ABSTRACT

Introduction to the Problem

Social movements require organised activity for collective action to meet their well-defined objectives and goals. The same is true for the women’s movement. Within the broad conceptual framework of the ‘women’s movement’ in India, there are organisations with varying perspectives and ideologies, divergent understandings of patriarchal oppression and its outcomes and these organisations, therefore, also adopt varying strategies to combat injustice and inequality. The organisation structures too range from very formal bureaucratic ones to those that hold hierarchy as a symbol of patriarchy, domination and oppression and therefore functions using strategies that are contrary to formal structure. These are chiefly those that are based on feminist ideology and that have aligned with democratic principles of organisation.

The widely held view in both Sociology of Organisations and Organisation Theory is that organisations have to be structured around some organisation principles and ‘hierarchy’ is treated as axiomatic. Most organisation structures have largely been bureaucratic because formal organisational structures that function with co-ordinated and controlled activity are held as essential ingredients for efficiency and efficacy. This might hold true for profit-oriented organisations where there is a clear, quantifiable index by which productivity and efficiency can be measured. However, women’s experiences of gender discrimination, gender stereotyping and rigid institutional structures which are built on the foundation of patriarchy, have resulted in the alignment of feminist thinking with democratic principles and collective organisation and participatory decision-making. These organisations often have diffused and non-quantifiable goals. This study investigates whether it is in fact possible to successfully organise without a hierarchy and whether hierarchy should be the definitional criterion for movement organisations as well.

Collective action has been adopted by labour movements in lobbying for their interests against the ruling class. It was ‘collective action’ that brought forth two moral
political ideologies, namely, democracy and communism. While a vast body of literature exists on collective action of the left, very little exists on collective organising of women. Very little information is available on how organisational goals can be achieved through more egalitarian processes, where control and accountability are the duties of every individual in that organisation and not just the powers vested in the hands of a few. The experiences of collective or participatory organisational experiments are rarely documented or analysed. The primary objective of this research, therefore, is to study the impact of collective organising of Bailancho Saad (A Women’s Collective in Goa) that has been in existence since 1986 on the society in Goa and to assess the organisation through its outcomes, namely, (1) political or policy outcomes, (2) cultural outcomes, (3) mobilization outcomes and (4) personal development outcomes.

The study begins with a review of literature on concepts related to gender, feminism, and organisation theory. The study then maps the Indian women’s movement and the evolution of its agenda and then focuses on Goa. Using a variety of data sources, we look at the concerns of the women’s movement in this small state and some of the issues for women as was evident from available socio-demographic data. A case study of a women’s collective Bailancho Saad (meaning cock’s crow) in Goa forms the focus of the study with a few comparative insights from two similar yet different organisations, namely, Forum in Mumbai and Saheli in New Delhi.

**Rationale for the Study**

A Google search on ‘organising for empowerment’ will lead one to recent (2008) corporate management terms such as ‘inverted pyramid’, ‘democratisation of organisation’, ‘reverse accountability’, ‘enabling environment’ and ‘lattice organisation’. While these terms are hypothetical to corporate houses, they are lived experiences and practices of feminist organisations within the women’s movement. However, there is very little research available, particularly in India, on the contribution of women’s collective organising on the principles of democratic functioning and empowerment of women.

**Objective and Scope of the Study**

The objective of this research is to study the origins of Bailancho Saad, and the context in which it was started and within which it continues to function. The scope of the study
includes the day to day functioning of the organisation, the processes and strategies adopted, and the outcomes of collective organising on state policy, as well as the impacts on society and on women in particular.

**Data Sources and Methods**

Existing organisational and movement theories are reviewed to locate collective organising theory of women’s activist organisations with it.

The case study of Bailancho Saad used the ethnographic methodology where participant observation was the prime tool for data collection. In-depth and unstructured interviews and discussions along with other data sources such as reports, press releases etc., were used to identify and analyse emerging themes and issues. For the observation data, field notes were scrutinized for recurring themes which were then matched with data collected from other sources to describe the organising experiences and outcomes of collective organisation.

The target of collective action, namely, to change public attitude towards women for the creation of an environment that enhances women’s empowerment and equality is clear. An attempt is made to study the extent to which this target of collective organising has been achieved by analysing its impacts on the larger society from the transformations within it from new vocabularies and practices that may have emerged as a consequence and the way women’s issues are framed by the media. Insights were also drawn from data made available through sources such as the Census, NFHS, NSS, NGO’s and micro studies.

**Organisation of the Thesis**

This Doctoral thesis is presented in 10 Chapters. The introductory chapter titled *Understanding Gender, Women’s Experience and the Democratic Community*, is divided into 5 Sections. Section 1 defines certain concepts such as gender, feminism and discusses aspects of feminism and the women’s movement such as the waves of feminist thought, the birth of the women’s movement, the seeds of democracy through collective action and feminists’ contribution to it, issues of power and non-hierarchical organising. Section 2 makes a case for the study of a women’s collective in Goa. It outlines the study site, the rationale, objectives, scope and the research questions that were to be addressed by the study. Section 3 details the methodological strategy, the reasons for choosing the
study site, it looks at self as on ‘informant’, the tools used for data collection and includes some notes on the validity of such a case study. Section 4 discusses both the significance and the limitations of the study. Finally, Section 5 presents the organisation of the thesis.

The second chapter titled *Organisations and Organising: Insights from Theories* begins with the ‘goal and role’ determined definitions of the term ‘organisation’, and then goes on to explore the classical theories of bureaucracy and scientific management which viewed human beings almost as machines who can perform effectively given a clear organisational blueprint. Theorists such as Henri Fayol, who stressed on the importance of division of labour and specialized knowledge; Max Weber, who differentiated modern bureaucratic authority from charismatic and traditional authority, and Karl Marx, who criticised the capitalist society and recommended the shared ownership of the means of production and the fruits of the labour for a truly democratic society are discussed. Then we discuss some thinkers on ‘organisations for efficiency’ such as Robert Michels and Frederick Taylor. We then move to theories that consider the unplanned, emotional and not necessarily rational, ‘human relations approach’ such as the Hawthorne Experiment, Maslow’s theory of self-actualization and Douglas McGregor’s views on personnel management.

It is difficult to compartmentalize the existing theories, as there are overlaps among them. The chapter highlights some of the structuralist theories, which synthesise classical bureaucratic theories and the human relations or interactionist approaches. We then examine theories that discuss the impact of environment, both external and internal, on organisations: the contingency theory, T. Burns and G. Stalker’s views on organic systems, the resource dependency theory, the institutional theory, and the compliance model.

Chapter three titled *Gender Critique of Theory: Case for Revisiting Women’s Organisation* presents a feminist critique of the theories of the ‘Founding Fathers’ and argues that most classical theory has been androcentric. We look at how biases about women’s work have fuelled these androcentric positions and moves on to a gender critique of organisation theory, making a case then for non-hierarchical organisation theory. We discuss issues of power and non-hierarchical organising and look at the incompatibility of hierarchy to people-centred empowerment as well as the feminist
contribution to experimenting with the inverted pyramid, democratic organisation, reverse accountability, and enabling empowerment through participatory processes.

Chapter four, *Mapping the Women’s Movement in India*, as the title suggests, maps the issues concerning the autonomous women’s movement in India from its earliest traceable origins to contemporary times. It is not merely a chronological account of campaigns and struggles, nor a statement of the ‘achievements’ of the movement; but it is an attempt to sketch the evolution of the movement and the transitions within it. Beginning with the social reform movement, when women were viewed as passive recipients of emancipation, the chapter moves to the struggle for Independence, which saw women’s active participation in it. We then look at the existing western versus ethnic critique of the Indian women’s movement.

Moving to the post-independence period, we discuss the new beginnings with the ‘Towards Equality’ report, the birth of the autonomous women’s movement and the introduction of women’s studies. We discuss also the role of ‘law’ in the process of women’s empowerment.

From the national canvas we move then to the birth of the women’s movement in Goa which is the study site for the case study used in this thesis.

The Chapter five, titled *Status of Women in Goa: Outlining the Empirical Context for Bailancho Saad*, uses data from a variety of sources to explode certain myths about women in Goa. Data from the Census of India, National Sample Survey (NSS), National Family Health Survey (NFHS) and other government reports together with data from academic papers and reports from NGOs and activist groups including Bailancho Saad are used. We attempt in this chapter at sketching the socio-economic background in Goa that necessitated the formation of an activist group and the need for its sustained intervention. Although the situation of women in Goa may, in many respects, be better than it is in many other states in the country, there is yet much to be desired. Some of the issues discussed here include the impact of tourism promotion on women in Goa, the rise in urban poverty, declining sex-ratio, women’s education, health, the unique law in Goa, namely, the Portuguese Civil Code, women’s political participation as well as other social practices prevalent in the state.
The next three chapters are devoted to the case study of Bailancho Saad. Chapter six is titled *Non-Hierarchical Experiment: Processes and Issues of Bailancho Saad since 1986*. In this chapter, we discuss the birth of the ‘Collective’ and outline the routine functioning of the organisation. The transition that has taken place over the years in terms of the organisation’s membership, society’s response, the changes that have taken place with media intervention, the organisation’s networking with other groups, the introduction of paid staff and the acquisition of a flat are some of the aspects of growth and change that are discussed. Finally, the collage of programmes and activities undertaken from 1986 to 2009 are briefly outlined to give the reader a preliminary understanding of the organisation.

Chapter seven titled *SAAD (The Awakening Call): Priorities and Responses*, details further the work of Bailancho Saad, the issues it has been involved with as well as the views it holds on those issues gathered from newsletter called *SAAD* that the organisation publishes. This newsletter is more or less like a consolidation of the views of the organisation, as much debate and discussion precedes its publication. The organisation deliberates on all the issues presented, the text is agreed upon through the process of consensus and therefore it is representative of the pulse of the organisation at that time. All issues ever printed, from the earliest issue, which was published in 1989, to the last issue till date, which is Volume III – Number 6: *In the Wake of Communal Violence* (not dated), are analysed. These newsletters were circulated amongst members and supporters of the organisation. In all 18 newsletters are discussed in this chapter.

The Chapter eight, titled *An ‘Outcome Analysis’: Strengths and Limitations of Collective Processes*, analyses the organisation’s strategies and processes in the context of the outcomes seen or experienced within the society in which it works. Drawing from Suzanne Staggenborg’s essay “Can Feminist Organizations be Effective?” (in *Feminist Organizations*, eds. Myra Marx Ferree and Patricia Yancey Martin. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995, pp 339-355), we will look at the following categories of outcomes namely; (1) political and policy outcomes, (2) cultural outcomes, (3) mobilization outcomes, and (4) personal or self development outcomes.

Political/Policy Outcomes include success in getting the movement’s demands on the political agenda, getting new policies implemented, actually reaching out to the
targeted population and the success in transforming political structures. In short, it means bringing about substantive changes that affect the whole society.

Cultural Outcomes include changes in social norms, behaviours and ideas among a public that extend beyond the beneficiaries of the movement. That means reaching out not only to the women population but society at large, which includes the male population as well. Cultural outcomes are closely linked to the personal outcomes in that they include the dissemination of knowledge, encouragement of participation and the empowerment of women.

Mobilisation Outcomes refer to the ‘activation of a pool of people who can be drawn into subsequent movements’. The collective functioning creates a ‘collective consciousness’ which can affect future mobilisation and the ability to bring about political and policy outcomes by creating resources for future mobilisation.

Personal/Self Development Outcomes impact on all the other outcomes and refer to aspects of individual empowerment, enhancing commitment and responsibility.

Chapter nine is titled Other Collective Interventions: Forum and Saheli – Some Comparative Insights. In this chapter, two other ‘collective’ interventions for women’s empowerment from around the country, namely, Forum Against Oppression of Women (FAOW) in Mumbai and Saheli in New Delhi are briefly discussed. These collectives bear some similarities to Bailancho Saad such as being ideologically opposed to ‘hierarchy’ and developing the service or outreach component of the organisation while at the same time being actively involved in campaign work on a range of issues related to women. Yet, they have been functioning independently in three different states though networking with each other on common issues. In this chapter insights into the experiences of Saheli and FAOW are drawn from information obtained from key informants in the respective organisations, and from information from secondary sources including reports, booklets, etc., of the respective organisations. Some of the informants were even contacted over e-mail.

This thesis concludes with Chapter ten titled Conclusion: Lessons from Women’s Collective Organising. Here some of the limitations of the study are reiterated and we conclude with a few principles from Bailancho Saad’s experience with collective organising.
Significance of the Study

The collective that is studied has been in existence for over 23 years and has grown not only in its range of activities and programmes but in its membership too. The researcher having been associated with this collective *Bailancho Saad* since 1986, almost since its initial stages, is well placed to analyse the transitions that have taken place within the organisation over years, sketch out a description of the strategies and processes that have been employed, and analyse the outcomes of this collective organising.

This study engages in a discussion on the theory of organisation, analyses the organising processes and outcomes, and contributes to the theory of organisation from an Indian gendered perspective. Lessons derived from the experience of non-hierarchical or collective organising may be useful for organisations that wish to adopt flat structures and will be particularly important for the women’s movement. Finally, the use of participant observation in the case study of a women’s organisation that the researcher has been associated with for a long time may be of interest to ethnographers. The limitations too of the researcher’s involvement with activities of the collective are discussed. This discussion contributes to the current literature on methodology.