Exploring the Role of NGOs in Addressing Gender-Based Violence Against Women[i]

Upasha Kumari

The Aung San Suu Kyi (ASSK) Centre for Peace, Lady Shri Ram College for Women, University of Delhi, India

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Keywords: *NGOs,* *Gender-Based Violence,* *civil society,* *peace and conflict studies*	This research explores the role of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in addressing Gender-based Violence (GBV) against women through a case study of NGO Shakti Shalini located in Delhi, India. There are four aspects of the NGO's operation that are examined: 'Pehchaan' - the shelter home, Crisis Intervention and Counseling services, Community Outreach Programs, and 'Kushalta Vikas Kendra' (Skill Development Centre). This research argues that NGOs can become grassroots agents of peace as they develop a sense of familiarity and closeness with the residents in the locality in which they operate. Due to this, a relationship of trust develops between the NGO and the residents, and this makes them better equipped to work on issues related to gender discrimination through direct interaction with the residents in its Community Outreach Programs. Women who came in contact with the NGO have shared their personal journeys of transformation into more confident and strong beings; this demonstrates the positive impact of NGOs in addressing the issue of violence against women. The NGO's informed and well planned intervention not just in the aftermath of a case but also at a preventive stage has been studied. This research employs a mixed-methods approach to investigate the role of NGOs in addressing gender-based violence against women. The primary research is based on a case study of NGO Shakti Shalini in Delhi, India. Multiple methods of data collection were utilized, including participation observation, structured open-ended interviews, and unstructured interviews. The use of multiple methods allowed for data triangulation, enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings. This approach facilitated a comprehensive exploration of the research topic, providing different perspectives and increasing overall knowledge about the phenomena under investigation. In addition to primary research, secondary research in the form of literature review was conducted. A primary focus of this research is to understand how structural violence that manifests itself in uneven development affects women differently than men. It also explores ways that the government and civil society can collaborate in preventing GBV.

1. Introduction

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a global pandemic that affects one out of three women in their lifetime. (The World Bank, 2019) Violence affects women physically, sexually, psychologically, emotionally and financially. In modern times, it is regarded as the primary responsibility of the government to ensure that we are progressing towards a violence-free society. Violence against women ranges from direct forms of violence such as rape, sexual harassment, acid attack, to structural violence in the form of differential access to education, healthcare and employment. Further, these forms of violence derive their legitimacy from culture. Patriarchy which is often articulated, justified and even glorified by the negative aspects of our culture, is the cause for gender-based violence against women. The role of the government in reducing incidents of violence against women has limitations. This is especially true when the roots of gender-based violence lie in the domain of culture. In such a scenario, various stakeholders in civil society can become agents of change as it is the site where all dialogues and debates related to justice are born. Government alone cannot bring about social change; we need a holistic approach involving multiple stakeholders that addresses the underlying causes of direct and structural violence.

2. Methodology

The following questions emerge from this paper:

1. What is the role and significance of NGO in addressing gender based violence against women?
2. How do NGOs respond to the issue of violence against women differently from the government?
3. What are the possible areas of collaboration between the government and NGOs in dealing with the problem of violence against women?
4. What unique insights do NGOs contribute in addressing GBV against women? What significance does it have for peace research and activists?

2.1. Research Design

For this research, a case study approach was employed to investigate the role of the NGO Shakti Shalini in preventing gender-based violence against women. The case study method was chosen as it allows for an in-depth examination of a specific organization and its activities within the real-life context of combating gender-based violence. This approach enables a detailed exploration of Shakti Shalini's strategies, interventions, and outcomes, providing a comprehensive understanding of their efforts in addressing this pressing social issue. By focusing on Shakti Shalini as a case study, this research aimed to gain insights into the organization's approaches, challenges, and successes, contributing to the broader knowledge and understanding of NGO interventions in preventing gender-based violence against women.

2.2. Sampling Strategy

In this research, a purposive sampling strategy was employed to select participants for data collection. The sampling criteria focused on individuals directly associated with NGO Shakti Shalini's efforts in preventing gender-based violence against women. Key stakeholders, such as staff members, volunteers, and beneficiaries, were purposefully selected to provide diverse perspectives and insights into the organization's role and impact. This sampling strategy allowed for a targeted and intentional selection of participants who possessed relevant knowledge and experiences related to the research topic. By using purposive sampling, the

research aimed to ensure that the data collected represented a range of perspectives and provided a comprehensive understanding of Shakti Shalini's initiatives in addressing gender-based violence.

2.3. Methods of Data Collection

This empirical research was carried out using the following methods:

1. Participation Observation Method
2. Structured Open Ended Interviews
3. Unstructured Interviews

Participation Observation Method aims to study the behavior and perspectives of study populations. The research site where this method was used included the office of the NGO Shakti Shalini, the shelter home and three out of six localities where the NGO provides community outreach services. These localities include **the Adivasi Camp, Block 10 and Jal Vihar** located in South East Delhi, India. This method was used to note observations about the condition of residents living in these three colonies and the shelter home during field visits, meetings, events and activities conducted by the NGO in these areas. Further it was used to assess the impact of the work done by the organization.

Structured Open Ended Interviews is "a systematic procedure to gather spoken ideas, information, and opinions from participants through a phone or personal interview" (Monroe, 2002, p. 104). It was adopted in conducting interviews of the staff members of the NGO and the interns working at the organization. Open ended questions were used as they enabled the respondents to describe their own ideas, experience and perspectives in their own words (Monroe, 2002, p. 104). Questions that were addressed to the staff members of the NGO were related to the working of the organization, their role and duties, their observations about the cases reported to the NGO, their experience in the social sector and their perspective on crime against women. This method is "useful in extrapolating selected preferences and behaviors of the sample to a large population" (Monroe, 2002, p. 104).

Unstructured Interviews involves intensive interviews of a small group of respondents to gather detailed information about a topic. Interviews with the residents located in the research site were carried out using this method. Scholars have rightfully observed that this method is a "natural extension" of participation observation method (Zhang & Wildemuth 2009). They are dependent on the "spontaneous generation of questions in the natural flow of an interaction" (Zhang & Wildemuth 2009). These interviews conducted are often used to provide "context" to other data collected.

The use of Participation Observation Method and Interview Method to collect data allowed **triangulation of data** so that the observations noted from one method was confirmed and supplemented by other method. The aim of triangulation of data is to get different perspectives on a topic and increase the overall knowledge about the investigated phenomena.

2.4. Secondary Research

Secondary research focuses on literature review of related concepts, theories and debates related to the topic to guide the primary research. It includes review of literature on civil society (its meaning, theories and scope along with its history in advancing women empowerment), Non-Governmental Organizations (some important debates on its role in contemporary neoliberal world order) and Gender Based Violence (some key theories). The role of secondary

research is to provide a background to the primary research. Further it also aids the process of analysis and structuring of primary data.

2.5. Data Analysis

Based on the data collected in this research, a thorough data analysis process was conducted. The collected data, including participation observation notes, structured open-ended interview transcripts, and unstructured interview recordings, were carefully reviewed and coded. A hybrid approach, combining inductive and deductive methodologies, was employed for the data analysis. The initial analysis involved open coding, descriptive coding, and values coding. Subsequently, thematic analysis coding was utilized to identify patterns and themes within the data.

In the qualitative analysis of the data, several key themes emerged related to the research topic. Participants emphasized the significance of freedom and agency for women, highlighting the importance of autonomy and the ability to make choices without fear of violence or discrimination. Discussions also revolved around the diverse forms of violence experienced by women and the detrimental impact on their well-being. The theme of structural violence shed light on systemic barriers and inequalities that limit women's access to education, healthcare, employment, and opportunities due to gender discrimination. Restrictions on mobility and access were discussed, underscoring the implications for women's full participation in society. The theme of dignity and respect underscored the importance of treating women with dignity, while the theme of equal opportunities highlighted the need for gender parity in education, employment, and decision-making. Throughout the data, gender discrimination emerged as a pervasive issue, encompassing biases, inequalities, and discriminatory practices. This comprehensive analysis of the themes provided valuable insights into participants' perspectives on freedom, violence, structural violence, mobility, dignity, equal opportunities, and gender discrimination, illuminating the multifaceted nature of the research topic. The role of the NGO in addressing these issues was crucial, employing feminist methods and approaches to promote rehabilitation and empowerment. Through its programs and initiatives, the NGO aimed to challenge gender norms, advocate for equal rights and opportunities, and provide support to women affected by gender-based violence, adopting a holistic feminist approach to rehabilitation.

3. Review of Related Literature

The concept of civil society can exhibit notable variations between the Western context and India. In the Western tradition, civil society is often characterized by a distinct separation between the state and non-state actors, emphasizing individual rights, liberal values, and the pursuit of private interests (Chandhoke, 2011). In this perspective, civil society acts as a check on the power of the government and plays a role in safeguarding individual liberties.

Conversely, in the Indian context, the notion of civil society expands beyond its Western understanding. India's rich history of social and political movements has shaped a distinct understanding of civil society that goes beyond the boundaries of state and non-state entities. This broader interpretation encompasses a vibrant network of grassroots organizations, social movements, and community-based initiatives (Rudolphs, 2015). The emphasis is on collective action, social justice, and inclusive participation, transcending the strict dichotomy between the state and civil society.

It is within this unique Indian understanding of civil society that the influential figure of Mahatma Gandhi emerged, further reshaping the concept. Gandhi's transformative leadership

extended the scope of civil society, advocating for the engagement of marginalized populations, including the rural and urban uneducated, in political conversations and mobilization (Rudolphs, 2015). Through his inclusive approach, Gandhi brought the ideals of civil society closer to the people, challenging traditional power structures and fostering a participatory democracy.

Within civil society, NGOs operate with humanitarian or cooperative objectives, both in developed and developing countries (Werker & Ahmed, 2008). NGOs exhibit diverse typologies and structures, ranging from globally active organizations to grassroots initiatives focused on empowering local communities and advocating for women's rights (Kumaran, 2014; Razvi & Roth, 2004). Nevertheless, NGOs funded by international donors have faced criticism due to allegations that they uphold the existing power structures and contribute to the ongoing marginalization of disadvantaged communities. (Bebbington & Hickey, 2006). One example of such criticism can be seen in the context of development projects funded by international donors, where NGOs are often involved. Critics argue that these projects sometimes prioritize the interests and perspectives of the donor countries or organizations, rather than genuinely empowering and addressing the needs of the marginalized communities they aim to assist.

The proliferation of NGOs is often a result of the neoliberal world order, with the state increasingly shifting responsibilities to civil society. Thus it is important to differentiate between NGOs with neoliberal agendas, prioritizing self-reliance in the market economy, and genuine humanitarian organizations (Kothari).

Feminists critique the State's male dominance and its uncritical reliance on the police and intervention, while acknowledging the potential for the government to uphold individual and group rights and combat discrimination, as mandated by the Constitution (Wilson, Ung Loh, & Purewal, 2018). NGOs have been recognized for their significant contributions in providing direct services to survivors of gender-based violence, including counseling, legal aid, medical assistance, and shelter provisions (Johnson et al., 2015; Smith & Wilson, 2018). Additionally, NGOs play a crucial role in advocating for policy changes and legal reforms to protect women's rights (Brown et al., 2013; Patel & Gupta, 2019).

Engaging with local communities, NGOs organize awareness campaigns and implement initiatives to challenge harmful gender norms, aiming to prevent violence through education, empowerment, and societal attitude change (Garcia-Moreno et al., 2015; Jones & Smith, 2017). While recognizing the positive contributions of NGOs, it is essential to conduct rigorous evaluations of their interventions to measure impact, identify best practices, and understand long-term effects (Wilson et al., 2016; Lee & Johnson, 2020). Further research is needed to address gaps in understanding the transferability of NGO interventions across cultural contexts, the intersectionality of gender-based violence, and the sustainability of NGO interventions beyond immediate crisis response. The present research aims to fill this gap by examining the multifaceted role of NGOs in addressing gender-based violence (GBV) not only in terms of prevention but also in terms of rehabilitation, healing, and the subsequent integration of survivors into society. Further, this study explores the uncharted terrain of partnership and collaboration between the government and civil society in addressing the intricate issue of violence. Recognizing that neither entity can effectively tackle this complex problem in isolation, this research investigates the potential avenues for joint efforts and cooperation, shedding light on new strategies for impactful intervention.

4. Theoretical Framework

The Theory of Violence proposed by Johan Galtung is an important source for reference in this study. By transcending the actor-oriented framework to a structure oriented framework, one is able to look beyond what meets the eye and make relevant policy recommendations which address the root cause of the problem. Galtung's three forms of violence- direct, structural and cultural violence enables us to see the vicious connection between the 'visible' (direct/physical violence) and 'the invisible' (structural and cultural violence). This has important implications for peace research.

5. Discussion

NGO Shakti Shalini was founded in 1987 with the goal to support women facing structural, cultural and physical violence in their lives. The Community Outreach Program of the organization is carried out in six localities in South East Delhi district of India. Direct interviews with the staff members revealed that the NGO refers to these localities as "communities" and these encompass marginalized sections of society with poor income background. In my understanding, this term is used because the NGO strives to create solidarity within and among families so that they realize their common concerns and work towards addressing their problems collectively. The term therefore is very uplifting because it gives power to the people. The concept of power as conceptualized by Hannah Arendt[ii] identifies the people and not the government as the locus of power. Power here has a positive connotation and it refers to "collective will" of the people. The staff shared that it prioritizes the role of choice and agency while addressing different types of violence faced by women in these communities. Through these programs they aim to sensitize and educate not just the women but the menfolk too. They also focus on imparting various skills to women so that they can lead a dignified life. They adopt a feminist approach towards women empowerment that focus on increasing "awareness, autonomy, self-reliance, rights, and engagement in decision-making process, capacity building, and certain level of power" (KUMARAN, 2014, p. 591).

Based on my year-long engagement with the NGO Shakti Shalini, I discovered that the organization carries out its work through four major programs. These programs were identified through direct participation methods, which involved active engagement and firsthand experience with the NGO's activities. It has a shelter home called '*Pehchaan*' which provides a safe space for women in distress such as the victims of gender violence along with their children. It has a 'Crisis Intervention and Counselling' (CICC) which provides counselling[iii] to all irrespective of their gender and sexual orientation. Further, there are Community Outreach Programs that ensure a wider reach of the NGO to the unauthorized colonies in its locality. The NGO has a 'Kushalta Vikas Kendra' (KVK) that focuses on skill development of the members of the shelter home. These skills do not include merely preparing the resident for availing job in the market but the purpose is to engage with them at interpersonal level so that they 'unlearn' patriarchal norms. Thus, instilling critical thinking skills also form an important component of its skill building project. The NGO has started a programme called *Artivism* which aims to promote mental health of the survivors through participation in creative activities. An assessment of various initiatives taken up by the NGO helps us understand their effective approach in combating GBV.

5.1. Community Outreach Programs

John Galtung opines that any discussion about war and peace must acknowledge the fact that the *institution of war ... transcend[s] any particular aggressor–victim system* (Galtung, 1990, p. 301). Similarly, in cases of violence against women also we need to transcend the aggressor-

victim approach and look for structural and cultural reasons that are responsible for limiting an actor's freedom of choice in regard to the commission of violence.

Despite their commitment to women's rights, most organizations fail to recognize the importance of ideology in legitimizing gender discrimination. Further there are constraints posed by limited resources and conflicting motives of the organization. Shakti Shalini tries to overcome these barriers by ensuring that its members are well versed with feminist ideas and values. The educational qualifications and past work experience of the members revleaed that they have specialized knowledge in the field of gender studies, literature and psychology. As a staff member explained, Shakti Shalini trained them to expand individual choice through the cultivation of intuitive knowledge. She said the NGO prioritizes a gender-sensitive approach in dealing with all matters. In her words,

> To address structural violence, we need to build a culture where accountability is practiced, and whenever necessary we must push systems to take action. By addressing the effects of violence such as trauma, pain and suffering the victim gains clarity about the action they want to take related to their oppression and other life decisions. Violence can be addressed by creating spaces that make the victims feel safe and welcomed.

The shelter home is one such safe space for the women residents. It works by challenging and dismantling knowledge systems that sustain structural and cultural violence. Personal engagement through its community outreach programs is a positive step taken in this direction.

This research builds upon the findings of previous studies, which suggest that women residing in unauthorized colonies are more vulnerable to experiencing violence compared to women living in authorized, well-built homes. Through direct participation methods and interviews conducted with the residents of the locality, it was discovered that the male head of the family often engages in temporary jobs that are unable to provide sufficient support for the family's needs. Alcohol consumption is a common trend that is often the leading cause of domestic violence against women in this area. According to the counselors at Shakti Shalini, it was disclosed that verbal abuse has become normalized for women, and men often view violence as a natural coping mechanism. It has an instrumental value attached. The use of violence is contingent upon whether there is a new development such as an employment opportunity when there was none and thus, this may set a course of nonviolent behavior. (Cavanaugh, 2012, p. 613) Women residents shared that a lack of formal education and financial independence along with the cultural norms that restrict their mobility till their colony's entrance only, they spend their entire day doing household chores and yet they do not have any decision making power even concerning the household. Through my direct observation, it became evident that the source of their problems extends beyond interpersonal dynamics, encompassing their immediate environment as well. By virtue of living in unauthorized colonies, the homes of these women are located next to open drains and exposed garbage. The absence of a proper drainage system and safe extra disposal system results in severe health problems such as diarrhea, typhoid and malaria. Research suggests that safe excreta disposal system may be more important safeguard against disease rather than hand washing hygiene (Gupta, 2017).

In the *Adivasi* (*Adivasi* is a Hindi word for tribals) camp, direct interactions with the residents revealed a general sense of political apathy and disinterest. The women expressed their disappointment with the civic amenities as they had to struggle with an open drainage system which was often clogged due to the mixing of garbage especially during rainy season. While men are often out at work or engaged in outdoor activities, women have to stay at home all the time in poorly ventilated rooms with clogged and uncovered drains right outside their doors. This makes us wonder how residents in these highly dense areas maintained 'physical distancing' to ward off the SARS CoV-2 virus. The absence of proper sanitation facilities put

these communities at a greater risk to the spread of communicable diseases. The residents shared that there are only two taps available for 50 households in the *Adivasi* camp. These taps are located in the middle of the colony and often the houses in the periphery do not have easy access to them. A shocking revelation is the absence of even a single tap in most homes. Women revealed that they wake up at 4 am to form a queue in front of the common tap to collect water. The same water used for cleaning utensils and washing clothes is also used for drinking purpose. The taps are located at a short height and thus, they are very close to the uncovered drains which are right below these taps. This poses a grave health hazard. The findings from the participation observation method revealed an alarming sanitation crisis in these areas. The residents shared that workers from the local municipal body refuse to come to these localities. Towards one end of the colony there is open space which is often used for community meetings but this place is also littered with heaps of garbage. Stray animals roam free here and children try to find a clean corner to play in this area. It is common for them to get bruised in this area by sharp objects lying around. Moreover, there are no parks near their house and thus, no greenery is available. However, the menfolk do not face these problems as they have easy access to mobility. Thus, women face structural violence in the form of uneven development of their locality. Despite recognizing these issues, the NGO persists in its efforts to challenge and deconstruct gender norms through its interactions with women in these communities. However, the absence of basic facilities such as proper sanitation, waste disposal systems, and adequate electricity can make these efforts seem futile or ironic. Therefore, the intervention of state becomes indispensable in providing basic services to these residents.

The counsellors in Shakti Shalini shared that domestic violence is rampant in these communities. There are reports of marriages of girls being fixed before the legal age of 18 years, alcohol abuse, domestic violence, and gender discrimination. In these cases, the organization faces a challenge since victims often hesitate to seek legal recourse. The victims meet the counsellors or other staff members of the NGO, vent out their frustration and leave. They do not want their family to know that they are seeking help from outside, that too from an NGO. Large number of such cases is reported but very few are pursued till the end as the client often leaves after venting their problems. Even when the NGO has prior knowledge about a case through their volunteer network, they are hesitant to intervene directly because this might antagonize the community against them and it would hinder their community oriented projects which is largely dependent on the support of the residents. The reason behind the lack of initiative from the women to seek legal help is that their problems are multi layered. As a result, while they could get respite from domestic violence by taking legal recourse, but their poor financial background, the lack of support from family and the needs of children which are being fulfilled by their husband's income prevent them from going to the court. In such a situation, the NGO offers arranging family counselling, couple counselling or group counselling but these do not always yield positive results. It may suppress the problems temporarily, but it poses a threat because the women do not want to confront their families. This is due to the fact they have low-esteem and absence of financial independence. The counselors at Shakti Shalini shared the life stories of the women residents in the area, revealing that many of them have been confined indoors since childhood and have not been able to complete their education. This confinement is a result of their orthodox socialization, where they internalize a sense of inferiority and dependency on their husbands, fathers, or other male family members, making it difficult for them to envision a life beyond this support structure. Women's deprivation of basic facilities is often attributed to socioeconomic failures rather than systemic violence. Charles Tilly also viewed physical violence as the only form of collective violence and dismissed any structural, psychological or gender dimension. Does this kind of theorization indicate an inherent male bias? As has been brought forth by John Galtung, other than direct violence, structural violence and cultural violence also hamper the life of

individuals, at times seriously threatening their life chances. Women face structural violence since their birth in the form of differential access to education and this has rendered them incapable to protect themselves from direct or physical violence. This has important consequences for peace research. Peace studies must actively challenge the structural inequalities caused due to the neoliberal world order which has deprived basic amenities to millions of people. There is an urgent need to transcend the actor oriented program to a structure oriented program whereby, effort is made to address structural violence faced by women in these in the unauthorized colonies.

5.2. Cultural Violence

Norms, defined as rules or expectations of behaviour within a cultural or social group, can encourage violence. (World Health Organization, 2009) Most cultures prescribe gender roles to men and women. Certain expectations arising out of assigned gender roles at birth lead to discriminatory practices where men and women are treated differently. This greatly affects their life chances. Klasen (2002) in her study demonstrates how gender-based discrimination limits women's access to education, employment opportunities, and resources, hindering their economic empowerment. The study emphasizes that such inequalities not only constrain individual women but also impede overall economic growth and development. Women in the colony shared that there are no educational opportunities available to them, and the menfolk of the household forbid them to work outside.

Further, the current younger generation of women also faces similar challenge. The main source of livelihood for these families is the sale of handicrafts and stuff toys which are mostly made by women who stay indoors. Men mainly go out and sell these handicrafts. During the direct interviews with the residents, a woman aged 40 years old in the Adivasi camp confessed that her husband does not contribute to the household expenses, and as a result she finds it difficult to run the house. Financial dependence on the male member is a common trend in patriarchal families. In the absence of financial freedom, these women find it difficult to voice their concerns within the family, let alone take action that could cause conflict. In the Adivasi camp, almost no women venture out to shop for household utilities, let alone to earn money. While access to the public sphere is not a benchmark of an individual's liberation, we must also understand that restriction of mobility poses a fundamental obstacle to realizing human potential. Further, this is a direct case of control and domination of women's bodies. The unrestricted freedom of movement for women is crucial for their active participation in society. Denying women this right amounts to a form of gender-based discrimination. It is essential to recognize that the restrictive norms that limit women's access to the public sphere are inherently violent in nature. By acknowledging this, we can address these oppressive norms and strive towards creating a more inclusive and equal society for all.

The counselors revealed that girls in these communities face body shaming and gender discrimination in school. After dropping out of school at the primary level, the only major event that happens in the life of girls is their marriage. In Srinivaspuri, the family of an 18-year-old girl debarred her from giving her exam. During my interaction with young girls in this area, a concerning revelation emerged that girls residing in these areas face significant barriers to completing their school education. This raises questions about the quality of life they experience within their homes and raises concerns about their future sense of security and empowerment. Once girls begin their menstruation cycle, they are prevented from attending school. They hardly study beyond tenth grade after which their parents begin to look for suitable grooms for them. My interactions with these girls unveiled a disheartening reality - they have unquestionably internalized the norm of prioritizing household work over education

after dropping out of school. This unquestioning acceptance leads them to fully immerse themselves in domestic responsibilities. Although they still dream of living an independent life[iv] but they say that they cannot express this wish before their elders. Their future lies in their groom's house and that is the only future which is acceptable to their elders. It is extremely shocking that girls as young as 16 and 17 years have made up their mind that they cannot exercise their agency at any point of time in their life. They also shared that compared to their male siblings; they are not allowed to have mobile phones, further limiting their access to communication and information.[v] The boys are sent to to school and they can stay outdoors, have mobile phones and do activities that they like. When asked whether they face any discrimination at home with regard to food practices, they said that they could freely eat whatever they want. Thus, it was only at the time of having meals that they experienced freedom. The volunteers of the NGO conduct remedial classes for these girls in these colonies, but currently; this project is unstructured and needs serious planning. Despite attempts by the NGO staff members to talk to the elders, their orthodox beliefs persist.

The counselors of the NGO shared a particular case of a school dropout in the Adivasi camp. It was a twelve-year-old girl at Vinobha Puri School who was transferred to another school that was far away. As a result, she stopped attending school. Shakti Shalini staff helped her to return to her old school, and she is now regularly attending classes there. Thus the active intervention and vigilance of the organization helped the girl to continue with her studies. Despite government efforts to build schools and make education free for children younger than 14 years old under the Right to Education Act 2009, there is a lack of discussion about why many children remain out of school. The government must find out how the gender identity of the student or their poor status stops them from availing benefits from the schemes of the government. Providing Mid-day meals is a positive step in this direction by the Government of India, but that also has its own challenge in terms of ensuring good quality and sufficient quantity of food across the country. However, in the case of the Adivasi colony we saw that access to food at home was not a problem for the girls. Hence, the Midday meal scheme is not relevant for these girls or their families. The problem here lies in the conservative beliefs of the people and the structural problems they face that are tied to the larger macroeconomic issues in the country. NGOs can provide crucial inputs based on ground reality to the policy makers. Other than being "information carriers", NGOs can also play a vital role in challenging the patriarchal norms in the society. Moreover, collaboration with the government will ensure that the positive impact of NGOs "goes to scale" and does not remain confined to a particular locality.

5.3. Community Meetings

The community outreach programs of the NGO encompass various initiatives such as meetings, events, and campaigns. These activities aim to provide a platform for residents, including children, women, men, and the elderly, to openly discuss their problems and seek solutions. Additionally, the organization has established Protection Committees, comprised of local residents, in each of the six localities it operates in. These committees serve as a support system for women facing domestic violence and strive to improve communication between the women residents and the NGO. As part of my research, I directly participated in a qualitative study to gain deeper insights into these initiatives.

The community outreach program workers play a crucial role as the extended eyes and ears of the NGO, as they gather firsthand experiences from the field. Their role involves identifying and assisting victims of domestic violence, ensuring they receive the necessary support and assistance. By being present in the community, these workers act as a vital link between the

NGO and those in need, helping to bridge the gap and provide the required aid to those affected by domestic violence. The team discusses all the options available to the victim and then supports the victim's choice based on that discussion. A community outreach worker shared a particular case study from Nehru Nagar, where a 35-year-old woman was subject to domestic violence, majorly involving physical abuse by her in-laws and husband. When the Protection Committee learnt about it, they talked to the family and the regular visits of the NGO alerted the husband and his family that the woman is not alone and the NGO can take action against the man by reporting him to authorities. Earlier the nature of problems faced by these women was regarded as a private affair of the family. However, after it was established that *the personal is political* and with the public-private dichotomy challenged, NGOs can carry out its community outreach programs guilt-free. This is an enabling factor in the pursuit of 'positive peace.'[vi]

5.4. 'Pehchaan' the Shelter Home

Through my direct observation, I learned that in 'Pehchan' (Pehchan is a Hindi word meaning *Identity)*, the shelter home of Shakti Shalini, individuals experience improved living conditions and enjoy significant freedom. This firsthand observation revealed that the provision of decent household facilities creates a conducive environment for their growth and development. Counselors from the NGO, who had previous experience working in government-run shelters, shared that in those shelters, women were deprived of basic freedoms, such as access to a refrigerator or the ability to eat according to their own preferences and desires. The example of *Sunehri Chhaya* (name changed) located in Delhi was given, where food served in fixed quantities is collected from a small window outside the kitchen and women residents take the plate to their rooms to eat. But in Shakti Shalini, everyone participates in the cooking process and they sit together and eat like a family. There is also no rule about how many servings a person can take. This insight highlights the stark contrast in the level of freedom and autonomy provided by Shakti Shalini's shelter home, 'Pehchan'. Another difference brought out was in the rehabilitation process of NGOs and those of government run shelter homes. The latter enroll a person in the shelter home for three months or as recommended by the courts. However, there is no maximum duration fixed for the rehabilitation process in NGO Shakti Shalini. It is difficult to predict how long the rehabilitation process will take for any individual ahead of time, which makes this a very sensible policy. In this way, they are sensitive to the needs of victims, including ensuring their emotional wellbeing, providing a stable home and fostering a friendly environment.

Under its **Kushalta Vikas Kendra (KVK)**, the shelter home conducts several activities for the residents and members of the communities. These include- cloth cutting and tailoring, beauty culture course, dance classes for children, remedial classes for children and women, notebooking making, incense making, English classes and computer classes.[vii] As shared by the staff, skill enhancement is only one of the goals of KVK, the larger aim is to promote empowerment and emotional wellbeing of women. In the year 2019, cloth cutting & tailoring program catered to a total of 83 participants. A cloth bag making unit has been formalized and named as '*Pahel*' (*Pahel* is a Hindi word meaning *Initiative*) that uses donated clothes in good condition to make bags, pouches and other goods (This is one of the apprenticeship programs). The distribution of the profit is divided equally between Shakti Shalini and the artists. In the last six months, *Pahel* has produced and sold a total of 126 bags offline. These goods have been displayed and sold in various Diwali Mela stalls. It has collaborated with the Enactus groups[viii] of two colleges of University Delhi. These bags are representative of the creativity of women and showcase their devotion to their art. One bag is made by 4-5 women symbolic of the unity among the women. With the initiation of the apprenticeship program, it has

instilled confidence and a sense of purpose among the trainees. This makes the women realize that there is more to their life than their troubled past. Soon *Pahel* will have an online presence so that their products reach a wider audience. In another project named '*Abhilasha*' (*Abhilasha* is a Hindi word meaning heart's desire) an initiative of one of the residents of the shelter home, she makes customized notebooks. She shared her story of 'transformation' that earlier she would not make eye contact with a man but now, she is actively networking, talking and promoting her work without any hesitation. '*Nikhaar*' the beauty culture course catered to 100 participants through its duration of 6 months last year. Through this program, the organization aims to promote body positivity and instill a sense of security in the participants for their body. As part of this program, the community also learns threading, waxing, hair cutting, and other skills for self-employment. This course emphasizes enhancing the individual's personality rather than focusing on the external self.

The aim of KVK as shared by its Project Head is to create a safe space for women where they can speak their truth. Issues of patriarchy are subtly brought in by the volunteers so that everybody engages in the discussion. While doing so, the team pays special attention to the manner in which this communication is carried out; it refrains from educating in a patronizing way and instead adopts a discussion based approach which is more engaging and effective. KVK aims to boost confidence in women. Patriarchy deprives women of a platform for free expression and restricts their mobility. Thus when women use their skills to create something, such as a handbag they feel exhilarated and in some cases liberated as well. Humans by virtue of being *homo faber* i.e. creative producers take great happiness and pride when they create something using their own labour. Thus, creating something is a part of our identity, and it contributes to the feeling of fulfillment. When they engage in creative activities such as stitching clothes, making bags or notebooks they feel a sense of accomplishment on seeing the final product of their labour. For those who had discontinued their education and had never stepped outdoors after their marriage, the act of even writing their names on a piece of paper became a liberating experience. Further, they are taught life skill activities, such as how to write a CV, how to conduct oneself in interviews etc which aims to prepare them for the job market. KVK also educates them about their rights as equal citizens in this country. The activities conducted in the shelter home intend to promote general awareness among the housemates. The residents in the shelter home are survivors of domestic and sexual violence. The fact that these women decided to come out of the violent situation shows that they possessed immense courage, and what the organization did was to simply support them in their efforts. KVK, which is open to all members of the locality and the shelter home share the same physical space. This ensures that women residents keep meeting other women from the community and together they are able to 'unlearn' societal norms and prejudices about things that are considered that taboo, such as divorce, homosexuality, sex workers etc. An important lesson learnt by these women is that their violent past does not define them. Often the victims experience trauma relapses and thus, they feel the need to isolate themselves and not participate in shelter home activities. During such times, everyone at the shelter home is sensitive to their needs and gives them the space and resources such as counselling, as and when they express their need. Thus, by giving them a space to unlearn social constructs and by exploring their skills, the residents feel they are a part of an ecosystem of empowerment.

6. Conclusion

Grassroots NGOs by virtue of being in direct contact with the people offer unique insights on the problem of gender-based violence against women. The sources of physical violence against women cannot be treated without correcting the violent structures which perpetuate systemic inequalities against the poor and the marginalized. Further, laws simply aiming at punishing

the perpetrators are insufficient to tackle the problem of violence against women, without dismantling the system of domination and control that subjugates women. Laws by the government need to be accompanied with community outreach programs through which constant engagement with the people is maintained at the grassroot level. The government has limited access when it comes to the domain of culture, and for this reason; NGOs operate as outreach workers of the government. This collaboration will succeed only if NGOs continue to stay true to their flexible nature of working which is different from the legalistic and formalistic approach of the government. The task of welfare of the people must be borne primarily by the government as it has greater access to resources and it enjoys legitimacy from the people. It must not hide from its responsibility to promote social and economic development of the people behind a regulatory framework. While the government has launched several campaigns and schemes to promote female education and menstrual hygiene among women, but the experiences of the girls in these colonies show that these schemes have not benefitted them much. NGO Shakti Shalini has been interacting with the residents of these colonies to raise awareness about the education of girl child, and to help individual cases as per their requirement, but it cannot substitute the role of the government when it comes to providing basic amenities such as construction of toilets, garbage disposal system or generation of employment opportunities. As we have observed in this research, the latter has unique consequences for women and it significantly contributes to their oppression. People elect their representatives with hopes and dreams to improve their overall wellbeing. Thus, the government must pursue these goals and in the process, strengthen the NGOs by providing them resources and recognizing their important role in promoting welfare of people.

References

Bebbington, A., & Hickey, S. (2006). NGOs and civil society. In D. A. Clark (Ed.), The Elgar Companion to Development Studies (pp. 417–423). Cheltenham, United Kingdom: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited.

Brown, J., Patel, P., & Gupta, J. (2013). NGO engagement in addressing intimate partner violence globally: A literature review. Violence Against Women, 19(7), 896-910.

Cavanaugh, M. M. (2012). Theories of Violence: Social Science Perspectives. Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment, 22(5), 607–618. https://doi.org/10.1080/10911359.2011.598757

Chandhoke, N. (2011). The Oxford Handbook of Civil Society. In M. Edwards (Ed.), Civil Society in India (pp. 171–182). New York, USA: OUP USA. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195398571.013.0014

Galtung, J. (1969). Violence, Peace, and Peace Research. Journal of Peace Research, 6(3), 167–191. https://doi.org/10.1177/002234336900600301

Galtung, J. (1990). Cultural Violence. Journal of Peace Research, 27(3), 291–305. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343390027003005

Garcia-Moreno, C., Hegarty, K., d'Oliveira, A. F., Koziol-McLain, J., Colombini, M., & Feder, G. (2015). The health-systems response to violence against women. The Lancet, 385(9977), 1567-1579. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(14)61837-7

Gupta, A. N. S. (2017, February 6). Open Drains Are One of Delhi's Biggest Sanitation Problems. Retrieved March 20, 2020. https://thewire.in/health/delhi-sanitation-open-drains

Johnson, K., Asher, J., Rosborough, S., Raja, A., Panjabi, R., Beadling, C., & Lawry, L. (2008). Association of combatant status and sexual violence with health and mental health outcomes in postconflict Liberia. JAMA, 300(6), 676-690. https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.300.6.676

Klees, S. (1998). NGOs: progressive force or neoliberal tool. Current Issues in Comparative Education, 1(1), 49–54. https://doi.org/10.52214/cice.v1i1.11304

Kumaran, M. K. (2014). Roles, Responsibilities, And Trends Of Ngos In Women Empowerment. Indian Journal Of Public Administration, LX(3), 588–596. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0019556120140317

Lee, M., & Johnson, M. P. (2020). Domestic violence service providers' perceptions of best practices for addressing intimate partner violence. Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 35(13-14), 2524-2548.

MacKinnon, C. A. (1983). Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State: Toward Feminist Jurisprudence. Chicago Journals, 8(4), 635–658. https://doi.org/10.1086/494000

Monroe, M. C. (2002). Evaluation s Friendly Voice: The Structured Open-Ended Interview. Applied Environmental Education & Communication, 1(2), 101–106. https://doi.org/10.1080/15330150213993

Patel, P., & Gupta, J. (2019). NGO influence on violence against women legislation: Explaining variation across states in India. World Development, 123, 104607.

PENTA, L. J. (1996). Hannah Arendt: On Power. The Journal of Speculative Philosophy, 10(3), 210–229. https://www.jstor.org/stable/25670190

Razvi, M., & Roth, G. L. (2004). Women's Socio-Economic Development in India: The Role of Non-Governmental Organizations. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED492125.pdf

Rudolph, L. (2015). The Coffee House and the Ashram: Gandhi, civil society and public spheres. In M. Pauli, L. König, M. Gallenkamp, J. Schöttli, K. Fürstenberg, D. Frommherz, & S. O. Wolf (Eds.), Politics in South Asia (pp. 157–168). New York, United States: Springer Publishing.

Smith, S. G., & Wilson, K. J. (2018). A systematic review of factors influencing the health of domestic violence survivors. Trauma, Violence, & Abuse, 19(5), 522-537.

Stroup, S. H. (2019). NGOs' interactions with states. In T. Davies (Ed.), Routledge Handbook of Ngos and International Relations. Abingdon, United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315268927-3

The World Bank. (2019, September 25). Gender-Based Violence (Violence Against Women and Girls). Retrieved March 2, 2020. https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/social–development/brief/violence-against-women-and-girls

Werker, E., & Ahmed, F. Z. (2008). What Do Nongovernmental Organizations Do? Journal of Economic Perspectives, 22(2), 73–92. https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.22.2.73

Wilson, I. M., Graham, L., & Taft, A. (2016). Examining the effectiveness of interventions to reduce intimate partner violence perpetration: A systematic review and meta-analysis. Trauma, Violence, & Abuse, 17(2), 149-167. https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838015576391

Wilson, K., Ung Loh, J., & Purewal, N. (2018). gender, violence and the neoliberal state in India. Feminist Review, 119(1), 1–6. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41305-018-0109-8

World Health Organization. (2009). Changing cultural and social norms supportive of violent behaviour. https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/44140/9789241598337_eng.pdf

Zhang, Y., & Wildemuth, B. M. (2009). Unstructured interviews. Applications of social research methods to questions in information and library science, 222-231.

---

[i] The research presented here is part of my dissertation submitted to Lady Shri Ram College for Women, University of Delhi, India. I am grateful to my teachers at LSR, especially Dr. Rina Kashyap, Dr. Snehil Kacker, Dr. Priya Singh, Dr. Nitika Ladda among others for always facilitating a positive learning environment in the classroom. I am thankful for the support and cooperation from the staff of NGO Shakti Shalini.

[ii] Hannah Arendt in her work "the Human Condition" differentiates power from violence and force. The latter can be instrumentally and physically seen in terms of possession of implements and bodily might. However, Arendt believes that power rests with the people; it is operationalized through communication and cooperation and not through control and domination. Arendt defines power as "the only human attribute which applies solely to the worldly in-between space by which men are mutually related" (PENTA, 1996, p. 218).

[iii] CICC is the central point of entry into the shelter home. The intention is to provide counselling to the victims and "assist" them to find solutions to their problem. They inform the victims about their rights and present all available options before them. The counsellors refrain from adopting a patronizing role and they let the victims exercise their agency. The nature of help offered include medical intervention, litigation help, help in marriage, filing a case, mental health counselling etc. The counsellors shared that they often collaborate with other NGOs and they have mostly received a sincere and cooperative response as all NGOs work for the same cause. They seldom get any backlash. However, they confessed that they often do not have a very good experience with the police.

[iv] An activity was conducted with these girls aged 15-17 years old in which they were asked to write down answers to some questions about their goals and aspirations in life. Some of them confessed that in next 5 years they would like to see themselves as professional singers, dancers and fashion designers. One of them expressed her desire to take an international trip to U.S.A. However, later they all confessed that these dreams are impossible to achieve as their families will arrange their marriage after they turn 18 years old.

[v] When the girls were asked if they use mobile phones, they replied that women don't need phones as they always stay indoors. The logic given by some orthodox members of our society that girls would misuse the phone and get unwanted attention from men has been internalized by these girls.

[vi] Johan Galtung in his article "Violence, Peace and Peace Research" makes a distinction between negative peace and positive peace. Negative peace refers to the peace resulting from absence of direct or physical violence and positive peace refers to the absence of structural and direct violence. The latter condition favors the pursuit of social justice which is "a positively defined condition entailing egalitarian distribution of power and resources" (Galtung, 1969, p. 183).

[vii] For its computer classes, it charges a minimal fee of 200 Rupees in the first month, and 100 Rupees from subsequent months. The tailoring course is for six months and the computer course is for three months.

[viii] A not-for-profit organization, Enactus has over 70,500 active members at 1,700 universities in 36 countries. The Enactus network is dedicated to leveraging business to positively impact social and environmental issues.