Chapter 1

Introduction

The present study is about the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and their role in prevention, protection and rehabilitation of child labour. The term NGOs is commonly used for non-governmental organisations involved in socio-economic development of the poor and weaker sections as well as those working for environment and development of natural resources and human development issues of equality, justice and rights. They are to be distinguished from non-governmental and voluntary organisations involved in cultural, sports and religious activities or professional and political organisations. And it is in this sense—NGOs working for development and social justice—that I use the term NGOs here.

Over the past decade, the number of NGOs in India has multiplied manifold. NGOs are not only working with individual beneficiaries and communities at the grassroots level but also on macro issues of environment, natural resources, liberalisation, privatisation and structural adjustments and issues of rights and justice. The NGO sector has influenced the state and national governments as well as foreign governments and international organisations on problems of environment, forest policies, and housing for the poor, policies related to women-children and tribal development. Once regarded with suspicion, NGOs have now gained a large measure of legitimacy and credibility notwithstanding charges of corruption and lack of public accountability and transparency leveled against some NGOs.1

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The programme of structural adjustment of the Indian economy and consequent realignment of decision-making in the political and cultural domain advocated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF)-World Bank combine are being implemented vigorously by the Indian government, resulting in extremely adverse effects on a wide cross-section of civil society. The processes of globalisation, market economy and state-sponsored privatisation of development, over the last decade, have all added to the further marginalisation of the marginalised.

The failure of the state to reach the poor and marginalised, and the disinterest of political parties in issues relating to them, has meant that the role of NGOs in India, as in the other developing countries, has become even more crucial, particularly in the area of micro-macro linkages and public advocacy. It is an irony that the state, which ignores some of the most disadvantaged communities, also decides to rely on NGOs for meeting the basic needs of providing education, health services, employment and other basic infrastructure. In the emerging scenario, the NGOs face the dual task of collaborating with the state and at the same time fighting policies that are detrimental to the poor and the marginalised.

The new trading regime of World Trade Organisation dominated by the leading trading partners and trans-national companies has now put a stranglehold on Indian trade and affected prices. Already visible is the escalating price of life-saving drugs; essential food items, gifting the most profitable public sector units to Multi-national Corporations, the exit policy proposed for retrenching excess workers, restructuring the public distribution system to eliminate 50% of the beneficiaries, privatising the power sector and numerous other industries, redefining the role of the state and dramatic changes being proposed in the Constitution of India and numerous welfare legislation. All these developments affect not only
the adults but also the children who are worst sufferers of this process, given that there has been reduced budgetary allocations to the social sector, particularly health and education, reducing the access to affordable health care and education by the poor.

After fifty-three years of Independence, India has the largest number of child workers in the world. It also has the distinction of having the largest number of children who never went to school or were pushed out of school. In spite of many efforts children are not high on the political or administrative agenda. The State is aware that trade and commerce, the manufacturing industry, the information sector, merchants and landowners and the middle class require that at least 100 million children are not in schools but engaged in the most dehumanising and menial jobs. The State also encourages the non-employment/non-payment of living wages to adults and oversees the destruction of all that goes to make up sustainable livelihood for the poor. The consequence of all this is that the poor children have no relevance for education, or play or childhood. For generations the poor were never allowed to enjoy a phase in their life called childhood.

Thus, we see that there's a silent conspiracy towards tolerating and perpetuating child labour. In this context, the study of the role played by the NGOs in this direction becomes necessary. The challenge for all child rights activists is no doubt to locate their struggles in the common struggle for social transformation for a more just, humane, equitable democratic order. Yet there is need for specificity: that the movement and campaign for the children's rights while relating to and being part of the struggle of other social movements, should have an ideology and programme of its own.
If a NGO succeeds in its goals, it is to the credit of that NGO, plus the society, which has provided a certain enabling environment for it to succeed. In such a context, how and why a NGO succeeds and the strategy it adopts, tells us about the society at large. Thus, success of NGOs in a society points out the scope of social dynamism in that society. For instance, child labour has a certain latent legitimacy in Indian society. Even the Government of India Report on Child Labour (1979), accepted child labour as a ‘harsh reality’. The report emphasised that child labour cannot be totally eliminated till poverty is rooted out. Hence, the report sought to ban child labour only in hazardous industries and to regulate and ameliorate the conditions of work in other sectors. In such a social setup, one has to wait and watch how NGOs will be able to pressurise the government to pass a legislation banning outrightly any kind of child labour in India.

1. Objectives of the Study

The objective of the research is to examine the NGOs’ efforts in the context of programmes and development processes with regard to working children. My interest is to find out what kind of strategies are successful and what are the limitations of NGOs working in its field. I have focussed on NGOs working for child labourers within the capital city of Delhi and have surveyed 17 NGOs, choosing two of them for in-depth study. Although there are many studies on voluntary organisations in India, very few of them are sociological in nature; most of them are studied from the point of view of social work. I have sociologically studied two NGOs in Delhi and attempted to find out how the ideology of the organisation shapes up the strategy that an organisation adopts, how far these organisations have been successful in achieving their stated goals and what are the limiting factors for them.
2. Chapter Scheme

This Thesis is divided into eight chapters. The present chapter spells out the objectives and justification of the study. It describes the methodology, tools and techniques used to undertake the study. Since the study is confined to the National Capital Region (NCR) of Delhi, this chapter describes the universe of the study with its physical and demographic details. Urbanisation problem in Delhi is also studied with because in Delhi with the increasing urbanisation, the slum populace is increasing, leading to an increase in the number of potential or actual child labour.

Chapter 2 introduces the problem of child labour, its magnitude, causes and consequences, the governmental (Indian Government's), initiatives taken in this regard as also the role of NGOs in dealing with the issue of child labour.

Chapter 3 is an attempt towards developing an understanding of NGOs. Here, NGOs have been defined, its types, functions, their relative advantages and constraints compared to the government agencies as well as their role in the development process has been outlined. NGOs have also been distinguished from social movements in this chapter. This is important since many NGOs have originated from movements. Briefly the role of NGOs in civil society has also been dealt with. With the States gradually withdrawing from social sector and welfare activities, NGOs are being seen as an alternative. However, it has been pointed out in this Chapter that governmental and non-governmental agencies are complementary to each other and one cannot replace the functions of the other.
To understand the NGOs working for combating child labour in Delhi, it is important to locate it in the overall context of the NGO movement in India. Chapter 4 attempts just that and traces the history and growth of NGOs in India, their sources of funding and limitations and their relationship with the government.

In Chapter 5 survey report of 17 NGOs has been presented. Here the aims and philosophies, strategies/initiatives, and future plans of these 17 NGOs in a comparative manner have been described. The Chapter also covers the difficulties faced by them in the course of their work.

Chapter 6 and 7 are case studies of two NGOs viz. Bandhua Mukti Morcha (BMM) and Salaam Baalak Trust (SBT), where the origin and development of these two NGOs, selected for intensive study have been traced. It describes and critically analyses their philosophies, aims, objectives, initiatives, organisational history, structure, sources of funding, relations with the government, police, local authorities, their future plans, successes and limitations.

Chapter 8 concludes the study by analysing the finding of the research and stresses on the fact that NGOs have their limitations and hence to be more effective in the protection and rehabilitation of child labourers, they need a supportive role of the government. It also gives certain recommendations of the tasks, which the government and NGOs should do, in this field.

3. Universe of Study

The fieldwork was carried out in the Capital City of Delhi. Delhi was chosen not only because I reside here but also because I intend to
know what efforts are being carried out for child labourers and potential child labourers\textsuperscript{2} by the non-governmental organisations in a typical urban centre. Rapid urbanisation and strong and pervasive presence of urban poverty is associated with the phenomenon of street children. A crucial segment of exploited child workers who are not covered by any legislation or social welfare programmes are victims not of natural disaster or war, but of urban civilisation – rapid modernisation, unbalanced economic policy leading to rural impoverishment, breaking up of extended families and extreme poverty.

3.1 Physical Aspects of Delhi

Delhi with an area of 1483 sq. kms. is situated between the Himalayas and Aravalis range in the heart of the Indian sub-continent. It is surrounded on three sides by Haryana and to the east, across the river Yamuna, by Uttar Pradesh. The major part of the territory lies on the western side of Yamuna, while only some villages and urban areas of Shahdara lie on the eastern side of the river. Delhi’s altitude ranges between 213 and 305 meters above sea level. The general slope of the land is from North to South.

Physically, the National Capital Region (NCR) of Delhi can be divided into three segments or parts – the Yamuna Flood Plain, the Ridge and the Plain. Leaving aside the Yamuna Flood Plain (Khadar) and the Ridge, the entire area of NCR Delhi is categorised as Bangar or the Plain. A major proportion of the NCR is plain and on this are located Delhi, New Delhi and Delhi Cantonment along with a vast stretch of numerous villages. The land of the plain is mostly fertile.

\textsuperscript{2} I consider children living in the slums who neither go to school nor work as potential child labourers.
3.2 Important Statistics of Delhi According to 1991 Census

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistic</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population Total Persons</td>
<td>9,420,644</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decennial Population Growth Rate 1981-91</td>
<td>+ 51.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area (Sq. Km.)</td>
<td>1483.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Density of Population (Per Sq. Km.)</td>
<td>6,352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex Ratio</td>
<td>827 females per 1000 males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Rate</td>
<td>75.29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Males 82.01%, Females 66.99%, excluding children in the age group 0-6 years)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of Urban Population to Total Population</td>
<td>89.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of Scheduled Castes Population to Total Population</td>
<td>19.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.3 Statistics on Slum Population in Delhi

While Delhi has a high literacy rate and per capita income, and high levels of girls in education as is evident from the above table, it is also a city where, ironically a large segment of the populace is poor, living in slums and as under-serviced communities. On the basis of information supplied by slum wing of DDA, information on proportion of slum population of Delhi Municipal Corporation (Urban) is presented in Table 1.1.
Table 1.1

Proportion of Slums Population in Town

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class, Name and Civic Status of Town</th>
<th>Proportion of the Slum Population to Total Population of the Town</th>
<th>Density (per sq. kms.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Delhi Municipal Corporation (Urban)</td>
<td>24.98%</td>
<td>91,556</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Slum and Jhuggi Jhonpri Wing, Delhi Development Authority, 1991.

The population residing in the area notified slum area of Delhi is around 18 lakh as per figures given by slum wing of Delhi Development Authority. The proportion of slum population to total population of Delhi Municipal Corporation (Urban) works out of 24.98% as given in the above table.

3.4 Urbanisation of Delhi

The state of Delhi has undergone many changes during the last century: the Capital of India shifted from Calcutta to Delhi (on 12th of December, 1901), the city underwent the great impact of immigration due to war, then exodus due to partition and simultaneously the greater immigration that accompanied the exodus. From a mere population of 4,05,819 in 1901, the population of Delhi has grown into 94,20,644 in 1991. The city has been attracting huge streams of migrants from various parts of the country thereby staining the city's infrastructure and creating squatter settlements and slums. These problems are typical of any rapidly growing Indian city. For the teeming millions, the city is where there are jobs. In the 1901 Census, of the total population of 238 million, only 10.8 per cent or 25.6 million lived in cities. In 1991, this had gone up to 25.72 per cent; by 2001, nearly 350 million, of the
estimated over billion population, will be urban residents. By that year, there will be 31 cities with a population between one and ten million and Mumbai, Calcutta and Delhi will have more than 14 million people each. The urban centres do not have the capacity to assimilate the migrants who are forced to rotate from one type of informal sector activities to the other to eke out their livelihood. The informal sector has the following characteristics: easy entry for new enterprises, reliance on indigenous resources, family ownership, small scale of operations, unregulated and competitive market, labour intensive technology and informally acquired skill of workers. Informal employment in Mumbai contributes almost 50 per cent of city’s total jobs and an overwhelming percentage of those staying in slums with no educational background, and skill depend on informal employment. Owing to massive influx of pauperised population from the countryside, slums continue to grow and according to the estimation of the Planning Commission and other urban agencies, around 20-30 per cent of cities of India live in slums.

To understand the magnitude of urban poverty, one has to understand the conditions of life in urban slums and squatters with regard to basic services like safe water, health care, nutrition, housing, sanitation and drainage. The slums are congested having only narrow lanes with open drains and stagnant stinking waste water, garbage dump with children using them as toilets, poorly maintained public toilets with appalling sewer system, inadequate water supply through stand posts, narrow unpaved lanes, poor street lighting and kutcha houses, high.  

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4 Ibid.  
incidence of enteric diseases, are the typical symptoms of the deteriorating environment of slums. But the root of their poverty lies in low and irregular income and this is often coupled with vicious habits of drinking and gambling.

In the city of Delhi, according to the 1981 census, there were 26,870 persons who were the houseless population, compared to 6,586 in 1961, who spent their nights on the pavements. This shows a fourfold increase in twenty years. Apart from that, in 1987, there were about 600 jhuggi cluster (squatter settlements) in Delhi with approximately 2,200,000 jhuggies, wherein nearly 1.2 million people lived in sub-human conditions.\(^7\)

In such a situation of mass poverty, children of the economically depressed sections become active participants in the struggle for survival. It is estimated that there are nearly 100,000 street children in Delhi.\(^8\) This includes children who spend most of their time on streets engaged in street trades such as rag picking, vendors, porters, etc. They may be living with their families in slums or on pavements. NGOs surveyed by me were catering to street children, who are making their ends meet, as also to the slum children, who may or may not be working, and hence are no-where children, neither in schools nor in the labour force. Hence, it was imperative to dwell a little on urbanisation process in Delhi and the slums.\(^9\)

4. Methodology

'The study is empirical and data has been gathered based on the

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\(^7\) Delhi Development Authority Slum Wing, “Appeal to Registered Voluntary Organisations”, *The Times of India*, October 1, 1987.

interviews- formal and informal- with key persons and members of the NGOs and the beneficiaries of these organisations. I have also made use of the brochures, annual reports and other documents produced by these NGOs on the aims and objectives, ideologies and strategies.

The research is confined to studying the various interventions of NGOs dealing with child labour in Delhi. The initial information about these NGOs were obtained from an ILO document on child labour which had a list of NGOs working in the child labour field – directly (by release, rescue and rehabilitation of child labourers, ameliorating the working conditions for child labour) or indirectly (by imparting education to the slum children, who do not have any access to schooling and thus preventing their entry into the labour force). And as I started the survey some new names were also added to the original list by the very NGOs that were being surveyed. E.g., from the organisation named Ankur, which is engaged in imparting non-formal education to children, two more such NGOs – Vidya and Angaja - were suggested for a visit. The NGOs surveyed are:

Child Relief and You (CRY); South Asian Coalition on Child Servitude (SACCS); Bandhua Mukti Morcha (BMM); Mobile Creche; Jagriti; Ankur; Butterflies; Bal Sahyog; Deepalaya; Centre of Concern for Child Labour; YWCA-Asha Project; Delhi Brotherhood Social Development Society; Prayas; Community Aid and Sponsorship Programme; Salaam Baalak Trust (SBT); Angaja Foundation; and Vidya.

To get an account of the activities of the organisation, the hindrances in their functioning, their opinions regarding some of the best examples of reforms in the field of child labour as also their views on what more needs to be done and finally their future plans, a schedule
was prepared and the heads of the organisations concerned were interviewed on that basis. For an in-depth analysis of the two organisations viz., BMM and SBT, I adopted participant observation technique along with the use of interview-schedules. 

I supplemented primary data with secondary sources of information in the form of documentary material taken from the file of the organisations i.e., brochures, pamphlets, child-sponsorship forms, magazines and Annual Reports.

The survey of 17 NGOs was conducted in the months of August-October 1997. A profile of the NGOs based on interviews and documentary sources was prepared. Out of the 17 NGOs, two NGOs were chosen for case studies. The criteria for their selection were the reputation they had attained and easy accessibility to the researcher. This does not mean that the other NGOs were inaccessible for in-depth study. All but one organisation, viz., Butterflies, were ready to allow me to study their organisations. Butterflies expressed its inability to cooperate in the following words: "As a matter of our policy, Butterfly never coerce or cajole its children to give interviews since we have had unfortunate experiences of the children not wishing to discuss certain issues and so feeling traumatised by relentless questioning".

I conducted my research of the two chosen NGOs from October 1998 to May 1999. The BMM was willing to cooperate with me right from the beginning. This organisation, due to Swami Agnivesh, has developed a certain concept of child bonded labour system and its elimination. These will be elaborated in Chapter 6. While doing fieldwork in BMM, I got very close to Swami Agnivesh's niece, Mona, who was doing voluntary work in one of the schools of the organisation. In an informal chat, it was

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9 In the words of the Director of Butterflies.
accidentally revealed by her that her best friend is one of the Trustees of the SBT. I expressed my desire to study the same organisation since it was doing commendable work for working boys of the railway station in Delhi, and I asked Mona to talk to her Trustee friend that I would be visiting his organisation. The Trustee, through Mona sent his visiting card and the names of the persons with whom I could initially talk. In this way, it became easy for me to conduct my research.

5. Justification of the Study

A documentation of the experiences of the interventions of NGOs in helping child labour is important since many such experiences are scattered and are not studied systematically. It is necessary to carry out such studies and examine the replicability of these models.

In the absence of systematic information on new approaches in various parts of the world, policy makers and practitioners in governmental and non-governmental organisations have had to operate in isolation and learn by doing rather than on the basis of documented knowledge. It is, therefore, desirable to gather information on who is doing and what is being done, both to provide concerned policymakers and practitioners, with easy access to information, to facilitate communication and interaction among them and to enhance the capability of regional and international organisations, to provide increased support for national and community efforts on behalf of children.