer and the marginalized sections of the society (Pandey, 1990; Kothari, 1986). Since then NGOs in India have taken up various issues, sometimes together with the State and sometimes in opposition to the State, to pioneer such issues as rights of the girl child, empowerment of women and the poor, protection of forests, pollution, occupational health, water and power management systems, repropogating indigenous technology and a host of other related issues.

It would be wrong, however, to treat the NGOs as homogenous, as there are different types operating all over the country. For example, in India, there are social action groups, local groups, semi-political groups, youth groups, 'Mahila Mandals' (women's group), support organizations, federations, associations, Gandhian organizations, Marxist organizations and so on (PRIA, 1991; UNDP, n.d.). Before starting any discussion about NGO/ government relationship, it is important to pay particular attention to how I should describe a non-governmental organization.

In western countries, NGOs or voluntary organizations are mostly regarded as vehicles for channeling aid to needy people. The NGOs are recognized as important because of their organizational and managerial efficiency and the "corrective and curative services they can render to society" (Ralston, et al cited in Pandey, 1990). Voluntary organizations in India are so diverse and multifaceted that it is really hard to systematize or classify them fully. This term is also problematic as it is yet to be defined in a concise manner (Sood, 2000). Ordinarily, we might say, that any organization that is not related to government is a non-governmental organization. But this definition is too

general and homogenizes the voluntary organizations. So for the purpose of my paper, I would try to arrive at a definition of NGOs that can bring the organizations I interviewed within its scope. It is important to mention here that this definition is exploratory and evolving.

Keeping in mind the objectives and programs of the three organizations that I interviewed, Nishtha, Calcutta Rescue and Swadhina, I feel that an NGO is an organization that is involved in developmental work. By development the focus here is on people (be it children or women), who could achieve their 'agency' and 'identity' on their own by the support of these non-governmental organizations, support that comes in the form of programs, resources, ideas and skills (PRIA, 1990). This support also aims at helping the people to organize, so that they can influence policies, planning and ideas not only at the local or district levels but also at the national and international levels (PRIA, 1990). It is important then, that through advocacy, research and networking, these organizations support the people to counter and confront forces of oppression and marginalization. This support can also be defined as empowerment.

Empowerment means that the people will be organized to struggle and bring appropriate changes beginning at the grassroots level (PRIA, 1990). Empowerment of people would also mean empowering from within to make them self-reliant and to develop their own identity. This is what I believe can be taken as one of the important definitions of the NGOs I interviewed as these organizations are based on the above rationale. This rationale is reflected not only in their underlying belief, but also in their programs and activities. For example, we find that a health program by these organizations not only

provides medicines and treatments but also tends to educate people on health issues and solve other non-health related problems in an integrated manner.

In addition to their social commitments, the political context of NGOs must also be kept in mind. Third world countries like India who are to a great extent dependent politically as well as economically on the North, often end up creating their own social colonies internally. The NGOs in this regard can also be viewed as community action groups that struggle against any kind of domination and reflect a resurgence of counter-ideologies based on social, cultural, historical and indigenous factors.

Because of the kind of work the voluntary organizations do in India, they are often regarded by many as a reaction against government institutions that are highly structured and bureaucratized. Social academicians maintain that NGOs are meant to be opposed to the State (White, 1996, cited in Sood, 2000; Chabal, 1986, cited in Sood, 2000; Bayart, 1986, cited in Sood, 2000). Especially in the case of India, Gupta feels that the concept of NGOs "seem to have gone further than in the West in denying the validity of the state altogether..." (Gupta, 1997, 307, cited in Sood, 2000)[2]. It is these oppositional views that are the major barriers in NGO/Government collaboration. Thus my definition of an NGO is not an organization that should essentially oppose the State but that tries to work not only with the State but also with other national and international organizations to achieve the following:

- development and operation of infrastructure

- supporting innovation, demonstration and pilot projects

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[2]It is important to point out here that a number of feminists in India, like Pam Rajput or Devaki Jain considered but rejected this strategy and have been writing to support the quota system of women in local

- facilitating communication

- technical assistance and training

- research, monitoring and evaluation

- advocacy for and with the poor and the marginalized (Clark, 1991).

To bring about a more holistic development, it is important then that the NGOs start working together with the government.

In the development ideology of the modern world, "collaboration" has certainly become the buzzword. The reason collaboration has become so important is because it is a mechanism of "exchanging information…taking some concrete common steps around a specific issue" (UNDP, n.d, 64), interaction, dialogue and joint action. Collaboration between NGOs and government as well as within NGOs themselves, provides the opportunities to come together, share their knowledge base, expertise, resources, and capacities in order to work together on a specific issue. In India, a large number of actions around questions of environment such as the campaign against Union Carbide following the Bhopal Gas Disaster have been made possible only because of collaboration if not always between NGOs and government but definitely between NGOs themselves (PRIA, 1990; Clark, 1991).

Development as specified by DAWN, as well as UNDP, does not only mean working for people; it also needs to be conceived and realized by people themselves. As I have already discussed in chapter 1, any kind of real collaboration must be grounded in concrete realities through the participation of the grassroots, especially women and girl children.

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government. They believe that democratic government is not something that we should get rid of in a

The different variables of development like food, security, health, education, jobs-all these can be achieved only when people set their own goals. The people involved must make the decision needed to reach these goals and build "the social, economic and political structures that move them closer to their aspirations" (UNDP, n.d, 3). This is the core of what is also known as participatory development. And this is where the NGOs become important as they work "from people's perceptions of their own needs and build on their strengths"(UNDP, n.d, 3), rather than just trying to compensate people's grievances with external assistance and ideas from the top (UNDP, n.d, 3). They can bring the people's perspectives to the government in cases where the governments fail to reach the grassroots, thereby giving prominence to the need for pluralism to the citizen's voices (Mowli, 1990; Clark, 1991).

NGOs can also serve as the unofficial conscience of nations, closely monitoring how governments fulfill their human rights obligations. Thus, they can develop the essential checks and balances that should be there in an open society (Mowli, 1990; Clark, 1991).

Thus, governments should develop mutually empowering relationships with NGOs in order to promote people-centered development. The World Summit for Social Development (WSSD, 1995) represents a landmark in the field of collaboration as with the active participation of hundreds of NGOs, governments committed themselves to the goal of eradicating poverty "as an ethical, social, political and economic imperative of human kind" (UNDP, n.d, 7). Many NGOs have also undertaken gender related research in documenting women's unpaid work and have advocated and lobbied for gender equality.

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world of corporate globalization but that we should try to remake the State.

Because of the disproportionate burden felt by women as a result of the impact of adjustment on social service programs, women's groups have taken up these issues and worked together with governments to ensure that "macro policies are gender-sensitive" (UNDP, n.d, 11).

From the above discussion, it can be summarized that NGOs and governments can collaborate on the following 3 principles: to promote dialogue among governments and NGOs to help develop policies to support sustainable human development (UNDP, n.d; Clark, 1991); to help voluntary organizations develop capacity building programs; to seek additional program resources and to strengthen the involvement of NGOs and Government in the design, implementation and monitoring of projects and programs (UNDP, n.d.).

Generally the Government of India has tried to come up with various programs to work closely with the NGOs (Mowli, 1990). Right from the mid 1950s, there have been programs of assistance to voluntary organizations like Freedom-from-Hunger Campaign (FFHC), People's Action for Development (PADE) and Council for Advancement of People's Action for Rural Technology (CAPART). Yet a look at the scholarly literature does suggest that the collaboration has not been that successful for various reasons. It is a paradox that in spite of the great expectations, many of these organizations are working in isolation with little interaction and coordination within themselves. It is not uncommon to find many of these organizations working in an area, almost treading on each other's toes, yet they hardly recognize each other or cooperate with each other (Mowli, 1990). Added to this, the interface between voluntary organizations and governmental organs has hardly received any attention. Neither the central nor the state government in India has come up

with any concrete and clearly defined policies or fruitful suggestions to overcome this snag (Mowli, 1990).

The problem becomes more important in the case of a state like West Bengal that has an essentially socialist government. West Bengal, situated in the eastern region of India covering 78,000 square kilometers, is the fourth most populous state in India with a population of 68 million (1991 census). It has the highest population density among the Indian states, (excluding Delhi the capital of India) and the Union Territories. It continues to attract large numbers of migrants from neighboring states and from neighboring countries like Nepal and Bangladesh. Two major events in West Bengal that have strongly influenced the socio-economic situations in the state are land reforms and empowerment of Panchayats.[3]

West Bengal like other States in the country recognizes the importance of constructive involvement and participation of community as well as NGOs and women's organizations in developmental efforts (UNICEF, 1997c) There are a number of NGOs and women's organizations working on various issues in West Bengal, and the West Bengal government believes in fostering a closer link with these organizations.

Yet the relationship of NGO/Government in this state has hardly received any attention as the lack of literature on this issue suggests. An analysis of this issue also becomes important in the light of the statement made by the West Bengal State Government, that NGOs will no longer be allowed to work independently in West Bengal. To undertake any development activities, they will have to work in collaboration with

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[3]Panchayat refers to the village councils in India. With its May 31st, 1995 program, West Bengal became the first state in India to elect new panchayat members under new legislation requiring that 1/3 panchayat

'panchayats' and 'zilla parisads' (district councils). Although apparently this announcement might seem as an attempt towards collaboration, in reality it is a blow to the functional freedom of NGOs and a step towards control of all voluntary organizations.

According to various NGO members, as reported by Sengupta (1996), this will result in the state government getting all the credit for doing developmental work and will also take away all the freedom from NGOs in choosing projects and programs independently. The NGOs have also been urged by the state government to disclose the source of their funds to the government and inform about their future plan of action. This is deemed necessary by the government for proper coordination of activities and optimum utilization of funds.

As pointed out in another article by Ashok V. Chowgule (1996), although top communist leaders have always tried to give attention to the need for greater NGO/Government collaboration, this statement made by the state government in fact brings out the double standard of the Marxists' dealings with the voluntary sector. Chowgule also points out that many voluntary groups in West Bengal complain about how it is much better to work in other states like Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, rather than in West Bengal as years of leftist rule have only led to the stunting of the NGO movement in West Bengal.

Given this state of affairs, my research tries to focus on some of the real issues that is hampering collaboration in West Bengal and the possibility of a future collaboration as well as to provide with some recommendations about how the situation can be improved by developing a new model of collaboration.

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leaders be women. This is a particularly significant step as a new constitutional amendment makes the

My research is thus the search for such a new attempt at collaboration marking the blueprint for a much larger and longer process. It is only through the collaboration and participation of the grassroots that the nebulous seed of real development can germinate. It is only an integrated, cooperative approach based on sharing of ideas and resources will lead to an alternate and better social order that is just, equitable and free of all hierarchical power and positions.

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changes, which give more power to panchayats through all the states of India.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Introduction

The methodology of this thesis is interdisciplinary, standing at the intersection of Social Science and Humanities and building on the inner strength of both these scholarly traditions. The interdisciplinary nature of the thesis is consistent with the approach of Women's Studies and also stems from my two different backgrounds in Comparative Literature and Feminist Social Science. This interdisciplinarity helped me to question some of the assumptions of traditional Social Science research and at the same time provided me with answers to those doubts I had (for a detailed study of the above issues see Ethnographic Feminism edited by Sally Cole and Lynne Phillips and Decentering the Center edited by Uma Narayan and Sandra Harding).

As a student of Humanities, with a background of studying literature by Said, Spivak, Narayan and Mohanty and by studying Feminist Social Science, I was aware of the subjective context of the research process and the position of the researcher as well as the informants. Post-colonial as well as Post-modern feminist researchers have always questioned the subjective experience of the researcher, who collects information and retains control of the interpretation (Abwunza, 1995). It is the researcher who chooses which voice to include and which to delete.

Even the representations from the interviews can be different day to day; there can be different representations possible and one person can represent in apparently contradictory ways on two different days. I am aware of the fact that their stories as well as my interpretations are not the full representation of the whole scenario in India or of the

research participants themselves. Post-colonial and Post-modern literature did help me to think about the constantly changing identities and accounts of reality that is possible in my data. While doing my research, I was also cautious about the fact that no experience or interpretation is homogeneous and should not produce an essentialist picture of the Indian scenario thereby ignoring the differences, pluralities and ongoing changes common in virtually all nation-states.

But as a Feminist Social Scientist, I believe that the aim of feminist research is to challenge the oppressions and marginalization of women and is to try to listen to women's voices that have been ignored for ages by the effluvia of traditional 'main-stream' research. The methodology is listening to women's words and experiences and treating them as more important than the academic literature and theories.

Fully acknowledging the issues of power and positionalities of the researcher and the researched what I argue is that as a feminist scholar my most important concern is to give space and validity to women/girl children's voices, not usually heard everywhere. As well I hope to capture some of the organizational realities (as heard from some of the key leaders of the organizations) that have meaning as well as political and policy consequences. In order to avoid misrepresentation I have used a variety of sources to support the authenticity of the voices and have used the words of research participants and placed their words within the appropriate historical and political context. I have used the women's voices to destabilize the hegemonic scholarly discourse and settle some of the assumptions that tend to ignore women's voices.

My research thus tries to capture the experiences and feelings of the girl children, as expressed by them to gain knowledge that can be utilized for the feminist work of changing women's peripheral position.

This chapter describes the data collection procedures and explains how interviewing is appropriate to this research. Here I also discuss the methodological problems I faced in the course of my interviews that stem from differences between traditional research and feminist research.

Data collection and the selection of the organizations:

I became interested in the development issues of West Bengal during the second year of the graduate studies in Kolkata at a seminar organized by the Women's Studies department of Jadavpur University. It was then that I first decided to work with the NGOs. Later after my graduation when I started working for an NGO, I could experience the various difficulties sometimes NGOs have to face in the state and began to realize how much better the scenario would have been if the organizations were working with the government towards a common goal. Upon entering the masters program in Women's studies, I decided to further my understanding of the collaboration issue in India as I believe that it is only through collaborating and working together that true development can be achieved. That is why through my research I want to comprehend the interrelationships between the various macro level policies and programs of the government of West Bengal, local women's organizations, Calcutta Municipal Corporation (CMC) and NGOs, working to improve the health/education/social standards of girl children. The objective is to find out how far these organizations feel the necessity and importance of collaborating and incorporating not only each other's ideas, resources

and expertise but also the girl children themselves while formulating their policies and programs.

Getting in touch with the organizations and convincing them about the objectives of the research was not an easy task. At first I went through a list (downloaded from the Internet) of NGOs and women's organizations active in West Bengal for the development of women and girl children. I sent out a number of emails explaining my research and interviews I would be doing in Kolkata. Hardly any of them responded other than Paromita Roy, the director of Swadhina (meaning Independent), a women's organization working for girl children in Kolkata. She gave her consent for the interviews and was very enthusiastic about the whole project. While searching the net, I read a few articles by Dr. Bharath Sethuraman, on Nishtha (meaning Dedication), another voluntary organization in Kolkata. I got in touch with Dr. Sethuraman who was also a member of a funding agency in the US, helping Nishtha, and he introduced me to Mina Das, the founder of Nishtha. It was from the same list that I came to know of Calcutta Rescue, and its member in Canada, Anup Bhattacharya. He emailed Gautam Ghosh, secretary of Calcutta Rescue in Kolkata, explaining to him about my research and Gautam Ghosh gave his consent. Thus these are the three organizations that I contacted before leaving Canada for my research. I profile each of these organizations in the next chapter.

While in Kolkata, I was introduced to Tapas Roy, officer at the Social Welfare Department, Government of West Bengal, by Manjushree Mukherjee, a social worker and a teacher I knew personally. Manjushree Mukherjee and Shubhobroto Banerjee, another active social worker in Kolkata also helped me with their valuable insights from their

experience in the field and some of the results of my research were also based on the interviews I had with them regarding NGO/government relationships in West Bengal.

Amongst my key informants were the eight girl children that I interviewed, aged 10-18. Four of them were under the projects of Nishtha (Nanda, Rita Mondal, Shikha) and Calcutta Rescue (Mita, Parul, Sayeeda) and the two others girls (Vania and Shefhali) I knew personally. The girl children from the organizations were approximately 14-15 years old while both Vania and Shefhali were 18.

From Nishtha I interviewed Mina Das, and Bulu Sarkar, a social worker at Nishtha. From Calcutta Rescue, Dr. Nandita Das, Gautam Ghosh and from Swadhina, Paromita Roy, Saswati Roy and Dr. Asit Roy were interviewed. Therefore my total key informants were 15, apart from Manjushree Mukherjee and Shubhobroto Banerjee with whom I had informal discussions providing background information.[4]

Once in Kolkata, I called up all three organizations and sent them the consent forms so that my potential participants could make a well-informed decision about participating in the research. I made a Bengali (local language of West Bengal) translation of the consent forms and read them out to the girl children.

My interviews as part of the field research were basically semi-structured open-ended interviews covering thematic topics and background information (See Appendix 1 for details). The interview was also in many ways similar to an oral history in its methodology. Interviews were held in the Social Welfare Department, organization's office and in two of the girl's houses (Vania and Shefhali). The interviews were all done in my native language that is Bengali and were taped with the participant's permission. I did

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[4]Some of these names are not real names in order to protect confidentiality of the people who requested it.

two focus group interviews with the girl children in the two organizations that lasted for about 1-2 hours. The interviews with the government officials and NGOs took place at their places of work and lasted approximately 2-3 hours, sometimes with short tea-breaks, and one took place over two days. Vania and Shefhali were interviewed individually in their homes.

Issues of Confidentiality and Voice

As I was dealing with human subjects in my research, my research proposal had to be first approved by the University Ethics Committee, where I had to submit a copy of my proposal, questionnaire, draft of consent form (see Appendix 2) and also to clarify some of the ways I was going to do my interviews. The reason the issue of confidentiality became so important in my research process (the issue of confidentiality is also discussed later in chapter 7), is because the University Ethics Committee had guidelines, taken from medical research, which assume that when dealing with human subjects, I should be able to guarantee confidentiality and anonymity.

Although I understand the importance of guarantees of anonymity and confidentiality, if such guarantees are made, they must be inviolable. I did not want to make such guarantees of confidentiality and anonymity because I am interested in oral history and in describing specific organizations and policy processes, which are impossible to disguise. Under such circumstances is it not unethical to make such guarantees? As some of the organizations I interviewed were small, it is difficult to disguise the source of information, if one is identifying the organization in a specific historical context. Also, I correctly expected that some of the participants wanted to be on record to get credit for

their projects and perceptions. In cases like this, I have mentioned the names of the organizations and also a few names of people who wanted to be on the record.

The whole idea of anonymity (as opposed to confidentiality), that the interviewer does not know the identity of the interviewee, made no sense for my study in India, a country in which one needs to be introduced to potential study participants. It would have been culturally inappropriate to interview anonymous participants as one would not simply speak to strangers in India. Another issue that I had to explain to the University Ethics Committee was that my study involved oral history interviews and so I had to retain the contextual, geographical and historical authenticity. Thus it would make no sense to guarantee blanket confidentiality. But what I did was to discuss the whole issue of confidentiality with my research participants about what will be "on" and "off" the record and about whether they wanted to be identified. My preference was to tape interviews and to treat the information as "on the record" and as an authentic account of their experiences and perceptions. I also made this clear to my respondents, and they agreed to that. However, when my respondents wanted to keep some information off the record or asked me not to record certain information, I turned off the recorder at their request. This I had to do a few times when I was discussing the themes of co-optation by the state government with the organizations.

I did not use the real names of some of the members I interviewed as some of them did not want to be on the record. However as to the names of the organizations, they wanted to have them on the record as they felt it will give their organization some more publicity and would also encourage other organizations to come forward and talk about their problems.

I made every attempt to safeguard the tapes (after transcribing them) by putting them in a secure location under lock and key. While in use and in storage, the data were not identified by names of specific individuals or organizations. Instead tapes and interviews were assigned a number and the code sheet for the numbers was stored separately. I know that because of the nature of the data, the contents of the tapes would likely be traceable, but this procedure will protect privacy and guard against unauthorized but casual intrusions and chance encounters with data sources.

Both before and after the interview, I discussed with each participant whether they wanted a copy of the tape for review, and whether they wanted it erased or whether they want it deposited in the archives, if possible after five years. All of them wanted the tapes to be deposited in the archive for future research, and one organization requested that I send a copy of my thesis to them.

Interviewing in Feminist Research

Generally an interview is defined as a "way of finding out about people" by asking questions (Oakley, 1981, 32). An interview, Ann Oakley suggests, is essentially a conversation in which two people talk to each other. It is a tool to gather information from respondents. Thus it can also be regarded as a "pseudo conversation" (Oakley, 1981, 32) which in order to be successful, " must have all the warmth and personality exchange of a conversation with the clarity and guidelines of scientific searching" (Goode and Hatt, 1952, 191). Feminist researchers thus perceive traditional social research interviews as very objective, detached or hierarchical (Goode and Hatt, 1952, 36). Oakley argues that this difference between feminist interviews and traditional social science interviews is actually a reflection of the wide spread gender stereotyping, where the

woman is taken as " sensitive, intuitive, incapable of objectivity and emotional detachment and as immersed in the business of making and sustaining personal relationships as opposed to men who are rational, objective and seen to be possessed of an instrumental orientation in their relationships with others" (Goode and Hatt, 1952, 38). Oakley points out that it is no accident, therefore, that most of the methodology textbooks "refer to the interviewer as male" and "[a]lthough not all interviewees are referred to as female, there are a number of references to 'housewives' as the kind of people interviewers are most likely to meet in the course of their work" (Goode and Hatt, 1952, 39).

Taking the above mentioned points into consideration, feminist researchers like Anderson and Dana (1995) thus argued that an interview should be a form of giving expression to women's experience as well as revealing their perspectives. For feminists, "representation of women's experience" is " the beginning and often the end of production of knowledge claims" (Gottfried, 1996, 5).

The reason I chose to do interviews in my research is because I feel that interviewing in a feminist way gave me an opportunity to have closer contacts with my informants and to document their own accounts of their experiences, feelings and aspirations. I agree with Reinharz that the process of interviewing, using a feminist approach gave me direct access to the ideas, thoughts and feelings of my informants. It helped me to open my ears to the voices and perspectives of the members so that I can hear the unheard and unimagined.

I had to be very informal while talking to the girls as some of them were really shy and not ready to respond. I never rushed them and kept the atmosphere as informal as possible. To break the ice, sometimes I even discussed the latest movies they have seen

and it really helped to bring us closer. It was different from traditional social science research (perhaps not so much from anthropological research), as my interviews were more like conversation devoid of any detachment, objectivity and hierarchy. The informal conversation brought us closer.

There was a certain degree of freedom and flexibility present in all my interview sessions that made them more like informal discussions than formal traditional social science interviews. Many of my respondents took some time to think before answering my questions. I never tried to rush them and waited for them to speak up. Sometimes they even went back to the previous question and gave their comments in the midst of another discussion. This was possible because I never asked them to stick to the present question only and tried to give them freedom to explore whatever questions they wanted to talk about. I did not even show them my questionnaire, and most of the questions actually came up from the discussions that we were having. In fact it was pointed out by one of the government officials I interviewed that he had never experienced an interview like this, that is so very informal and relaxing and like a conversation.

Dilemmas faced during my research

While on my field research a few methodological concerns came up as part of my qualitative interviewing. On the basis of Oakley's accounts, I had expected the interviews to be good, full, conversations and to be able to participate fully and completely. I was startled and disillusioned when that did not occur, especially in the case of girl children I interviewed, as girl children are usually the marginalized in the society whose world views have "typically become known through adult accounts" (Brannen and O'Brian, 1996, 1, Cited in Alldred, 1998). In fact one of the key concerns that came up was the relationship

of power that existed between the girl children and me and also between me and the adult members of the organizations.

Issues of Power

According to Wolf, power in research is discernible in three interrelated areas:

> a) power differences stemming from different positionalities of the researcher and the researched (race, class, nationality, life chances, urban-rural background); b) power exerted during the research process, such as defining the research relationship, unequal exchange, and exploitation; c) power exerted during the post field work period- writing and representing (Wolf, 1996, 2).

Major dilemmas in my research were linked to the first area that Wolf point out about the different positionalities of the researcher and the researched based on (in my case) primarily three issues, class, age and urban-rural background.

The Class Difference Between Me and the Girl Children

While in the field, I felt uneasy about the class difference that existed between me and some of my informants, especially the girl children as some of them were from rural backgrounds or from slums working as domestic helpers. As opposed to their class identity, my identity as a woman was also linked up with my emergence from a typical upper middle class background. These two identities more than anything else, to my way of thinking, profoundly affected the methodology vis a vis the interviewing of the members of the organizations by creating a kind of barrier between us.

Language was the prime medium of communication, and was mediated by the bourgeois class ideologies of mine. While both the interviewees (most of whom hailed from economically under privileged sections) and I were interacting in Bengali, our mother

tongue, yet there was clearly something that was preventing me from reaching out to these girls. This happened more in cases of those interviews when I was talking to the girls in the organizations as well as to some of the members of the organizations who were not so fluent in English. Then I realized that my Bengali was the Bengali of the typical bourgeoisie 'nabina' (the modern woman), punctuated by English words, idioms and phrases bearing a testimony to my years of study in an English medium school.

Much as I would try, it would be well nigh impossible for me to shake off the entire construction of myself as a bourgeois woman, from a typically Bengali middle class urban family. I could feel when I first started talking to them they were too shy to talk. Some of them even told me that they did not know how to speak in English. Their shyness was also to some extent because of the fact that I have come from Canada, and they made efforts to talk to me in English. I could sense some kind of insider/outsider dilemma being created while doing my interviews, thereby making my participation in the children's world only partial.

My first attempt to break through this identity and truly identify myself with my interviewees (who did not adhere to the same class ideology as I did) was however met with a very low measure of success. More as I tried to share the same thought, feelings and beliefs with these members, the more it became apparent to me, that such attempts could hardly lead to anything conclusive.

Actually two very noticeable reactions could be felt by my attempts at any kind of equality of terms during the course of my interviews. The primary reaction was one of reticence. Instead of merely putting in questions for the interviewees to answer, I tried increasingly to join in and to start a conversation. But it soon became apparent that, it was

only I who was doing the real talking. Thus, it was my ideology and belief, which were getting expressed in the course of the interviews. The interviewee was no more than a passive collaborator, who would acquiesce to whatever I had to say. The disparity of class relations was making the flow of knowledge unidirectional. From an essential receiver of information, I had become the dispenser of such. Moreover I could feel that some of the interviewees were even willing to be mediated by what I had to say as they put a blind faith on my supposedly superior knowledge and intellect as borne out by my years of formal education in a reputed English medium school, my anglicized Bengali pronunciations, and of course my studying in a foreign university. The dialogue, which I sought to enter into on terms of equality, soon thus degenerated into a meaningless monologue. The interviewees were sometimes too embarrassed to express any independent opinions, and after a while, they became increasingly taciturn and the more I tried to identify myself with them, the more absurd this process of identification became.

For me this was an important dilemma, as I was worried that in my attempt to speak about the girl children, I might end up emphasizing my own adult perspectives. It reminded me of what Helleiner calls, "gendered adultism" where the researcher becomes more interested in what "the adults had to say about the children and what children had to say about adults, than what children had to say about themselves" (Helleiner, 1999, 35).

Another interesting point that I noted while interviewing some girls who were from upper class backgrounds was an attempt on their part to render themselves in adult-centered terms instead of presenting their accounts in their own words. As Alldred once pointed out, often children do not want themselves to be regarded as fools by adults and try to "explain themselves convincingly to those in power over them" (Alldred, 1998,

153). Therefore, I had to be extra careful about my own use of language while talking to them, and I tried to use as much simple language as possible and try to avoid using English. The method worked as after they noticed me using simple words to frame my questions or express my opinion, they started becoming more relaxed and easy with their words.

The class and age differences and differences in background were also apparent in my interviews with the members of the organization. While in case of the girl children, I was regarded as the 'supreme authority', the attitude changed in the case of the members where they regarded me a mere student, just trying to finish up my Masters thesis. The fact that I was studying in Canada also created problems as many of the members were skeptical about how could I expect to make any change in India, by being myself in a "developed" country like Canada. One of the members wondered in the course of the interview how all this interviewing is going to help other than finishing up my Masters.

It was a pertinent question that made me think about the results of my research. I could feel that it is true that my research would not be able to create such ripples. But then what I pointed out to her was that these small studies together can obviously create change, and more and more people doing research in this direction would come forward to take some kind of action. My study would help them to give a direction. This she agreed with.

The way I successfully negotiated the problems associated with the imbalances of power, during the interviews, was to neglect it entirely. This I did in the later part of my interviewing by remaining increasingly silent and letting my interviewee do as much of the talking as possible. Respectful listening (as my supervisor Dr. Linda Christiansen-

Ruffman, had once pointed out to me in the course of a discussion about feminist methodologies), was the only means through which I could draw out of the girls their real thoughts, beliefs and concerns. It also made me realize that to do interviews in a feminist way does not mean that the researcher and the researched have to be necessarily "good friends" and identify with each other perfectly. My genuine interest in listening to what they have to say brought us closer and created a sense of trust that is important for feminist research (Reinharz, 1992). I did not pretend to be a good friend of my informants but tried to establish a more egalitarian orientation. I thus tried to downplay my academic status and portrayed myself more as a "learner" and a "listener" rather than a researcher, only interested in collecting data (Reinharz, 1992, 29-30).

Self-Disclosure

To initiate dialogue with my respondents, I often had to resort to self-disclosure so that the interviews did not become mere interrogation. Self-disclosure also became necessary because of the age difference that existed between me and my respondents. As for the girl children, all of them were teenagers and being much older than them, I was not really sure if they would be able to open up to me. What I did was start talking about their daily lives, school activities, dreams and hobbies. It started from there and we ended up talking about how I went abroad to study and how as a girl I too had to face so many problems that they were facing. We even spoke about Indian movies and their favorite stars. It brought us closer and at the end of the session, I was happy to be their elder sister "didibhai" as they called me and had to promise to go and visit them next time I am in Kolkata.

This also helped me to listen to their everyday experience in their own words and from their own 'standpoint'[5], thereby challenging the traditional social science research methods where either women are neglected or 're-presented' by man's voice. As for the organization members, they were interested in knowing what exactly I am doing in Canada and what kind of research I was interested in. One of the organizations was really interested in my background and even asked me to come and work with them, as I am also interested in girl children.

Some of the members also wanted to find out my opinion about certain issues before replying themselves. I shared my thoughts with them as it helped me to establish an interactive relationship with my respondents but emphasized at the same time that my opinion does not necessarily reflect the real situation compared to the members some of whom were far more experienced than me in the field. These I believe gave them the autonomy and space to express their views and also decreased the risk of me as the researcher leading the interviews.

Sensitive Subjects

Another issue that I faced while interviewing the members of the NGOs or the government officials, was their attempt to suppress certain information. One of the issues that some of the organizations tried to avoid was the question about control of research projects by foreign donors. Every time I tried to ask the question and find out their opinions regarding the problem, there was a tendency on the part of the members to avoid

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[5] According to Canadian Sociologist Dorothy Smith, to take women's experiences as a standpoint means to validate women's experience and to use women's experiences to investigate society. Traditionally experiences of men tended to be the center of analysis in Social Science research that did not match up with phenomena women experienced. Hence feminist social scientists like Smith and Harding argue that

it by making some general comments. From their body language, it was apparent that they did not really want to discuss the issue with me. The same kind of response was also evident when I asked them about allegations about co-optation and involvement of women and girl children in their project planning and programming. They did not really avoid the question but made it obvious that they do not want to continue the topic any further. This is similar to or serves the same purpose as gate-keeping. Many feminist scholars like Shulamit Reinharz have pointed out how gatekeepers often want to protect themselves or the structure of power in their organizations from criticisms or embarrassment and prevent outsider access; they do not want the outsiders to intervene.

I did not want to force them into saying anything as their silences and pauses were enough for me to interpret the real issues, but what I did was to make it very clear to them that I do not want to exploit them or the information they will give me and that their names and personal details will be changed, too, if necessary. Thus while writing my thesis some of the names of the members of the organization were changed as the members did not want to be on record officially.

Post Interview Dilemma

In the post interview period while writing my thesis, I sometimes faced problems transcribing some of the interviews as all of them were done in Bengali, the local language of Kolkata. Sometimes some of the words used did not have exact equivalents in English, and I had to go through the transcriptions again and again to find out the best words to express correctly what the words meant in Bengali.

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women should also have an equal say in the research process and that the perspectives of women should be incorporated into research to understand social phenomena.

Even while writing my thesis, I tried to "re-present" the voices of my interviewees as much as possible. In the male-stream academia where an academic theoretical 'meta-language' is considered the only acceptable way of writing, I had to be extra careful towards the gap that exists between the spoken word and the academic presentation of the spoken word (Standing, 1998), and I tried to make my thesis as grounded and close to realities as possible.

Thus, what becomes clear to me while doing research following feminist principles is the very dynamism of feminist research methods with no fixed set of rules and the necessity of an integrated, holistic approach to designing research. As Christiansen-Ruffman points out, what is necessary is that research designs be shaped by the "interaction of the community and the researchers, with due recognition of the expertise of both parties" (Christiansen-Ruffman and Lord, 1999, 15), the ultimate focus being on "[f]or whom, with whom, by whom, about whom and on whom is research being done?" (Christiansen-Ruffman and Lord, 1999, 15).

Chapter 4

Profile of the Organizations Interviewed

Introduction

In this chapter, I describe the organizations that I interviewed, the history behind their establishment, their objectives and activities. I divided their activities into three types: educational, health and cultural. I have emphasized these activities as some of the work done by the three organizations is to a great extent similar, and there can be possibilities of collaboration among them. This possibility of collaboration I have discussed later in my 'findings' chapter with more details.

Nishtha

History:

Nishta was first started in 1975 by a group of women at Baruipur on the outskirts of Kolkata. According to Mina, initially the main purpose of the organization was to combat the evil forces dominating the women and to establish the legitimate rights of the female folks in the domestic front as well as in the society. Gradually, Nishtha started increasing its activities ranging from providing basic education to girl children, development of the nutritional health of girl children to social empowerment of women. Their project area today consists of almost 60 villages with an approximate area of 110 sq. kms and with a population of 78,120 people. It has 4-5 permanent workers and many voluntary workers.

Activities of Nishtha:

Nishtha has been active in forming women's groups, organizing girl children as well as boy children to form groups to develop their rural society. Below I briefly describe the activities to have an idea of the kind of work in which Nishtha is involved.

According to Mina, amongst the most important activities of Nishtha was the formation of "Mahila Mandal" (women's group), "Kishori Bahini" (girl's group) and "Balika and Balak Bahini" (children's group). During the time when I went to Nishtha, it had 35 "Mahila Mandals" active in 37 villages working together to build a platform where they can unitedly raise their voice against oppression and violence and to help other women in the villages who are in distress or in need. In their effort to fight against all sorts of exploitation, they are assisted by the "Kishori Bahini" (comprising teenage girls) and "Balika balak bahini" (girls and boys of age group 6-9 years). Nishtha provides these two "Bahinis" with formal and non-formal education, along with leadership training, training on village administration, community development, knowledge of environment, reproductive rights and legal rights of women in the society so that these groups of girls and children can involve themselves with the "upliftment" of the "Mahila Mandals" and other developmental processes.

Educational Programs:

One of the important activities of Nishta, characterizing its activities, is its educational programs. In the developmental scenario, education plays an important role. At present, Nishtha is running 9 schools where 980 students are studying. In addition, Nishtha runs pre-primary educational centers with 305 students, non-formal education centers having 555 students and school for drop out children comprising of 120 students.

Mina described the poverty in this area where the average income per family is cd$ 15-20 i.e. Rs.500-600 approximately; by occupation most of the people are share croppers, agricultural laborers, van rickshaw pullers, artisans or carpenters. Because of the poverty families in this area find it hard to send their children to schools. Nishtha provides the children with free books, stationary and food to encourage them to come to school.

In its non-formal schools, Nishtha stresses extra-curricular activities, paintings and physical education. Basic education is thus imparted through folk songs, folklore or dramas. As part of non-formal education, during harvest seasons, members of Nishtha go to the fields and try to teach women working in the fields.

Health Programs:

Under its health programs, Nishtha runs 8 clinics for general illness, and one exclusive clinic for the treatment of gynecological disorders of females. The 8 health clinics in general focus on regular health checkups of school children as well as children of age-group 0-5 years, antenatal and postnatal care of mothers, reproductive health, sanitation and hygiene, regular de-worming of children and nutritional health. It is important to note that the health services rendered by Nishtha is allopathic in conjunction with homeopathy; homeopathy is very popular among the rural people as it is inexpensive and has fewer side effects.

Economic Development Programs:

Besides education and health, Nishtha also places emphasis on the economic development of the villagers, especially women. In accordance with that, it runs various income generation programs that include poultry, fishery, prawn cultivation, paddy, "kantha" stitching (a special way of sewing) and small savings. It has also formed 3 artisan

cooperatives where the village girls collect orders, purchase raw materials and do all the marketing and selling by themselves.

Nishtha's emphasis on the girl child:

Besides its other activities in the health, economic and educational spheres, Nishtha is also engaged in improving the status of the girl child particularly in the rural areas. Mina pointed out that the position of the girl child in the family quite frequently is much too wretched to be described in words. Parents believe that money spent on the girl child is money being thrown in the waste basket, since the destiny of every girl child is to be married off which entails her going off to a different family. The girl child is often allowed to eat only after her male siblings had their meals and even then, she is given meals that are inadequate for her developing body. Consequently severe nutritional deficiencies develop in her during her formative years. One must also remember that these are the girl children who are going to be (in many cases) adolescent and teenage mothers giving birth to babies which consequently suffer from various ailments, being born of mothers who are themselves ill. Thus a vicious cycle is created and maintained in deference to the patriarchal modes of the society. Thus often it is the ingrained cultural traditions that operate within the matrix of the family and the society that lead to certain patterns of discrimination against women in general and girl child in particular. As Bulu Sarkar, the social worker at Nishtha revealed to me,

> It is true ... while the girl child has to put in as much labor as the male child in typical low income families in the vicinity, it is only the male child who is credited for the labor and consequently gets a disproportionately large share of the nutritional intake provided by the family (which is in any case rather limited), while the girl child, being regarded as a passive agency of child birth is hardly given the nutrition she deserves.

Nishtha seeks to dissipate the tensions that arise as a result of years of patriarchal cultural codes, by holding discussion sessions with the women and especially young men of the society who are sensitized about the gender perspective and the reasons for supporting the development of girl children. These interactive sessions are also aimed at giving ample opportunities to women to explain their needs and demands and also to discuss the various socio-economic and cultural prohibitions they face in their daily existence.

Calcutta Rescue

History:

It was from the Director, Gautam Ghosh that I came to know that Cal Res was established by Dr. Jack Preger, a British National who came to South Asia in the early 1970s. Cal Res covers a comparatively larger area than Nishtha and has approximately 10-15 permanent members and a few voluntary social workers.

Activities of Cal Res:

The current activities of Cal Res consist of health interventions and providing sustenance delivered through outpatient clinics, formal and non-formal schools and handicraft projects.

Educational Programs:

The 3 schools run by Cal Res are aimed at providing not only formal education but also food, clothing, medication and non-formal education like handicraft training, poetry sessions, singing/dancing sessions to children aged 2-12. The schools with around 400 students from slums and local pavements are divided into two shifts, 9a.m.-11a.m. and

12.30p.m-2.40p.m. The time between the two shifts is allocated for lunch for all students.

When the children first arrive in school in the morning, they are given milk and either a

banana or high protein biscuits. They are also given a nutritious meal at lunchtime. Such

meals are planned keeping in mind the eradication of the common nutritional deficiencies

prevalent in the locality. A comprehensive medical program is provided for the students

for the treatment of such diseases such as anemia, Vitamin B/A deficiency, malnutrition,

T.B. etc. They also have a family planning program in which school children are given sex

education in small groups of the same sex.

Health Programs:

The health programs of Cal Res mainly comprise 4 health clinics in different areas

of Kolkata, each of which cater to different health needs. Below I have discussed briefly

each clinic and its activity.

The first important clinic is at Tala Park, Cal Res's mother and child clinic. Patients

are treated for a variety of conditions, given preventive medicine, health education and

ante/prenatal care. Advice is also given on family planning. The health workers receive

individual instructions in ante/postnatal care, on how to document the care they give to the

mothers and learn how to prioritize care, ask appropriate questions and give appropriate

advice. In this the local midwives also assist them.

The Sealdah Clinic is for general adult patients together with facilities for cardiac

and diabetic patients. The patients here are also provided with free food, transport money

and clothes. Some also receive help with school fees and books for their children, rent or

house repairs. In terms of outreach, 2 staff visits slum areas each week and bring those in

need of treatment to the clinic. They also give health education to the people in those areas with the intention of making them aware of their right to good health.

The Chitpur Clinic provides medicine, health education and support on social, financial and nutritional basis to leprosy patients. Podiatry has a large role to play and a volunteer podiatrist works there.

Cal Res's newest clinic is at Belgachia, situated in an area where the residents predominantly belong to the lower income group. In February 1999, DOTS (Direct Observation Treatment Short Course), the T.B. program organized by WHO and run by Indian Government, began in the clinic. Approximately 45 patients attend the clinic every day. A large part of the work at Belgachia is community outreach. The outreach workers also fulfill the role of health providers, health educators and agents of change.

Economic Development Programs:

Cal Res runs two spinning and weaving courses for boys from poor backgrounds with the aim of providing training to improve their employment prospects. A sewing program is also being organized in one of the schools employing 36 women, many of whom are either widowed, deserted or living with sick or unemployed husbands.

Cal Res's emphasis on the girl child:

As pointed out by various members of Cal Res, the organization believes strongly in developing the girl child in every aspect. Nandita Das, the nutritioner of Cal Res, informed me that most girls are married off on reaching adolescence, and the parents of those who remain unmarried are reluctant to send their daughters to the schools to be educated. But then Cal Res does not have any particular programs for adolescent girls that can bring changes in the patriarchal familial tradition, through mass contact or awareness

campaigns. But it does organize special interactive sessions like Nishtha among the health workers, girl children and parents. Even in the course of everyday classes, the teachers are instructed to impress upon the girl children the needs of proper diets rich in vitamins and iron so that in future they can become healthy human beings. The girls are then instructed to go back and inform their families so that a mass awareness can be generated. Cal Res members believe that these ventures can convince the parents about the needs for proper development of the girl children and instead of sending them to work as rag pickers or domestic helpers, girl children can be raised as human beings capable of successfully contributing to the development of the society.

Swadhina

History:

Swadhina, established in 1986 in Kolkata, has been specifically engaged in creating awareness amongst women on various issues. Swadhina had only 3 permanent members in its Kolkata office, but it has many more centers in other states of India having approximately 100 permanent members. The main aims of the organization include: self-reliance in health care especially for women, through community based health awareness and health action; economic empowerment in families at the micro level through small scale economic enterprise and savings promotion; eradication of illiteracy and functional literacy through non-formal education initiatives at the village level, especially among girl children; and establishment of a culture of hope and peace replacing a culture of silence, fatalism, conflict and all forms of social disharmony.

Activities:

Swadhina has 140 women's groups established at the grassroots level, the primary aim of the organization being self-sustainable development and social empowerment of women through formation and strengthening of women's organizations. In West Bengal Swadhina is active in 10 villages, where they have set up 26 non-formal educational centers that act as action centers. Swadhina conducts field level training- on skill enhancement, peace value education and development orientation for other voluntary organizations.

School Health Program:

Unlike the two other organizations, Swadhina does not have an educational program and a health program running separately, but they are integrated and run through 3 primary schools in Kolkata. Known as School Health Programs, Swadhina undertook this program in association with the Indian Medical Association covering 800 school children from low income groups. The major nutrition related problems in these slums are anemia, deficiency of vitamin A, vitamin C, and scabies. Instead of formulating any one long-term development program, Swadhina treats each girl child according to her specific requirements and ailments. Moreover, renowned medical officers also do regular check-ups.

Swadhina's emphasis on the girl-child:

Paromita Roy of Swadhina raised what I believe to be an extremely crucial point in relation to the health of the girl child. These children coming from backgrounds stricken by intense poverty (as most of their parents work as daily wage-workers or domestic helpers) often go into drugs and other harmful behaviuor at a very early age. So merely

looking after the physical health of the children would not suffice; they have to be given a

cultural orientation, which is being done by setting up libraries, celebrating children's day,

women's day and organizing different cultural programs for the women in the slums. Not

just arranging for medical treatment, Dr. Asit Roy told me, that a continuous process of

monitoring is perhaps as important as providing the medication itself, because as a result

of various socio-cultural inhibitions and a sense of moral conservatism (fashioned by the

patriarchy of the family) there is a tendency to exhibit lack of continuity. Parents actively

discourage the girl children to either partake of any education or to be involved in any

kind of physical activities after a certain age (normally around 12-14). This sort of

patriarchal conservatism is not restricted to any one religion or community. Even though

this problem may be less acute in the urban slums than in the rural districts, it is by no

means absent. Moreover, while during early childhood, the parents show a propensity to

send their children for education, after a certain age the girls are forced to drop out of

schools and stay at home or start working as domestic helpers. This is because education

is regarded as redundant and even counter-productive in respect to marriage (which is

considered the ultimate fulfillment of a girl's physical existence). Most of these girls are

"married off" by the age of 13-14.

A concept that has been developed by Swadhina to facilitate the monitoring

process are health cards given to each of the girls covered under their project, containing

the height, weight and other particulars, including required doses of medicines of such

girls. It not only aims at development of the nutrition and health of the girl child, but also

seeks to bring about an immediate and radical change in the psyche of the parents through

contact programs that can prevent the problems of early marriage and childhood. This

approach is no doubt a result of the feminist ideas, which inspire and guide the organization.

To facilitate the awareness programs, Swadhina has advocated the formulation of local women's centers comprising women from the slums who operate to empower and encourage the girls and women of the locality to listen to their needs and concerns, so that these needs can be taken into account while formulating programs.

Concluding Comparison

All three organizations give emphasis to the development of the health and education of the girl child. Moreover, all three conduct interactive sessions with the children, and sometimes with the parents, not only to create their awareness but also to listen to their needs and concerns. These sessions involving girl children and women are found useful by all while formulating their programs and policies. More specifically, the organizations gain ideas about the areas to be emphasized and the concerns to be advocated to government officials so that they may design programs which are more client-based and need-based.

But the three organizations, as well, are not all the same. Talking to Swadhina and the two NGOs before, I felt how much greater benefit could be obtained if there were a wider networking among such bodies because the NGOs through their greater resources can make a real difference in the physical health of the girl child while the women's organizations can work to raise awareness of the rights of the people, especially women and children and to terminate the continual cultural subjugation.

Chapter 5

History Behind the Rise of NGOs in India

In this chapter, I summarize briefly the history behind the rise of NGOs in India. Voluntary initiatives, voluntary action, voluntary work and voluntary organizations have a long, chequered history in India. Social reform movements, political movements, movements for liberation of the country – all have derived assistance and strength from voluntary initiative and voluntary action. Tracing this history is important as it shows how NGOs or social organizations started as an alternative to the government policies and ways of development. I propose to confine my study to the history from the 19th century onwards, as this was the period that saw the rise of various social reform movements as well as the various missionary activities in India. In short, this period has more tangible linkages with voluntarism and voluntary action, as it is understood today. History shows that around the 19th century, the mission of these organizations was considered all good, selfless and hence praiseworthy. But as times passed, the voluntary sector no longer remained as homogeneous as before, and it started developing more as a counter ideology at the grassroots level. In this chapter, I discuss what historical factors facilitate or constrain the growth of the voluntary sector in India, and the differing relationship of the voluntary sector with the State. As we will see, the relationship was never really successful, and there are only a few isolated cases in the past of NGOs and government taking a collaborative approach. Also, this chapter portrays the involvement of women at various stages of the development of voluntary organizations and stresses how women have been an active force through the voluntary movement in India, taking part in various decision making processes and advocating change of the patriarchal society.

One of the most important voluntary contributions during the first half of the nineteenth century (1800-1850) in Indian history was by the Christian missionaries. Initially the missionaries had to face resistance from the ruling East India Company as the Company was doubtful of the implications of the missionary activities on their expansionist designs, but the Charter Act of 1813 finally removed all restrictions on missionary activities in India and provided for the maintenance and support of a Church establishment in British India. This led to the expansion of missionary work in the area already conquered by the British and led to the creation of a conducive environment for British conquest in some areas (particularly tribal areas) where the British had to face resistance (PRIA, 1991). Thus the first seeds of voluntary activity were sown "cooperatively" to achieve the expansionist objectives of the missionaries, British imperialism and the Company (PRIA, 1991).

Besides the Christian missionaries, there were several other organizations established by the Hindus as well as the Muslims to focus on such issues as women's education, education for the untouchables and 'upliftment' (a word commonly used by the social workers of India in the 19th century) of the deprived and marginalized sections of the society. The main organizations were Atmiya Samaj (the first known voluntary association in India) founded by Raja Rammohan Roy in 1815, Paramhans sabha, Prarthana Sabha, Hindu Dharam Sabha and the Faradi Movement initiated by Haji Shariatullah. Women around this time had also begun to organize themselves and were taking up issues like education, widow remarriage or child marriage together with their male counterparts (Butalia, 1998).

By the second half of the 19th century (1850-1900), there was already a rising

discontent among the Indian masses about British rule, and the nationalist leaders had

already begun to realize the irreconcilability of Indian people and the British colonial

interests. After a moderate campaign against the division of Bengal, the wave of Swadeshi

Movement[6] swept the country during the first decade of the 20th century. This was the

beginning of a mass involvement in the national movement (PRIA, 1991). Massive

protests occurred across the country with the involvement of people from all walks of life

against the British misrule.

Women too played an important role in these economic boycott campaigns and

participated in various movements against the British government with great zeal. In

rallies organized by the congress, women attended in large numbers often with little

children in tow. Their foremost leaders around that time were Sarojini Naidu, Sarladevi

Chaudharani and Anne Besant. Sarojini Naidu, the first women president of the Indian

National Congress, led a small delegation of women in 1919 with Margaret Cousins,

asking the British government for equal rights of representation for women with men. The

government rejected it on the ground that a "backward" country like India would never

accept the idea of equal political rights for women (Kishwar, 1997). Thanks to the efforts

of these women's struggles, despite the fact that there was no mass women's suffrage

movements in India, still each of the Indian provincial legislatures voted to make it

possible (Kishwar, 1997). In 1928, an All India Women's Conference (AIWC) was called

that was a huge success and AIWC became an institution by itself. AIWC, together with

other women's groups raised demands for a Hindu code Bill, that resulted in introducing

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[6] Swadeshi implies 'our own' and the movement encompasses boycott of every-thing that was foreign and

monogamous marriage for men and daughter's right to inheritance. These mass

movements were important for the history of voluntary activities in India, as they not only

channelized the voluntary spirit for political action and mass mobilization for the struggle

of independence, but also saw Gandhiji's initiation of 'Constructive Work' activities

between 1922-28 (PRIA, 1991).

Mahatma Gandhi, as he was popularly known, is still famous all over the world for

his principles of non-violence based on the principles of 'ahimsa' (the refusal to use any

form of violence) and on the "law of passive resistance". He came to India in 1915 from

South Africa and organized an anticolonial movement uniting millions of people which

employed 'satyagraha'. 'Satyagraha' was explained in massive and sustained civil

disobedient movements and non-cooperation with the British rulers, thereby reaffirming

Indian identity and freedom. The idea of mass protests against government was actually

inspired by Gandhi, as he himself was involved in much such protest. In 1917, he helped

the indigo sharecroppers of Champaran to protest against the unfair exploitation of their

landlords. He encouraged the textile workers of Ahmedabad to continue to strike and fast

to end their oppression. Gandhi's first challenge to the British government in India was in

response to the arbitrary powers of the Rowlatt Act in 1919. India had cooperated with

the British during the First World War. But instead of receiving Dominion status, civil

liberties were curtailed. Gandhi, called for a one day strike on all economic activity based

on the principles of 'Satyagraha' (holding on to truth). In 1920, he initiated a nation-wide

campaign of non-cooperation with the government that urged the Indian peasants not to

pay any taxes and to refrain from buying liquor since the government gained revenue from

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accepting everything that was indigenous.

its sale. In 1924, he went on a 21 day fast to bridge the gap between Hindus and Muslims, pleading for unity, religious tolerance and love for one another. It was to a great extent Gandhi's nonviolent agitation that prepared the ground for Great Britain to renounce its supremacy in India.

Gandhi not only influenced the anticolonial movement but also the various volunteer and nonprofit groups. India's mission after independence for those who shared this perspective was village reconstruction- re-establishing traditional handicraft industries that had succumbed to cheaper machine-made goods from abroad and rooting out social evils, particularly un-touchability, illiteracy and debilitating habits such as drunkenness and drug taking. Thus voluntary activities in the pre-independent India were mostly oriented towards the rise of a national movement against the ruling government and to establish a nationalist spirit in the minds of the Indians.

Gandhi deserves special mention as many of his principles of nonviolent agitations are now being followed by the various volunteer organizations in India like the 'Narmada Bachao Andolan' in Gujarat by Medha Patkar and Arundhuti Roy. The movements to help the 'dalits' or the untouchable castes was also initiated by Gandhi when in 1932 he went on a fast on behalf of the 'Harijans' (a term coined by Gandhi himself, referring to the lower castes in India considered untouchables) as the 'Harijans' had been given separate electorate to vote. The issue was resolved and even Hindu temples were opened to untouchables for the first time. His struggle was so significant because he challenged the institutional violence of the state. He not only recommended refusing military service but also refused to pay taxes to a militarized state. He envisioned a non-violent state as he believed that violence is an obvious restriction of liberty. Till today many voluntary

organizations have been run inspired by the ideals of Gandhi. The leadership that he gave to the voluntary movement in India, by combining local issues like indigo or salt with national politics in the time of crisis, paved the way for mass participation based on the ideals of comprehensive progress (Kapadia, 1995).

Gandhi's emphasis on women is also significant. He might not be the first to address women's issues in India, but his thoughts were radical no doubt. He did not just want to bring relief to women but wanted women to be equal participators with men in every sphere of life. Gandhi's philosophy about women is greatly reflected in organizations like SEWA (Self-employed Women's Association) in Gujarat, founded by noted social worker Ela Bhatt, an organization that insists on women's own leadership, initiatives and self-help (Kapadia, 1995).

Gandhi made it clear that the fight against the foreign domination will not be successful without women participating. In response to his call, thousands of women rallied for civil disobedience. Women set aside their traditional roles, and coming out of their seclusion, they entered the 'public' domain, remaining undaunted by police beatings or arrests. Even tribal women joined the movement inspired by his belief that India's salvation depends on the enlightenment of women (Kapadia, 1995).

Besides Gandhi, it is also important to mention Subhash Chandra Bose who founded the Azad Hind Fauz or Indian National Army popularly known as INA. Bose, who contrary to Gandhi's philosophy supported armed revolution against the British was successful in achieving not only Hindu-Muslim unity but also enabled women to get their rightful role in public affairs. INA had women freedom fighters who were given training to fight the British soldiers (South Asian History, 2002). Surya Sen, another notable freedom

fighter also supported women's participation and in his group women provided shelter, acted as messengers and fought with guns, something that was quite unexpected of women to do at that time in India. Pritilata Wadedar, a famous freedom fighter died while conducting a raid, while Kalpana Dutt was arrested and tried along with Surya Sen and sentenced to life imprisonment (South Asian History, 2002). When the entire Congress leadership was put in jail in 1942, women leaders like Aruna Asaf Ali and Sucheta Kriplani joined other male members to lead underground resistance to British rule.

Between the period 1900-1947 the most significant voluntary activity in India was oriented to the attaining of independence. As a result of agitation, protests and movements, both by women and men, the Indian Independence Act was passed in 1947 that spelt out that from August 15th, 1947 there would be two independent dominions, India and Pakistan. On 15th August 1947 India gained independence with Jwaharlal Nehru as the first Prime Minister (Information On India, 1999-2000).

The first 20 years of independence, till the mid 1960s may be termed as the phase of nation building. Many in the stream of social reform based voluntary action and the stream of constructive work joined together in the government's responsibilities and tasks of nation building. This task focused on extension work in the field of agriculture, health and community development. It led to the governmentalisation of 'Khadi' and village industries. It also resulted in the co-optation and formalization of the work that was initiated both in the areas of education and health and also in areas of economic activities through state sponsored cooperative movement (PRIA, 1991). A majority of the women too did not stay in politics. The nature of Indian politics changed radically within the first five or six years of the first election, and many women got involved with educational

institutions or women's groups to develop constructive work for social betterment (Butalia, 1998).

Some others from the stream of social reform based voluntary action after independence found their expression in social work and in the institutions of higher education such as SNDT and TISS in Mumbai- set up for training young people in social work. The underlying perspective of social work continued to remain the same 'to provide help to the needy' by starting with the analysis of the need and focusing on a welfarist approach. Another expression of the social reform-based stream continued in programs in the field, which focused on relief, rehabilitation, welfare and charity. The work of missionaries spread further in this phase after independence with new institutions of education and health being set-up in different parts of the country. The primary emphasis continued to be in the southern states of Kerala, TamilNadu, parts of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka and tribal areas of central and eastern India. This was also the period that saw the social programs of various dioceses getting established under the overall perspective developed by the work of missionaries before independence.

It is estimated that before the 1960s over 80% of the voluntary organizations were either Gandhian or church related (Fernandes, 1986). In the 1950s, most of these organizations were either in relief or in institutionalized programs such as schools and hospitals. Most workers of the Gandhian organizations went to the rural areas to work for the economic development of the poor. Many of them got involved in these programs and in the implementation of projects initiated by the Five-Year Plans. Their focus was mainly on "productivity-oriented technology" and on "functional literacy-oriented extension work" (Fernandes, 1986, 3). In other words, they did not question the system but sought

to better implement the schemes conceived by the Government (Fernandes, 1986). In fact, a large number of grants, legal entitlements and charters were provided to the 'Constructive Work' of the Gandhian workers. Although many of the workers did not join the government as the ruling party, they worked closely with governmental programs, retaining a degree of autonomy in their functioning. To this was added a later generation of "social work" agencies, working with community development or Panchayati Raj. Thus social workers and government worked closely "with this whole array of 'voluntary' effort, the former receiving important inputs from the social base through their contact with the latter as well as imparting to them a sense of being part of a common endeavor" (Fernandes, 1986, 15).

However, by the 1970s, many young people who have started experiencing the ill-effects (such as unemployment) of a new GNP-based growth model began to question the very system and the patterns of development and the trickle down theory of the government (Fernandes, 1986; PRIA, 1991).

Despite their professed aim of carrying out elaborate developmental and welfare functions, the elected government during this period was able to establish only a token administrative presence at the village level. The contradiction between the rich and poor, the divide between the urban and the rural also increased during the 1950s and 1960s. The dominant sections tended to get most benefits of the economic-growth-oriented technical and other organizational inputs (Arora, 1979). It was at this stage that alternative and integrated rural development began to be experimented with through the initiatives taken by a new generation of people in 1968-69 (PRIA, 1991). The new professionally trained youngsters began to enter voluntary development organizations to set up new initiatives

(PRIA, 1991) to rally around issues such as environment, women's rights, health (Fernandes and Lobo, 1986). This new changed situation also affected a large number of Gandhian and church-related organizations who detached themselves from the government support and extended their support to these newly developed organizations (Fernandes, 1986).

This was also the period when the circumstances had forced a number of people to reflect upon their experiences or look back critically at the emerging trends in the country's political process. The process of politicization of the post-independence generation, which began during the 1967-69 period, had become much less by 1979. This had left many restlessly looking for constructive alternatives to channel their energies and concerns in order to realize their dreams for a more humane and just society. This fall out from the political process contributed to the growth in voluntary action, both in terms of quality and quantity (PRIA, 1991).

The1970s was the period when ideas about conscientization and people's participation began to emerge. This was the period when more focused work with target groups, landless laborers, tribal, small farmers, women, scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, 'dalits' etc also became the basis for the program of work of voluntary organizations. With the growth in number and scope of voluntary agencies, sectoral specialization in such areas as health, agriculture, education and literacy also gained momentum during this period (PRIA, 1991).

As the above history shows, from the1960s onwards, a schism started appearing between government and the voluntary sectors, the gap increasing more and more. During this period, Indians, especially the youth, started getting disillusioned with the ineffective

state planning to adequately counter the problems of inequality, poverty, health or human rights. They began to address themselves to these unresolved problems. Working outside the purview of either the government or any political party, this youth community started setting up voluntary organizations, especially in the rural areas, and they took up issues such as health, literacy or agricultural developemnt. Their efforts often paralleled the "on-going work of the Gandhians (in such aspects as village industries, prohibition, leprosy and untouchability) and of Christian organizations (in the fields of health and education)" (Pandey, 1991, 13-14). In the 1970s, this voluntary activity became more constructive and people-oriented as it started experiencing the oppressive nature of the National Emergency[7] of the 1970s. Women around this time took part in campaigns against rising prices, movements for land rights and peasant movements (Butalia, 1998). It was also around this time that many of the contemporary women's groups began to get formed, with their members often being women with a history of involvement in other political movements. Thus the number of volunteer organizations started increasing that campaigned against such issues as land entitlements, liberation of bonded labors, forest contractors (e.g. Chipko Movement) and construction of big dams (e.g. Sardar Sarovar project) (Pandey, 1991).

The Chipko movement in India was the result of relentless struggle of hundreds of village women, committed to saving their means of subsistence and their communities. The name of the movement came from a word meaning "to embrace" where women

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[7] The proclamation of Emergency (under Article 352 of the Indian Constitution) from June 1975 to March 1977 placed unlimited authority in the hands of the Central Government suspending both the federal provisions of the constitution, civil liberties and guarantees for fundamental rights. The center acquired powers to make and execute state laws, proclaimed censorship and postponed general elections among other things.

hugged the trees, thereby saving the trees by interposing their bodies between them and the contractor's axes (Chipko Movement, n.d.). Guided by the non-violent principles of Mahatma Gandhi, the Chipko protests in Uttarkhand achieved a major success in 1980 when the then Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi announced a 15 year ban on green felling in the Himalayan forests of the state. Since then, the movement has spread to Himachal Pradesh in the north, Karnataka in the south, Rajasthan in the west, Bihar in the east and Vindhyas in central India. Since the movement, the lives of women in these areas have changed for the better. Women's groups have spread to most villages in the hills and formed the nuclei of the ecological rehabilitation of the Himalayas. Management decisions are made in cooperation with women who actively participate in various actions and decisions of the community (Chipko Movement, n.d.).

Another important issue that saw mass involvement and agitation by women was violence against women, especially in the forms of rape and "dowry" deaths- the killing of married women for the 'dowry" or money/goods they were forced to bring with them at marriage. The women were able to mobilize so much support through street marches and campaigns that the State had to make the laws on rape and dowry more stringent (Butalia, 1998). Besides agitation, women started setting up counseling centers, legal aid centers and women's shelters. All over the country, women were active in protests and reforms geared towards improving the conditions of women's lives (Butalia, 1998). The reason women and their movements are mentioned in my thesis is because of the invaluable contribution they have made to the freedom struggle and to women's issues. My thesis is also an effort to bring these women out of the oblivion where they have been placed by the patriarchs and give them their deserved honor.

According to Kishwar (1997, 5), women's participation in decision making also declined after independence because of the pervasive gender discrimination. State policies became so corrupted that women cannot work within it, unless they also become good at "power-grabbing" and "plundering" resources. Instead of including women into the main process of decision making women are further marginalized and not allowed to have much voice even within their own communities.

Besides the rigid bureaucratic State procedures also has made it difficult for women especially poor women from the grassroots to participate in the process and the government hardly encouraged women's participation in public affairs. Even in the "panchayats" that apparently should involve women from the grassroots, the difficult rules and regulations as well as complications of paper work makes the poor illiterate women completely helpless and lost. Thus in the final standing decision making rests in the hands of the male leaders, too busy making their own fortune and hardly bothered about issues of women's integration into the system.

Thus, in this chapter, I tried to examine the history of the NGOs in India and their sometimes contradictory relationship to the state. The history helps us to understand that what started primarily as mere charity work, developed over the years to become full-fledged organizations veered towards developmental work and community mobilization and capable of challenging the bureaucratic institutions about their incapacity. It is in this context that we have to take a closer look at the NGO-Government relationships since independence and whether their attempts at collaboration can be successful or not.

Chapter 6

Relationship of NGO-Government in the Contemporary Scenario, Pros and Cons

Introduction

In this chapter I take a look at the NGO-Government relationship in the contemporary

situation. Following PRIA's[8] conceptualization, I have divided this relationship into two

categories: State as Regulator, State as Funder. In this section, I begin by examining

various aspects of the State, particularly in parliamentary democracy form- a form of

governance that has been enshrined in the Indian constitution and practiced since

independence in 1947. The vast diversity of voluntary organizations and the complexity of

the character of the State in a country of the size of India with local, regional and national

dimensions makes it difficult to propound a specific set of relationships; yet the following

is an attempt to highlight the dimensions of such a relationship and the nature that they

acquire in the contemporary context.

State as Regulator and Funder

State as Regulator:

One of the functions of the government in a modern society is to regulate the

social, political and economic space. The Indian State enacts a variety of regulatory

mechanisms through its organs and agencies as well as through laws and legislation. Two

types of legislation directly affect voluntary organizations in India today. The first set

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[8] I have selected PRIA (Participatory Research In Asia) as it is one of the most comprehensive studies I have found so far on NGO/government relationships. For the study PRIA collected materials from 30 centers in 8 different cities and conducted 8 in-depth case studies as well as 5 short case studies. The findings were also based on 5 regional meetings with about 400 participants.

relates to laws of registration. The most common form of registration is a Society

Registration Act that was set up during the colonial British rule in 1860. Before

independence, the Act was created to provide membership to organizations like national

associations of doctors or nurses. In the post independence era, voluntary organizations

are registered under the Act to acquire legal identity for operating in the state. The Society

Act has been subsequently modified and amended by several state governments in different

parts of the country. The second set of legislation that regulates voluntary organizations is

that related to finance. Two specific laws are relevant here. One is the Income Tax Act of

1961 which has always treated the work of voluntary organizations at par with that of

such organizations as business trusts, charitable hospitals and educational institutions.

Thus in the eyes of the Income Tax Act, all such organizations, including ones as diverse

as these which are the focus of this study, are treated similarly.

It was during the Emergency in 1976, when the Foreign Contributions Regulation

Act (FCRA) was enacted. Through the Act, an effort was made to keep track of those

who received foreign funds, and all foreign money had to go through only one account. A

report had to be presented to the home ministry every six months by the relevant

organizations. Many organizations were also forced to ask for official permission for each

project to ensure that the project was in no way against the dominant interests (PRIA,

1991).

The setting up of the Kudal Commission[9] in 1981 to inquire into the working of

the Gandhi Peace Foundation was another example of the strained NGO, Government

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[9] The "lok Sabha" or the general assembly passed a resolution on August 28, 1981, requesting the then government to set up a commission of enquiry into the activities of Gandhi peace Foundation, Gandhi Smarak Nidhi and All India Sarva Sewa Sangh. A Commission headed by Justice P.D. Kudal was set up

relationship. This commission made allegations against as many as 945 organizations of Gandhian inspiration that affected the work of these organizations to a great extent (PRIA, 1991). Many other small activist groups were forced to spend much of their time in administration to send regular reports to the Government. Since Indian funds were not easily available, red-tapism forced many organizations to go in search of foreign funds and much of their activity was affected by the administrative work involved.

State as Funder:

Historically, a very unique role the State played is that of Funder of Voluntary organizations. Right after Independence, the then government began to utilize its access to vast resources to provide land, facilities, infrastructure and funds to a large number of Gandhian social work and constructive work organizations to continue their work as voluntary organizations. In fact several institutions have been set up by the government over the last 45 years to find ways to promote funding of voluntary organizations.

One of the early ones to set up was Khadi and Village Industries Corporation (KVIC)- a unique institution set up to finance activities of those organizations engaged in promoting Khadi and village industries for the economic upliftment of the poor as well as to provide marketing outlets to their productions. Subsequently, a large number of departments and Ministries of the national and state governments began to evolve schemes for funding voluntary organizations. The most common ones have been in adult education, literacy, and health care and in recent years in environment and social forestry. In 1986, Council for Advancement of People's Action and Rural Technology (CAPART) was set

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on February 17, 1982 under the Commission of Enquiry act 1952. From 1982-87 the Commission inquired into a large number of voluntary organizations associated with those mentioned in the enquiry

up as an autonomous institution to finance voluntary organizations under various schemes and programs. It is also interesting to note that CAPART has been able to evolve schemes to benefit the poor, providing the funds to voluntary organizations to organize the poor.

Thus over the years many voluntary organizations have utilized government funds and many continue to do so. A large number of them have totally depended on grants from the State.

Critique:

The various Acts that the State has enacted as a Regulator and a Funder to assist the voluntary sector so far are not without criticism. For example, is said that the Society Registration Act is more like a bondage for the NGOs/Women's Organizations as every successive amendment to the Act in different states of the country has taken away more and more power from the voluntary organizations by giving " unilateral and inordinate powers to the agents of the State to intervene, regulate and check the fates of voluntary organizations registered under the Society Registration Act of those states" (PRIA, 1991). Also, over the years many more amendments to the Act have been made with a view to further tighten the control over voluntary organizations.

Issues Related to State Funding

Although the State does provide grants and funds, most of them are available for special schemes and programs largely conceptualized and designed by the State. Therefore, voluntary agencies have to fit their proposals into these schemes and programs. The result is that voluntary organizations become in that case mere implementers of the

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commission and provided several interim reports as well as a final report that recommended a vast array of regulatory measures to restrict the activities of the voluntary organizations in India.

" ideas, concepts and programs created by the state" (PRIA, 1991). It makes the work of voluntary organizations, " narrowly confined" and "predefined" (PRIA, 1991). Even approval of funds requires a number of personal visits by the staff of the voluntary organizations to concerned government departments and officials that delay the operation of the project considerably (PRIA, 1991). In cases of those organizations that are totally dependent on state funds, complaints are often made about the increasing state bureaucracy and corruption and how as dependent recipients from the state donor, such voluntary organizations are forced to experience the tension of attempting to work with bureaucratic and corrupt institutions in order to continue to receive grants from the State for the completion of their projects.

In an attempt to escape this dependency on the state, many voluntary organizations turn towards international donors and agencies for funds. Foreign funding not only brings foreign exchange to the Indian economy, but since independence, the government of India has been promoting export led industrial development and continues to rely on large grants, loans and credits from foreign governments, from bilateral funding agencies, from the World Bank and the IMF, as well as from commercial banks and lending agencies (PRIA, 1991). The presence of foreign funding has led to many innovative experiments as well as to new ideas, new initiatives, new approaches and new modes in a wide range of areas have emerged in the field of voluntary work. Nevertheless, foreign funding is a much more complicated and sensitive issue in India than perhaps in many other countries of the world.

Issues Related to Foreign Funding

There are several issues related to foreign funding. The first issue relates to how the agenda of voluntary organizations can be influenced by the representatives of foreign funding agencies (PRIA, 1991). In different periods of history, over the last 40 years, different issues have taken primacy in the eyes of many voluntary organizations partly because they were accorded priority by the funders. In a specific sense, many times the representatives of foreign funding agencies influence visibly, openly and directly the programs and activities of the organizations, and sometimes these programs are inconsistent with the realities on the ground (PRIA, 1991).

According to Fernandes (1986, 22), the competition for foreign funding has led to wide spread inability of voluntary organizations to build up unity and strength within themselves. It also leads to the "accumulation of assets of voluntary organizations and their search for greater security". Many groups split internal conflicts and tensions arise because of the competition for foreign funding.

On the whole, therefore, the issue of funding for voluntary organizations has become increasingly critical. On the one hand, there is concern related to dependence on external sources of funding as well as the government funding and on the other hand the urgency to find alternative and sustainable ways of financing the volunteer work to ensure the autonomy of the organizations.

Thus the overall experience seems to indicate that availability of resources from the state for the work of voluntary organizations is unique and useful, on the one hand, but it has also been limiting, controlling and "dependence-creating" on the other hand.

Given such a contradictory relationship, it is hard to believe that there can be any kind of

interrelationship or collaboration between the government and voluntary organizations.

Yet, there are instances of voluntary associations forming collaboration between them and

the Government. Let us first discuss how these collaborations have been successful.

Successful Collaboration

There are instances of NGOs working together with the government successfully

in India in quite a few states. One of the examples that Sood (2000) cites is that of Pravah,

an issue based network of activists, experts and NGO representatives working together to

provide drinking water to all people in Gujarat, through the promotion of community

participation (Sood, 2000). One of its most significant strengths has been its efforts to

develop a positive and open relationship with the state. Let us first discuss some of the

reasons why NGO/Government relationship has been successful.

First, collaboration between government and NGOs have also been possible

because of the official support provided by various governments, to encourage NGO

activities in priority areas without undermining NGO autonomy and independence. A

forum such as CAPART is an example, and as Schopflin (1997) argues, it is in fact hard to

conceive of NGOs functioning successfully without the State. The State provides an

integrative framework within which NGOs can operate. At the same time, NGOs must be

free to challenge the State in order to preclude the bureaucratic rationality of State action

from obtaining the kind of authority that would generate rigidity.

Second it may also be said that collaborative efforts between state and NGOs

provide for more effective levels of democratic governance as well as fashion a more

effective developmental strategy through strengthening institutions, staff training and

improving management capacity (Clark, 1991). For instance, Pravah and several other

NGOs, by working closely with the government, have been successful in convincing the

officials to allot a significant amount of financial resources to various alternative

technologies which were previously implemented solely through NGOs (Clark, 1991). In

this regard, a government resolution was passed to allocate a significantly larger amount

of money to these alternative strategies, thereby altering current policies significantly

(Clark, 1991).

Other examples of a successful government- NGO relationship can be cited from

states like Gujarat, Kerala or Tamil Nadu (of course these states have different historical

backgrounds). In these states, the government sponsored community development

projects were not successful as the project staff lacked proper training. In spite of having

State training institutes and field training institutes, the responsibility of training the staff

was entrusted to the NGOs as they were better equipped for the job because of their grass

roots contacts. Again, in Bangalore, the government staff sought the participation of

voluntary organizations in imparting training to bore-well caretakers, health volunteers

and women auto-rickshaw drivers (Mowli, 1990). By associating with such programs, the

NGOs actually gave credibility to the government sponsored programs by re-enforcing

people's faith in the State's ability to solve the problems of the people (Mowli, 1990).

Third the NGOs will also be able to expose the government to a grass roots

perspective, which might otherwise be neglected (Clark, 1991) and may encourage

changes in attitudes and practices necessary to curtail discrimination. The planning of

projects and policies can be strongly influenced by inviting NGO leaders to serve on

government commissions or by holding public consultations in which grass root

organizations are able to voice their concerns and experiences (Clark, 1991). World Bank experience (Cernea, 1988) drawn from a survey of 25 bank-financed projects indicates a strong correlation between project success and the participation of grass roots organizations. More recently, the bank has been deriving important insights from the public consultations included in environmental assessments in which NGOs often play a major role (Clark, 1991).

As Clark notes, even with a largely adversarial relationship, consultation can be productive. The Environmental Congress, a network of NGOs in Sri Lanka, initially adopted a fairly confrontational style with respect to the government. On one issue, the government proved receptive to their concerns and dropped plans for a major project. After this, the NGO developed a more constructive dialogue with the authorities. The government in turn invited five NGO representatives to participate in the National Environmental Council, which reports to the Prime Minister on the environment ramifications of all major development projects (Clark, 1991). Thus when both parties found that their solutions are not competing alternatives, but are complementary contributions, the possibility for a genuine collaboration was opened.

Fourthly NGOs can educate and sensitize the public as to their rights and entitlements under state programs and can attune official programs to public needs by acting as a conduit for public opinion and local experience. They can also influence local development policies of national and international institutions (PRIA, 1991). Thus, many NGOs today prefer maneuvering into a negotiating position with official bodies in order to help communities articulate their concerns and to enhance the power of the people. The

literature that describes this evolution (Tandon, 1992; Clark, 1991; Hulme and Edwards 1992) talks of NGOs becoming important agents of the modern society.

According to Clark (1991), governments can do the following to enable a healthy relationship.

● Formulate social policies which encourage the NGO sector and increases the State's accountability to the public.

● Come up with regulations to help NGO growth and to root out corruption, to foster management and discipline.

● Provide incentives to the organizations through various policies.

● Provide information about various schemes to the NGOs, to enable the organizations to reach the grassroots, serving as intermediaries to other NGOs.

● Foster and not dominate coordination between the NGOs through meetings, consultative committees, staff training, sharing of experience and management skills. For example, Disha has been an influential NGO operating on central government's commission on bonded labor.

● Provide funds to encourage NGO activities without undermining NGO autonomy and independence.

Some of the above criteria have also been supported by other scholars like Salmen and Eaves (1989) and Sood (2000).

Thus, where the government has a positive social agenda and where NGOs are effective, there is the potential for a strong collaborative relationship (Clark, 1991). But as Tandon (1991) clarifies, this does not mean the subcontracting of placid NGOs, but a genuine partnership between NGOs and the government to work on a problem facing the

country based on mutual respect, acceptance of autonomy, independence and pluralism of NGO's opinions and positions.

Collaboration Among NGOs

So far I discussed some of the criteria pointed out by various scholars for a successful NGO/ government relationship. Let me now focus on some alliances between voluntary organizations themselves. Coalitions between the voluntary sector, agencies or groups is important towards the attainment of national development, but the small size and sometimes limited financial resources, hinder the NGOs from challenging the economic and political systems sustained by bureaucratic governments or other political institutions. So the power of voluntary sector can gain momentum from coalescing and networking with other similar interest organizations to create new political and institutional realities (Korten, 1990). Once organized, they can mobilize significant political forces on a global scale. As Korten notes, these networks are the building blocks of social movements. It is an alliance of organizations and individuals where resources are combined in pursuit of "shared, defined and consequential goals that strengthen the movements position in relation to major opposing forces" (Korten, 1990, 2).

An example of such an alliance was the campaign against Nam Choan Dam in Thailand which could have displaced thousands of people and destroyed a major wildlife sanctuary. One of the organizations that played an important role was the Project for Ecological Recovery (PER), a small Thai environmental NGO that forged an alliance amongst 38 grass roots organizations in the threatened area as well as other student organizations, media, conservationists and international network of organizations and journalists. The alliance was successful in convincing the government to cancel the project.

Even in the case of Pravah, the government could not coerce the NGO to do away with its

philosophy because of its alliance with other NGOs that gave it the confidence and

momentum to enhance its autonomy and not to bow down before any pressure (Sood,

2000). Thus coalescing can make an important contribution to strengthening awareness of

issues and building commitment to activism. It can also develop a sense of community and

can help break feelings of alienation and powerlessness that many NGOs experience while

working against the hierarchical social structures (Korten, 1990).

Factors Hampering NGO/Government Relationship

One of the most important reasons for non-collaboration between government and

NGOs is because of the fear that NGOs are always an alternative to the state and that they

harbor a hostile attitude towards state. Traditionally, it is the state that has been the

primary actor behind the development of the Indian society. However as Desai (1996),

Nandy (1989), and Kothari (1988) note, and we have also noted while discussing the

history behind the rise of voluntary organizations in India, because of the State's failures

to promote essential policies and development initiatives for the marginalized sections of

the society, especially women and children, NGOs had to fill the gaps left by the state. As

Kothari explains, "as a system of managing the affairs of societies, this 'top-down' model

has failed. It is against this failure that the rise of new actors and levels, new forms of

political expression and new definitions of the content of politics acquire significance"

(Kothari, 1984, 402).

According to Chabal, civil society is a "vast ensemble of constantly changing

groups and individuals whose only common ground is their being outside the state and

who have ... acquired some consciousness of their externality and opposition to the state"

(Chabal, 1986, 15). Bayart maintains that the only relationship voluntary organizations can have with the state is that of confrontation (1986, 11). Beteille (1999, 2588), states that in India, "unfortunately, a great deal of the recent enthusiasm for civil society in this country has been derived by a negative if not a hostile attitude towards the state...." It is precisely these oppositional definitions that tend to minimize the co-operative efforts that do not exist between NGOs and the state.

The next important blockade against this relationship according to Riker (1995) and Farrington (1993) is that NGOs fear being co-opted by the state and thereby losing their autonomy. As PRIA (1991) points out, as autonomous institutions, NGOs might have different approaches, different perspectives, and different styles of working. Therefore, it might be difficult for them sometimes to come under a common formal and strict framework of working (Fernandes, 1986).

Thirdly Governments fear that NGOs erode their political power and might threaten national security (Fowler, 1992). Even too much dependence on government bodies can create problems as NGOs might not be in a position to question the State and uncritically accept State policies and activities to get funding.

Another point that Fernandes mentions, is that these organizations also are afraid of the fact that if they ally themselves with the Government, then the government will use the marginalized groups as vote banks and may not be of any help to the organization as such (Fernandes, 1986). In fact some groups like 'Bhoomi Sena' were born as a result of the disillusionment with party cadres who were earlier active among them (Fernandes, 1986). These points have also been supported by other scholars like Fowler (1988 &1992), Salamon and Anheier (1991 &1992), Bratton (1988), Clark (1991), Tendler

(1982), Tandon (1987, 1991 & 1992), Brown (1988), Elliott (1987), and Brodhead and

Herbert - Copley (1988).

Collaboration Among NGOs

I have discussed the difficulties of NGOs collaborating with the government. Now

I will discuss why collaboration between the NGOs themselves is also hampered

sometimes.

Quite often collaboration between NGOs themselves is hampered because of the

"issue of inability of leadership to work together, in a given region or at a national level"

(PRIA, 1991). The struggle for leadership in AVARD can be cited as an instance (for

details see PRIA publication). It happens quite often that the members of the various

organizations find it difficult to come and work together under a common leadership as

each of the organizations is very autonomous and independent (PRIA, 1991). As a result,

leadership struggles inevitably make such attempts at collaboration frustrating and difficult

(PRIA, 1991). In fact, as pointed out by Fernandes (1986), the susceptibility to splinter

has been one of the most important problems for the voluntary organizations and their

inability to build up unity and strength with the various organizations. According to

Fernandes, one of the reasons for this is the clash between personalities and thirst for more

personal power that creates divisions between various organizations leading to inter-

personal conflicts and unhealthy competition. Remaining isolated and competitors of one

another makes NGOs a weaker force in the face of bureaucratic forces and therefore can

hardly be expected to initiate any movement (Korten, 1990). It is important to mention

here that this analysis points out a very typical characteristic of patriarchal ideas of

collaboration where gaining personal power is deemed more important than doing well for the people.

Both Korten (1990) and Fernandes (1986) are also of the view that this inability to establish collaboration between voluntary organizations is also because of the fact of "different views prevailing among action groups" with regard to the government (Fernandes, 1986, 24). Although most of the organizations were started as a reaction against the government, experience in the field has indicated "the need for strong support from the macro-level. For this, there are two alternatives: political parties on the one hand and institutions and organizations with a national standing" (Fernandes, 1986, 24-25).

For the second choice, although in many states like Orissa, this tendency to seek support from non-party institutions and organizations have proved successful so that a common platform for regular meetings could be created, but theorists are also skeptical of this. For example, in bigger states like Tamil Nadu, this technique was not that successful, partly because of the great number and variety of groups and partly because of the multiplicity of patrons who appear on the scene intent on co-coordinating action groups" (Fernandes, 1986, 25).

Summary

In the earlier section of the chapter, I recognized the elements of a healthy State/ NGO relationship and discussed how the Government and NGO can help each other to foster a more enabling environment. In the latter part, I analyzed how and why the potential benefits are not frequently realized, and I tried to consider ways of enhancing this relationship by taking note of various studies. In the next chapter, I will look at what the various members of the organizations that I interviewed have to say about the issues that I

raised in this chapter. This is important as it will give us a deeper understanding of the various merits and demerits of collaboration, help us to forge a link between theory and practice, and help to develop a way of overcoming the obstacles that can create interactions between State and NGOs in the global development planning.

Chapter 7

Voices on Collaboration

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from the interviews with the organizations as well as the Social Welfare Department of the Government of West Bengal, who participated in the study. The four broad areas around which I interviewed the three organizations and the department officers were the possibility of collaboration with the state and other fellow organizations, the constraints to it, the future of collaboration and the implications of government and foreign funding. Each section explores the potential of collaboration in West Bengal and whether a new approach can be adopted by overcoming the constraints to collaboration. As I have mentioned earlier in my methodology section that all the interviews were conducted in Bengali, the local language of Kolkata at various offices of the organizations.

Different Organizational Views of Collaboration

With regard to the present state of collaboration with the government, the impression that I got from Mina Das, the founder of Nishtha, was a clear indication of the lack of governmental support, either directly or indirectly. According to her,

> The government is more or less insensitive to our work.
> Ah... while we do need governmental support for
> overcoming various social and political constraints, it
> (governmental support) can come only if we adhere in toto
> to their policies.

Her views reflected the concerns pointed out by PRIA as well as scholars like Fernandes, Tandon or Clark about problems of co-optation by the government.

Nishtha's vitamin program is one area where I felt Nishtha had some sort of interaction with the government. Vitamin A and iron tablets are distributed by Nishtha to the women and girl children, and they are provided free of cost by the primary health center managed by the Health Department of the Government of West Bengal as part of the government's own health care projects. When I tried to point out this governmental help to Mina, she was not willing to accept this as proper collaboration. For her the participation does not extend beyond a certain limited extent and is far short of a full scale collaborative approach. Her views in this regard were somewhat similar to what Tandon considered a genuine collaboration in contrast to mere subcontracting of placid NGOs. Mina also lamented that the supply of such tablets is often inadequate, and there is a definite lack of cohesive planning even in this limited nature of participation.

Mina at the same time, was also not very enthusiastic, in fact extremely reluctant, to enter into a broad-based program with other NGOs, and she was particularly apprehensive about those that are more urbanized and located in the heart of Kolkata. The reason she gave for this reluctance was that a relatively small NGO such as hers would be overwhelmed by the bigger organizations who try to establish their own agenda and planning in the forefront and expect the other organizations to follow. She also complained about the fact that most of the time whenever those organizations have come closer together, more has been said than done.

> The time we spent preparing lectures and papers, and talking about
> how much better each organization is than the other, was very
> unacceptable to me.

She therefore prefers, "working in my own way" without caring much for larger coalition with the government or networking with other organizations. When PRIA discusses the inability of organizations to come and work together, the situation can be described as somewhat similar to what Mina pointed out.

Cal Res, however, was more enthusiastic about a collaborative approach than Nishtha. A meaningful approach in this direction has been taken by Cal Res, as it has applied for membership to CLPOA- the NGO forum conducted by Calcutta Municipal Corporation (CMC). Although Cal Res is not dependent on any kind of governmental funding at all, yet Dr. Nandita Das, the nutritionist of Cal Res, was very enthusiastic about collaboration and pointed out that being a member of a larger forum has its advantages, where there can be multi-directional exchange of ideas and viewpoints. It appeared to me that Cal Res then challenges some of the assumptions by PRIA as well as Mina about the inability of voluntary organizations to work together.

A point of similarity that I discovered between Nishtha and Cal Res is that their members expressed their disappointment about the apathy of the government in helping out the NGO organization in its activities or by providing facilities. Nandita pointed out that campaigns for the development of the nutritional health of girl children needs extensive campaigning and political will that can be easily nurtured and sustained if there is a regular process of networking among the various NGOs, women's organizations as well as the government. Moreover she also feels that such networking can also devise ideas regarding the development of girl children and their awareness about sex education, an issue on which she feels the need for focus.

One of the reasons why Cal Res wants to join CLPOA is that while the government in the normal course would not join in such networking, the CLPOA program conducted by Calcutta Municipal Corporation (CMC) can provide a forum for the interaction of various NGOs and the government on the basis of some pre-defined agendas and objectives. However, according to Gautam Ghosh, the secretary of Cal Res, the contingent conditions of such an opportunity for interaction is becoming a member of the CLPOA, which perhaps might entail certain liabilities and restrict the extent of free activities of the NGOs. But then he was also very optimistic about the benefits of networking and believes that if done in the right spirit, it would lead to a healthy relationship between the organizations. He also mentioned that at present, however, while seminars and workshops are held where a sizable number of NGOs participate including Cal Res, many of these organizations are not at all forthcoming in divulging the nature and extent of their work. So no concrete sustained collaborative approach can take place in the context of these grounded realities. As Tandon (1991) points out, mutual jealousy and distrust sometimes seem very deep-rooted amongst these organizations.

Swadhina, the women's organization that I interviewed, was more optimistic about a collaborative approach with the government rather than the other two organizations. Although it does not depend directly on government funds, it does go in for a collaborative approach with the government vis-a-vis their health projects, which facilitates their programs by increasing the mass base, and also making readily available medicines and vitamins distributed free of cost by the Health Department of the Government of West Bengal. Paromita Roy, the director of the organization, pointed out an interesting example of such grassroots level collaboration in the magic shows and road-

side plays that are held in the slums with the assistance of the Social Welfare Department of the Government of West Bengal, where the importance of good health of girl children is emphasized.

The officials of the Social Welfare Department (Government of West Bengal) were quite enthusiastic about a collaborative approach. I had expected that they would be complaining about the voluntary organizations for lack of support, but to my surprise, their reaction was quite different. They showed a comprehensive list of the works going on in collaboration with various NGOs in West Bengal. As Tapas Roy explained,

> See…we[government] are not an enemy of the NGOs. We
> do want to work with them as that can ensure better work.
> But at the same time we do need to keep some guidelines
> to ensure better working conditions. Tell me something,
> don't these foreign funding agencies also have guidelines?
> Then why blame the government alone? Besides we do
> need to choose the NGOs, as there are millions of them
> working and not all of them are equally good or
> trustworthy.

What Tapas had to say was similar to some of the scholars like Fernandes and PRIA's work who talk about how foreign donors are capable of controlling the planning of the voluntary organizations.

With regard to his opinion about the future of NGO/Government collaboration in India. Tapas asserted,

> Of course, NGOs and Government share a much better
> relationship now than before. This is because both of us
> have realized that it's hard to work, by being independent of
> each other. We need them and they need us.

Government and Foreign Funding and Fear of Co-optation

For its funding, Nishtha, is dependent to a great extent on foreign funding

agencies. Mina, was quite appreciative of external funding when I asked her opinion about

it. She said,

> When home funding is not readily available, I don't think
> it's wrong to get foreign funding. Also, the foreign funding
> agencies that help us, pay regular visits to our organization
> and assist us in all possible ways.

On the question of government funding, Mina mentioned CINI-ASHA, a nodal NGO that

mainly works to mobilize funds for other NGOs. Mina stated,

> CINI-ASHA is more cooperative than government
> departments, and we don't have to face much hassles for
> applying for fundings.

For the "hassles" that she mentioned, I asked her to be more explicit, and she explained,

> You know, the most important hassle I think is the various
> bureaucratic procedures involved for applying and even if
> you successfully complete all those, it helps more to have
> personal contacts rather than having a good project.

She also said,

> There is also the problem that government funding is mostly
> available to those NGOs that work with the Social Welfare
> Department, and that is one reason why we cannot get enough
> funding. In cases like this, we have to look for alternate sources.

Gautam Ghosh of Cal Res, also echoed the same opinion. He feels,

> In a way foreign funding facilitates our projects as we don't
> have to worry about money when planning a project.

Gautam's opinion was akin to what Fernandes (1986) discussed about how necessary it is for voluntary organizations to have sufficient funds for efficient management and program implementation.

With regard to Swadhina, it does not depend on any external sources or funds for its projects. According to Paromita,

> [External funding] constrains the method and system of
> development works as most sponsorship and funding also
> entails a silent or vocal demand of control and mediation.

Swadhina wants to garner its own funds through the selling of handicrafts and by way of subscriptions from its members, which as Saswati Roy mentioned,

> allows us to adhere to our own ideology without any
> intervention.

She also pointed out,

> There is of course a paucity of funds which does not allow us to
> work on a very large scale at once, but it helps us to keep our
> projects flexible and open to change according to changing
> circumstances.

What Swadhina members believe strongly is that a direct consequence of their small scale programs is that a good rapport can develop with individual clients where importance can be given to the client's specific needs and demands, and they can thus adapt their programs to fulfil those requirements. Instead of going in for large scale funding from the government or other funding agencies, Swadhina seeks to involve people who are ideologically compatible with their projects. However, Saswati, another member of Swadhina also clarified,

> Our projects are also flexible enough to incorporate
> government funds and planning when there is a certain
> compatibility of ideologies and policies.

Moreover Swadhina also concentrates on raising domestic funds from student's

organizations, teachers and professors, and these funds, though small in volume, do not

have any ideological preconditions attached.

When I asked government representative Tapas about the issue of co-optation that

has been so often raised in the literature and also by the members, at first Tapas was a bit

hesitant and took some time probably to organize his thoughts. Then he explained,

> Umm…perhaps…it would be wrong to disregard the
> accusation. But I feel co-optation is a very strong word. If
> government was like that, would so many organizations
> have worked with us?

He gave me a whole list of organizations working with the State government and

even international organizations like UNICEF and the Asian Development Bank. But I

pointed out that the objection raised is that government tries to take over the project or

stop funding mid-way through the project if the organization does not adhere to their

principles. Tapas reasoned,

> As I told you before, we have to have our own guidelines.
> Usually, we are responsible to citizens much more than the
> voluntary organizations. If anything goes wrong, we will be
> blamed more than anyone else. So it's our responsibility to
> try to make sure that the organizations we work with are
> compatible with our model of development. It's important
> to do so before starting a program. Of course if they have
> any new models, we would consider that too and include
> that in our planning. Also, the volunteer workers sometimes
> need training and orientation for the success of the project.
> When we try to do that, it is taken as co-optation.

His points were similar to what Schopflin (1997) argued about state providing an integrative framework for the NGOs to work successfully. And if NGOs can provide for staff training for government organizations as pointed out by Clark (1991), Government organizations too can take up that responsibility for making the programs more useful and sustainable.

About funding, Tapas said,

> We have enormous resources and we need to make sure
> who to give it to before entering into an alliance. We do
> have genuine concerns, and we are making an all-out effort
> to reach the community. NGOs can definitely help us in this
> respect, and we are trying our best to assign the NGOs their
> proper place in the process of development.

The last few sentences were said with such a firm conviction that it gave me a feeling that collaboration might not be a totally impossible idea in West Bengal.

On the question of interaction with the government and possibilities of co-optation, Paromita said,

> We always try to create an atmosphere of co-operation with
> the local government as we do not intend to run a parallel
> system. Our one and only aim is to empower the women
> and girl children, by raising their consciousness, so that they
> learn to demand their rights. We are not here
> to criticize either the government or other organizations as
> we can appreciate the problems such larger organizations
> must face.

As to the question of co-optation, Paromita feels,

> If we have a beneficial project, I don't think government
> would reject that. And anyway certain guidelines should be
> there to facilitate the processing.

But both Mina and Gautam were of different opinion. Mina said,

> Co-optation is of course there. But when we received
> foreign funding, it was the funding agency that approached
> us through CINI-ASHA as they were impressed with our
> work and projects. They never tried to influence us in
> changing our planning.

Gautam said,

> Our funding agencies never force us to do work according
> to their rules. They give us all the freedom we need to select
> a certain program, as they know that we here are more close
> to the base and know what is needed. Of course we discuss
> with them before finalizing everything, but that is to make
> the project better and more useful. It always helps to have
> different perspectives to choose the best way to do the
> work.

While discussing the issues around co-optation by government agencies, I asked the

members if collaboration within organizations themselves might help to fight these forces

as has been pointed out by scholars in the previous chapter. Paromita was very optimistic

> Collaboration between voluntary organizations will be a
> very good platform to express solidarity amongst NGOs. It
> will help to share our experiences and expertise to work for
> common action and programs that can help to create impact
> on the policies of the government.

Even Gautam and Mina supported the concept of coming together and networking to

achieve changes in government policies. But then why is it not happening? Gautam

pointed out a valid reason that has been discussed by various scholars and that is the

competition for funds. He explained,

> I believe it [funds] is the main factor behind a lack of
> cooperation. See, most of the NGOs are extremely secretive
> of their specific source of funding, and this leads to an

environment of distrust amongst us. This is what poses a
hindrance to active communication and support between all
the organizations.

He further stated,

> The scenario becomes worse when it comes to foreign
> funding. There is so much money involved that the secrecy
> increases and organizations working in the same locality
> towards the same goal may vehemently criticize or dismiss
> each other. More often, they are not even aware of each
> other's work.

In fact, I found that Cal Res and Nishtha were good enough examples of the

above. Working almost in the same locality with pretty much the same objectives, they

were hardly aware of each other's work.

Given this intense competitive attitude, how can collaboration be successful? Are

there ways this can be achieved? Paromita stated an important point,

> See, it will be utopic to think that all the NGOs will work
> together towards a common goal. There will be internal
> conflicts, tensions and competition for fame. But a
> beginning has to be opened. It is not enough to just identify
> the causes. We are a small NGO, yet as member of Maitreyi
> we have come across many other important NGOs. It is not
> that we started collaborating right from the first day we met.
> We tried out smaller things like organizing street marches,
> road-side plays, celebration of women's day, and other
> events. Gradually we get to know each other and when few
> of us realized that we are ideologically compatible we
> discussed about working together. We also work with
> Social Welfare Department, local clubs run by State
> governments, and it all started with coming together on
> smaller issues initially.

Mina stated that if other organizations work in similar areas as theirs, they would

be glad to network with them. It was Nandita, who was as enthusiastic as Paromita

pointed out,

> You know when we thought of working about sex
> education of slum children, our field experience made us
> realize that it will not be possible to do so by ourselves. We
> need to reach grassroots and the only way this can be done
> is to approach the children through local government run
> schools. This is why we joined CLPOA as we knew of
> government's interest of spreading sex education. We were
> overwhelmed to find so many organizations working with
> CLPOA interested in this issue and we are looking forward
> to working together.

But how can this "working together" help these organizations? Nandita pointed

out that this could be done by sharing the experience, expertise, resources and manpower.

But then why not they approach their foreign donors for help? According to Nandita and

Gautam,

> It is the quality of work that matters. If we find that
> working together with government and other voluntary
> organizations will help us to attain our goal, there is nothing
> wrong in approaching them. If they wouldn't have been
> enthusiastic, then we would, then we would have asked our
> foreign donors. Anyway, government funding is not always
> enough, and we might need both. Well, aren't we trying to
> forge collaboration here between government and foreign
> funders too? I think we deserve a credit for that.

From what Paromita, Nandita and Gautam had to say it was obvious that the

concept of collaboration was not something totally oblivion to them. They might not be

into a totally collaborative approach, but they all see a possibility of it in the future for real

development and believe that what is important is the beginning no matter how trivial it is.

As Gautam said,

> It is for the state to create the required infrastructure and
> provide necessary resources to develop the base for
> cooperation. If these are there, why wouldn't we work with
> them?

Mina too supported Gautam,

> More than the voluntary sector is the government's
> responsibility to locate the deficiencies to fill up the gaps to
> reduce disparities. Once that is done, understanding and
> cooperation will naturally follow.

Tapas concluded,

> We [government] might have faults. But instead of merely
> criticizing us, if the voluntary organizations come forward
> with significant force, we would definitely help them.

This was an important statement coming from a government official reflecting the changes

in their outlook toward development and collaboration.

Thus, the research questions discussed above provoked a series of responses and

helped to bring out the clarity of roles these organizations are playing in West Bengal. It

can be hoped that the analysis of challenges and problems would stimulate them to think

of new solutions, new actions and new practices.

Chapter 8

Where do girls stand in this collaboration?

In the previous chapters, while discussing a new collaborative stand between NGOs and government, I emphasized how this new alliance can make projects developed for women and girl-children more constructive as they work towards a common goal, exchanging their ideas and resources for a better world. Even the members of the organizations that I interviewed were mostly enthusiastic about a collaborative approach, and some of them are trying in their own ways to forge this alliance.

But one important issue that was missing was the role of girl children in their projects. If projects are planned for girl-children, should not girls play a role in deciding what is good for them? We can see in my history section that women have been contributing throughout the voluntary movement. There have been women in the past who took part in various decision-making processes or in major socio-political activities. But the scenario has changed, and often these days we find organizations or government do not find it necessary to incorporate the actual needs, actions and perceptions of women, especially girl-children, while formulating their policies and programs.

As pointed out by Manjushree Mukherjee and Shubhobroto Banerjee, even when projects are initiated for the development of the girl-child vis a vis reproductive, nutritional health, education etc, the girl-children are regarded as mere passive agents for the mute reception of such projects. Any kind of interaction with the clients that is the girl-children, in the formulation of such projects is generally disregarded. Ironically, it is women themselves who have the last say about their desires and in what particular area of life they really want the developmental work to focus. This is the reason why I discussed

what exactly an integrative collaboration should be based on DAWN's analysis in the Introduction. Here I still analyze how far the voluntary organizations and the government are akin to the principles of a feminist notion of collaboration.

As a student of Women Studies, I believe that it is important to make the society aware of this unequal treatment of girls. It is imperative to have a feminist perspective to achieve this equality for the girl-child, and therefore, I consider my research to be on women, for women, and with women. My research thus essentially carries the seeds of a feminist perspective that is essential for gaining knowledge that can be utilised to change the oppressive and exploitative conditions of women and girl-children in a patriarchal society (Fonow and Cook, 1991). It is important to note here that it is feminist scholarship that pointed out for the first time how children are usually addressed indirectly as objects of adult study rather than as "full subjects in and of themselves" (Helleiner, 1999, 28). Thus my focus is on the girl-child as an individual in her own right. I recognize her agency and subjectivity. Moreover I recognize what might be called "public agency". By "public agency," what I mean precisely is what the girl child can do individually as well as collectively to become an important part of the society's development planning.

The organizations that I interviewed had different ways of integrating girls into their programs. The way Nishtha does it is by regularly arranging interactive programs between its client community (mainly the women and girl-children) and the health workers of Nishtha, where each child's health experiences regarding the nutritional programs are discussed and principles of hygiene and basic nutrition are given. Such interaction takes place regularly on a monthly basis and all the girls that are interviewed at Nishtha attested to the fact that such interactive sessions help them to understand the nutritional needs of

the body. Ample opportunities are given to them to explain their needs and demands and various socio-economic and cultural prohibitions they face. To quote, Rita Mondal, a girl-child at Nishtha,

> The didis [health workers] at the interactive sessions are so
> sincere. They listen to all that we have to say and advise us
> on how to keep our houses clean and also maintain personal
> hygiene. We always go and tell our parents what the didis
> had advised us.

So it is clear that these sessions serve two distinct purposes. On one hand, they help to provide a forum where the voice of the client community is taken into account and the demands and needs of the same explored in detail and also on another level these sessions help Nishtha to reach a much wider community as these children go back to their parents and inform them of the advice. Thus a communication chain is created which has far reaching ramifications. Shikha, another child informant, pointed out,

> Didis listen to our problems and they ask us what we
> ourselves can do to change it. They teach us how to be
> independent and self-confident and how we can try to find
> our own solutions.

Mina of Nishtha added,

> We feel it is important to talk to girls about what they think
> and need and our programs are guided by that. If we are
> planning for them, we cannot just force anything onto them.
> We need to involve them too.

Cal Res too, arranges for special interactive sessions between its health workers, the girl children and their parents where the needs of the girl-child are discussed and their views are taken into account. Even in the course of the everyday classes, the teachers are

instructed to impress the needs of a proper diet, rich in vitamins and iron upon the girl-children, so that in future they can go on to become healthy human beings. The girls are expected to go back to their homes and inform their family members so that a scope of mass awareness is raised by a kind of percolation process.

Swadhina involves girl-children not only through interactive sessions, but also by celebrating Women's Day, Children's Day and organizing different cultural programs for the women and girls in the slums. The girls are encouraged to talk about their own issues, changes they want to see around them and to share their ideas with each other. Paromita Roy pointed out that often in these interactive sessions, they have identified problems in some families like wife beating or drunkard husband and the women themselves have taken decisions about what can be done to eradicate the problem. Swadhina just supported them in their endeavor, but what was important is that the solution came out from the women themselves. For Paromita, this is really important as it proves that girls and women are capable of taking decisions about their own life. Swadhina, being a member of the NGO forum, Maitreyi, had taken these endeavors to other larger organizations and they hope to get the government involved in their process too. Moreover, the programs of Swadhina are geared exclusively for and with the women and girl-children and therefore, most of their projects are about how more involvement of women and girls can be possible. Also, to facilitate the awareness programs, Swadhina has advocated the formation of local women's centers comprising women from the slums which operate to empower and encourage the girls and women of the locality to satisfy their needs, needs that they feel necessary. Formation of such committees often needs co-operation of local government sponsored clubs to reach the community and till now Paromita told me,

Swadhina has not had to face any major problems in this regard. Government has been quite co-operative with Swadhina.

What about the girl children themselves? What do they think about getting involved in the decision-making bodies? The response of some of the girls was really enthusiastic. As Vania, a grade ten student in Kolkata expressed,

> We girls really want to do something for our society, to make some changes. But we do not know where to start from, where to go and get involved?

Shefhali, a domestic helper was more pessimistic,

> Didi, who would listen to us, or ask for our advice? It is something totally impossible that we take decisions about what we want.

It is really depressing to note that even at the end of three development decades, we can find women still being marginalized from developmental planning, and as pointed out by Sohoni (1994, 8), there is every possibility that women's marginalization is "preceded, presaged and lived out by girls". Girls in fact bear more than women do, the discriminatory treatment at the societal, personal and socio-economic levels (Sohoni, 1994, 8).

An example of this discriminatory treatment was expressed, almost unknowingly, by Mita, a 15 year old girl, under Cal Res's educational program. When I asked her about her daily routine, she pointed out,

> In the morning, me and my brother get up and start getting ready for school. I help my mother to cook and then we eat and leave for school.

When I asked her about the after school activities she told me,

> Sometimes I go and play, but usually I come home and help
> my mother to prepare dinner and take care of my brother.

But what about her brother who is just a year younger than her? Does he help his mother

too? Mita told me,

> Bhai [brother], is young and he loves to play so my mother
> lets him play after school. Also she told me that I am a girl
> and I should start learning household works.

The girl did not seem disturb by this discriminatory treatment meted out to her; in fact she

did not even notice it. This discrimination is part of the socialization processes of many

girls in India, and in many other parts of the world. Childhood, especially girlhood, is

necessarily mute, and it is veil of silence that has to be lifted for any proper development

to take place (Sohoni, 1994).

When I asked Vania about her opinions regarding getting involved in decision-

making processes she was very enthusiastic,

> You know, given an opportunity, we can show how girls
> are capable of changing the world around them.

In answer to my question about how she thinks she can do it, she told me,

> Well, I don't think that we can actually sit on the
> government board taking the final decisions and signing
> papers. What seems feasible is that these organizations
> come and meet us or arrange workshops or seminars and try
> to find out what we need and want to change. Based on that
> they can make the necessary plans.

Vania's response, perhaps, clearly indicated the best way girl-children can be

involved in this whole collaborative process. It indicates an integrative, holistic approach

where not only the bureaucratic agencies come closer, but they actually plan with the girl-children themselves. But how can these girl-children be reached? Vania was very prompt, "why not through our schools?".

But all this time, while interviewing the girl-children, there was this one dilemma haunting me throughout and that was the whole question of class. Vania, being brought up in an upper middle class family, goes to a renowned English medium school where girls are much more independent than those who belong to the lower class families like Shefhali or Nanda. Both of them work as domestic helpers in the morning and go to local schools in the afternoon. Their opinion about taking part in planning and programming and getting involved with NGOs and government was just a dull look and a faint smile. They had no answer for my question. For them it is a far-fetched dream.

West Bengal being a leftist state where equality of class is emphasized, this situation was evidence of where things really stand. Shefhali and Nanda are not only girls, but also poor bearing the double burden of negligence and discrimination no doubt. So it was important to find out some ways to help these girls come out of their situation and realize their own individuality and identity. Instead of looking for various theories, I decided to find the answer from the girls themselves. Vania told me,

> We can help these less-privileged girls to be independent
> and confident. We can choose slum areas around our school
> or buildings and arrange certain interactive sessions with the
> girls in the slums. We can talk to them, find out their health
> problems, social-economic problems, and communicate that
> to the planners. Based on that, government can plan their
> projects.

What Vania told me seemed an appropriate way of bringing the girls together where they can share their experiences, needs and aspirations, wishes and desires, and convey them to the larger organizations. There might be certain shortcomings of this kind of a procedure, but, there has to be a start somewhere, and these girls showed me where to start from. It is high time that development be seen from the vantage point of girls/women to analyze the short falls of development (Sen and Grown, 1987).

Another important issue that I wanted to find out through my research was what initiatives have been taken so far by the government to include girls in their programs. Shefhali told me that often women from local clubs, run by the government, come and speak to them about their health problems, socio-economic problems, sanitation and various other issues. They talk to the girls, advise them and ask them about what their needs are. Although it is not a very regular process, there are some possibilities of bringing the girls and the government together by these visits. Vania told me that in her school sometimes they have people coming from health departments of the government of West Bengal, trying to figure out the problems girl-children face regarding their health and what remedies they want to have from the government. She even stated that some of the schools, where her friends go, including hers, organized a few workshops where they met poor girls from local slums and imparted to them the knowledge they have gained from the government workers. This to me seemed very appealing where girls who have more access to official resources are actually trying to bring those perspectives to those girls who are not so upfront. This is where I could sense the seeds of collaboration germinating, where girls of different social classes are making an endeavor to come closer and work together.

As Vania concluded,

> Whatever may be the class difference it is important to
> remember that we are all girls and like sisters. We need each
> other to create change.

The intention of the girl children to work together as sisters indicated that a feminist

concept of collaboration is not too far, when women's voices would enter the definition of

"development and the making of policy choices" (Sen and Grown, 1987, 82).

Chapter 9

Conclusion

In the concluding chapter of the thesis it is now important to analyze what kind of collaboration is being carried out in West Bengal and whether the model is similar to the one DAWN scholars talk about that tends to integrate women into development assessment and action plans, so that it can address women's needs and issues more effectively.

If we take a closer look at the various activities of the three organizations as well as examine their opinions regarding the issue of collaboration, we can identify three different versions of collaboration emerging (even if the organizations themselves would not use the word collaboration for what they were doing). These are:

- the traditional top-down concept of collaboration where NGOs and government collaborate with each other without a focus and purpose for collaboration.

- the 'Getting Things Done' model of collaboration where NGOs collaborate with government and with each other, with a focus on the marginalized sections of the society that is women and girl children. Under this model, the organizations think that it is crucial to collaborate and therefore attempt to expand the number of groups and individuals who are interested in building a social movement to create change. However, the marginalized are not as actively engaged in this collaboration, as they should be although they do form an important part of the whole process.

- the Bottom-up model of collaboration where in the collaboration between government and NGOs, the marginalized section that is women and girl children are the most important agents of change who are actively integrated in to the planning and action of the organizations. Under this model, women are dynamic agents rather than passive beneficiaries. Programs and projects are planned from the standpoint of women and girl children and not forced from the top.

During the hey day of developmentalism in 1950s, 1960s and 1970s development was equated with modernity and industrialisation through which 'backward' societies could be developed. One of the main assumptions of this theory was that the State or Government should play the central role in introducing development policies and strategies that would lead to better life and standards of living (Rheddock, 1996). In the 1980s and 1990s, the emphasis shifted a bit with the entry of new actors in the development field, that is the non-governmental organizations (Rheddock, 1996). The new partners- government and NGOs- became the new arbitrators of decision-making, where women had little say. Women were largely considered as "traditional" or "backward" and in need of being taken care of by these organizations rather than working for the development of the country. Women and girl children were seen as mere objects of development planning by others.

One of the main criticisms of this model is that it is essentially based on an androcentric discourse of development that negates women's experience and is based on the politics of hierarchy and power[10]. Under this scheme only those partners collaborate

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[10] It is important to mention here that another facade of this patriarchal model of development in today's world is Globalization. Under the disguise of economic growth, Globalization has worsened the condition

who have power and resources and are engaged in a game of power over each other. It is typically a horizontal collaboration (Government ↔ NGO) where women and girl children, relegated to the lowest strata of the hierarchical structure, are considered as "silent" and "passive" clients- if they are considered at all.

It is this kind of collaboration that most of the scholars talk about as reflected in Chapter 6, where we can see in my literature review section that most of the discussions are around NGO/government collaboration and its problems. There might be passing remarks about women and girl children but the emphasis is how the two most important collaborators can come together and work with each other. The model is essentially patricentric as it tends to negate women's experience and does not include women in active planning and is a partnership between people who have control over resources and power.

Organizations like Cal Res (a service-oriented organization) are involved in this kind of collaboration and its application for the membership of CLPOA is another step towards this patriarchal model of collaboration. The membership might be beneficial for exchange of ideas and approaches as pointed out by Nandita, but she definitely does not talk about how girl children can be integrated into this collaboration. Even the various interactive sessions that she mentioned does not really integrate girl children into decision-making or planning. Rather girls are discussed as being used as instruments to reach out to their parents. The programs designed for the development of the girls are in fact patricentric- neither recognizing nor developing the active agency of girls. Rather the

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of women by increasing the workload of women, reinforcing gender relations and perpetuating the traditional gender division of labor (See Reddock for detailed discussion).

services reinforce traditional roles, where the four health centers basically aim at keeping the girls healthy to become future mothers.

Also, when Gautam discusses the problems of working together with either the government or other organizations, pointing to the jealousy and distrust amongst organizations, the intense competition for funds or co-optation by government, they remind us of a very stratified patriarchal structure where everyone is busy accumulating capital and power for themselves. Nurturing a genuine interest for doing good for grassroots people cannot definitely survive under this regime. This is also the reason why development policies in post independent India could not really address the needs of women or girl children as development models built on western (or should we say eurocentric?) patterns were aimed at gaining economic prosperity only. Equal participation of women that was emphasized so much by Gandhi (as I have discussed in Chapter 2) was totally forgotten, with women becoming more and more marginalized and peripheral.

This traditional model has been so powerfully established for ages that it is very easy to get carried away by this model (something that happened to me as I mentioned in my First chapter), accepting it as the only way towards development. Even the organizations, in which I saw different collaborative models emerging, in fact tended to use the word collaboration in traditional sense. For instance, Nishtha did not see the word collaboration to be applied in the relationship they were developing with the girl children. It was only with the help of DAWN's analysis that I could realize what an important collaborative work Nishtha is doing with regard to the girl children. There is a need,

therefore, to reorient economic and political thinking such that it works from the ground up rather than the top down.

As opposed to the oppressive and hierarchical model of collaboration that I discussed before, I want to advocate for an alternative model of collaboration, a wholistic, integrative version based on the ideals of DAWN, that (as I mentioned earlier in Chapter 1) is based on the "needs and concerns of different women, and defined by them for themselves" (Sen and Grown, 1987). This concept of collaboration will have the potential to challenge all hierarchical concepts of alliances and break down the status quo, thereby making the whole issue of collaboration more dynamic and integrative. It is therefore a collaboration which cuts across society's hierarchical structures based on power and resources; in this type of collaboration, diverse organizations work with each other, the government and most important of all with the grassroots and the marginalized to create changes in the social order. The two organizations Swadhina and Nishtha have key but different features of this DAWN model.

Swadhina, (based on 'Getting Things Done' model) is one such organization that is trying to collaborate with the bureaucracy as well as the grassroots. If we recall Paromita's discussion, we will see that she emphasizes Swadhina's willingness to work with everyone as well as the government so long as they are ideologically compatible. Their organization is open to everyone who has a genuine interest in women and girl children as their main objective is to work together for common action and programs that can empower women and girl children by raising their consciousness and awareness about needs and rights. Swadhina in this regard challenges the first model of collaboration as Swadhina, being a feminist organization, wants to express their collective focus together

with those other organizations that have a clear focus on the girl child. Swadhina's concept of collaboration has potential political effects as it believes that to make the marginalized have some voice, structural changes are necessary in the existing power structures (so that everyone can work together with a common goal of changing the society) and it is not possible for one group to achieve that. Therefore it feels the necessity of working together as a force to generate a social movement. The collaboration is to organize various women's groups as well as other institutions to force the development planners to take women/girl children seriously and address their concerns. By challenging hierarchy and power plays, Swadhina is thus engaged in a transformational politics, to ensure that women and girl children do not simply remain recipients of development.

Ideologically, therefore, Swadhina no doubt has a clear focus on women and girl children and is doing a great job advocating their rights, but its main activities catered through the School Health Program raise a question of the extent of involvement of girl children in actual decision making processes. It does have women's centers at various slums to listen to the needs and concerns of women and girl children and also organizes various interactive sessions with the children, but it does not have enough scope to include girl children as real voices.

Nishtha is an example of the third model of collaboration. Nishtha through its various activities has been constantly engaged in making girl children an inherent part of planning. Through its various groups, like 'Balika Bahini' or 'Kishori Bahini', Nishtha tries to empower girl children so that they can make their own decisions and plan their own programs. The programs aimed at giving the girls leadership training, as well as knowledge of village administration, community development and/or legal rights tries to

make the women and girl children self confident and capable of doing development work by themselves. The needs and concerns are voiced by girls themselves and their solutions too. This is what is referred to by Canadian feminists as listening to first voice women, and Nishtha adheres to this principle no doubt. The model is therefore a feminist model of collaboration that not only seeks to collaborate with the grassroots but also aims at empowering them by actually involving the girls into stages of policy decision and actual implementation. Nishtha's collaboration with the girl children will no doubt produce some good women leaders in the long run that would make future planning and programming for women more effective.

But there is one shortcoming about Nishtha's ideology and practice. Being funded by international donors, Nishtha does not feel the urge to collaborate with other organizations or the government and vehemently stays away from any kind of power games. As Mina stated, instead of wasting time boasting about each other's organizations or getting caught in various bureaucratic procedures, she would rather work by herself. It is this lack of collaboration with other organizations that keeps Nishtha isolated from other organizations. And it also keeps Nishtha from being as effective as it might be in making social changes. The great work that Nishtha is doing in terms of societal change is not being dispersed by Nishtha to other organizations, thereby depriving the other institutions to learn from what it has achieved in terms of empowerment of women and girl children. Therefore in order to be more wholistic Nishtha needs to collaborate with other organizations too, something that Swadhina is doing as the main purpose has to be 'Getting Things Done' collectively.

Ideally and actually therefore organizations like Swadhina and Nishtha should collaborate with each other so that both the organizations as well as the girl children can work together to create changes. As the reader may apprehend by now, it becomes necessary here to add a fourth model of collaboration, that is DAWN's feminist model of collaboration which is integrative as well as holistic. Each organization (Swadhina and Nishtha) has developed important pieces of DAWN's model but they will be more powerful if they collaborate with each other and use parts and practices of each other. This does not mean that they will have to give up their identity or work pattern. DAWN's model is based on power of diversity and therefore Swadhina and Nishtha coming together will be an example of two diverse groups working together, retaining their unique strength and configuration. Swadhina could begin to involve women's groups while Nishtha could bring girl children as active agents and definers of agenda. Each will bring its own strength making the collaboration much more stronger and transformative.

In terms of policy implications, it will be immensely beneficial for the government to adopt this feminist model of collaboration as it will give government the scope to include girl children and women in its planning. Inclusion of girl children will necessarily end up in transforming the stereotypical notions of development built on years of patriarchal approaches to development. It will help develop polices that are women-friendly, making sure that there is a gradual increase of women and girl children in the decision making process. It is only then that women and girls would become active participants, agents and partners of projects. It is high time that the so called "powerful" sections of the society realize that collaboration based on power and resources only, does not lead to a just development and what is necessary is the presence of real people to

make real changes in the society. In taking action and making choices, women will therefore become agents of their own development.

Thus as Peggy Antrobus had pointed out, in a world of neoliberalism where there is hardly any scope for diversity, feminist movements as expressed through DAWN scholars have been successful in creating a paradigmatic shift in the discourse of development by discovering an alternative vision of collaboration. This collaboration built on the common commitment to women and girl children " creates a tolerance of difference, and offers greater possibilities for respect and dialogue and for analysis than any other social movement" (Antrobus and Christiansen-Ruffman, 1999).

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Appendix 1

<u>Initial questions for oral history by participating groups:</u> (To be translated into Bengali)

(As the primary means of collecting data while doing my field research, I intend to do focussed in-depth interviews. Below I have outlined the sample questions of the information I expect to collect as is common with such unstructured interview techniques. More specific questions will be developed during the course of the interview.)

<u>For Government Officials, CMC, Members Of Women's
Organizations and NGOs.</u>

<u>(A) Nutritional health programs and policies:</u>

(1) What is the high priority health concerns for girls in urban West Bengal? Is determining nutritional status one of them?

(2) In your memory, what programs and policies have been undertaken in West Bengal to promote girl children's nutritional status? (Probe for role of girl child)

(3) Are there any distinct issues taken into consideration while planning policies and projects for the development of girl children's health?

(4) How is diversity being considered? In what ways are girl children's experiences and needs considered in identifying the issues? How are girl children involved?

<u>(B) Participation and Involvement of girl child:</u>

(1) In what ways are girl children's (10-18) needs and demands assessed in identifying the issues relating to nutritional health?

(2) How do you involve the girls in your projects and programs?

(3) What do you think about girl children's participation in their projects and policies? (Probe for each and differences among them)

(4) Do you think participation of girls in decision-making roles is important?

(5) What are the various ways by which girls can participate and voice their opinion in the development of nutritional health?

(6) Do you think your current projects are based on the needs and demands of girl children? If yes, why do you think so?

(C) Problems and barriers:

(1) Do girls in urban areas face any kind of barrier to the utilization of health services? If yes, what kind of barriers (economic, social, political, cultural etc.)?

(2) Do you try to involve girls while trying to find solutions to those problems?

(3) What are the ways you involve girls?

(4) How does participation and involvement of girls help you in planning your projects and policies?

Government and CMC: (Interrealationships)

(1) What is the extent of collaboration with women's organizations and NGOs in the state while planning for girl children?

Women's Organizations and NGOs: (Interrelationships)

(1) Do you face any kind of constraints (economic, political, cultural etc.) while planning any project/policy for girl children's nutritional health?

(2) Is it necessary to have government approval prior to undertaking any program?

(3) What is the extent of collaboration with state government and CMC while planning for girl children?

<u>Girl Children (10-18):</u>

<u>(A) Nutritional Health:</u>

(1) What do you think are the primary health issues for girls in West Bengal? Is

development of nutritional health one of them?

(2) Do you know what is meant by nutrition or what constitutes proper nutrition?

<u>Decision making roles:</u>

(1) Who decides in your family about what you should eat everyday?

(2) Have you ever been asked about what you would like to have as your daily diet?

(3) Do you usually eat what you want to have?

(4) Are you aware of what the government or other development organizations doing to

improve the nutritional health of girls?

(5) What problems do you think should be addressed by the organizations regarding the

nutritional health of girl children?

(6) How would you describe major problems faced by girls in achieving nutritional health?

(7)Have you ever been involved in any project/program undertaken by

government/women's organizations/NGOs regarding the development of nutritional

health? (Probe for their roles and participation)

(8) What relevant information have you gained from your involvement?

(9) Do you think it is important for the various organizations to listen to you before

making any decision concerning you? If yes why do you think so? If no, why not?

(10) How you think you can contribute to the various development initiatives that are

undertaken in West Bengal for the development of nutritional health of girls?

(11) How do you think you can voice your needs, demands, and confusions to be

effectively involved?

Appendix 2

Pre-Interview Consent Form
(To be translated into Bengali)

Thesis Project: Planning For The Nutritional Status of the Girl-Child in Calcutta

Researcher:

Supervisor:

Contact Person: If you have any questions at any time during or after this research, please feel free to contact either me, Dr. Linda Christiansen-Ruffman (whose coordinates appear above) or the Research Ethics Board of Saint Mary's University.

I invite you to take part in a research study at Saint Mary's University. The aim of this research is to study the interrelationship and the collaboration between the various projects and programs undertaken by the West Bengal government, Calcutta Municipal Corporation, women's organizations and Non-governmental organizations, working in Calcutta for the improvement of the nutritional health of girl children aged 10-18 and also to examine the extent of participation of girls, their needs and demands in these projects and programs.

Taking part in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. You are under no obligation to answer any question that you feel is too personal, offensive in any way, or is a threat to your emotional well being or position. If you wish to skip a question with which you feel uncomfortable, please do not hesitate to do so. Since I am interested in getting the historical accuracy, all of the answers to the open-ended questionnaire will be tape recorded; however if you want certain information to be "off" record, I will treat that information as confidential and only me and my supervisory committee will have access to this confidential information unless you desire otherwise. You can also ask me to turn off the tape recorder at any time- or even go back and erase something. Do you have any questions about issues of confidentiality? We should also discuss what happens to the tape. If you are interested, I can give you a copy of the tape for possible revisions. Also, after five years, if you want I can destroy the tape or deposit it in archives in India for future studies. At the end of the interview, we will again talk about what will happen to the tape, issues of confidentiality and also whether you want a two-page written summary of my findings. Should you wish to see the full thesis, this will also be made available on request. Thank you for your cooperation and involvement in helping me complete my study.

I have read the explanation about this study "Planning For The Nutritional Status of the Girl-Child in Calcutta". I have been given the opportunity to discuss it and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. However, I realize that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time.

_____   _____

PARTICIPANT'S SIGNATURE   DATE

_____   _____

PARENT/GUARDIAN'S SIGNATURE   DATE

_____   _____

RESEARCHER'S SIGNATURE   DATE

Post-interview Consent Form

Thank you for your participation and cooperation in helping me to do my interview. Now that we have come to the end of the interview, is there anything relevant you want to talk about that I haven't asked you?

As I have mentioned before, I am doing oral history interviews with an aim towards historical authenticity and thus have recorded the interviews. However, there might be certain information that you want to be treated as confidential or "off" the record that you did not mention earlier. Please let me know about that now- or even in the future. If you like, I can give you a copy of the tape for possible revisions.

Would you like to have a copy of the tape? (Please check)

_____   _____
(YES)   (NO)

Would you like to have a two page written summary of my findings? (Please check)

_____   _____
(YES)   (NO)

I plan to retain the data for 5 years, as is normal practice. Then I hope to arrange to send them to archives in India for future studies. Let me know how you feel about it? (Please check)

_____   Agree the tape could be archived.

_____   Please destroy the tape.

_____   _____

(PARTICIPANT'S SIGNATURE)   (DATE)

_____   _____

(RESEARCHER'S SIGNATURE)   (DATE)

Tape # _____