CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: Understanding Gender, Women’s Experience and the Democratic Community

There are many reasons why a study of women’s experience with democratic organising is pertinent. Not least among these reasons are (1) the uniqueness of the exercise, (2) their experiment with collective organising for women’s empowerment, (3) the democratic organisational processes employed in this striving for equality, and (4) the lack of records of these experiences as women’s contribution within the history of the struggle for gender equality in society. In this chapter we introduce some concepts frequently used within such feminist interventions and prepare a new backdrop of organisation theory and practice from women’s experiences gained through experimenting with non-hierarchical organising.

This chapter is divided into five sections. Section 1 discusses some of the theoretical considerations concerning the concept of gender and then goes on to look at alternative ways of understanding it. It examines the normative and the applied contexts of the role of ‘gender’ in political life. In this section, the underlying argument is that women’s experience of gender discrimination, gender stereotyping and the rigid institutional structures built on a foundation of patriarchy have resulted in the alignment of feminist thinking with democratic principles of organisation. We then move on to a discussion on the feminist contribution to the concept of a democratic community and build a case for the study of a women’s collective. Section 2 makes a case for the study of a women’s collective in Goa, outlines the objectives of the study, its scope and the central research questions that will be addressed through the research. Section 3 discusses the methodological strategy, the kinds of data that we have used in this study as well as the data sources. Section 4 highlights the significance of the study as well as the limitations of such an exercise and finally Section 5 outlines the organisation of chapters in this thesis.
SECTION ONE

Understanding Gender

1.1. What is Gender?

The term gender is used by feminists to refer to the socially constructed character traits and role expectations which society has defined differently for men and women. Very often, though incorrectly so, the terms sex and gender are used interchangeably. Feminists, however, assert that there is a clear distinction between the two. While gender is socially contrived, sex refers to the biological or genetic features that differentiate males from females. Feminism also contends that it is socially constructed gender differences that have most often been used to subordinate or oppress women.

Generally speaking, the character that is stereotypically used to describe a ‘man’ is largely viewed as positive or neutral, such as strong, big and aggressive, while the character of a ‘woman’ is often viewed as negative – timid, shy, weak, small, and so on. According to the feminist psychoanalytic perspective, our own sense of differentiation or separateness from others, as well as our psychological and cultural experiences and interpretation of gender or sexual difference are created through psychological, social and cultural processes, and they get confirmed through relational experiences. Psychologists hold that we can only understand gender difference, human distinctness and separation, relationally and situationally (Thorne 1978).

The opposing view to feminist thought assumes that one’s nature or essence is determined or fixed by ones genetic structure and that, therefore, feminine and masculine characteristics are the natural concomitant of biological differences between the sexes. The women’s movement has made concerted efforts to rectify this erroneous view. The feminists emphasise that gender is not a biological given, but is the result of a process of socialization that defines roles and characteristics in varying and changeable ways.

We might, however, mention also that there is another school of thought, a radical and constructivist view, that holds that sex itself, as a biological feature, is socially constructed and what counts as biological difference emerges through a process of cultural or social choice (Gould 1999). This is purported particularly by the gay/lesbian...
movement, but we will not get into details about this as it takes us beyond the scope of this chapter.

1.2. The De-gendering Agenda of the Women’s Movement: Origins of the ‘F’ Word

Although gender inequality has been recognised as a universal problem within the women’s movement in particular, efforts to combat gender inequality have been varied in their approach as well as the guiding ideology. The body of work that emerged with a conscious attempt to de-gender universalisations, so that they were not biased against women, has earned the title ‘feminism’.

The word ‘feminism’ was invented by Charles Fourier, a French Socialist in the early nineteenth century to mean the ‘new woman’ who would ‘transform and be herself transformed by a society based on association and mutuality, rather than on competition and profits…Changing oneself was part of changing the world’ (Rowbotham1992: 8). The term ‘feminism’ was used later to highlight women’s specific oppression in relation to men, while also distinguishing this oppression from other unequal relationships existing in society. The term was first used in English in the 1890s to talk of women campaigning for the right to vote, but in the twentieth century it was used to describe a particular strand in the women’s movement that stressed the uniqueness and difference of women rather than the demand for equality. Too often, however, and even today, the term ‘feminism’ is regarded with suspicion and ‘women’s liberation’ in used instead.

Feminism is a term that has been given a range of shifting meanings over time. Judith Astellara talks of feminism as

a proposal for social transformation as well as a movement that strives to end the oppression of women… As a movement, feminism has a long history of rebellion, more or less organised but always expressing opposition to the social institutions that made possible the inferiority of women (1984: 71).

It is pertinent to note, however, that even amongst persons who call themselves ‘feminists’, views do vary. ‘Feminists have not always had the same concept of woman, either at any time or over time’ (Delmar 1986: 23).
Many feminists have proposed the de-gendering of society or, in other words, working towards the creation of a society whose existence is not determined by gender and sex, thereby eliminating male domination. Some have argued that since characteristics such as nurturance, gentleness, etc. are products of development and social location, they can be acquired by men just as easily as men acquire characteristics of aggression, competitiveness, etc., provided they are given the appropriate experience and with necessary social re-organisation. Interestingly, there are some who have been committed to the process of de-gendering society but who have not wanted to identify with the label ‘feminist’ (Kishwar 1991).

Despite varying views on some issues, most feminists do take it to be a truism that women’s sense of self-worth and personal power has been weakened, and consequently also her personal power because of the patriarchal, male dominant society which has resulted in the internalization by women of many demeaning constructions of women. Thus, the reclamation project of women’s self-integrity and confidence is part of most feminist programmes. Barry D. Adam (1978), linking historical conditions with responses to domination has shown how minorities unwittingly contribute to perpetuating the same social order, which devalues them, through their simple everyday actions. It is not uncommon that women are accused to be women’s worst enemies. Particularly in the Indian context, with the issue of dowry harassment, mothers-in-law have often been perpetrators of the crime. However, if we look beyond such arguments, we will see that the real issue is a deeply engrained patriarchal mindset that forces social practices to duplicate the oppressive order.

The early feminists opined that to bring about an equitable society the socially contrived differences between men and women have to be minimized (Beauvoir 1953; Millet 1970). The contemporary feminist movement, however, views gender differences as essential, acknowledges that women are fundamentally different from men and argues that these differences must be recognized, theorized and even maintained (Ortner 1974; Chodrow 1974; Ferguson 1987).
1.3. More about Feminism

A ‘Google search’ on feminism will give a host of definitions such as that of the British suffragist and journalist Rebecca West, ‘Feminism is the radical notion that women are people’ or that ‘feminism is both an intellectual commitment and a political movement that seeks justice for women and the end of sexism in all forms (definition of *Standford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*) or the simple *Wikipedia* statement that ‘feminism is an ideology focusing on equality of the sexes’.

Feminism is a broad, multifaceted political orientation rather than a single ideology. It could be liberal, radical, socialist, Marxist, lesbian or other, but the common thread that runs through all is the recognition that women, compared to men, are an oppressed group and that women’s problems are a result of discrimination. Feminist theory covers the scholarly terrain, from biological sciences to the social sciences to literature and philosophy. Diverse theoretical perspectives are joined together under the broad title of ‘feminist theory’ because of their shared concern with gender relations, gender arrangements, the exclusion of women, the androcentric nature of conventional ideology, and because of a common concern for social change.

Feminists such as Betty Friedan (1963) located female subordination in the separation made between private and public spheres, that is, men’s work in the economy and women’s place in the home rearing children. Her critique of ‘functionalism’ reviewed the relationship between the individual and social structure. Joan Acker (1980) argued that gender was also an axis of stratification, and Sylvia Walby (1986) talked of patriarchy as a stratifying system resulting in gender inequalities. Feminists have continually shown that the theoretical and practical exclusion of women from the universalist public is no mere accident or aberration. The feminist slogan ‘the personal is the political’ suggests that no persons, actions or attributes of persons should be excluded from public discussion and decision-making, although the self-determination of privacy must nevertheless remain.

In this Section we will not go into details of the various feminist ideologies, as has been dealt with by Maitrayee Chauduri (2005) and Chris Beasley (1999). Feminist ideology, generally speaking, sees women as an oppressed and disadvantaged group and that the root of this oppression is in social arrangements. Feminist ideology articulates
that, for the correction or elimination of oppression, social, political and economic change is required.

1.4. Waves of Feminist Thought

Most literature on feminism divides this social movement into three phases or ‘waves’. The first phase, often referred to as the First Wave of feminism, refers to the period between 1848 and 1918. This movement, which began in the West, focused initially on getting women’s rights in public spheres like women’s right of franchise, education and paid work. This phase had rather orthodox views, however, about dress, behaviour, etc. (Delamont 2003).

The Second Wave was the period between 1918 and 1968 (ibid.). At this time, reforms such as health care for underprivileged women, women’s right over their bodies and the private sphere became the focus, particularly women’s role in the home.

In the Third Wave of feminism, which is since 1968, the focus has been on discrimination in the public sphere such as unequal remuneration and privileges for the same work, domestic violence and rape, revolution in education and curriculum and women’s participation in decision making and politics. Since the 1970s there has also been an explosion of production of feminist scholarship in various disciplines.

Early theorists had highlighted the exclusionary institutional arrangements. Slowly, attention shifted from equity issues to examination of the consequences of women’s absence as knowledge producers, as decision makers, as equal partners. They argued that a patriarchal society was being built with the historical under-representation of women and absence of women’s voice. ‘After an initial phase of ‘deconstructing’ the Western intellectual tradition, in which feminist theorists uncovered the gender blindness as well as the gender biases that existed, the task of feminist theoretical ‘reconstruction’ began’ (Benhabib and Cornell 1987: 1). It was around this time that we see in India the birth of what came to be labelled as the ‘women’s movement’. This subject will be dealt with in detail in Chapter 4 titled Mapping the Women’s Movement in India.
1.5. The Awakening: Women’s Movement against Oppression

The Women’s Movement came into existence to overcome the oppressive system and to reorder social relations. Women’s experience was that the society was patriarchal and their acceptance of their reality in a way was perpetuating this domination.

Domination, as distinguished from coercion on the one hand and unequal power on the other, involves control or delimitation of the actions of another through control over the conditions of action, objective or subjective. Such domination is not necessarily fully conscious or deliberate, and may be implicit in the way certain social institutions or customs operate (Gould 1999: 326).

Unequal power, however, is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for domination. It was women’s realization of their equal potential and also the role they themselves played in perpetuating a patriarchal order through their submission to oppression and domination, that finally led to an awakening termed as the ‘women’s movement’. Feminist theory critiqued the development of hierarchal structures and proposed new structural possibilities.

Similarities to the revolt of the working class, is often drawn when discussing the origins of the Women’s Movement. Women became aware that they were not being accepted as equals by men in both public and political spheres. According to Michael Mann (1973: 13) and W.S. Landecker (1970: 228), the requirements for a revolutionary ‘consciousness’ are (1) a sense of class or group membership, the recognition of a similarity between self and like-situated others, (2) a recognition of the divergence between own and other-group interests, and (3) the belief that social alternatives exist.

In the West in the late 1960s (Iannello 1992: 37) and in India a decade later we saw students and others who had worked for the civil rights movement, forming grassroots level women’s groups and were primarily involved in ‘consciousness raising’. These groups provided a forum for women to discuss their experiences of gender discrimination as well as work towards strategies for change. Many of these groups were committed to non-hierarchy, non-formal leadership and experimented with different organisational structures.
1.6. Sowing the Seeds of Democracy through Collective Action

Collective action represents a move away from the previously ascribed relationships such as family, community and religion and towards a newly achieved status, which is based on common interests (Kim et al. 1994: 22). We have seen the use of collective action as a strategy in labour movements in protest against the existing undesirable working conditions and working relationships. Members of the working class have organised and lobbied for their interests against the ruling class through demonstrations and revolutions. It was ‘collective action’ that brought forth two types of moral-political ideologies namely, ‘democracy’ and ‘communism’. Awadhendra B. Sharan and Ravikant Sharma (2002) have discussed the birth of Indian Socialism and its impact on the women in pre-independence period and the first few years of independence. They talk of the participation of a large number of women in the struggles of the Left despite the fact that addressing women’s concerns was at the bottom of the charter of demands. The women’s movement in India identified with the ideology of the Left, with Socialist ideology and the rebellion against patriarchy can be seen as a continuation of the revolt against colonization. Patriarchal power as the oppressor replaced colonial domination. Several women’s organisations in the 1970s were ideologically opposed to hierarchy as a symbol of patriarchal power and, therefore, collective action formed the base for the organisation structure and process adopted by many women’s groups. The underlying ideology is that hierarchy represents patriarchy, while democracy and collective action represent equity.

Talking specifically of the Indian experience of the birth of democracy, we see that India did not become a democracy under external pressure, neither was it owing to modernisation and development, but as an outcome of the struggle for independence from colonial power. Mass political movement and civil disobedience of even the poor and illiterate population formed the backdrop to democracy in India and aided the creation of political consciousness. The influence the freedom struggle has had on the Women’s Movement cannot be denied. At the same time the transformations that have taken place in the Indian polity, namely, the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution, the Women’s Reservation Bill, the various laws that have been enacted in favour of women are, no doubt, largely owing to the feminist movement in the country. Today, political
representation of women in the context of local governance in India is no longer a contested issue. As long as women experience less political ‘space’, it will only lead to a greater need for women’s ‘voice’ to be heard and, therefore, for more forceful collective action.

1.7. The Feminist Contribution to Democratic Theory

While India is proud of being the largest democracy, rarely is women’s contribution to democracy or democratic theory ever acknowledged and even more rarely is the link made between collective action and democracy. There have been some efforts to understand how political structures and processes have shaped, encouraged or discouraged collective action (Snow et al. 1988, 1992; Tarrow 1988), but even these have largely been gender blind. According to Sidney Tarrow’s political opportunity model (1988), the extent to which collective action is enhanced will depend on (1) degree of openness in the polity, (2) stability or instability of political alignments, (3) presence or absence of allies and support groups, (4) divisions within the elite or its tolerance for protest, and (5) policy making capacity of the government.

Rita K. Noonan (1995), however, points out that mainstream social movement theory, the political opportunity model, for instance, is inadequate to understand and explain women’s collective action. She argues for a different lens to be used in the analyses of collective action in the Third World, where collective action has been largely triggered by crises and struggles for survival. Her case study in Chile has shown that women’s political power and collective action came out of a ‘closed’ polity and that too at a time when there was intolerance for protest of any kind. Women’s source of power in the Third World, she opines is often informal and non-traditional (not based on electoral politics). During economic and political crises, as the experience in Chile showed, women as caretakers of families and communities were the ones who created and ran survival organisations, and subsequently took to the streets in mass protest, thus transforming women’s traditional responsibilities in family and community into political power.

Another important point Noonan raises is that oppositional movements may not necessarily use the ‘oppositional frame’ and that sometimes, collective action may be
able to legitimize their actions using the dominant discourse. She extends her critique of the political opportunity model to include the very perception of opportunity and argues that very often the so-called opportunity is not really perceived by those involved in collective action particularly when it is in response to an issue of survival. She suggests the concept of ‘cultural opportunity structure’ (ibid.: 85) meaning a culturally sensitive understanding of social protest.

Drawing from David A. Snow (1992), Noonan (1995: 85) discusses the idea of ‘collective action frames’. In understanding collective action, ‘human agency’, forms a crucial component to the framing of activities and ‘ideology’, ‘beliefs’ and ‘values’ form important determinants of mobilization strategies. Collective action frames consider participants as ‘rational actors engaged in the construction of their own mobilizing beliefs and strategies’ and they “do not frame campaigns in a cultural or social vacuum’ as the larger political and social context matters (ibid.: 86). Mass media plays a crucial role as well. Snow (1992) has argued that ‘master frames’ or larger cultural frames enable the understanding of how and why participants of collective action assign blame for the problem they are attempting to address. ‘Master frames are generic; specific collective action frames are derivative’ (ibid.: 138).

In this chapter we will not go into aspects of democracy that are covered under constitutional law and theory, like, for example, the tension between the will of the majority and protection of individual rights and autonomy or the public versus private debate, as it is beyond the scope of this study. Our concern here is with issues governing the range of threats to women’s liberty and equality under patriarchy. It is not to say that feminists have not been interested in the Constitution and its interpretations. Tracy E. Higgins (1997: 1661), for instance, points out that mainstream constitution theory rests on a particular conception of citizenship which lacks a critique of power beyond that which is exercised by the state. She highlights feminists’ contribution to democracy in the context of equal protection but also argues that no distinction has been made by feminist theorists between legitimate uses of public power that enhance women’s equality and illegitimate uses that reinforce subordination. Feminist theorists have argued for a feminist conception of democratic citizenship (Higgins 1997; Ewig 1999).
Jane Mansbridge (1983) in her book *Beyond Adversary Democracy* talks of the two main contributions of feminism that have bearing on the concept of democratic community: (1) feminism’s sensitivity to the phenomenon of unequal power or domination, and (2) the distinctive emphasis on the dimension of care and commonality that derives in part from the experience of mothering.

1.8. Women’s Experience: ‘Care’ the Foundation of Democracy

We have already discussed in the subsection titled *The Awakening: Women’s Movement against Oppression* the relevance of women’s experience of ‘domination’ to the birth of a democratic community. For too long women have been victims of exploitation, oppressive control and inhibited freedom and have been denied equal opportunity and benefits. The secondary status of women is one of the few ‘true universals’ although the real experiences may be diverse and vary from culture to culture.

Women’s role as ‘care givers’, ‘mothers’, is sometimes celebrated. However, the acknowledgement of the contribution of this role played by women to the concept of a democratic community is indeed rare. Care encompasses a range of positions such as concern for the other not out of duty or obligation but out of a feeling or sympathy; attention or attentiveness; sensitivity to the needs of others, and more strongly, taking the other’s interests as equal or more important than one’s own; concern for the interest of the family … (Gould 1999: 329).

This experience of caring and concern, that is characteristically taken to belong to women, facilitates an awareness of common interest that is fundamental to the possibility of a democratic community. The concept of care when transported to the democratic community translates into responsiveness to the special needs and interests of people. Kathy Ferguson (1984) advocated an integration of the private and the public worlds to allow women to offer alternatives to bureaucracy.

Some features of the care model (Held 1987) that can be usefully extrapolated to the larger context of the democratic community are as follows:

1. The concern for the specific individuality and differences of the other that is involved in social reciprocity or the reciprocity of respect. This includes a
sympathetic understanding of the perspective and individuality of the other. Here political feelings are distinguished from personal sentiments or morals.

2. The concern for each other is defined by their participation in a common activity oriented to shared ends, or a common good.

3. The concern for the vulnerable or as mentioned earlier, the relationship of benign non-reciprocity – providing welfare to the poor, sick, aged, unemployed and dependent members of the community.

We should be careful here to distinguish between the non-reciprocal nature of mothering or parenting particularly of the young child and the non-reciprocal relations of domination or exploitation, in which one controls the actions of the other inhibiting freedom or benefits. Our discussion here is related to the former role and not the later.

We do recognise the limitations in using the parenting or mothering model in any extrapolation to political or institutional contexts of democratic communities. But a democratic community is based on reciprocal relations among individuals who share authority by virtue of their equal rights to participate in decision-making. Equal rights together with personal relations, character traits, as well as, certain ethical norms are conditions for the development of a democratic community.

The hope for a democratic community is weakened in situations of oppression and domination or even when the relationship within the family, between men and women, is that of subordination of interest and personality to that of the other. According to Carol C. Gould (1999), what is needed by a democratic community, is a synthesis of care and justice, of individuality and community. It is ideally constituted by ‘… individuals-in-relations, who reciprocally recognise each other, share some ends, and take themselves to be members of the community’ (ibid.: 335).

Several scholars have argued that the twentieth century feminist organisations have been the key to understanding and perpetuating the development and spread of personal and collective change (see Ferree 1987; Katzenstein 1987; Klein 1987; Mueller 1987). Still others argue that feminist organisations contribute to a better society with the dismantling of bureaucratic organisations (see Ferguson 1984, 1987; Meredith Gould 1979). Lisa Disch (1991: 503) writes that, ‘no course in democratic thought is complete without a section that examines the contributions of feminist scholars to the field’.
Feminist critical theory makes feminist, democratic, and post-modern thought more politically astute. It breaks out of oppositional thinking about power and oppressive ideals of group solidarity, but still asserts that group oppression exists, and that oppressive institutions can be transformed through collective action (ibid.: 503).

The aim of the Women’s Movement was to extend democracy. This involved a critique of formal political procedures and representative democracy to allow every woman to participate (Rowbotham 1992: 275). It is indeed a retrograde step to democracy when women are excluded from any kind of decision-making, as democracy is an activity that is common and shared ensuring that everyone governed has an equal right to participate in joint decision-making. In this context, then, collective action and non-hierarchical organising will only take us closer to the democratic dream. Women’s organisations and NGOs will, therefore, be ‘veritable “academies” for democratic learning’ (Ewig 1999: 76).

1.9. Feminist Power and Non-hierarchical Organising

Power has been a complex and challenging question for feminists. By this, we do not imply that feminists have not theorized power, but have, in fact, distinguished between feminist or legitimate power that is for the benefit of women and coercive or oppressive power. Feminist have not only been engaged with naming the different kinds of power (Ferguson 1984; Kanter 1977), but have also been questioning the kind of power that produces conditions of oppression, discrimination and exclusion of women. Within the women’s movement, feminists have strived for power that is egalitarian, peaceful and inclusive. Feminist power is ability, energy and strength arrived at from tapping women’s potential and through channelling collective resources for women’s empowerment. In short it implies, ‘enabling people to do what they could otherwise not do’.

There is a clear distinction here between this enabling power and coercive power which really implies ‘making people do what they would not do’ by using oppressive force. As Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1977) has pointed out, power as domination supports and is supported by hierarchy the result of which is that power remains vested in a few persons at the top of that hierarchy. Others are limited by this in their ability to act or be
effective affecting therefore the whole system of effectiveness. With feminist interpretation of power people can maximize their potential.

Empowering more people through generating more autonomy, more participation in decisions, and more access to resources increases the total capacity for effective action rather than increasing domination. The powerful are the ones who have access to tools for action (Kanter 1977: 260).

The term that is used today to distinguish feminist power from coercive kinds of power is ‘empowerment’. Empowerment is associated with the notion of self-control, while power is associated with the notion of control over the other. It might be because of this that in the organisations that have focused on empowerment, members monitor themselves more than in hierarchical organisations which have a formal administrative set up to monitor employees. In Ferguson’s work (1984: 8) on The Feminist Case against Bureaucracy, she refers to bureaucracy as the ‘scientific organisation of inequality’. She argues that although social relations between classes, races and sexes are fundamentally unequal, bureaucracy projects these and other forms of domination into an institutional arena that both rationalizes and maintains them (ibid.).

SECTION TWO
Making a Case for the Study of a Women’s Collective in Goa

Social Movements, reform or revolutionary movements have a well defined objective or goal and requires organised activity for collective action towards meeting the desired objective. According to John Wilson (1973: 8), ‘a social movement is a conscious, collective, organised attempt to bring about or resist large-scale change in the social order by non-institutionalized means’. These ‘collective enterprises to establish a new order of life’ (Blumer 1969: 8), could emerge for a particular campaign or issue with a single goal and cease to exist when the objective is met, or could continue to exist with broad goals and defused strategies to meet the ends or could have continuously evolving agendas too. Ongoing movements in particularly and those with a single focused objective as well require a stable organisation. According to Paul Wilkinson (1971: 27),
'a social movement must evince a minimal degree of organisation though this may range from loose, informal or partial level of organisation to the highly institutionalized and bureaucratic movement and the corporate group’.

The same is true for the Women’s Movement in India. In the evolution of the movement particularly post Indian independence, several women’s groups emerged all over the country to fight a variety of causes (Lingam 2002). Some of these were small intellectual groups, others were large mass based organisations, some emerged in support of a single victim of violence, or a campaign against a particular site of oppression and injustice and were short lived and others that continue to exist with evolving agendas. Within the broad conceptual framework of the ‘women’s movement’ we have seen organisations with varying perspectives and ideologies, divergent understandings of patriarchal oppression and its outcomes and therefore also varying strategies to combat injustice and inequality. The organisation structures of women’s organisations working for change range from very formal bureaucratic ones to those that hold hierarchy as a symbol of patriarchy, domination and oppression and consciously try to do away with formal structure in their organising processes. The latter are chiefly those that are based on a feminist ideology that have aligned with democratic principles of organisation.

However, the widely held view in both Sociology of Organisations and Organisation Theory is that organisations have to be structured around some organisation principle and ‘hierarchy’ is treated as axiomatic. According to the Scalar principle of classical management, subordinates at all levels should follow a chain of command and communicate with their seniors only through their immediate or intermediate senior thereby following a clear line of authority. In hierarchical organisations, the structure has not only clearly defined patterns of authority, rules and procedures even regarding inter-personnel relationships, communication and work roles but also a centralised decision making body and a clear division of labour.

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. But, should the same hold true for organisations that are
speareheading the women’s movement, who have more abstract and non quantifiable goals? Should hierarchy be the definitional criteria for movement organisations?

Today, even in profit organisations, particularly in knowledge based organisations like the IT sector, the trend is to adopt flatter or, in other words, more horizontal organisational structures and to introduce strategies that would increase individual motivation, commitment, development and fulfilment, with the aim at increasing productivity and enhancing the achievement of organisation goals. This move is an outcome of one of the biggest management challenges and that is to manage the performance of a diverse workforce. Besides liberation struggles, trade unions and worker uprisings have shown that revolts against authoritarianism and domination are not uncommon and moves to introduce elements of democracy are to check such insurgencies within the organisation. Yet despite the corporate move to introduce less formal elements within the organisation, profit based organisations invariably do not rule out the need for structure. There is still a line of command, distinct persons in positions of authority for organisation accountability.

Non-hierarchy is assumed to result in anarchy (Fayol 1937, 1949; Merton et al. 1952; Etzioni 1964 and Mouzelis 1968). Non-hierarchy however, does not mean lack of structure but that the structures are more fluid thereby resisting rigidity. Collective organising has been the ideal of women’s organisations that are committed to democratic styles of organising despite individual differences that might exist between its members such as caste, class, socio economic background, education, skills and capabilities. The underlying argument for such organisations is that bureaucracy and hierarchy are inherently patriarchal. Efforts are therefore made to overcome differences that exist within the organisations that challenge the attempt at organisation with a ‘non-hierarchical’ structure. In experimenting with non hierarchical or ‘collective’ organising, women’s organisations have been pioneers. Yet there exists very little documentation of these singularly unique experiments such as Saheli in Delhi, Forum Against Oppression of Women in Mumbai and Bailancho Saad in Goa which has also sustained its efforts for over two decades. These organisations have been working towards changing the present status of women to one of empowerment. They acknowledge women’s specific oppression in relation to men in both personal and public life and do not allow this aspect
of inequality to be subsumed with all other unequal relationships that exist in society. The study proposed is primarily concerned with the working of such organisations, and argue that women’s collective organising could be excellent academies for democratic learning.

Bailancho Saad, a women’s collective in Goa has been identified for the case study as the researcher has been associated with it almost since its inception.

1.10. The Study Site

Goa situated on the west coast of India, was a Portuguese colony for 450 years from 1501–1961. It was then a Union Territory right up to 1987 when it was declared an independent state. The period around 1986–87 were troubled years for the Goan society not only because of the discussions around ‘statehood’ but also the issue of state ‘language’. There was much tension over whether it was to be Marathi or Konkani. At this time we saw issues of ‘identity’ come into centre stage. For the first time in Goa’s history after liberation, the local society was unsettled by violent agitations and rioting. It was in this milieu that Bailancho Saad, the women’s collective chosen for case study, was born.

Goa is unique for several reasons not only because of its geography which makes it a haven for beach tourism. The Portuguese influence is still evident in the society. The reasons that lead up to locals adopting a changed lifestyle has been forgotten by most people but history has recorded the severe inquisition that compelled people to convert to Christianity and also modify their lifestyle so that no practice had any semblance to anything that the colonizers felt was ‘pagan’ and therefore a hindrance to their missionary agenda. The women no doubt were the ones who were the targets of many of the bans or restrictions laid down by the Portuguese (Desouza 2003).

One of the positive interventions of Portuguese colonisation was the introduction in 1867 of the Codigo Civil Portugues or as its better known, the Common Civil Code, which is still in existence in Goa despite statehood. In Goa the registration of births, deaths and marriages is mandatory. Then, the law provides for equal property rights to both men and women. In fact all women have an equal share to both paternal as well marital properties.
There have been many other recent positive indicators for empowerment of women such as a high age at marriage (25 years), a universal knowledge of contraception (99 per cent), a small family size (1.77 child per woman), the highest per capita income (Rs 70,112) and high percentage of women’s literacy and education which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

Despite all the indicators of empowerment in Goa, there are several concerns such as the negative impacts of development (tourism, mining, construction etc.), increasing violence against women, the high cost of living, high anaemia among women, the frequent disinheritance of women, the low participation of women in the paid work force, the son preference that is prevalent to list just a few. However, the most worrying statistic of all which is indicative of the declining status of women is the sex ratio particularly the juvenile sex ratio that warns of a foreboding future and provides the backdrop against which the women’s collective Bailancho Saad has been working for women’s empowerment in Goa.

1.11. Rationale for the Study

Very little research is available in India on the contribution of women’s collective organising to principles of democratic functioning and empowerment of women. The collective that is intended to be studied has been in existence for over 20 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 since 1987, almost since its initial stages would be able to analyse the transitions that have taken place within the organisation over the last 20 years, sketch out a description of the strategies and processes that have been employed and analyse the outcomes of this collective organising.

We anticipate that a study of this nature that will engage in a discussion on the theory of organisation and analyse the organising processes and outcomes with a case study of a women’s collective will contribute to the theory of organisation from an Indian gendered perspective. Lessons may also be derived from the experience of non hierarchical or collective organising that 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 will be of interest to ethnographers. The limitations too of the researcher’s involvement with activities of the collective will be discussed which might be valuable to the current literature on methodology.

1.12. Objective and Scope of the Study

The objective of this research is to study the origins of Bailancho Saad, the context in which it was started and within which it continued to function. The functioning of the organisation, the structure that emerged, the processes that were adopted as well as the outcomes of its collective organising on policy, the society in Goa and on women in particular will be analysed.

Using Gamson’s (1990) criteria namely (1) acceptance of a challenging group as a legitimate representative of a constituency by the target of collective action, and (2) new advantages won by the challenger which includes a broad range of outcomes that advance the cause of the movement, the success of movement will be assessed. The political or policy outcomes, cultural outcomes, personal development outcomes and mobilization outcomes will be analysed.

**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** refers to the ‘activation of a pool of people who can be drawn into subsequent movements’ (Staggenborg 1995). 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** impacts on all the other outcomes and refers to aspects of individual empowerment, enhancing commitment and responsibility. It analyses the success in minimising differences through individual empowerment while acknowledging and accepting individual limitations.

Comparative insights will be drawn from information collected about the working of other collectives such as Saheli in Delhi and Forum against the oppression of Women in Mumbai and also with hierarchical women’s organisations such as the Goa State Commission for Women which the researcher is currently a member of.

### 1.13. Research Questions

Most collective action by movement organisations is undertaken to challenge the contemporary society and is often triggered by a deep felt anguish and outrage over the magnitude of human suffering (Rowbotham 1992). It was felt that it would be significant therefore to ask:

1. What is the context in which the organisation was conceived?

Given the predominant hierarchical organisation trend it would be interesting to see

2. How was the articulation of non-hierarchy arrived at?

3. What the principles governing collective organising are?

4. How does the organisation routinely function?

To trace the transitions within the organisation and not merely to make a chronologically account of events we ask:

5. What are the kinds of activities, programmes organised?

6. What has been the scope of the activities and programmes of the collective?

With the view to analyse the political/policy outcomes, the cultural outcomes, the mobilization outcomes and the personal/self development outcomes that have already been outlined in the proposal we will look at

7. What are the various outcomes of collective organising?

8. What are some of the achievements of the Collective that have strengthened the organisation?
9. What are the problems and limitations that the organisation has encountered?

10. How have these problems and limitations been negotiated with?

In the past 20 years of the organisation no doubt there has been mobility within the organisation. That is to say that, there must have been old members that have left the organisation and new members that have joined. We intend to study the changes that have taken place within the organisation. Besides organisations such as Bailancho Saad have a clear agenda to change society. Therefore the dynamics between the organisation and the society that is the focus of its work will be interesting to study. In this context we look at

11. What the prospects of the organisation are?
   a) Is it tied up with individual members?
   b) Is it related to societal response?

12. Does more forceful collective action result from a denial of space to women in decision making?

Finally to be able to look at the similarities as well as differences in operation of other women’s organisations we look at similar collectives as well as other hierarchical organisations.

13. How do the experiences of Bailancho Saad compare with that of other collectives in India such as, Forum against oppression of Women in Mumbai and Saheli in Delhi?

14. How do the experiences of Bailancho Saad compare with a hierarchical women’s organisation such as the Goa State Commission for Women?

SECTION THREE

Methodological Strategy

1.14. Background notes on choosing the Study Site

I have been for years intrigued by the experiments, though few and scattered, of non-hierarchical organising that I have encountered through my association with Women’s Studies and the Women’s Movement. While my association with Bailancho Saad goes back to 1988, the initial years of my involvement with the organisation was
one of an active participant looking to be involved in social work with women and this was soon after graduating from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences in Mumbai and moving to Goa where I was a new migrant in 1988.

It was, however, in March 1993 that I collaborated with the then Head of Department of Management Studies at the Goa University to undertake a case study of ‘Bailancho Saad’ which emerged from my discussion with him about its unique, collective organisation style. This research interest developed into a more detailed collaborative study which was later funded by Equations, Bangalore on ‘Tourism Critique and Tourism Movements in Goa’ of which the involvement of Bailancho Saad’s critique of tourism formed a part. At this time formal permission from the group was sought in 1993 to study the organisation. The organisation was very open to the study and, in fact, welcomed an analysis of both their functioning as well as their ideological positions on issues. I undertook data collection for this first phase of the case study from March 1993 to June 1995.

Locating my interest for research as with the inquiry into non-hierarchical organising, on which there was very little literature available, I decided to undertake a more detailed doctoral research on the subject. I was posed, however, with certain methodological dilemmas. The prime methodological problem was one that is faced by most researchers, namely, the choice of the field or study site and the selection of a ‘typical’ case for study. There were other experiments with non-hierarchical organising for women’s empowerment and organisations that were committed to functioning without a hierarchy scattered around the country, but, in Goa, Bailancho Saad was the only case available. Further the nature of information required, namely, the organisational strategies and processes could not be understood merely from interviews or observation over a short period of time. This cannot be achieved through structured interviews or a questionnaire. It was important to understand the dynamics within the organisation over a period of time to be able to fully grasp the successes, if any, as well as limitations of the unique organisational style. Being located in the state of Goa, I was left with no other option but to choose Bailancho Saad and then use information collected from different sources about other similar experiments across the country to provide comparative
insights as well as provide a deeper insight into the limitations and successes of the organisation style. Theories and explanations emerged as the work progressed.

My past association with the collective and earlier involvement with a project aimed at studying Bailancho Saad’s critique of tourism strengthened the argument for the choice of organisation for it allowed for a deeper investigation into the organisations activities, processes and outcomes. It may be pertinent to note here that a male researcher in the 1990s may not have been able to have the same rapport or access to information from the members as I did as collective at that time had male supporters for public programmes and workshops but men were not allowed during the weekly Saturday meetings. It was with this background that Bailancho Saad was chosen as the prime study site for doctoral study.

Choosing a topic and case for study depends on the research interests of the researcher, theoretical assumptions, how representative that group is of all such groups and most importantly the willingness of the group to permit access to the researcher. According to C. Bosk (1979), the privilege of being an observer is a gift presented to the researcher by his host and subjects.

1.15. ‘Self as Informant’

The researcher has drawn from Stella Mascarenhas-Keyes (1987) work on the value of using self as informant while at the same time has also been consciously adopting strategies to overcome the constraints as highlighted by the same author brought on by ‘permanent kinship and associational links’ (ibid.: 180) as well as those that were brought on by the expectations of other members when I was often mistakenly perceived by members as part of the group. At various stages during the researcher’s association with the organisation the research was discussed, however, with regular attendance at meetings, participation in discussions, the researcher would find herself more involved in the group. Further the researcher was a Member of the Goa State Commission for Women (GSCW) during the period between 2006 and 2009 and Bailancho Saad would refer several cases to the GSCW. At some of the Bailancho Saad meetings women whose cases had been referred to the GSCW would be present and the dynamics in the group
would be affected. For instance, I would be addressed as ‘Madam’ by the woman who had been assisted in her case by me as a Member of GSCW.

Drawing once again from Mascarenhas-Keyes’s concept of ‘multiple-native strategy’ (1987), the researcher in this case had to adopt a ‘multiple-participant strategy’ for example, at the GSCW there is a clear hierarchy in the seating arrangement which is around the large glass topped table of the Chairperson of the GSCW. Members sit along the sides flanking the Chairperson, while cases called for hearings are seated across the table from the Chairperson.

In Bailancho Saad, while there are tables and chairs which are used by the staff during the rest of the week, however, during the weekly Saturdays meetings the chairs are piled up against the wall and members sit on the floor in a circle.

There have been occasions during these meetings when the researcher’s presence on the floor has caused a bit of discomfort to women who have sought assistance from the researcher in her role as Member GSCW. There have been times when chairs have been offered to the researcher and a very conscious effort has to be made to fit in. Unlike the case of Mascarenhas Keyes (1987) where ‘props’ used were language and clothes, in this case, the researcher had to consciously use behaviour and mannerisms that would bridge the invisible barriers due to the ‘multiple-participant role’ of the researcher and to make sure that the research exercise was not an ‘arrogant enterprise’ (Agar 1980: 41).

1.16. Tools of Data Collection

The methodology used for the case study of Bailancho Saad could be termed ethnographic, as data has been collected over a period of over fifteen years. The fact that the researcher’s affiliation with the collective extends over a long span of time has enabled a deeper understanding of the finer nuances such as the changes in individual’s confidence and growth within the organisation which cannot be learnt from interviews. While secondary sources such as reports, press releases, newsletters etc. were also used, the prime tool of data collection has been observation, discussions and in-depth interviews.

In the course of work with this women’s collective, the role of the researcher has oscillated between participant, observer and participant observer. The initial affiliation to
the group was as a participant and subsequently the researcher was involved in a study of
the anti-tourism movement in Goa of which this collective was a part. At this time, with
the knowledge of the group the researcher began interviewing members and the study
was made clear to the group. The interest in the unique organisational style grew with the
affiliation with the collective and through observation of the processes.

The prime success of the organisation style that was observed was the confidence
it built in individual members. Several women who had been observed to come to the
group for assistance as victims of oppression, discrimination, or violence of some sort
over time became empowered to even assist other victims. The subject of non-
hierarchical organising was taken up for study as a result of this experience with
Bailancho Saad and the fact that there was very little literature available on the subject.
The researcher then ceased being only a participant and was at times only an observer or
a participant observer. During some of the public meetings and programmes organised by
Bailancho Saad the researcher was only an observer while at other times was a participant
observer.

Regarding the role of the researcher, R.L. Gold (1958) explains that the researcher
may be a complete participant, concealing his true identity and intentions from the group,
and living entirely as they do (as in the case of Charles Booth’s study of the poor).
However, in this researcher’s experience, during the period of complete participation, the
researcher had no intention to study the group and therefore was genuinely a participant
during the period of affiliation with the group. Gold (ibid.) also speaks of ‘observer-as-
participant’ which involves only limited participation and ‘participant-as-observer’ which
implies active involvement in the group, but where the group knows that the researcher is
not really one of them and is aware of the purpose of the interaction. In the case of this
researchers experience however, although the fact that the group was being researched
was known to all in the group often in the minutes of the meeting when the list of
members attending the meeting was made, the researchers name was included along with
the other members. Very often I was requested to undertake specific tasks such as draft
letters from the organisation to various Government offices, or assist in the organisation
of programmes. A.C. Mayer (1975: 28) talks of this aspect of fieldwork as the ‘balanced
reciprocity of relationships and information’. I, therefore, undertook certain
responsibilities for the organisation such as designing their invitations and banners, editing some of the letters to the press and other correspondence, etc.

The role of the researcher in this case study cuts across all the researcher role classifications (Denscombe 1999: 150; Gans 1962) as the researcher has been at times a ‘real’ participant and at other occasions the researcher was only an observer, that is to say that the researcher was physically present at the event which was observed, but did not really participate in it. Then there were occasions when the researcher’s participation was determined by the research interest and the researcher was a participant observer. Even during this period for certain programmes the researcher again was a ‘real’ participant and after the programme reverted to that of an observer or participant observer. In this case, the researcher took on the role of an analyst of the researcher’s own actions while being a real participant.

There was no situation, however, where the researcher’s role had to be kept secret. Consent was obtained from the group for the research. It was felt that due to the previous relationship of the researcher with the collective, the revelation of the researcher’s role would not affect the naturalness of the setting in any significant manner. In this case the researcher obtained consent from the group to be participant observer and this identity as a researcher was openly recognized by those involved. Further, the researcher took the form of ‘shadowing’ the group through normal processes, witnessing first hand and in intimate detail the organisation culture/events of interest.

The reason why the researcher has been studying the women’s collective over a long period of time is to chiefly observe the changes that take place over time and to ascertain the durability of the organisational style as organisation theory only spoke of hierarchy for efficacy, efficiency and long term dependability. In 2006, Bailancho Saad celebrated twenty years of its existence which is longer than many hierarchical organisations stay alive today. By merely observing Bailancho Saad for a few meetings it will not be possible to get a deep insight into the work or working of the group, even less its impact on the individual participants of the society in which it operates.

According to Peter Worsley (1977: 89), quantitative methods are used when large populations are studied and do not require the researcher to be personally involved with the subjects. If personal involvement is important for the study or detailed information is
required, then it will be possible to study only a few people. Worsley argues for the use of qualitative methods as more valid as opposed to quantitative methods which claim reliability and representativeness (ibid.). In quantitative research, respondents rarely have the opportunity to judge the veracity of the data collected as the researcher rarely gets back to them or presents to them the results of the research. But, in a case study as that of Bailancho Saad, it was important that the researched know what the findings are and are presented with the conclusions of the study. Finally, as A.M. Shah and E.A. Ramaswamy have said in their preface to the second edition of *The Fieldworker and the Field* (Srinivas et al. 2002: viii), ‘The ultimate test of any method is the quality of the data generated by the methodology’. Speaking of research of this nature the same authors say that ‘… the outcome is the touchstone of research. The fieldworker can simple not afford to go wrong on facts’ (ibid.: viii).

In the case study of Bailancho Saad a variety of qualitative tools as well as secondary sources such as pamphlets, newsletters, press clippings, photographs are used to describe the experience of the organisation with non hierarchical organising. In telling a situation as it is, the researcher attempts to develop theories of non-hierarchical organising. In this study, the hypotheses emerges from the research as it goes along rather than being specified from the start and is used as a guide to the kind of data that is collected. In this case study it was the experience of the collective’s non-hierarchical organising that guided further research into the issue.

**1.17. Some Notes on the Validity of such a Case Study**

The uniqueness of this organisation justifies the use of case material of a single organisation in theoretical analysis and as the ultimate test of the validity of the findings of the study, aspects of this case study, were presented to Bailancho Saad at various periods. The feedback from the organisation was important also to overcome the limitations of qualitative methods, namely, those arising out of the personal involvement of the researcher and to avoid any scope for bias. Triangulation using a combination of interviews, observation and use of secondary data such as press-notes, publications of the organisation, etc. was adopted so that the strengths of one tool could then compensate for the weakness if any, of the other.
SECTION FOUR

Significance and Limitations of the Study

1.18. Significance of the Study

Collective organising is not a very well researched area. While there have been several experiments with collective organising, women’s experiences with collective organising, in particular, have not been systematically documented or theorised. While there has been some amount of research in the area in other parts of the world, women’s collective organising in India remains largely unexplored. Besides, theory on organising has focussed on hierarchical systems of organising as we will see in Chapter 2.

Despite the paucity of research done in this area, the narratives of empowerment expressed by women who have had experience with collective organising and participatory decision-making, makes such a study all the more significant, particularly as women’s empowerment is currently seen as a priority in India.

1.19. Limitations of the Study

The biggest limitation of a study of this nature is the methodology required to collect the necessary data. As already mentioned, most women’s collectives have not systematically documented their experiences and even if reports, newsletters, and other information have been published periodically, these have not been preserved for reference. Culling out documentary evidence has been laborious.

In order to fully grasp the organisation, its members, organising processes and to evaluate the organisation’s outcomes, it has been necessary to do so using participant observation. This methodology comes with the limitations of reliability and validity of field notes based on observation, the fact that often the presence of the observer might result in changes in the setting or behaviour of those being observed, the fact that the observation had to be over a long period of time making the research process very time consuming and last but not least the fact that a study using participant observation often results in low objectivity and has greater chance of biases being prevalent.
SECTION FIVE

Organisation of the Thesis

Chapter 2 looks at some insights from theories about organisations and organising particularly mainstream theory and Chapter 3 makes a case for revisiting women’s organisation through a gender critique of conventional theory.

Continuing the literature review presented in the above chapters, Chapter 4 traces the History of the Women’s Movement in India and the various interventions for women’s empowerment in the country and then zooms in to the birth and growth of the Women’s Movement in Goa including the origin and development of Bailancho Saad, the women’s collective selected for case study. We will look briefly also at the different types of organisations that existed and exist in the State of Goa and which are involved in work for women to bring out the uniqueness of Bailancho Saad.

Chapter 5 presents an overview of the changing status of women in Goa and outlines the empirical context for Bailancho Saad, the first major women’s activist organisation in Goa aimed at women’s empowerment. Here several secondary data sources are used to present demographic and other statistics of various aspects to determine women’s status. Data has been drawn from the Census of India, National Sample Survey, National Family Health Survey, other government reports, academic papers and includes also reports from NGO and activist groups.

In Chapter 6 we look more closely into the case study of Bailancho Saad and its experiment with non-hierarchical processes as well as trace the collage of issues taken up by them from 1986 when it originated to 2009.

Chapter 7 attempts to analyse the work of Bailancho Saad, the issues it has been involved with as well as the views held on those issues from their printed Newsletters called SAAD from the earliest issue which was in 1989 to the last issue till date which is Volume III Number 6: In the Wake of Communal Violence. SAAD means ‘the awakening call’, and was introduced by Bailancho Saad to reach out to a wider audience. Chapter 8 looks at some of the strengths and weaknesses of collective organising using the ‘outcome’ analysis focusing on the political and policy outcomes, mobilisation outcomes, cultural and social outcomes and personal and self development outcomes.
Chapter 9 draws a few comparative insights from other organisations and Chapter 10, the concluding chapter, presents a summary of the major findings of the study and derives key lessons from the experience in non-hierarchical organising.