

STANCE OF NGOs AND VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATIONS IN ACHIEVING THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND THEIR EMPOWERMENT

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INTRODUCTION

It is not new to us, that the existence and acceptance of women in society have always been in threat. From ancient times, the social structure was simply against the freedom of women. Starting from the first day of civilization, women were pulled to be dependent on men and were utilized for the continuation of generations, domestic work, and for the entertainment of men. And more significant was that they were not allowed for education. In the name of the religion, it was declared by the religious and social leaders that taking education by women, reading books, attending social functions were simply sin. This illogical, unlawful and unjust practice of the society continued for a millennium. Many reformers and organizations had raised their voice for ensuring the rights of women since they had felt the necessity of women in society and the sake of the nation.

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In this regard, Swami Vivekananda said *“There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on only one wing”*

This shows that even in the 19th century the social reformers could assess the momentousness of the women and equalized women as another wing of the nation. But a section of people was always there to oppose them and the advancement of the women. Unfortunately, this section of people still exists.

Women's Rights and the protection of women's rights is a global issue now. All over the world along with respective governments and government policies, NGOs (Non Governmental Organization) and Voluntary Organization are also working on this aspect to provide support and to protect the rights of women.

WHAT IS AN NGO AND VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATION?

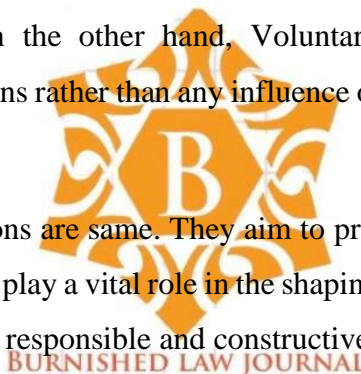
We often make a big mistake by using the voluntary organization as the synonym of NGO. But there are significant differences between these two.

The term NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION or NGO first came into currency in 1945 because of the need for the UN to differentiate in its charter between participation rights for the intergovernmental specialized agencies and those for the international private organization.[1]

But VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATION is a long-ago concept. From the midway of 19th century, the 'voluntarism', as well as Voluntary Organization, prevailed in society.

NGOs typically include non-political and political organizations focused on a particular cause. Though it is said as a non-government organization they are generally government-funded or both combination of government and private funding. On the other hand, Voluntary Organizations are controlled and administered by an association of citizens rather than any influence or funding from the government. They are an entirely self-governing body.

But the motives of both the organizations are same. They aim to provide human being a life with dignity in society and protect their rights. They play a vital role in the shaping and implementation of participatory democracy. Their credibility lies in the responsible and constructive role they play in society.[2]



DID THE WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT ENLIGHTEN THE CANDLE FOR THE NGOs AND VO FOR WOMEN?

The exact period for the uprising of the NGO and VO cannot be clarified. But it is believed that in 18th century the first-ever NGO was formed at the time of ANTI SLAVE movement.[3]

But for the rights of women and the protection of it, the first-ever Women's Rights Organization was founded by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Antony. They began their fight for a universal suffrage movement to the U.S. Beginning in the mid 19th century aside from work being done by the women for broad-based economic and political equality and for social reforms, women sought to change voting laws

to allow them to cast their vote.[4] This women rights organization further paved the way for the entire world to work for women and ensure their right in the society as that of the men.

But in the 19th century India was an underdeveloped, independent and tabooed country. The girls had been suffering from childhood marriage, early widowhood, lack of education, *purdah* system and ample different deprivation. So, it was beyond the expectation of the women in India to think about their own voting right. They lacked their critical and open thinking.

Fortunately, few reformers brought about changes and could uplift a section of women by educating them and inculcating modern ideologies in them.

In the 19th century Raja Rammohan Roy with his team voluntarily had broadened the base of the movement for women and their rights. It is regarded as the first-ever Voluntary Movement or association that stood for the women in India.

It is believed that BHARAT STREE MAHAMANDAL was the first women's organization of India, which was a voluntary organization and unauthorized. It was founded by Sarala Devi who mainly aimed at women education.

But India's first major feminist organization was founded in the early 20th century.

It was Annie Besant, Margaret Cousins, Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy, Subbalakshmi and Sarojini Naidu who founded Women's Indian Association a multiethnic group that aimed to educate women, abolish child marriage, raise the age of sexual consent to sixteen for the women, win female suffrage. It was the first organization in India to boldly connect Indian Women's social and sexual subjugation with patriarchy, poverty and political disenfranchisement.[5]

NEED OF NGO AND VO ALONG WITH THE GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND AGENDAS FOR THE PROTECTION OF RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND THEIR EMPOWERMENT

Every nation has its own policies and commissions for the protection of human rights and separately for Women's rights and their empowerment. Still, there is a requirement for Voluntary organizations and NGOs for the protection of human rights and to provide us a life with dignity in the society when the government or its special policies fail. The inability of the government alone to create just and sustainable societies is persuasively demonstrated throughout history. Prompted by the inadequacies of the state,

citizens across the globe have developed organizations of civil society – NGOs and VO to help address a wide variety of social needs and ensure the protection of rights.[6]

But Governments across the whole world have set up numerous plans, enactments and policies in favor of women rights and their empowerment. Why does the scenario seek help from the NGOs and VO?

NGOs and VO possess some characteristics or can endure to some extent which a government cannot.

Firstly NGO and VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATION can communicate directly with the citizens which is a mere impossible task for the government. Secondly, NGOs and VO provide opportunities to for the self-organization of society. They enable citizens to work together voluntarily to promote social values and civic goals, which is their main aim.[7]

Voluntary Organization reflects the diversity of the society itself. In case of protection of rights of women, they help in protecting their rights and empowering them by promoting changes at the “grassroots”

At the same time NGOs become a spokesperson for the deprived classes, women and attempt to influence Government policies and programs on their behalf.

The programs by the NGOs and VOs are done through campaign and pilot projects to participate in public forums and the formulation of government policy plans.[8]

Basically, NGOs and VOs do the advocacy for the deprived section be it women or poor backward people against the Government to implement policies and make suitable changes.

They actually take up the responsibility of fulfilling moral and social needs that ought to be taken by the government. This is why NGOs and VOs should be given life-and-death heed in society.

ROLE OF SOME EMINENT NGOs AND VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATION WORLDWIDE

There are countless NGOs and VOs supporting women and promoting equality and fairness in wages, women suffrage, in behavior and opportunities have spent years at the forefront of their missions.[9]

WOMEN'S GLOBAL EMPOWERMENT FUND is an active group that assists in empowering underprivileged women in UGANDA by providing opportunities like business training and access to microloans to promote their professional independence. The group's contribution since 2007 have thrived Ugandans, with five women affiliated with WGEF's program running for and winning – political office in 2016.[10]

- WOMEN FOR WOMEN INTERNATIONAL seeks to help displaced women by conflict and oppression in eight foreign territories including Iraq and Rwanda to resist them from beggary and exploitation. They provide education and also job offerings to the graduates. Currently, the group is helping with psychosocial and educational resources to Syrian women of Iraq, intending to reach over 3000 women in the upcoming three years.[11]
- SCHOOL GIRLS UNITE grasps educational discrimination among young women in a developing country. Education is the key for the upliftment of women in society. But in Mali, Africa only 1 girl out of the 4 makes it to 7th grade only, which is an issue of great concern. School Girls Unite subsidizes their education, often at a cost as little as \$75 per child, and encourages the recipients to complete their education.
- EVERY MOTHER COUNTS was founded by Model Christy Turlington Burns, to ensure proper care taken of the mothers of nascent children. In the 21st century also child, delivery is done at residence with the help of a midwife and without any medical guidance. This causes improper treatment of the mothers who need proper nutrition and medication. So she started this organization. The organization has arranged grants that have improved mother mortality rates in Tanzania, Haiti, and India.



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- **SHARE AND CARE FOUNDATION** is supporting women in rural India. It prioritizes education, health care, and gender equality. Their goals have emphasized self-defense training for women as well as financial management skills.

These are just very few NGOs and VOs that are contributing and planning various programs and campaign to promote women empowerment and prevent discrimination globally. Other than these hundreds of NGOs and VOs are working on this aspect. Among which ‘Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom’, ‘Women’s World Summit Foundation’ (WWSF), ‘Equality Now’, ‘Centre for Reproductive Rights’ are mention-worthy.

SOME NGOs AND VOs IN INDIA THAT ARE ACTIVELY WORKING ON THE WOMEN EMPOWERMENT ISSUE

Gender discrimination and violence against women are very common in India.^[12]

Right from a young age, women are made to believe that they are inferior and weak. Girls in rural areas do not get the same priority or opportunity as that of the boy child of the family. The basic rights have hampered itself in the family. To prevent this misogynistic and patriarchal type of practice many voluntary organizations and NGOs in India came up with the government to save the women from being inferior in society. Some glimpses of them are -

v **SNEHALAYA** was established in 1989, in Ahmednagar, Maharashtra. The NGO works for women and children and LGBT communities affected by poverty.

Their special project is to provide sanitary pads, providing space to women to make and sell their art to be self-independent economically.

v **AZAD FOUNDATION** works for the indigent women living in urban India, who experience abusive behavior. In this foundation, women go through a six-month course which includes self-awareness, defense training, sexuality and reproductive rights and more.

v VIMOCHANA is an NGO that was founded in 1979 at Bangalore. This foundation was created by some activists who provide an arena for women's rights. It helps women to get jobs. They also find admission for the children in orphanages who are having low earning mothers and could not provide proper meals or medication.

v MAKAM (Mahila Kissan Adhikar Manch) came up with something totally different from the others. It is a Voluntary Organization that fights for the rights of landless women farmers. It is spread in 24 states of India. The mission of MAKAM is to provide women self-reliant and independence by giving them rights over sustainable livelihood resources like *Land*.^[13]

v CENTRE OF SOCIAL RESEARCH (CSR) is also a Voluntary Organization founded by a group of social activists from JNU in 1983 in New Delhi. It also aims to create a *violence-free, gender-just society* through social research, capacity building and advocacy for the women. It operates on all three levels – local, regional and national, helping to create a non-gender-biased society.

These were just a few renowned one. Many more organizations are working for the protection of women's rights in India by providing them proper education, social status, jobs to gain economic independence. Among them SEWA, AZAD FOUNDATION, CREA, SWANITI are notable and they also aim to be the same as the above.

HELP OF NGOs AND VOs IN PROTECTION OF WOMEN RIGHT IN 'TALIBANI SOCIETY'

The notorious torture of the Taliban for their sexism and violence against women is internationally famous. Their stated motive was to create a “secure environment where the chastity and dignity of women may once again be sacrosanct”.^[14]

Taliban laws for the women provided all means to resist women's empowerment and to advance their status in society.

Afghan women were forced to wear *BURQA* at all times in public, because according to one Taliban spokesman, “in the face of a woman is a source of corruption” for men not related to them.[15]

From the age of 8 they were not allowed to be in direct contact of males other than their close relatives, or in-laws.[16]

Women were not allowed to decorate themselves or wear high heeled shoes as no man should hear a woman’s footsteps lest it excites him.

Women were not allowed to have an education. If any woman wanted education, she had to go for an underground school where the staff, teachers and female students used to attend the school at great risk. They were also not allowed to be treated by a male doctor unless accompanied by a male *chaperon*.

Polygamy and marriages of girls under sixteen years of age with that of a triple aged man were common practices. They had to face public Flogging and Execution for the violations of Taliban laws, which was merciless in nature.[17]

Every worst scenario that a woman can face in her lifetime was supposed to be present there in their so-called laws.

The protest of international agencies carried little weight with TALIBAN authorities, who gave more importance to their own interpretation to ISLAMIC LAW and did not feel bound by UN Code or human rights law, legislations it viewed as an instrument for Western Imperialism.[18]

The then UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros Ghali expressed his concern regarding the status of Afghan women but no such significant changes could be brought to them.

After this international failure to rescue Afghan women and to protect their rights some Voluntary Organization came up to get rid of this treatment on women. Though very few, they came up with an optimistic thought of protecting the rights of Afghan women and to save them from Taliban brutality. Among them **WOMEN FOR AFGHAN WOMEN** acted as a grassroots civil society organization dedicated to protecting and promoting the rights of Afghan women. It was established in 2001 and is now regarded as the largest non-governmental Afghan women’s rights organization in the world. They had made tremendous strides to become free from the grasp of the Taliban laws. Soon after the fall of Taliban

they made a great success with almost 900 Afghan staff presently working tirelessly to empower women and children of Afghanistan.

But still Afghan women are standing in an inferior ground in comparison to the entire globe. Many NGOs and VOs started working for women empowerment in Afghanistan. Some of them are:

- **AFGHAN WOMEN'S MISSION:**

A small group of Americans founded this organization in 2000 as a way of providing medical assistance to Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan. The Afghan Women's Mission focuses its support on efforts led by Afghan women such as clinics, schools, orphanages, agricultural programs and demonstrations. The volunteers of this nonprofit are proud to support the political and humanitarian efforts of another organization on this list, the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA).

- **AFGHAN WOMEN'S NETWORK:**

This institution was opened by a group of women after participating in the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, the Afghan Women's Network aims to provide a platform for the movement of women in Afghanistan. Spouting a presence in Kabul, Herat, Balkh, Kandahar, Bamyan, Paktia, Nangarhar and Kunduz, the network acts as a shield for 125 women's organizations across Afghanistan. The member organizations are aimed with addressing violence against women, the health of children and education for girls.

- **AFGHAN WOMEN WELFARE DEPARTMENT (AWWD):**

Founded in the last year of the Soviet war in Afghanistan in 1989, it started as an antidote to improve the outcomes of Afghan women in refugee camps. Expanding from its original purpose, AWWD now helps Afghan women entrepreneurs in Peshawar. AWWD has imparted education to approximately 13,000 women in education services, vocational training, general health, reproductive health, gender awareness training, human rights and income-generation.

- **REVOLUTIONARY ASSOCIATION OF THE WOMEN OF AFGHANISTAN (RAWA):**

It is known to be the oldest advocacy foundation for women in Afghanistan. A group of highly-educated Afghan women formed the group in 1977 under the leadership of an Afghan woman named Meena. Even after the murder of Meena, RAWA desperately continued to struggle for the rights of women for the democratic and secular values in Afghanistan. In recent time, RAWA publishes magazines to raise awareness of the dilemma of Afghan women and provides education, healthcare and employment opportunities to women in Afghanistan.

In response to the abuse of women in Afghanistan, several non-profits organizations have been made. They keenly focus on empowering women and help them escape the impede of poverty and abuse. Many of these nonprofits are based in Afghanistan and feature Afghan women in a prominent leadership role.[19]

MALALA FUND:

The entire world is known by the name Malala Yoisafzai. She was the first woman rather a young girl who demanded to receive an education in the Taliban society of Pakistan and openly started to attend school. As a result of her protest, she was shot in her head in 2012 but she survived. She did not foot back and went on with her fights and kept on motivating Taliban women throughout the world to receive an education. She is an inspiration for women empowerment.

In 2013, she founded MALALA FUND, which is performing internationally for girl's education. They are driving solutions to barriers to girls' education in Taliban communities. A digital newspaper and publication for girls and young women to share their thoughts, challenges, and accomplishments are also being added to their program.

GENERAL ANALYSIS OF THE ACTIVE ROLE OF NGOs AND VO_s IN INDIA

The role of NGOs and Voluntary Organization is considered to be significant in the fields of the sub-economic welfare of Saharia Tribe. The NGOs sector acted as an agent of socio-economic transformation. Notably, this sector has also influenced the theory and practices of public administration during the last quarter of the current century. In India, according to the seventh five year plan (1985-1990), for the first time, NGOs were given the freedom to plan their own schemes and follow the methodology they thought best to eradicate poverty of scheduled tribes in rural areas. During that period, the Council for the Advancement of People's Action and Rural Technology (CAPART), was formed to seek assistance in a combined approach to rural development through NGOs. CAPART was promoted as an autonomous organization under the union ministry of Rural development. People and NGOs, who were engaged in rural development related activities were the members of the governing body and CARAT. In India, NGOs have played a significant role in the field of tribal development and for achieving their basic human rights.

Nation-building the first flickers of NGO movement for the tribal development was first started in 1871, the Bhil Seva Mandal formed in Gujarat. A.V. Thakkar was the man behind the voluntary agencies of 145 working for tribal welfare. More than 20 NGOs were working in different parts of the country for the cause, under his leadership

This is how the role of NGOs and VOs took a pivotal role in the advancement of society. Henceforth, people who wanted to come forward to raise their voice for the empowerment of women and to contribute to providing them their basic rights got a new platform to be the spokesman in favor of the deprived women.

ANALYSIS OF NGOs AND VOs WORKING FOR EMANCIPATION OF WOMEN IN INDIA

Indian NGOs have been involved in development work of one sort or another for over 100 years and have been important in Indian government programs, as well as being partners for international NGO (INGO) donors since the nation's independence in 1947. As this was before the deregulation of the 1990s, it was a period when the Indian state was more pervasive in people's daily lives and NGOs were under some surveillance. Since then, NGOs have become mainstream actors in development with not only INGOs supporting them, but also bilateral, multilateral, and a broader range of Indian state agencies being

involved in NGO programs. During the mid-1980s, while local Indian NGOs were involved in broader social justice programs for the empowerment of women, at a local level NGO programs focused on income generation and the like for marginalized groups, with an increasing focus on women. SEWA an NGO in Ahmedabad, for example, had been looking at gender justice issues as well as income generation programs for women since the mid-1970s, and by the mid-1980s their model was being picked up by NGOs across India, and the idea of the 'empowerment of women' was gaining currency.

The mid-1990s found the word 'women's empowerment' in the glossary, and all NGOs felt they had to subscribe to it, with whatever they can. The 1990s was also a time when NGO effectiveness was being questioned, after the optimism of the 1980s regarding the value of NGO work. The other debate in the mid-1990s was the focus on women's programs and empowerment, and the important issue of gender implicit in these programs. This was energized by the Beijing women's conference and the move in the debates from women and development (WID) to gender and development (GAD). A key feature of most NGO work in India, and certainly in southern and western India since the mid-1980s, was that the work was mainly with women and the self-help group programs were targeting women. In the 1990s there was also a shift in focus from income generation programs for women, which unfailingly cleared the aspect of high labor low productivity but however, it glimpsed as a new idea for income stability of women. Though this was an improvement on income generation per se, often the NGOs' focus was still on income, education of women and to raise their voice against violence.[20]

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However, the periphery of NGOs is broader than that of Voluntary Organization. But still Voluntary Organization is the *first platform* in India to speak out in favor of women's rights when the NGOs were still in their *germination phase*.

The first unauthorized VO that took active role in empowering women was ARYA MAHILA SABHA, which was founded by Pandita Ramabai.

She founded it in sake of deprived Indian widow, orphan and the blinds during the BRITISH RAJ.

Following the footsteps of Mrs. Ramabai many feminist voluntary organizations came forward.

BANGA MOHILA SAMAJ which started first school of arts for the women in independent India.

AGHORE KAMINI NARI SAMITI in Bengal, the SATARA ABOLONNATI SABHA in Maharashtra, the MAHILA SEWA SAMAJ in Bangalore and the PRAYAS MAHILA SAMAJ in Allahabad started their work on Women empowerment.[21]

Started with handpicked organizations, now India has more than 200 authorized NGOs working on WOMEN RIGHT and countless VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATION.

People are thinking WOMEN RIGHT as the basic HUMAN RIGHTS. They are joining VOs and NGOs to work for the advancement of society by providing assistance to the backward classes be it socially or financially.

The flourishing journey of the feminist organizations or NGOs was not easy. The pre independence scenario for the NGOs was tougher than that of post-independence.

The post-independence set up of NGOs was supported and pushed up by the government as well as Constitutional frameworks of the nation. The enactments regarding divorce, succession property, reservation that had been made in favor of the women enhanced the NGOs and VOs to work in a directed manner and to ensure the rights of women. The vibrant history of Indian NGOs in the 73 years since independence has resulted in a more broad-based sector, but one that still has to contend with problem of autonomy and independence.

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CONCLUSION

Every human being possesses some morality and humanity within himself. This primarily leads to the formation of NGOs and Voluntary Organizations.

Along with this the social structure and customs for the women in the entire world acted as the secondary and principle reason behind the uprising of NGOs and VOs. The feminist organizations felt the urgency to change that connotation about the women. Besides the government and its institutional mechanism and policies for the women, organizations like these had to work so that women can enjoy their social status and it worked out beautifully.

The journey from 'staying behind the *purdah* to flying airplane'; 'from not possessing the critical thinking ability to raise her own voice for her basic rights to conquer the world with intelligence', WOMEN proved

to be another wing of the society. But only with Governmental policies and Constitutional frameworks, it would not be possible for the women to reach this goal.

Hence, we can come to this conclusion that the contribution, support and the endeavor of the NGOs and VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATIONS for the WOMEN EMPOWERMENT helped them to experience “A THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS”!

[1] 12 chapter 5.pdf <https://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/28859/8/08_chapter%203.pdf> accessed 15 October 2020

[2] Ibid

[3] ‘Abolitionism’ (www.wikipedia.org, 18 July 2020) <en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anti-slavery_movement> accessed 15 October 2020

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[5] ‘Women’s Indian Association’ (Encyclopedia.com, 5 September 2019) <<https://www.encyclopedia.com/international/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/womens-indian-association#:~:text=WOMEN%27S%20INDIAN%20ASSOCIATION%201%20Reform%20and%20Early%20>> accessed 15 October 2020

[6] ‘role of NGO in women empowerment’ (GK Today, 17 March 2017) <<https://www.gktoday.in/gk/role-of-ngos-in-women-empowerment>> accessed 15 October 2020

[7] Ibid

[8] Ibid

[9] Jake Rossen, ‘Mental floss’ (mentalfloss.com, 8 March 2018) <<https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/534393/organizations-helping-women-around-world>> accessed 15 October 2020

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[15] 'M. J. THE TALIBAN: ASCENT TO POWER' (2000) <Oxford University Press, ISBN 0-19-579560-1 pp. 108-110.> accessed 16 October 2020

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[18] Wikipedia, 'Taliban treatment of women' (Wikipedia.org, September 2019) <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Taliban_treatment_of_women&action=history> accessed 16 October 2020

[19] Will Sweger, 'Seven non-profits working to help women in Afghanistan' (The Borgen project, 30 September 2016) <<https://borgenproject.org/tag/afghan-women-welfare-department/>> accessed 16 October 2020

[20] Chapter 7.pdf <<https://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/49950/13/chapter%207.pdf>> accessed 16 October 2020

[21] Ibid

