CHAPTER 8
CONCLUSION

Civil society intervention for women strengthening is an age old practice. Society is dynamic; consequently the paradigm of both voluntarism and women’s issues underwent a change. The heterogeneous society transmits multiple women’s issues. Panda (2000) says that in India, the most intense form of inequality exists in form of caste and gender. A number of research findings disclosed that women are the deprived gender in both rural and urban areas of the country (Dubey et al. 1986). GEM (Gender Empowerment Measure) and GDI (Gender Development Index) are the two critical indices introduced by Human Development Report of 1995 by UNDP, to understand status of gender world over. These indices critically measure relative empowerment of women and men in different sphere. Human Development Report, 2014 presents a Gender Development Index (GDI) for the first time, which shows gender development gaps among 148 countries. Though overall gender gap is an 8% deficit for women, the income gap is outrageously high, per capita income for men is more than double that for women. India has been ranked 101 among 136 countries in the 2013 edition of an annual report Gender Gap Index that makes a global assessment of the progress made in bridging the gender gap. Women empowerment will remain the prime objective for the world. This study focuses on the role of NGOs in women empowerment. Besides discussion on broad findings, it is mandatory to locate or weave empirical findings within the framework of already acknowledged knowledge base. So this concluding chapter will focus on three substantial points: a) discussion on role of NGOs in women strengthening within the framework of empowerment and integration of findings of study; b) explanations on fast development of state of Himachal Pradesh (incidence of multipartite relationship between state, civil society and women agency); c) elucidation of main findings of the study.

It is found in this study that NGOs have brought changes in several dimensions of hilly women’s lives. The extent of change varies in distinct dimensions such as socio-cultural, political representation, economic, psychological, health aspect etc. NGOs work as a stimuli to strengthen the deprived group such as women. Empowerment is a mutual and participatory process i.e. both the planners and
receivers have to exert to achieve it. It is observed that women participants linked with NGOs hold unique defiance. The audacious attitude of women helps them to step out of their homes for development. World over millions of organizations work but as far as change they brought is concerned, it is sporadic in nature. Several elements work together in an empowerment process of an individual or group by development organizations. To explain this, Panda (2000) puts forward an important proposition about the role of NGOs in women empowerment. She explains the whole process of empowerment by putting an emphasis on certain elements i.e. immediate environment of the target group (disempowered), empowerment process, immediate environment of the external agency or the NGO and the macro environment. Target group comprises of deprived people for instance hilly women in case of present study. And the external agency in this study is NGOs of district Kangra. She explains further that the empowerment process connects the target group and external agency (NGO) through operational and campaigning programmes. The external agency uses various methodologies to sensitize masses. In district Kangra too, several approaches such as PAR (Participatory Action Research), PRA (Participatory Rural Approach), PNA (Primary Need Assessment) etc., are used by NGOs in women empowerment. In figure 1, it is showed that input in form of resources, active participation by target group (hilly women) and NGOs runs through the projects and programmes.

**Figure 1**

Empowerment System

![Empowerment System Diagram](image)

*Source: Panda (2000)*

The execution of resource flow would depend upon the skill implementation of NGOs. NGOs implement several projects; some are successful while others are big
failures, in spite of all sort of resource availability. At times an external agency or NGOs implement projects that are not planned by inculcating contributions of the beneficiaries or the target group. Such types of projects are futile. In certain conditions masses do not support a well-planned project by NGO because of socio-cultural constraints. These conditions reside in macro environment in which NGOs as an external agency work for target group. Rural women have multiple constraints on their mobility in society. Sen (1992) says that a rural women generally lack mobility. Their works constantly goes unaccountable and often reward less. At some regions in district Kangra too, community still do not accept the participation of women outside of their homes (as discussed in detail in chapter six). The state of Himachal Pradesh provides impetus to both its civil society organizations and women agency to flourish. This stimulus makes the macro environment in Himachal Pradesh quite fertile for development interventions. Finally the visibility of implicit and explicit changes or the outflow in various dimensions of target group augments the process of empowerment. To understand the whole process of empowerment, it is important to focus on several other elements such as macro environment, target group, external agency’s interventions etc.

Macro environment plays a significant role in empowerment process. The universe of the study is district Kangra of Himachal Pradesh. An important question arose about the successful evolution of vivacious voluntary culture working for women strengthening in the regions of Himachal Pradesh. In the neighbouring states of Himachal Pradesh such as; Punjab, Jammu Kashmir etc., voluntary culture is not so ubiquitous and active, like it is in Himachal Pradesh. Though, these neighbouring states cope up with the serious women issues or social evils. To this Dreaze et. al. (2007) justifies that Himachal Pradesh started its journey towards social development quite late but matched states like Kerala and Tamil Nadu very quickly. As far as literacy is concerned, Himachal Pradesh caught up fast and this happened because of provision of government schools everywhere. They emphasized on several important reasons behind development of Himachal Pradesh such as i) well-directed public intervention in support of social opportunities, ii) active agency of women, and (iii) local democracy and social co-operation (Dreaze and Sen, 2002). Himachal Pradesh won two ‘IBN7 Diamond States Awards 2011’. This award ceremony is the only one of its kind initiative that identifies the extraordinary efforts of the states and their determination to bring about change.iii
It is observed that there is a unique presence of multipartite relationship of state, its vivacious civil society and an active women agency in Himachal Pradesh. These tripartite elements support each other. Himachal government is encouraging both its civil society organizations and women agency to flourish. NGOs are working in collaboration with government departments in several important projects. The provision of social opportunities by the government of Himachal Pradesh can be the reason behind its flourishing and vivacious civil society intervention.

Active women agency of the state implies their extended capabilities; their longing for the persistent self-development. Hennink et al. (2012) defined agency, as people’s capacity to act independently and make choices- comprised of three components: (a) self-confidence and self-efficacy to set and achieve goals; (b) ability to make informed decisions that are recognised and respected; (c) belief in own ability to take action to effect change based on own goals. Women of Kangra district are agriculturalists, entrepreneurs, activists and are home makers simultaneously. Besides usually assigned gender roles, they work in harsh geographical conditions and perform all spine breaking domestic chores that average Indian women perform. Their persistence to endure in harsh conditions and defiance to change conditions of their lives is phenomenal.

It is imperative that people at the verge of powerlessness, must try to alter their social situation. Any developmental intervention is in vain without active participation of masses. This is one big reason that grass root NGOs use participatory approaches for mobilizing maximum number of masses. NGOs are instrumental in bringing change. Judge and Sharma (1988) say that social change, a consequence of human action, is conditioned by the challenges faced by a society from time to time. The relationship between challenges, human action and change represents a dialectical process and this has been continuing since ages (Judge and Sharma, 1988:14). Now very significant question arose i.e. what is the liaison between the voluntary organizations and social change? According to Pimpley, “It has been recently recognized that, voluntary efforts at social change are as important as some impersonal processes like industrialization and urbanization” (c.f. Judge and Sharma, 1988:1). Ahlawat quotes Rosenthal et al. (1985), “Social organizations are weapons of the powerless. They create milieu for people or groups with few formal institutional ties and for ideas that are not part of institutional concerns. Social organizations tend to question both accepted relations of power and ideological underpinnings of those
relationships. Therefore, innovative ideas often take shape with social organizations as they develop programmes, agendas justifications for pursuing social change. Ultimate success of an insurgent programme is dependent on its broadly supported mobilization. Such organization must find avenues to introduce their agendas into wider discourse (c.f. Judge and Sharma, 1997:190). NGOs in district Kangra are following the same line and persistently highlighting their agendas by introducing several women empowerment schemes. However, the change that they are able to bring in the lives of hilly women is sporadic in nature.

To start with the main findings, it is observed that most of the women in their early thirties show preference for participation in NGOs. Most of the women respondents belong to Scheduled Caste. They asserted that caste based disparity prevails in district Kangra. Most of the SC women exhibited their anguish on caste based inequality. The state has won award for up gradation in literacy but ground reality is different. Still in the most of the blocks of district Kangra, people do not allow their daughters to take education after fifth standard. In fact most of the women respondents were educated upto primary level only. Education is directly linked to the choice of occupation or vocation. Consequently majority of the women were self-employed. Poverty of women has worsen their condition. Very less women were found to be dependent. Most of them belong to middle income group. Mainly the respondents follow Hinduism. One fourth of women were Tibetan Buddhists. Tibetan women confront problem of cultural adjustments. They are not proficient in regional or official language such as English. Some tibetan women living in exile in Mc. Leodganj region of district Kangra resort to prostitution. They are poverty stricken and lack confidence immensely. Their delineation of empowerment completely differs from regional women. Their cultural differences, different dialect, low level of self-assurance etc. calls for an immediate need for their strengthening.

It is seen that NGOs in this study are dependent highly on government aid. More than half of the organizations have successfully implemented the foreign funded projects. In fact the specialists, trainers of these foreign funded projects gave new dimension to the perspective of regional NGOs. The project of Indo-German Changar Project implemented by the NGO Himachal Pradesh Eco-Development Society in Palampur zone of district Kangra sets an instance. The officials and trainers of this project helped in establishment of successful women co-operative in Kangra i.e. Samridhi (a popular micro-entrepreneurial unit owned and run by hilly women).
However, foreign fund availability is not that easily accessible for all the NGOs. Tibetan NGOs are getting regular foreign funds from their international sister organizations. As far as official formalities are concerned, foreign donors impose their procedures that clashes with regional NGOs’ ideologies. It becomes difficult for regional NGOs to fulfil all the procedures in a way to access to and implement projects. NGOs such as Jagori, Nishtha, TWA (Tibetan Women Association) performed really well in project implementation funded by foreign donors. “One Billion Rising” campaign (initiated by international women activist Eve Ensler of an NGO V-Day) is implemented and continued very well by NGOs of district Kangra. This contemporary international women’s movement echoes the slogan world over i.e. “Zero Tolerance towards Violence against Women”.

NGOs in this study are operational in all over the state. Government of Himachal Pradesh is executing many projects in collaboration with these NGOs. In implementation of many women empowerment schemes like IGMSY (Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana), Kishori Shakti Yojana, ICPS (Integrated Child Protection Scheme), SABLA, Self-Help Groups Building and Working Women Hostel scheme etc., GO-NGO collaboration can be seen. Besides this, in water shed management projects, disaster management etc., this collaboration is active. In area of operation, NGOs in district Kangra primarily focus upon economic empowerment and capacity building of women. Whereas in political representation, health awareness are the aspects in which NGOs lag behind.

In professional and operational aspect, most of the NGOs are below average. Three-four NGOs exhibited perfect functioning and professionalism. As far as staffing, office management, planning of activities or implementation of programmes is concerned, these NGOs really has set an instance. Whereas four-five NGOs still run on one man show basis. In such NGOs, one-two members accomplish all the tasks. And their paper work is always perfect to fetch attention of funding agencies. These NGOs are proficient in organizing false people, staff, and well maintained offices within a short duration of time before implementing any big project or at the time of appraisals. As far as transparency, accountability is concerned three-four NGOs redirect awful status. There is no proper procedure of conducting elections, improper audit reports, lack of activities etc. are their loopholes. Case studies regarding functioning of NGOs are discussed in the chapter 3 and 4. On the other side, NGOs report complications such as lack of appropriate leadership to run NGOs, struggle for
existence, non-availability of funds, peak of corruption in government funding agencies etc. These conditions are discouraging for NGOs.

NGOs in district Kangra rely on grass-root approaches such as PRA (Primary Rural Appraisal), PNA (Primary Need Assessment), and PAR (Participatory Action Research) etc. These organizations found these approaches best for mobilizing masses. Nearly seven-eight NGOs prioritize exploratory research before implementing big projects. Domestic violence, gender based disparity, feminization of poverty, livelihood generation, HIV among hilly women, extent of political representation are the chief research topics of NGOs in Kangra. NGOs use mass mobilization processes like rallies/ foot marches, silent protests etc. Very few NGOs use dharnas, hunger strikes, gheraos etc. as the ways to mobilize people. Most of the NGOs in the study felt that they have highly influenced aptitude level of women. They are sure about their contribution in enhancing and improving capacity building of women. Rest of the NGOs viewed that they are able to bring change in economic condition of women with their interventions. Only three NGOs asserted about their competence in altering political representation and health awareness of women.

This study is primarily based on women’s’ perceptions and experiences about their participation in NGOs. Participation is a pre requisite of process of empowerment. Hilly women’s perception about their participation in NGOs is quite instructive. Geographical conditions of Himachal Pradesh made participation of women complex. Lack of gender specific transport, secure, all weather transport proved a barrier in women’s participation in NGOs. As far as stages of participation is concerned, majority of the women join in the implementation stage of the project. Women’s participation is limited at the project planning stage. And participatory level of women is meagre in evaluation and follow up stages of NGOs’ projects. Limited participation in important stages of project such as; planning, evaluation and follow up raises question on NGOs’ approach. NGOs in district Kangra claim to use approaches such as PNA (Primary Need Assessment), PRA (Participatory Rural Appraisal) etc., which prioritizes community participation. So women’s lack of participation at all the stages of project reflects that NGOs of district Kangra have to capture the real notion of participatory approaches. Without complete participation of beneficiaries, development projects become futile. Women’s extent of participation in learning programmes, workshops, capacity building programmes etc. was quite satisfactory. Majority of the women exhibited awareness about the wide range of
issues such as; awareness building on the issues of violence, legal literacy, cost-effective farming methods, vermi-culture and herb cultivation, youth leadership, panchayati raj participation, hobby building (self-pride enhancement by enabling driving skills, photography, reiki, yoga training, health awareness, environment cleanliness, livelihood generation skills, self-defence etc. Women were quite contented with the exposure visits, they made during their participation in NGOs. Their out of the state learning and skill development exposure visits brought immense change in their perspectives. They felt more confident and poised after such visits. Majority of women expressed that they confronted hindrances in their participation in NGOs at initial stage. Opposition by husbands or families was the prime hindrance they reported. It is followed by fear of character assassination by community and neighbourhood etc. Improvement in women’s economic condition after participation in NGOs has mainly changed the attitudes of the spouses and families. They started supporting their participation in NGOs. Most of the women accepted that their participation in NGOs altered their personality completely. They felt more confident, well-balanced, and positive after exposure to the whole new world of social work and self-development. Their first step of participation became instrumental in their strengthening.

It is found that in economic aspect, more than half the proportion of women stated that, NGOs encouraged them to become self-dependent. Micro-entrepreneurship was widely adopted vocational choice after receiving livelihood training from NGOs. The micro-enterprise skills induced by NGOs, comprise of handicraft training, apparels stitching, pine needle (chalafu) artisan training, opening up of food processing units etc. Majority of the women were earning up to Rs. 2000 before joining an NGO, they started earning between Rs.2000- Rs.5000 afterwards. Women recognized enhanced level of earning after joining NGOs. The networking of women SHGs (Self Help Groups) is not so strong except than in case of two-three NGOs. More than half the sample of respondents does not have the membership of SHGs formed by NGOs. And for rest of the members of SHGs, participation in SHGs meant prospects related to mobility and multilogues on community’s issues. As SHG members replied that besides easy credit facility, membership of SHG enhanced their confidence level too. Rest of the women who did not found the SHG membership so helpful; majority of them stressed that presence of defaulters and non-repayment by members made SHG membership ineffectual.
In health dimension of empowerment, NGOs in district Kangra have scored below average. Only one fourth of women felt that, they became more aware in health dimension after participation in NGOs. This dimension of women in district Kangra needs immediate attention by NGOs. As mostly hilly women report health related issues. Women in district Kangra unveil more musculoskeletal disorders like neck, shoulder; back pain etc. Farm women are open to multiple health issues. Women here also reported iron deficiency anaemia, which is the most prevalent micronutrient deficiency. Only two-three NGOs prioritize health empowerment as their prime agenda of working. Less than one fourth of women agreed that they became more attentive about health issues after participating in NGOs. In majority, there is a discontent that they attained health empowerment through the NGOs’ interventions.

Psychological or self-development aspect is one such dimension in which NGOs in district Kangra topped. Multiple positive responses were given by women respondents. Astonishingly 100 per cent of the respondents agreed that they can sense a prodigious change in their self-development aspect. Most of the women acknowledged that they were unable to talk to strangers properly. Participation in NGOs, exposure visits, learning etc., made them proficient enough to raise voice against social evils now. They came to know about their capabilities. Largely women stated that their families have started to give weightage to their opinions at home.

Inspite of advancement, society of district Kangra is characterised by wrong cultural practices. Some of the evils like subordination of women by not granting them access to education, subjecting girls to child marriages, insisting on dowry, not granting women the choice of abortions for unwanted pregnancies even divorces from unhappy marriages, limiting their rights to ancestral properties, male dominance, violence of all types against women etc. It is found that less than half of the proportion of respondents agreed that their socio-cultural perceptions changed after joining NGOs. Women’s outlook changed after participation in several gender trainings, campaigns and workshops etc. Women responded that they are able to elevate voice against erroneous and unjust cultural practices in their homes and community.

Political representation is a pre requisite for women to attain complete empowerment in society. It is observed that slightly more than one fourth of women agreed on their enhanced political participation after joining an NGO. It is seen that most of the women amongst them asserted that they recognized the importance of
gram sabha meetings, community participation and local governance activities etc. And now they feel more profound to discuss issues of community and region. Women stated that they have attained ability and self-assurance to raise voice in local constitutional bodies against unjust practices or social evils. Majority of the women, who are mildly agreed on their political empowerment, stated that they were made to focus on other issues more by NGOs then on political awareness. Livelihood generation trainings, women self-help group formation, counselling on social evils like domestic violence, health and education of women were given more priority then political awareness. Nearly one fourth of women who mildly agree also accepted the fact that it is their own lack of interest that comes in a way of their political empowerment.

Overall NGOs in this study were successful in bringing a complete change in self-development aspect i.e. psychological dimension of women participants. The change in self-development aspect is followed by economic, alteration in socio-cultural perception, political representation and health dimension of empowerment. It is inferred that, NGOs have brought change in all the aspects of women’s lives. Health dimension is ignored by NGOs in Kangra drastically. On the whole this study contributes to an understanding of civil society’s intervention in altering women’s condition in the region. The successful model of composite relationship of state, vivacious civil society and its active women agency may set guidelines for neighbouring states like Punjab, Haryana where the situation of women is not so upright. The adjoining states are going through tough times as far as women issues are concerned. It cannot be claimed that women’s development is at peak in district Kangra of Himachal Pradesh. The subsistence struggle to bring change both by participatory women and NGOs is phenomenal. Definitely much more efforts are required for women strengthening in the region.