Women District Leader’s Perspectives of Organizational Change in a Rural Women’s Education and Empowerment Program in India: An Appreciative Inquiry

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This dissertation titled
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Abstract

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Women District Leader’s Perspectives of Organizational Change in a Rural Women’s Education and Empowerment Program in India: An Appreciative Inquiry

Director of Dissertation: Emmanuel Jean Francois

The purpose of this study was to explore women district leader’s perceptions of organizational change in a rural women’s education and empowerment program in India, using an appreciative inquiry framework. This is a qualitative case study of the Mahila Samakhya (MS) program, which was initiated to provide non-formal education and empower rural women in India. The program implements activities in 11 states among the 29 states of India. Previous studies have been conducted on the MS program, investigating facets in single states. These studies primarily focused on narratives and experiences of rural women based on inquiries in one of the states of India. These studies did not attempt to highlight the multi-faceted organizational processes, especially organizational change, undertaken in the MS program over the past two decades. As a result, there is limited knowledge regarding the comprehensive organizational practices of the MS women district leaders, key implementation units, working in a Government Organized Non-governmental Organization (GONGO). This study combined the conceptual framework of Appreciative Inquiry with the theoretical framework of organizational change particularly using Senge’s Learning Organization. During the current phase of the organizational change in the MS program, the 5-D model of the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) was used as a conceptual framework for exploring themes of
definition, discovery, dream, design, and destiny. For this study, the MS women district leaders, with five or more years of experience, working in the 11 MS states of India, at the district level, were purposefully chosen as interview participants. These district leaders work at the middle (meso) level of the organization and are positioned at the critical level of implementing initiatives for the GONGO. A qualitative interview protocol was developed using the 5-D model for structured, semi-structured, and unstructured interviewing. Interviews were conducted with 28 district women leaders. The data from the interviews was analyzed using AI’s 5-D framework. This study has a threefold purpose: it provides insights to understand the challenges faced by women in managing a women’s organization, managerial and administrative tasks; furthermore, it indicates disconnect between policies and implementation of organizational change in a GONGO organization; and, it contributes toward our current understanding of the organizational changes emerging in a rural GONGO educational program from a developing country. Recommendations for the MS organization, policy-makers, and future research are also discussed. The study could be used by policymakers to discern the trajectory of the Mahila Samakhya program, that has served as unique model for GONGO.
Dedication

To my ABCD’s

Appreciative and anxious parents ‘ShaShiv’,

Benevolent buddy brother and sister-in-law,

Cohesive cohort of friends and colleagues, and above all,

Dedicated educators!
Acknowledgments

I sincerely thank all, each and every member, of the Mahila Samakhya (MS) Program— who are both activists and educators. I must especially thank the 28 direct participants of this study: women who are radical and unique in their own spheres. I am humbled and honored to have had a brief encounter with each of you. I hope that I may continue to be part of your community of social change agents. A very special thanks to Ms. Geeta Gairola, Ms. A. Padma, Ms. Apexa Bhatt, Ms. Santosh Sharma, MS staff members and several indirect participants of this study who all unconditionally supported my fieldwork.

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<tr>
<td>AE-</td>
<td>Adult Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIE-</td>
<td>Alternative and Innovative Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRP-</td>
<td>Cluster Resource Person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIU-</td>
<td>District Implementation Unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DPC-</td>
<td>District Programme Coordinators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GOI-</td>
<td>Government of India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GONGO-</td>
<td>Government Organized Non-governmental Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JRP-</td>
<td>Junior Resource Person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KGBV-</td>
<td>Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MHRD -</td>
<td>Ministry of Human Resource and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS-</td>
<td>Mahila Samakhya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSK-</td>
<td>Mahila Shikshan Kendra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NPE-</td>
<td>National Policy on Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NPEGEL-</td>
<td>National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NPO-</td>
<td>National Project Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NRG-</td>
<td>National Resource Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRI-</td>
<td>Panchayati Raj Institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPD-</td>
<td>State Programme Directors</td>
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<tr>
<td>SSA-</td>
<td>Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan</td>
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said, on initiating “Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao” – Save Girl Child, Educate Girl Child (campaign to prevent the practice of aborting baby girls in the womb and to educate girls), that, “our heads hang in shame when we hear of instances of crime against women” (The Hindu, 2015, para. 3). This quote highlights not only the escalating crimes against women in India but also the need to educate girls. Since its independence, India has initiated educational programs that have endeavored to reach the marginalized sections of the society. During 1950-60s, rural educational initiatives by the state, for the rural adults, were directed toward achieving total literacy. Political discontent and social movements during 1970s brought forward the need of an inclusive role of state and non-governmental organizations for development and social change. Education became a vehicle of modernizing India, and a new ambitious educational policy merged from the Ministry of Education’s document Challenge of Education: A Policy Perspective (1985). The New Education Policy of 1986 was framed with the dual purpose for rural educational programs - education and social change. Furthermore, the undercurrent of local feministic social movements along with global focus on women’s issues, such as United Nation’s declaration of International Women’s decade 1975-85, made gender equality and empowerment an essential element for educational policies. Comprehensive and pragmatic, these educational programs required funding for sustaining activities for the long term.

Educational policies and programs in India, a handful of them, have been initiated with the assistance of international organizations and internal funding mechanisms. The
New Education Policy of 1986, with the assistance of the Dutch government, paved way for a hybrid form of educational organization. Thus, the emergence of the model program the Mahila Samakhya (MS), in 1989, became a symbol of symbiosis between government and non-governmental organizations (Ramachandran & Jandhyala, 2012; Sharma, 2008). The MS program was launched, as a Government Organized Non-governmental Organization (GONGO), for education and empowerment of rural women in India. The program was launched in 10 districts, of three states, as a pilot project. Later, the non-formal educational program was expanded and is currently being implemented in the 11 states of India. The program “focuses on empowerment of women as the critical precondition for their participation in the education process” (MHRD, 2008, p. 1). The program’s grassroots approach focuses on reaching the rural women from socially and economically marginalized sections of the Indian society.

The hybrid structure of the MS organization was envisioned for rural Indian women’s empowerment and education. The expectation from this hybrid organizational structure was to overcome the educational deficit and at the same time empower rural women to challenge the social root causes of their marginalization. Over the two decades, the MS program has been sustained through international funding from the Dutch and Department for International Development (DFID) of the UK government. The funding mechanism for the MS program changed, for political reasons, and Government of India (GoI) decided to continue the program under the five-years planning system (Ramachandran & Jandhyala, 2012, p. 18). Thus, from 2005-08 onwards (the tenth five-year plan was under implementation) the MS program continuation was not contingent
upon external funding. However, the change also brought forward structural changes to the MS program. These structural changes were introduced to achieve the educational targets set under the five-year planning system – to achieve the state’s educational targets (Ramachandran & Jandhyala, 2012). Currently, the Government of India is facing the challenge of achieving its share of the global mandate of Education for All (EFA). MS, being part of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)\(^1\) or Universalization of Education, has to be part of the government’s multi-pronged strategy to achieve education for all. Within this mandate, the initial conceptual framework of the MS program, education and empowerment of rural women, has witnessed organizational changes from time to time over the last two decades.

The MS program is a women’s GONGO educational program initiated for the empowerment of rural women. The researcher conducted an Appreciative Inquiry to gain perspectives from the MS program’s district leaders on definition, discovery, dream, design, and destiny (Five-D Model) regarding the GONGO educational and empowerment program. AI has generative potential to assist in providing insights into the MS organization’s resilient aspects that acknowledge the trials, tribulations, and triumphs over the past few years. The conceptual framework of AI’s Five-D Model has inherent aspects of creating narratives from ordinary organizational activities revolving around every day administrative and management tasks. The AI conceptual framework assisted

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\(^1\) Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2010 provides children the right to free and compulsory education till completion of elementary education in a neighbourhood school. Further, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) is a flagship programme for achievement of Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE) in a time bound manner, as mandated by 86th amendment to the Constitution of India making free and compulsory Education to the Children of 6-14 years age group, a Fundamental Right (p. 2). (Source- Ministry of Women and Child Development & Government of India (2015). Beti Bachao Beti Padhao. Retrieved from http://wcd.nic.in/BBBPscheme/launch/workshop/SchemeDocument_2220Dec20201.pdf)
in creating an alternative view emerging from the aspirations of the women district leaders. The organizational processes in this context are a *mélange* of bureaucratic (at national and state level) and non-formal structures of grassroots workers (at village level); their knowledge and complex interrelationships of experiences provide a unique case to undertake a study.

The first segment of the study presents the background for an empirical qualitative study. In the second segment, review of literature, theories, and concepts on organizational change, the MS program, the learning organization framework, and appreciative inquiry are discussed. The third segment is the research design, which outlined the procedures for data collection and analysis. The fourth section, presents the findings from the qualitative case study. The fifth and final section concludes the study with the discussion and the recommendations from the study.

**Background of the Study**

**Rural women’s education and empowerment in India.** Education and empowerment for women is a globally recognized priority. The deficits in education of women and girls have triggered a global mandate by United Nations through initiatives such as Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). MDGs (2000) as a strategy for gender, equality, and empowering women acknowledges the gender-based differential status. This global strategy has similar voice of concern as the Cairo Program of Action (1994) and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995). India is one of the member countries to these global action plans and strategies. The advent of such global strategies has given impetus to the Indian government’s already existing array of programs to
enhance gender equality. Historically in India, the gender inequality, entrenched within the societal institutions, has subverted the voices of women (Jain, 2003). The Government of India (GoI) has initiated several programs and policies to transform subjugating social norms within the rural society that perpetuate gender inequality. These programs were envisioned under the Five-Year Planning system that was initiated in 1951 for comprehensive educational strategy (Panda, 2011). The colonial legacy of planned development, along with a socialist agenda, directed the national policies for ensuring equity and equality in development initiatives. The Five-year planning process became a basis for envisaging and implementing policies and programs for reducing the traditional gender imbalances. The key programs and approaches of the adult education programs in India, pre and post-independence, are provided in the Appendix A. Since the initiation of First Five-Plan (1951-1956), the Government of India has been adapting and adjusting policies and programs to specifically reach the marginalized sections of the Indian society, namely, rural women that are excluded from the mainstream development due to issues such as caste, class, and above all their gender. The partial success of the programs initiated under the Five-Year Planning system led to envisaging new gender-based strategies to reach the rural women. Additionally, the Committee on Status of Women in India (CSWI, 1974) emphasized the process of marginalization of women and recommended social change through education (Jain, 2003; Jandhyala, 2012). The Mahila Samakhya (1989) program emerged from the multidimensional demand for enhancing gender equality. Thus, the Mahila Samakhya (MS) program commenced with the mandate for education and empowerment as planned intervention for women’s
equality. This program originated from the compelling linkages between education and empowerment of women (Jain, 2003; Jandhyala, 2012).

Jain (2003) explained that the predominantly entrenched system of patriarchy in India leads to creation of “women’s identity and roles through her (subordinated) relationship to men” (p. 7). Since the initial years, the girls are brought-up in the socially restrictive environment leading to limited options for education. Education is an opportunity reserved for the male members of a family while girls and women are restricted to their household chores. Stifling and subverting women’s voice has been a norm in the patriarchal society in India. Their empowerment becomes an obvious choice for the development agencies since they represent the opportunity gap in the process of holistic development (Grown, Gupta, & Kes, & UN Millennium Project, 2005; Jandhyala, 2012; Narayan, 2005). The plethora of international and national efforts for women’s education and empowerment has brought forward approaches such as Gender and Development (GAD) and Women in Development (WID). The feminist arguments have redefined development in context in women to highlight gender hierarchies and alleviation through voice and inclusion (Narayan, 2005). In India, since 1980, there has been significant attention to adult education and women’s education (Jain, 2003; Panda, 2011).

**Why Invest in Rural Women: Economic Priority Driven Research**

Studies by Chudgar (2009), Dreze and Kingdon (2001), Kambhampati and Pal (2001), and Govinda, Bandyopadhyay, and Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity (CREATE) (2008), indicate the influence of parent’s
literacy on education of children in rural India. Empirical studies have highlighted that rural women can play a significant role in the education of girls (Dreze and Kingdon, 2001; Govinda et al., 2008). Even though there are limited empirical researches to substantiate the claim for the role of adult education on children’s education (Chudgar, 2009). Yet in the Indian context, the role of women in girl’s education is explored as a positive possibility to advocate for gender based strategy for education and development of women (Chudgar, 2008). From economic standpoint, similar studies have been the basis for encouraging and investing in women’s education, especially rural women.

However, the Millennium Development Goals have focused more on girls’ education leading to the reframing of programs like the MS to divert/restructure activities around dropout girls in rural areas. The economic policy driven approach highlights the need to educate women but the long-term benefit of encouraging girl’s education has brought change in programs for education and empowerment of women.

**Empowerment Based Development (Empowerment Focused Programs in India)**

In this section, the definition of empowerment will be discussed along with the use of the term in the implementation of programs for rural women’s education in India. Narayan (2005) illustrates that the vocabulary of empowerment is as diverse as its applicability in the myriad of local contexts. The definition of empowerment, from the perspective of a global organization like the World Bank, has elements of broadness to embrace a global mandate for inclusive action strategies. Accordingly, there are four common elements present in every successful endeavor towards empowerment (Narayan, 2005, p. 4). These elements are “access to information, inclusion and participation,
accountability, and local organizational capacity” (Narayan, 2005, p. 4). These elements, either separately or collectively, play an important role in creating avenues for empowerment of the marginalized communities. The context and conditions for empowerment varies and no specific model is applicable for an intervention. The nature of the issue along with the context is a critical factor in designing and implementing an empowering strategy. Consistent with this perspective, Sharma (2008), framed empowerment in the context of governmental projects. She asserted that the ubiquity of empowerment with “multiple meanings… and translocal\textsuperscript{2} assemblage” (p. 2) has singularly espousing tenets. Furthermore, she delineated empowerment as a “moving target whose meaning is continually redefined through subaltern women’s struggles” (p. 197). Both authors asserted that global and local context of empowerment have uneven implications for individual or collective action (Narayan, 2005; Sharma, 2008). The problem has multiple issues and equally complex array of solutions that change meaning through redefinitions. Additionally, these implications gain multidimensional factors in the context of women’s empowerment - locally as well as globally.

**Education, empowerment, and women.** Narayan (2005) considered the prominent factors for exclusion to be —“voicelessness and powerlessness” (p. 3). In the context of women, these factors are constructed through social mechanisms. The unequal power relations between diverse groups further reduce the women’s access to the elements of empowerment. The “increased education [of women] is associated with empowerment” (Grown et al., 2005, p. 37). Empowerment of women in itself is not a

\textsuperscript{2} The authors define the term as “something that is both situated (but not locked in place)” (p. 2).
standalone approach for ensuring their inclusive participation. The intersection of empowerment with education engages women not just as a single unit of empowerment. Through education, women are better equipped to make empowering choices such as voice in local developmental issues and social bargaining power specifically in the issue of children’s education. Women are able to raise voice against problems, personal and collective matters emerging from social and cultural issues, at village level to resolve them with the support of the community. These myriad problems, ranging from domestic violence to access for education, become common grounds for collective voice by rural women. Some of these social and cultural barriers to education, faced by women and girls, are given in the Appendix B. Furthermore, education of women at the community level acknowledges participation of local stakeholders and their probable extension into local governance. The presence of these factors at the local level is vital to encourage the collective process of empowerment through education. The MS program was selected for this particular study because it has a multifaceted approach to education and empowerment of rural women in India. The global agendas are implemented by this program through locally relevant manifestations.

**Co-creation of empowerment: The bond of sisterhood.** The Indian subcontinent is known for patriarchal and subversive practices toward women and girls (Nozawa, 2012; Sharma, 2008). Dreze³ and Sen⁴ (2013) illustrated, from overwhelming

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³ Jean Drèze, a development economist, has significant background in social justice issues in India particularly related to hunger, famine, gender inequality, child health and education. He is one of the architects behind the flagship program *National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005.*

⁴ Amartya Sen, winner of Nobel Prize in Economics 1998, has extensively criticized the policies of the Government of India and offered his services to reframe policies to achieve gender parity.
statistical evidence that the demographic transition for gender equality achieved by many south Asian countries remain elusive in the context of India. They extrapolate the decadal indicators (census data from three decades drawn from international, national, and non-governmental organizations) such as female mortality, fertility rates, lower school participation rates for girls, and literacy (among many other indicators) to highlight the subjugation of women in India and ardently asserting for the fundamental need to invest in women. The contradiction of Indian growth story has been divulged and unpacked as a wake-up call to the Government of India. At this moment, it is equally important to realize that achieving elusive gender equality through education and empowerment cannot be solely achieved by delving into statistical evidence or by holding government responsible. There are entrenched factors of social injustice within the Indian society that tend to constrict public discussion and hence leading to a status quo situation for women. Another equally critical aspect worth highlighting is that even though Dreze and Sen (2013) have been highly critical of government failures (failure of planned programs and policies) they themselves have assisted Indian Government in envisioning programs and policies. Their assistance reflects the need to understand better the underlining factors for success and failures of these programs for policy purposes. This factor brings back the focus on current programs (currently the MS program is the only GONGO program for rural women’s education and empowerment) to explore and uncover a few critical factors that are impediments in achieving gender equality through planned intervention. This is

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5 Both authors have worked with the previous governments to envision and implement large scale government programs like MNEREGA, RTI, RTE, etc. Ironically, they are critical about the failures of government.
also imperative since the MS program has been working for more than two decades, yet it has been catalytic in partial success towards gender equality. The investment (through external and internal funding mechanisms) has sustained the hybrid GONGO program. However, it has been criticized and questioned for its continued existence (Ramachandran & Jandhyala, 2012). The GONGO programs initiated by the Government of India, such as District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), had a program-cycle and were discontinued after a stipulated duration. In the context of the MS program, no such program-cycle was part of the conceptual documents. The external and internal funding ensured the continuation of the program.

The implementation of the MS program in socially challenging environment has been assisted by its bureaucratic, yet flexible hybrid GONGO structure. This structure has provided space for rural women as well as MS staff to challenge the socially repressive practices such as dowry, domestic violence, child-marriage, etc. (some of the same factors statistically mentioned by Dreze and Sen (2013). The planned MS program envisioned the role of rural women in their own development to overcome historical injustices. This hybrid organization also became the breeding-ground for social activism and reengineering of the rural society by promoting open dialogue between women from different social classes to interact and plan activities for education and empowerment. In the persisting background of social challenges, these women (rural as well as MS staff) have equally participated contesting local repressive patriarchal practices through co-creating an enabling environment. There is a need for studies to highlight the local

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6 The current 12 five-year plan has been recently rolled out with the expectation that MS program will discontinue its activities in some of the program area.
challenges faced by the MS program’s district leaders in implementing initiatives for education and empowerment. Additionally, there is a need to understand the organizational factors/events of education and empowerment that have benefited (or partially furthered) the rural communities. These symbiotic events of co-creation of empowerment reside in pragmatic decision that are collectively and individually taken by rural women and facilitated by the MS staff members. For example, in a case of domestic violence, the rural women can collectively make a decision to either approach the police or resolve the matter at the village level (such instances are contextual and vary in outcomes). In addition, the MS staff members facilitate the process of achieving an amicable solution, which is socially and culturally acceptable. Such symbiotic events are part of the MS staff member’s personal life too and their stories of resilience have been documented in a few official reports. These events require conscientious inquiry to understand not only the success but also the causes for not being able to bring a drastic change within the rural society. Despite everything, these events are still considered as a pragmatic solution to provide immediate relief to the victim rather than becoming a significant event heralding an enduring social change.

**Mahila Samakhya Program: Genesis and Trajectory**

The Mahila Samakhya (meaning education for women’s equality; Mahila-woman, Sam- equal and akhya- voice) program was initiated in 1989 by the Government of India under the Ministry of Human Resource Development (Seenarine, 2004). The Department of School Education and Literacy has been instrumental in developing and

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7 Vis-e-versa, in some cases the rural women have fought and supported the MS staff member in their events of facing social problems.
designing this program as a “women’s agency” (Jandhyala, 2003, p. 3) for the education and empowerment of rural women; particularly from the socially and economically marginalized communities (Kandpal, Baylis, & Arends-Kuenning, 2012; Seenarine, 2004; Sharma, 2008). This radical program (Seenarine, 2004; Sharma, 2008) was developed under the New Education Policy of (1986) “to neutralize the accumulated distortions of the past” (Seenarine, 2004, p. 52). This process-oriented program generates the demand for education among women and girls through social mobilization and developing local leadership (Jandhyala, 2012; Janssens, 2010; Sharma, 2008).

The MS program: Conception and continuation. In 1989, the MS program was launched with the financial assistance from the Dutch Government. Since then the program’s funding has shifted to Five-Year Planning system with the assistance from Department for International Development (DFID) agency of the United Kingdom government. The concept for women’s empowerment and education in form of a concentrated effort, as a program, emerged from the educational policy of Government of India (GoI), namely the National Policy on Education of 1986. Ramachandran (2012), a passionate patron of the MS program along with Srilatha Batliwala, while narrating her personal journey recalls the 40-day “assignment” for the Government of India and the Royal Netherlands Embassy to operationalize the MS program (p. 34). She reflects on the initial skepticism for the proposal and courage to accept the “open mandate” (p. 35). She states the “Education Secretary and his Dutch counterpart expressed their determination to give it a try, despite all the risks” (p. 34). The program drew inspiration for the women’s development programs from Rajasthan and Development of Women and
Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA) program initiated by the Ministry of Rural Development (p. 36-40). The non-negotiable principles of the program were framed in 1987 and ensuing deliberations with the officials of the Education Ministry garnered uncertainty and cynicism. The launch and the success of the program became a personal challenge for few bureaucrats. Ramachandran (2012) reflects of the personal commitment required to ensure the initiation of the program.

…Education Secretary declaring [declared] that GoI will take on the challenge.

He almost took this on as a personal challenge. In the preparatory phase, he toured ceaselessly and attended almost all the district and state level meetings to communicate GoI's commitment towards the programme [sic] (p. 44)

After the initial skepticism the program was launched. However, the notion of empowering women was questioned and the terminology required official elaboration. Ramachandran (2012) describes her initial conceptual notion for the Education for Women’s Equality as a space to “create a cocoon, the Mahila Sangha, where women can peel off layers of fear, their negative self-images, the shame and years of conditioning, so that they can bloom and muster the courage and collective strength” (p. 45).

Ramachandran (2012) encountered persistent challenges from the bureaucrats in the Education Ministry and her strategy included presenting the MS program as a program for “women’s empowerment in a non-threatening way” (p. 60). Her statement reflects the knotty bureaucratic issues that a GONGO program had to face since nascent stages of conception. Another example is the financial management system of the program. The first budget for the MS program was prepared in 1988, and issues related to
ambiguity of tasks and coverage of the program emerged. These issues were rectified for “mismatch between financial patterns and programme [sic] objectives” (p. 59).

The gradual changes have been part of the MS program since its inception. Major changes to the organizational structure were undertaken during the 10th Five-Year Plan from 2002-2007. Gurumurthy and Batliwala (2012) explained the organizational changes for “re-designing it [the MS] for enabling the autonomous functioning of the sanghas and emerging federations, moving in the direction of providing resource support and scaling up the programme to reach new unserved areas” (p. 460). This redesigning for scaling-up of the program also “indicate a departure from the original MS philosophy” (p. 460). The 10th and 11th Five-Year Plans introduced structured approach for scaling-up the program, a departure from the gradual mobilization process for scaling programs. Furthermore, the MS program was involved in “dovetailing of women’s sangha formation” to fulfill the priorities of the government to achieve the international “targets in girl-child education” and “elimination of middle level staff, crucial for democratising the MS perspective … [and] a push for self-governance of sanghas” (p. 460). These steps indicate the departure from the initial concept of the program that aimed at providing a cocoon for the marginalized women. These “organizational constraints” (p. 465) have been discussed in studies to highlight the “explicit juxtaposition of the neo-liberal conceptions of self-rule” (p. 461). Additionally, the challenges, emerging from the 10th and 11th Five-Year Plans, to the women’s empowerment have been discussed at length. Nevertheless, changes to the organizational structure and its impact on the district implementation unit are currently ambiguous.
**Current status of the MS program.** The current status of the Mahila Samakhya for the 2014 is given in the following Table 1. The table provides figures for the MS initiatives and statistics from 2014 report of the Ministry of Human Resource and Development (MHRD).
Table 1

Mahila Samakhya 2014: Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Coverage</th>
<th>Figures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>States</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Districts</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blocks/ mandals (MS covers 36% of the blocks/ mandals in the districts in which it is working.)</td>
<td>679</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Villages</td>
<td>44,446</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanghas (Rural Women’s Groups)</td>
<td>55,402</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sangha membership (Women membership)</td>
<td>1,441,928</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federations (156, almost 48% are autonomous)</td>
<td>325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Savings and credit groups</td>
<td>21,825</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Savings and credit groups members (about 37% of the total sangha membership)</td>
<td>531,239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahila Shikshan Kendras</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In 4 states MS runs 187 KGBVs and in one state there are 802 NPEGEL centers.</td>
<td>2,989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative learning centers</td>
<td>16,864</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kishori sanghas – Adolescent girls group (5,23,701 members)</td>
<td>23,026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nari Adalats – Women’s courts (which have dealt with, cumulatively, 30,410 cases up to now)</td>
<td>481</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A total of 30,090 sangha members have contested panchayati raj elections, and 12,905 (43%) have been elected.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sangha women also find representation on the school management committees: there are 30,377 SMC members who are also sangha members.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS has successfully mobilized marginalized women; nearly 90% of the sangha membership is drawn from the disadvantaged sections of society. SC and ST constitute 56% of the sangha membership at the national level.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although the MS program has been recognized as an empowerment program (Jandhyala, 2003; Kandpal et al., 2012; Sharma, 2008), there have been criticisms based on non-representation of dalit (low caste) women (Seenarine, 2004), difference in approach (Jandhyala, 2012), and the governmentalization of empowerment (Sharma, 2006). Beyond this subaltern rhetoric and politics, there is an essential need to understand the MS program at the district (or meso) level where implementation of organizational change is undertaken for the rural women, for a better life in the existing social structure. These social structures and geographical contours define the daily lives of rural women who work 10 to 12 hours a day with very few opportunities for empowerment.

**Empowerment in the context of the MS program.** The term empowerment has been used and abused in the context of development programs (Sharma, 2008). The manifestation of empowerment is contextual since the ideas and notions differ from society to society, and region to region. The MS program draws its ideology from the local context and also from Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. The Freireian concept of “conscientizacion” has become a key ideology for developing pedagogy for empowering and educational MS program for the marginalized communities (Seenarine, 2004, p. 13; Sharma, 2008, p. 9). The MS program recognized this need for a community-based educational program. The program defined and adapted three concepts as empowering: first, the ability for women to meet their survival needs; second, women’s control over material resources; and third, awareness of their situation and factors leading to subordination (Jandhyala, 2012; Kandpal et al., 2012; Seenarine, 2004). The parameters of the MS program highlight empowerment for women by being able to
negotiate with government authorities for better educational opportunities and basic infrastructure for their community. The program works through women facilitators as a women’s agency with the rural women.

Figure 1. The concept of education and empowerment of the Mahila Samakhya Program. From “Between Questions and Clarity: Education in Mahila Samakhya” by S. Jain and S. Rajagopal in V. Ramachandran & K. Jandhyala (Eds.), Cartographies of empowerment: The story of Mahila Samakhya (p. 189), 2012, New Delhi, India: Zubaan Books. Copyright 2012 by Zubaan Books. Adapted with permission.

Mahila Samakhya has created a broad concept of education and empowerment for rural women and girls. The concept illustrated in Figure 1 specifies broad activities undertaken for education while aiming at empowerment. The MS program has initiated non-formal schools known as Mahila Shikshan Kendras (MSK) or women’s educational
centers in English. These centers are non-formal residential education centers. The MS program runs alternative centers for learning and literacy for weekly and fortnightly educational camps in common village centers to ensure accessibility. The MS’s approach for rural girl’s education includes enrollment in formal schools. Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV), residential schools for dropout girls, are also being run by MS program for the government. The KGBVs were named after Kasturba Gandhi, wife of Mahatma Gandhi, for her patronage to education of girls and women during the pre-independence era of India. The program also facilitated National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL) for girls from disadvantaged sections of the rural society with limited or no access to education. The MS program has initiated these learning centers, camps, and is facilitating in the development of government programs for education with empowerment at its core. The empowerment includes enhancing self-esteem and self-confidence of women and girls through experiential learning. Rural women are encouraged to participate in local governance, as elected officials, for administrative and managerial positions. Lastly, the MS program provides information, knowledge, and skills for equal participation in the developmental processes (Ramachandran & Jandhyala, 2012).

Women district leaders of the MS program. The MS program is a GONGO and follows the guidelines of the charter for hiring people at all levels of the organization. The program encourages the recruitment of women through transparent process of advertising and interviewing women candidates at the state level for administrative and implementation levels. There are opportunities created within the organization for
upward mobility of women working with the organization, through interviewing process open to everyone. The recruitment for each position of the organization is a public and transparent process following the guidelines by the Government of India. These women, and all the staff of the MS program, are not government employees and their hiring is contractual for one year. All employees’ performance is reviewed annually and their contracts are renewed at the state level. The GONGO structure has enabled such an organizational framework for hiring and retaining program staff with opportunities for upward mobility.

One district leader is appointed, in the MS program, for a district and currently the MS program is working in 130 districts. These district leaders have the power as, Drawing and Disbursing Officers (DDO), for managing the financial matters of the MS program. The DDO power is an administrative power granted to select few government officials. This governmental power ensures financial flexibility in the GONGO program. The women district leaders of MS program work closely with the facilitators and are responsible for implementation of the program activities in challenging rural environments (Sharma, 2008). These women leaders could “even overt hostility of the entire community” (Janssens, 2010, p. 976). They are responsible for mobilization of rural women and formation into a group for collective action (Jandhyala, 2003; Janssens, 2010). This is the primary process of conscientizacion towards empowerment requiring relentless efforts for social justice (Janssens, 2010; Sharma, 2008). These facilitators generally belong to the local community and are recommended by the local people to work with MS program. In a study, Sharma (2006) indicates that “[MS] is famous for
attracting ‘abandoned’ women- women whose husbands kick them out, who are divorcees or widows” (p. 71). Berry (2008), explores the social dynamics of such women in context of their narratives of being labeled as a “good women…or…bad women” (p. 4). The financial situation of such “single women” compels them to search for economic stability, which is otherwise a traditionally taboo issue (Berry, 2008, p. 10). Beyond financial stability, the MS offers such women an avenue to embrace their activist cum facilitator’s role and mobilize others toward empowerment. This avenue to “come out of their house” is the first step toward empowerment (Janssens, 2010, p. 976). Additionally, these women working with the MS program are lifelong learners, working as change agents and facilitators while working and planning with the rural women and playing a role of an active mentor in the community. These women’s day-to-day struggles can be personal and informative with common concerns and interests that bind them together. The women facilitators play an essential role in the implementation of these state based programs, yet their personal long-term relationship with the program remains an unexplored aspect. There is a need to understand better these intricate relationships created by the MS program between the woman’s agency and the rural women since, together, they generate an enabling environment for the education and empowerment for everyone. Figure 2 illustrates the organizational structure of the MS program. Further, the figure also indicates the critical level of the District Women Leaders at the implementation level of the program.
Figure 2. The organizational structure of the Mahila Samakhya Program. From the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), Government of India, nd, (http://mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/upload_document/Organogram.pdf) Adapted from the public domain.

Sharma (2008) elaborates upon the role of these “facilitator-activist” (p. 62) facing the paradoxical nature of their work as an activist of the MS program while negotiating the labels of activists and facilitators of a government program. According to
Sharma (2008), these facilitators face the “Catch-22” situation in their work with the program, facing direct threats in the process of challenging the dominant social norms in rural areas (p. 76). The author provides particularized incidences of some women leaders who are facing these intimidations because of their role as an activist. Similar instances of community level altercations involving individual and collective endeavors are present in the literature (Jandhyala, 2003; Janssens, 2010; Sharma, 2008). Sharma (2008), culminates with the statement that the “MS women, both employees and participants, are keenly aware of some of the dangers their work inheres and attempt to confront and negotiate… perils on a daily basis” (p. 199). These instances have a common narrative of collective agency that is a direct function of their personal fortitudes. These women leaders have personal stories of determinations that drive their passion for the MS program activities. The active engagement of these women indicates the need to better understand the perceptions of these district leaders since their role is critical in the implementation process. The interconnectedness of these women district leaders and their inherent role as an activist are especially significant for the MS program. These stories of personal motivation have been indicated in literature, but not explored to expand upon the interconnectedness of facilitators and their personal ties with rural women emanating from the MS program activities.

**Mahila Samakhya program states.** The MS program is currently being implemented in 11 states of India. Table 2 illustrates the six states that top in the lowest literacy rates in India according to the census data from 2011. These six states have the
lowest overall literacy as well as low female literacy rates. Bihar has the lowest literacy rates in India.

Table 2

*Six Mahila Samakhya states from the top 10 Lowest Literate States of India - Ranking per 2011 Census*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Literacy (in %)</th>
<th>Male (in %)</th>
<th>Female (in %)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bihar</td>
<td>61.80</td>
<td>71.20</td>
<td>51.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jharkhand</td>
<td>66.41</td>
<td>76.84</td>
<td>55.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andhra Pradesh</td>
<td>67.02</td>
<td>74.88</td>
<td>59.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uttar Pradesh</td>
<td>67.68</td>
<td>77.28</td>
<td>57.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chhattisgarh</td>
<td>70.28</td>
<td>80.27</td>
<td>60.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>72.19</td>
<td>77.85</td>
<td>66.27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 3 indicates literacy rates and ranking of all the 11 Mahila Samakhya states. The program’s focus is exclusively on women and girls of the marginalized sections. The interesting fact illustrated in the following data is that the program is implemented in the states with the lowest, Bihar at 51 percent, and the highest, Kerala at 92 percent, literacy rates for women across India. Literacy rates are not an indicator of empowerment of the women and girls.
### Table 3

**Literacy in all Mahila Samakhya states - Ranking per 2011 Census**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Literacy (in %)</th>
<th>Male (in %)</th>
<th>Female (in %)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bihar</td>
<td>61.80</td>
<td>71.20</td>
<td>51.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jharkhand</td>
<td>66.41</td>
<td>76.84</td>
<td>55.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telangana*</td>
<td>66.46</td>
<td>74.95</td>
<td>57.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andhra Pradesh*</td>
<td>67.02</td>
<td>74.88</td>
<td>59.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uttar Pradesh</td>
<td>67.68</td>
<td>77.28</td>
<td>57.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chhattisgarh</td>
<td>70.28</td>
<td>80.27</td>
<td>60.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>72.19</td>
<td>77.85</td>
<td>66.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karnataka</td>
<td>75.36</td>
<td>82.47</td>
<td>68.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gujarat</td>
<td>78.03</td>
<td>85.75</td>
<td>69.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uttarakhand</td>
<td>78.82</td>
<td>87.40</td>
<td>70.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerala</td>
<td>94.00</td>
<td>96.11</td>
<td>92.07</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


* Telangana is the 29th state of India and was created in 2014 from Andhra Pradesh. The census data indicates literacy rates from 2011 when the two states were together.

### Problem Statement

Previous studies on the Mahila Samakhya program have focused upon the context of education and empowerment for rural women and girls based on research in one site or one state of India. They have also explored the influence of neoliberal global agendas on the politics of feminism and governability of empowerment through educational
programs. For example: Nozawa (2012) on education, empowerment, and gender in transitional society that was based upon research in Bihar (one state); Kandpal et al. (2012) undertook a qualitative study on investments in child welfare in Uttarakhand (one state); Watanabe (2011) study in Uttar Pradesh (one state) focused on the interpretive policy analysis for enhancing equity in education and empowerment for girls in rural India. Sharma (2006) conducted an ethnographic study on empowering women or institutionalizing women's agency in Uttarakhand (one state). Sharma (2001) research site was Uttar Pradesh (one state) for her study on women's development through empowerment. The aforementioned studies have focused upon the program implementation policies that have shaped the discourse on education and empowerment of rural women and girls. These studies have made a significant contribution to our current understanding of the challenges for empowerment and education of rural women in India. Additionally, the MS program has undertaken internal and external evaluations from time to time (Jandhyala, 2012; MHRD, 2014). These evaluations are also restricted to few states at a given point of time. While the studies and evaluations have contributed to a better understanding of the radical and unique contexts that are part of the implementation process of the MS program, they did not assist in understanding the organizational structure of the MS program that has been functioning as a unique and radical GONGO since 1989.

Further, the existing studies of the MS program did not assist in understanding the gradual organizational changes that have been taking place over the past two decades. The MS program has adhered to its non-negotiable principles (Ramachandran &
Jandhyala, 2012, p. 19). These non-negotiable principles have been the mainstay of the 
program. Nevertheless, the current organizational changes have generated a concern for 
the MS program and its current structure. In a Record of Discussions of the National 
Resource Group Meeting, of Mahila Samakhya held on 26-03-2014, “Ms. Kameshwari 
Jandhyala expressed her concern about merger with SSA [Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan] — 
that it may annihilate the MS programme” (Mahila Samakhya, 2014, p. 2). Jandhyala 
(2012), a core member of the National Resource Group, has been associated with the MS 
program since 1989 and has considerable background in publishing reports and peer 
reviewed articles and books about the MS program (Jandhyala, 2003; Jandhyala, 2012; 
Ramachandran & Jandhyala, 2012). Her concern about the current organizational change 
reflects the threat to the overall organization that has been an autonomous entity. There 
have been changes in the funding agencies and mechanisms. However, the discussions on 
the merger at national level meetings indicate further scrutiny. The same document also 
seeks “consolidation” which entails to “collect and collate state specific practices” since 
“convergence has different meaning for each state” (MHRD, 2014, p. 3). These brief 
statements from the document indicate that there is an urgent need to understand better 
the organizational change process from the perspectives of the district level officials. To 
further contend for the perspective from the district leaders also emerges from the same 
document which highlights the “extent of knowledge that SPDs [State Programme 
Directors] and DPCs [District Programme Co-ordinators] have is far removed from what 
NPO [National Project Office] and NRG [National Resource Group] know” (p. 2).
The women district program leaders of the MS program at are the core of the program structure (see Figure 2 for the Mahila Samakhya organogram). The district level unit is also called District Implementation Unit (DIU) and coordinates the implementation of the program initiatives in 160 districts across India. Previous studies have paid less attention to the women leaders who manage the MS program and play the critical role of administrators and activists. These women have a lifelong commitment toward education and empowerment of rural Indian women. Further, they have a common thread of vertical and lateral trajectories of social justice in personal as well as professional lives. However, no previous study has been conducted with them to comprehend the organizational changes that have taken place and are proposed for the future. District leaders are the critical meso level link between the program’s macro (national) and micro (grassroots) levels. They implement the initiatives using their radical and unique approach for education and empowerment of rural women. The previous studies on the MS program were primarily focused upon the narratives and experiences of the rural women based on study in only one of the states or sites of India. These studies have not attempted to highlight the multi-faceted organizational processes especially change emerging from transitions during 10th, 11th, and 12th Five-Year Planning system (from 2005 to 2016 when MS transition to state funded program). The three Five-Year Plans have brought forward specific guidelines from the government to be undertaken in the MS program that is working in 11 states of India. As a result, there

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8 Some of these women leaders have worked with the MS program since 1989. They work with the program with limited options of transitioning at higher levels of the program. There is no elitism involved for their work with the MS program at the middle level. Further, it is not a career choice since pay scales are very humble.
is a limited knowledge regarding the comprehensive organizational practices of the women district leaders.

A qualitative study that can explore the perspectives of the district leaders has the potential to help understand better the ongoing organizational changes (in their historical context) on enabling the MS program to further its mission to empower rural women in India. The women district leaders are vital part of the women’s agency which ensures the MS program is “about giving women dignity and respect” (MHRD, 2014, p. 2).

**Purpose of the Study**

This study explored the perceptions on organizational change of the women district leaders of the Mahila Samakhya program for non-formal education in India using the 5-D model of the Appreciative Inquiry. The study employed an Appreciative Inquiry (employing Five-D Model) and Senge (1993, 2002, 2006)’s Learning organization, for the MS program- a GONGO, to better understand the perspectives of women district leaders. The inherent aspect of the AI model is integrating individuals within the organization’s change process using generativity (Bushe, 2010; Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987). Generativity is a transformational process, which includes an authentic concern and desire to foster change for the betterment of the future generation (Bushe, & Paranjpey, 2015; Lawford, & Ramey, 2015). In contrast to a deficit-based approach of organizational change, AI has presented space for positive actions and generating collective aspirations. AI has generative potential to assist in providing insights into the MS organization’s resilient aspects that acknowledge the trials, tribulations, and triumphs over the past few years. Furthermore, Senge (2006)’s Learning Organization, a
theoretical framework, lends natural blend to AI, a conceptual framework, with constructs to foster the continuing responsiveness, effectiveness, and efficiency for organizational change. The focus of the study was to understand better the organizational change process, currently undertaken, for the common objective of education and empowerment for women’s equality. The significance of the study lies in the fact that there are many studies conducted with the MS program and rural women; however, these studies do not bring out the organizational change facets of a GONGO program.

The Mahila Samakhya (MS) program, initiated in 1989, is a “large scale” (Ramachandran & Jandhyala, 2012, p. 6), unique and radical case of a Government Organized Non-governmental Organization (GONGO) working for rural women’s education and empowerment in India (Janssens, 2010; Sharma, 2006; Sharma, 2008). The uniqueness of the MS program is inherent in its more than two long decade existence as a GONGO – government organizational structure (“with guiding non-negotiable principles” - Ramachandran, & Jandhyala, 2012, p. 19) designed as a non-governmental organization (NGO). Even though the MS has had success with education and empowerment of rural women, there have been policy-based suggestions to restructure the program toward extensive impact (Jandhayala, 2012; Ramachandran, & Jandhyala, 2012). A need for restructuring and reorganizing emerges from the internal and external evaluation reports along with literature on the MS program (Jandhayala, 2012). These reports indicate further, that the felt need is evident in the current change and restructuring of the MS program at state and district levels. In this particular case, the scope of organizational change (OC) is targeted toward transformative structural change.
OC literature indicates transformative change requires a vision involving “knowledge of their organization: its sources of funds, … and human resources, to mobilize action with an idea” (Pasmore & Woodman, 2007, p. 267). The research gap emerges from our limited understanding of organizational practices of women MS program’s district leaders engaged with a GONGO for rural women’s education and empowerment.

The hybrid GONGO organizational structure has evolved from the flexible funding mechanisms to elaborate evaluation processes to produce evidences of success. In between these funding negotiations, the MS program has maintained its autonomy and adhered to its principle values. Even though, there has been dissatisfaction within the program at different stage of policy-based change, yet the current organizational change has led to ambiguity, distrust, and chaos at the implementation level of the program (Ramachandran & Jandhyala, 2012). No attention has been paid to the regional issues to inform decisions at the national level. There is “deafening silence… any focus on the organizational culture and ethos, a crucial dimension of a programme that consciously positions itself as a gender and social transformatory programme” (Jandhyala, 2012, p. 227). The district leaders working with the program since its inception are translating the ambiguity of the policy as a tool for culminating the program beyond the current Five-Year Plan. In this background, the study examined the MS program, with a conceptual framework of Appreciative Inquiry (AI), to understand the broader context of the organizational change. The organizational practices of the district leaders assist in better understanding the challenges of translating the OC mandate using appreciative inquiry’s Five-D model (Watkins & Mohr, 2001, p. 25). These district leaders further assist in
understanding the challenges faced by women in managing a women’s organization – managerial and administrative tasks, and beyond. Lastly, the study contributes toward our current understanding of the organizational changes emerging in a rural GONGO educational program from a developing country.

Overview of Methodology

This study examined the women’s agency, the MS program – a GONGO, using appreciative inquiry, by combining qualitative methods, to understand better the organizational change processes of the MS program. The study explored the perspectives of the MS program women district leaders regarding organizational change process. Face-to-face interviews (structured, semi-structured, and unstructured), telephonic interviews, and field observations were used for the qualitative study.

Research questions. The following questions were framed to explore the current organizational change undergoing in the Mahila Samakhya program:

Research Question 1: What are the perspectives of the women district leaders on organizational change in the Mahila Samakhya program?

Research Question 2: How do women district leaders identify and appreciate the best of organizational change in their Mahila Samakhya program?

Research Question 3: How do women district leaders envision the organizational transformation of the Mahila Samakhya program?

Research Question 4: What do the district leaders think are the best organizational strategies and resources that can create an ideal condition for the Mahila Samakhya program?
**Research Question 5:** What new structures do they think can be created to sustain the Mahila Samakhya program as a learning organization?

**Data analysis.** During fieldwork, notes were taken and managed in a framework to organize the “voluminous data” to assist with the data analysis (Patton, 2015, p. 534). After transcription and translation, the data was organized for coding using the AI framework. The perceptions of women district leaders, on organizational change were coded, analyzed, and presented to understand better, the outlook towards organizational processes for education and empowerment. The researcher used manual coding for analyzing the data. The data was arranged for “cross-setting pattern” analysis (Patton, 2002, p. 439). Based on 5-D model of AI the taxonomies and patterns were created to understand the sequence for triangulation and summarizing while ensuring credibility, usefulness, and above all avoiding bias (Berg, 2012; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Patton, 2015).

**Assumptions.** The assumption for this study is grounded in two aspects. First, the Mahila Samakhya program is working as a Government Organized Nongovernmental Organization (GONGO) in 11 states of India with the marginalized sections, namely rural women and girls. Second, the women district leaders are critical aspect of the organizational change process undertaken by the Mahila Samakhya program. Third, women district leaders are at the middle level organizational staff, implementing activities at the meso level of the MS program. Last, these women leaders have worked for more than five years at the district level; they may have transitioned on other levels of the program or may have left the program altogether.
Limitations. Patton (2002) affirms that there is “no perfect research design” (p. 223). Marshall and Rossman (2011) caution the researcher to understand the reality of “what the study is and is not” (p. 76). These two notions provide the framework for creating precincts for this study. This study has certain limitations that the researcher would like to acknowledge. Fieldwork for the study was conducted in 11 states of the MS program, as initiated by the Indian government. This qualitative inquiry explores the unique experiences of the participants through a case study, investigating the perspectives of the women district leaders regarding organizational change, using an appreciative inquiry framework. Furthermore, it is important to stress that this study is not an evaluation of the MS program initiatives. The MS program has been evaluated for its impact on empowerment of marginalized rural women. This study offers perspectives based on the AI’s 5-D model to better understand the future strategies as perceived by the women leaders serving in 28 districts across India. Additionally, the study is restricted to an understanding from significantly small population of the actual program area. This study offers petite generalizability (Stake, 1995, p. 7) since the data pertains to limited sample of participants. Stake (2006) emphasizes that because “the reader knows the situations to which the assertions might apply, the responsibility of making generalizations should be more the reader’s than the writer’s” (Stake, 2006, p. 90). The generalizability of the study is based upon the data from 11 states with specific purpose of understanding the hybrid organizational structure created with the sole purpose of education and empowerment of rural women. The study employed a case study for methodology to collect qualitative data. The data relates to the organizational and
personal experiences of women district leaders in their pursuit of empowerment and education. Evidently, these limitations provide the researcher an opportunity to bring in the voices of purposefully chosen unique cases. The MS women district leaders are implementing initiatives for rural women’s education and empowerment in marginalized regions of India. These initiatives are emerging from the global mandates for education for all. This small, yet significant, number of participants provides insights into fundamental organizational facets in the process of local programs that have global resonations.

This study is primarily focused on qualitative study with women. However, it is not a statement against participation of males in either the study or the dissertation process. Additionally, this does not refer to particular disregard for inputs from any male colleagues at any stage of the study process. This assertion emerges from Cindi Katz’s notion of “translocal countertopographies” that implores researchers to secure a meaningful study for achieving “link different places analytically and thereby enhance struggles in the name of common interests” (Katz, 2001, p. 1229-30). Further, the study has inherent elements of assisting the organization regarding its commitment toward empowerment and education of rural women. In this context, a wider network of organizations, social actors, activists, and academics are needed for collaborative creation and dissemination of knowledge. Nagar (2002) illustrates that the collaboration with men can be significant process to perceive “how women’s groups are building alliances with men and the ways in which male research assistants and co-researchers can play a critical role in yielding insights about activism, gender and space, particularly in gender-
segregated social contexts” (p. 185). In a similar light, the researcher would like to end this section with an affirmation that this study did not either ignore or discourage inputs from male members of the organization or the community during any stage of the study.

**Delimitations.** The purpose of this case study is not to seek generalization but to provide perspectives. The case study is delimited to district women leaders from the Mahila Samakhya program implemented in the 130 districts of 11 program states of India. This aspect of the case study emerges from the concept of “quaitain”, referred to as a group category or a factor of commonality (Stake, 2006, p. 6). Quaitain aspect emphasizes that the case studies require a commonality factor between each case while maintaining the complexity of the context. The quaitain or commonality of this case study is restricted to the women district leaders for their critical role in the implementation of the program at the district level. The field of knowledge, applicable to the research inquiry, is drawn from four connected and inter-related bodies of literature. First, empowerment and development; second, the Mahila Samakhya Program (women’s GONGO agency for education and empowerment); third, GONGO organizations in context of rural women’s education and empowerment, and lastly, Appreciative Inquiry (AI) in the context of Organizational Change (OC). The Mahila Samakhya program, a rural women’s organization for education and empowerment, was the research site, for the study, and it provides access to the global and local agendas for education in the developing countries.
**Significance of the Study**

The program’s activities are directed towards rural women. However, the MS staff plays the catalytic link between global mandates and their local manifestations. Furthermore, this study provides perspectives of the women district leaders as they reflect on the vocation of being state sponsored educational activists and administrators of a GONGO. They are the social change agents serving as an extension of government’s policy implementation while negotiating socially challenging hierarchical and patriarchal structures through their resilient spirit.

This study is significant since it has implications for the rural women and their decision-making and bargaining power emanating from non-formal educational programs. The multiple roles of the empowered women extend beyond the rudimentary household chores. Participation of these district leaders in the education and empowerment program activities can have catalytic implications for the girls as well as boys of the local rural communities (Grown et al., 2005; Narayan, 2005, p. 231). Their empowered roles in generating and aiding the village level educational activities are directly correlated to the enabling work of the MS program facilitators. These multiple benefits of empowering women provide a motive to explore hybrid organizational aspects of the MS program. Within this context, the researcher will explore the understandings and representations of small yet significant cases to “preserve the multiple realities” (Stake, 1995, p. 12).

This study contributes to the field of organizational change process in a GONGO for women’s organization. First, the study investigated the hybrid organizational
structures (GONGO) for empowerment and education. Second, a deeper understanding of social issues behind the education deficit of women is critical for the successful implementation of policies designed to address the rural women’s education and empowerment in India. Third, the study was conducted in 11 states of India to provide a comprehensive study of the MS program; currently there are few studies that provide glimpses of few states. However, in the global context there is a need to understand the MS program from the perspective of India. India is a country that is part of the global commitment towards education and empowerment of women. Additionally, India is a country that has participated in international funding programs and initiated its own local programs for human resource development. Finally, the effectiveness of community-based education programs rests on a clear understanding of the determinants of empowerment, especially among rural women; an understanding that we currently lack in our policies. Understanding how the MS program’s district leaders view the organizational change process, is crucial for the successful development of rural women’s education policies.

The MS program is not merely a functional hybrid (GONGO) organization but it has multiple layers of solidarity, reciprocity, collective/intersecting friendships, and overlapping personal interests that provide endurance to women as a collective agency. Women bond beyond work-sites and organizational structure. A non-formal organization of women exists beyond the hierarchies of quasi-governmental hybrid organization. This study discerns the manifestation of global mandates leading to local symbiotic events at the front lines.
The qualitative case study of women’s agency has much to offer for learning about rural women’s struggle for social justice and change. Furthermore, this study assists to better understand the undercurrent of implementing government programs at grassroots level, dynamics of funding for such programs, and social movements inherent to the region. The framework of AI and theoretical lens of organizational change was used for drawing on research in developmental and educational sociology, as well as women’s empowerment to answer the research questions. In the multitude of significance offered above a small and significant aspect is the positionality of the researcher. This will be discussed in the methodology section.

Definition of Key Terms

**Appreciative Inquiry** – Appreciative Inquiry (AI) has an affirmative process imbedded in its framework. The inherent aspect of the AI framework is integrating individuals within the organization’s change process using generativity. In contrast to some deficit-based approach of organizational change, AI has presented space for positive actions and generating collective aspirations. For the purposes of this study, AI provides an objective view that is not about deliberately choosing affirmative or positive voices within the organizations.

**Federations** – Federations have been introduced in the Tenth Five Year Plan to consolidate the village level sanghas. The creation of the federations is part of the exit strategy for the MS program. Village sanghas are mobilized to form federation at the block level. The number of sanghas in a federation is arbitrary. “As the stronger sanghas become more autonomous in their functioning, it is envisaged that they would federate
and that these federations will take on the role of coordination, as well as management of structures” (Ramachandran & Jandhyala, 2012, p. 126). Federations have evolved in all the 11 states of the MS program during 10th and 11th Five Year Plans. These federations are at different stages of evolution and the MS state units, with the implementation unit at district levels, are at the helm of facilitating the process of sustainable structures. The federation structure is visually illustrated in Appendix C.

**Five-Year Planning system** – Five-Year Planning system is a centralized and integrated national approach for the development of the programs. Since the initiation of First Five-Plan (1951-1956), the Government of India has been adapting and adjusting policies and programs to reach the marginalized sections of the Indian society, particularly, rural women that are excluded from the mainstream development due to issues such as caste, class, and above all their gender. The sixth five-year plan (1980-85) was the first to recognize the need to initiate policies with explicit emphasis on gender and development.

**Government Organized Non-governmental Organization (GONGO)** – GONGOs are nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) created by a government, as hybrid institutions with structures that are a combination of government and an NGO. These institutions are “innovative institutional forms (such as NGOs and GONGOs), which are taking on development functions usually associated with the state” (Sharma, 2008, p. 33).

GONGOs have been criticized for apolitical status quo stance especially in international forums (Subramaniam, 1997). They are “an important and growing global trend that deserves more scrutiny: use the practices of democracy to subtly undermine democracy at home” (Naim, 2007, p. 96).
Some literature indicates GONGO as Government operated Non-governmental Organization (Accenture-Stiftung, School of Communication Management, International University, & The Banyan, 2009, p. 3). However, for the purposes of this study the acronym GONGO will be elaborated as Government Organized Non-governmental Organization.

**Learning Organization** – This study employed Senge (2006)’s seminal work on the theory of learning organizations, his widely acclaimed work on the Fifth Discipline. Learning organization, in the backdrop of losing the bigger picture, is orientated towards an open organizational system for the organizational actors to work collectively in the team. Learning organizations integrate and understand the interconnectedness of within the organization.

**Non-formal education** – The broader mandate of the MS program is empowerment and education for rural women and girls. This educational mandate requires “increased participation of women and girls in formal and non-formal education through sustained engagement with them (lifelong learning/ continued education)” (MHRD, 2014, p. 2). This study will refer to non-formal education, which encompasses facilitative educational activities for increasing participation in formal and non-formal educational programs similar to educational goals of the MS program that is primarily facilitative in nature.

**Organizational Change (OC)** – The organizational change encompasses, for the purposes of this study, a set of practices and processes of implementation of strategies in a dynamic real-world organization. OC entails organizational mergers, transformations, governmental or non- governmental policy for implementation. Organizational change is
undertaken in response to internal and external environments. Organizational change is complex and non-linear, involving multiple stakeholders, and complex layers of organizational structure. Lastly, organizational change responds to the human aspect of the organization – internal as well as external.

**Quintain** – The term “quintain” emphasizes that case study require a commonality factor between each case while maintaining complexity in the background (Stake, 2006, p. 6). In this light, conducting a case study requires each context to be understood in depth with its complexity that may involve social, political, and historical factors. “Each case to be studied is a complex entity located in its own situation. It has its special contexts or backgrounds” (Stake, 2006, p. 3). Quintain aspect of a case study highlights the need to understand better the complex nature of social construction.

**Rural women** – Rural women, for the purposes of this study, are the women that participate in the MS program across the 11 states of India. The MS program is currently implemented in few districts of each state and does not necessarily cover all the blocks (smaller units of the districts). Rural women are mobilized to voluntarily participate in the MS program activities. Further, the identification and implementation of the MS program is based upon educational and social indicators that are drawn from the decadal census process of the Government of India. These factors imply that the participation of the rural women is voluntary, but, contingent upon the MS program’s area of implementation.

**Women District Leaders** – The District Implementation Unit (DIU) of the Mahila Samakhya program operates from the district level. The District Program Coordinator
(DPC) is a key person who “co-ordinates and supervises all aspects of the programme at the district level” (MHRD, 2008, p. 16). DPC’s are a critical link between State Office and the grassroots level workers. For the purposes of the study, the term *Women District Leader* was created to include DPC and other stakeholders who have been involved in the MS program as DPC at any point of time. The purposeful sampling requires the District Leader to have more than five years of experience.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

In the previous chapter, an overview of the study was explained to indicate an emerging need to undertake a comprehensive study that can assist in providing a better understanding of the organizational change, using the appreciative inquiry framework. The study is an attempt to understand the perspectives organizational change from the district leader’s vantage position in the Mahila Samakhya program. Secondly, there is also the anticipation to provide few evidences to policy-makers emerging from the voices of the district leaders of the planned governmental programs such as GONGOs.

Organizational Change

Organizations are evolving entities in a globally interconnected world with leaders as “architects of cultures” (Schein, 2010, p. xi). Numerous strategies are being attempted to facilitate organizational change for an efficacious common good. For example, Senge (2006) illustrates “The Learning Organization”, and “Systems Dynamics”. Leaders within an organizational system and structure while guiding and influencing common beliefs and values toward change lead organizations. An organization is “above all social…Its purpose must therefore be to make the strengths of people effective and their weaknesses irrelevant” (Drucker, 1997, p. 5). The social function of an organization is not just limited to organizational efficacy but extends to individual and collective knowledge construction and eventual abilities/efficacies especially in context of the organizational change (Hoy and Miskel, 2013, p. 75).

Organizational change according to Schein (1994) is undertaken so that the organization can be “sustainable, and handle internal and external challenges” (p. 4).
Further, Schein asserts that the informal and formal groups, within an organization, can lead to an efficacious organizational change.

These aspects of organizational change indicate that organizational change is undertaken in response to internal and external environments. Organizational change is complex and non-linear, involving multiple stakeholders, and complex layers of organizational structure. Lastly, organizational change responds to the human aspect of the organization – internal as well as external.

Organizational Change Theories

Organizational theory’s history dates back to the Bible and more specifically to the Old Testament (Burke, 2014). Prominent theories of the organizational change are systems and complexity theories. Systems theory is based on the belief that principles and laws that can be universal across various systems and can be generalized. Complexity theory is concerned with measure of diversity in internal and external factors existing within an organization. Organizational change theories concerning change from within the organization are Stage Theory and Organizational Development Theories. Other organizational theories encompassing change across the organizations are Inter-organizational Relations Theory and Community Coalition Action Theory. These theories indicate organizational change as a process that is undertaken in response to the internal and external factors to ensure that the organizations sustain in the long-term. The following section provides insight into two major theories of the organizational change.

Burke and Litwin causal model. Burke’s (2014) theoretical foundations provide us with a basis to understand the non-linear and chaotic nature of organizational change.
The causal model emerged from practical experience of the authors while working with British Airways (Burke, 2014). The causal model incorporates transformational and transactional dimensions that are borrowed from the related leadership theories. Open systems theory has been the basis for postulating organizational change that involves creating internal and external factors (Burke, 2014, p. 224). The Burke-Litwin Causal Model brings together the individual needs and values closely linked with the motivation. The model also asserts an open communication within the structure of the organization, for developing a two-way feedback system. This feedback is essential since the inherent factors for discord can create passive (latent activism) and adverse reactions (discontinuing associating with the program). These factors have to be considered to create a climate of open organization. The concept is regarding the “way we do things” (Deal & Kennedy as cited by Burke, 2014, p. 232).

The support for the Burke-Litwin model is based upon the assumption that “planned change should follow the flow from top, or external environment, to bottom, or performance” with a premise that they will “carry more causal weight” (Burke, 2014, p. 236). The authors present an argument and highlight the validity based on “selective” studies (Burke, 2014, p. 236). They further demonstrate that the external environment (customer behavior and satisfaction) will benefit the most from organizational change entailing transformational and transactional factors. Then, changes inside the organization are more visible.

In conclusion, the Burke-Litwin model provides transformational and transactional dimensions to the process of organizational change. The Mahila Samakkhya
was conceptualized to redefine the structure of the rural Indian society to enable the incorporation of varied needs of rural women regarding education and empowerment. Through the lens of the Burke-Litwin model, the organizational structure of the MS can be examined to better understand the process of organizational change. However, there a very limited applicability of the Burke-Litwin model is based on the fact that the GONGO organization is already undertaking social change in adverse social environment. The fluidity of the organizational system creates avenues for women empowerment through active involvement of the local communities. The validity aspect of the causal model reflects the immediate change in the external environment. However, the GONGO is involved in social change process (external environment for the MS) that is a gradual process. The MS program as a GONGO organization is uniquely situated rural non-formal program that largely provides autonomous status to its state units and encourages flexibility to the units for managing a bottoms-up approach (especially for undertaking the social and cultural issues). The state and district units can undertake changes according to their specific needs and this change does not have to be applicable to all the states or the district units. The Burke-Litwin model is more applicable for corporate and professionally managed top-down organizations that have specific targets and opportunities for quality/performance enhancements. The non-existence of such factors in the MS program lends limitations in employing the model for the study in its entirety.
Organizational Change, Transformation, and Reframing

A brief discussion on organizational change, transformation, and reframing is presented in this section to argue that the study is better served by employing interchangeable theoretical framework, terminology, and concepts of organizational change, transformation, and reframing. As Boleman and Deal (2013) asserted, it can be “enormously liberating to realize [that] there is always more than one way to respond to any problem or dilemma” (p. 17). The argument for using interchangeable aspect of the organizational change is based on two aspects. First, the literature on these theoretical frameworks indicates an interchangeable usage of concepts and typology. Second, the literature on the Mahila Samakhya program indicates that the organization has undertaken changes over the past two decades but there is no literature on the specific approach to organizational change process. Further, the official documents indicate change within the organization however; they reflect the organizational change as an administrative and planning tool rather than a theoretical framework. Hence, for the purpose of the study the, three theoretical frameworks will be used interchangeably to encompass the nuances of the change process undertaken by the MS program.

Jean-François (2015) offers the life-cycles of nonprofit organization from creation, growth, and possible end or transition. Organizational transformations are undertaken in cases where organizations renew and reconstitute their whole system in “order to start afresh” (p. 345). Further, organizational transformation entails reengineering and restructuring of an existing organization as a means of sustaining or enhancing the lifecycle of an organization. Lastly, organizational transformations are
initiated to assume “new identity” (p. 349). The brief discussion on the organizational transformation indicates that such an initiative is undertaken for a major change in system where the purpose is to reposition the organization.

Another closely related argument for using organizational reframing merges from Boleman and Deal’s (2013) concept of structural frame, human resource frame, and symbolic frame. First, structural frame refers to the “blueprint for formal expectations and exchanges among the internal players” (Boleman & Deal, 2013, p. 46). Second, human resource frame is based on the assumption that “organizations exist to serve human needs… people and organizations need each other” (Boleman & Deal, 2013, p. 115). Third, symbolic frame asserts that organizations are “interwoven patterns of beliefs, values, practices, and artifacts that defines for members who they are and how they are to do things” (Boleman & Deal, 2013, p. 243). These three conceptual frameworks highlight the need to embrace the organizational reframing as a comprehensive process that encapsulates the multiple levels of complexity existing within the organization.

In case of the Mahila Samakhya program the organizational changes are part of enhancing the outcomes, that is achieving targets for education and empowerment of rural women. The changes are planned and implemented without renegotiating the original principles of the organization that were conceptualized in 1988-89. The planned changes in the MS program echo Burke’s (2014) definition of organizational change, where in “change is systemic… as a result of a previous diagnosis and in collaboration with the relevant people within the organization” (p. 59). Further, the arguments from Jean-François (2015) and Boleman and Deal’s (2013) provide a holistic theoretical
frameworks that can be approached to incorporate various definitions and conceptual frameworks to understand better the organizational change being undertaken by the MS program.

**Studies on Organizational Change**

An empirical research by Battilana (2011) illustrates that “top managers, evidence shows, are not uniformly open-minded about it or about divergent organizational change in particular” (p. 822). Additionally, she asserts that there is a need to “distinguish between not just two social statuses, that is, low and high, but between three: low, middle, and high” (p. 831). Lastly, the authors discussed a “more fine-grained account of the influence of the organizational context in which actors evolve” (p. 831).

In a recent study, the scholarly approach to organizational change has been problematized and has argued for “actors’ sensemaking about organizational change” (Lockett, Currie, Finn, Martin, & Waring, 2014, p. 1103). This study employs Bourdieu (1977)’s theory of practice in context of social position, capital endowments and dispositions, of the change actors in contextualizing their approach to organizational change. The authors argue that organizational actors “work through a process of social construction” for sense making. Based on their study the authors argue, “considering the influence of individual actors’ unique social positions on sensemaking, we suggest that actors may be able to sensemake about new organizational schemata in a wider range of ways than has been accounted for in the existing literature” (Lockett et al., 2014, p. 1122). This study illustrates that the sensemaking of actors varies according to their social positions within the organization. The elite actor’s “existing organizational
schemata are more likely to align with their profession-centric disposition” (p. 1125). In other words, these elite actors align their sensemaking with the organization and are less disposed toward an authentic change. In contrast, actors not at the apex hierarchy of the organization are inclined toward change. Further, they believe, “change is possible because they will be able to influence the change outcome” (p. 1125). This study provides empirical evidence that actors at mid-level of the organization would be predisposed toward change. The power differentials in actor’s position are an aspect that has been explored in context of healthcare setting. This study indicates further research in different settings for generalizability.

These studies illustrate that organizational change literature is an evolving field that draws from various setting to explain the context of change process from the perspective of the change agents.

**Appreciative Inquiry Studies**

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) evolved to by-pass the conventional deficit approach adopted by the corporate organizations for problem solving and fixing the organizational conundrums. Recently, AI has been employed by researchers and organizations for program evaluation (McNamee, 2003), higher education (Priest, Kaufman, Brunton, & Seibel, 2013), and health management (Sharma, Ramani, Mavalankar, Kanguru, & Hussein, 2015). These myriad initiatives indicate that the positive inquiry approach of AI has been adapted in myriad organizational forms in many parts across the globe. Some of these studies and key-findings are discussed in this section to better understand the facets of AI.
**Appreciative Inquiry studies with leaders.** The roots of social constructivist in appreciative inquiry contribute to emerging discussion on leadership practices within organizations. Schall, Ospina, Godsoe, and Dodge (2004) asserted that “our understanding of leadership is socially constructed over time, as individuals interact with one another” (p. 148). This phenomenon of leadership is co-constructed as leaders develop perspectives from their work collectively (Schall et al., 2004). In this section, AI studies will be with specific focus on leadership projects.

Priest et al. (2013) discussed the leadership of faculty members in a study for higher educational institution where AI has been implemented as a planning and organizational development strategy. The researchers gathered qualitative data using World Café, an interactive methodology for facilitating group discussions, for open conversations and participant observation. The 5-D model guided the research questions and probes for the studying the ongoing AI process at Virginia Tech. The project was at design stage and the researchers were able to blend and pair the discovery and dream stages of the AI. The impact of the AI implementation is at a nascent stage and the study is an on-going process. However, the researchers have reported the changed behavior in the collaborative approach of the educational leaders. They further asserted, “leadership educators are uniquely positioned to bridge theory and practice through the use of Ai models… and also influence positive change in our organizations” (Priest et al., 2013, p. 28).

**Appreciative Inquiry studies with women leaders.** Appreciative inquiry has been increasingly introduced in community development projects for engaging
community members in developing countries. Mysore Resettlement and Development Agency (MYRADA), a pioneering organization for participatory approach, introduced AI in 1999-2000 in Karnataka, India. The staff of the MYRADA received resources with the assistance of United Kingdom’s Department for International Development (DFID) and Canada’s International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD). Singh, Patkar, Ramesh, and Babu (2011) conducted a qualitative study with MYRADA particularly focusing on women’s groups. MYRADA combined the approach of social capital and AI for organizing marginalized women’s groups. The qualitative study seeks to understand the aspects of social capital and AI for community based organizations. The study illustrates that long-term implementation of AI complements and aligns with the social capital (SC) approach for sustainable development. Further, the study underlines the critical value of participatory approach of the AI and SC, which enhances the mobility of marginalized women to access economic and empowering opportunities. These opportunities have assisted the women to emerge as leaders within their community and assess their development over a period of time. This study demonstrates the generative aspect of AI that has encouraged these rural women, with limited access to education, to manage their Self-help Affinity Groups (SAGs) for various community development projects. Using AI through oral narratives, reflections, and inter-personal communication, these women are able to trace their course of action. The viability of AI, as a long-term strategy in combination with other participatory approaches, for a women’s community level organization indicates possibility of implementing and expanding the framework to
similar initiatives. Lastly, this study highlights that AI’s conceptual framework is multi-faceted and can transition from corporate organizations to rural development projects.

Another study by Belden-Charles (2014) elucidated the AI’s implementation for the women’s leadership initiative for over two decades. The auto-ethnographic study was conducted in response to understand the underpinnings of a learning community for women leaders. The study again illustrates the strategies of dialogue, story or oral narration, self-organizing to emphasize the generative aspects of AI. Belden-Charles (2014) shared the emergence and presence of “challenges with inclusion, power and control between founders and newly emerging community leaders” (p. 37). In contrast to conventional problem-solving strategies, the Women’s Leadership Community (WLC) employed AI’s positive potential and aligned with the feministic-lens for creating their organizational identity. Additionally, these women created the language and practices for describing their leadership practices while following an iterative practice and dialogue. Belden-Charles (2014) described five practices, namely making room for one another, engaging Hestia energy, weaving webs of connection, walking the rainbow path, and sustaining the energy ball (p. 37-38). The study demonstrates that the power dynamics and organizational challenges, generating negative environment, could be resolved by positive form of inquiry (p. 39). Further, AI’s framework created the generative space for open dialogues to discuss the emerging issues and disentangling the recurring dynamics within the WLC. She asserted, “Dealing with differences can be difficult in volunteer or network organization… facing into their tension points using appreciative and relational practices helps group create organization vitality and sustain over time” (p. 39). This
study is critical in understanding the inherent nature of organization that creates space for challenges and dynamics, which can gradually escalate as the organization evolves. However, AI’s generative facet could assist to open dialogue about issues and resolving them with positive inquiry.

These studies highlight that AI has an inherent generative potential that has particularly assisted the organizations, which have chosen to employ unconventional organizational practices for women leaders. In the current background to study leadership as a social construct, an “appreciative inquiry emerges as one of the most appropriate methodological frameworks to pursue empirical work on leadership” (Schall et al., 2004, p. 148). Further, these longitudinal studies illustrate the organizational change and practices of organizations that have purposefully chosen AI after having deliberations and comparing emerging theoretical and conceptual frameworks. Both studies discuss the rationality of the organization for choosing AI and the success with women leaders. Both organizations, MYRADA and WLC have actively introduced and employed participatory and action research projects. Their experience with the AI framework indicates further possibilities for the women leaders.

**Studies on Mahila Samakhya Program**

The Mahila Samakhya (meaning education for women’s equality; Mahila-woman, Sam-equal and akhya-voice) program was initiated in 1989 by the Government of India, under the Ministry of Human Resource Development (Seenarine, 2004). The Department of School Education and Literacy has been instrumental in developing and designing this program as a “women’s agency” (Jandhyala, 2003, p. 3) for the education
and empowerment of rural women, particularly those from the socially and economically marginalized communities (Kandpal et al., 2012; Seenarine, 2004; Sharma, 2008). This radical program (Seenarine, 2004; Sharma, 2008) and a “unique state initiative” (Subramaniam, 2006, p. 73) were developed under the New Education Policy of 1986 “to neutralize the accumulated distortions of the past” (Seenarine, 2004, p. 52). This process-oriented program generates the demand for education among women and girls through social mobilization and developing local leadership (Jandhyala, 2012; Janssens, 2010; Sharma, 2008).

The facilitators of the MS program are at the core of the program; responsible for implementation of the program activities in challenging rural environments (Sharma, 2008; Subramaniam, 2006) and “even [face] overt hostility of the entire community” (Janssens, 2010, p. 976). They are responsible for mobilization of rural women and formation into a group for collective action (Jandhyala, 2003; Janssens, 2010; Subramaniam, 2006). This is the primary process of conscientización towards empowerment which requires relentless efforts for social justice (Janssens, 2010; Sharma, 2008). These facilitators generally belong to the local community and are recommended by the local people to work with the MS program. Additionally, these women working with the MS program are lifelong learners, working as change agents and facilitators while working and planning with the rural women and playing a role of an active mentor in the community.

Sharma (2008) elaborated the role of these “facilitator-activist” (p. 62) facing the paradoxical nature of their work as an activist of the MS program while negotiating the
labels of activists and facilitators of a government program. According to Sharma (2008), these facilitators face the “Catch-22” situation in their work with the program, facing direct threats in the process of challenging the dominant social norms in rural areas (p. 76). The author provides particularized incidences of some facilitators who are facing these intimidations because of their role as an activist. Similar instances of community level altercations involving individual and collective endeavors are present in the literature (Jandhyala, 2003; Janssens, 2010; Sharma, 2008; Subramaniam, 2006). Sharma (2008), culminated with the statement that the “MS women, both employees and participants, are keenly aware of some of the dangers their work inheres and attempt to confront and negotiate… perils on a daily basis” (p. 199). The MS program members have reported instances of direct threat to life, police cases, and harassment in internal and external studies as well as evaluations (Sharma, 2008). In some cases, initiating groups at the village level is not an acceptable activity for rural women. The “facilitator has to overcome considerable mistrust on the side of the women” (Janssens, 2010, p. 976). These instances have a common narrative of collective agency that is a direct function of their personal fortitudes. These facilitators and rural women have personal stories of collective determinations that drive their passion for the MS program as an organization. The active engagement of these women indicates the need to understand better the organizational processes that bring together women for education and empowerment.

Subramaniam (2006) elaborated further on the role of rural women facilitators. The transitional leadership of rural women facilitators is illustrated through the process of
creating and sustaining sanghas (grassroots organizations). Subramaniam (2006) assisted us to comprehend the flexible and intricate role of the facilitators between the state and the village, however, there is a need to expand and elaborate further on the role of the facilitator through the organizational processes. The facilitator’s role can be medium and intermediary link between the sangha and the MS program; as such facilitator is the medium for translating the global mandates into local actions. Facilitators, as catalytic agent, link the sites to the policy and thus require further research to understand the dimensions of global and local policy level implementation. Another aspect of the organizational process is that the facilitator can work as a conduit because of the hybrid structure of the MS program. Subramaniam (2006) explained the mobilization process of the MS program while locating her study in one state. However, MS program has evolved over the past two decades with individual approach at state levels (MS program is being implemented in 11 states). All the past studies conducted with the MS program including Subramaniam’s have the similar approach of conducting research in one state. This approach is critiqued by Tobin (2014) on the basis of providing a limited insight into a culture in terms of time and location. Tobin’s criticism provides a ground for exploring a multi-site study for a diachronic study that explores the change witnessed by these catalytic agents. These women district leaders and their stories, of interconnected experiences, has facilitated the process of empowerment and also assisted in co-creation of empowerment (more is discussed under methodology section).

The interconnectedness of these women and their inherent role as an activist are especially significant for the MS program. These stories of personal motivation have
been indicated in literature, but not explored to expand upon to include the interconnectedness of facilitators and their personal ties with rural women emanating from the MS program as an organization. While studies have examined the impact of the educational program in the rural communities, there has been less exploration about the impact of the program on the lives of the women that work for the program. This paper offers empirical evidence on this women's agency and their role within the organization created with the sole purpose of education and empowerment of rural women in India.

Resilient and radical, the Mahila Samakhya (MS) program has inherent strength of collaborative activists steering social change in challenging environments (Ramachandran & Jandhyala, 2012; Sharma, 2008). The MS program has witnessed its share of organizational challenges in terms of shifts in funding, policy led structural changes, and internal organizational problems (Jandhyala, 2012; Ramachandran & Jandhyala, 2012). These issues have emerged at various stages of the program implementation over the past few decades. Furthermore, these issues have been part of institutional knowledge and discussed at national and state levels as part of evaluations (Jandhyala, 2012). At the same time, the MS program has been facilitated by UNESCO, and its various officials have been recognized for their “localized processes” for social transformation (Ramachandran & Jandhyala, 2012, p. 29; Sharma, 2008). However, these triumphs remain unseen and unknown within the MS program since “departmentalized” restricts cross-sectorial learnings even within the government led initiatives working with similar mandates (Ramachandran & Jandhyala, 2012, p. 29). Therefore, we can say that the MS program has a legacy that requires an inquiry that would provide insights into
resilient organizational aspects. Further, these aspects indicate a need to understand better the “life-giving forces” within the organization (Watkins & Mohr, 2001, p. 198). These nurturing forces, existing within the organization, have influenced (positively) and sustained the organization over the last two decades.

Table 4 contains a list of documents, reports, books, and thesis, indicates the research conducted with the Mahila Samakhya Program and their respective sites, one state or site. This list has been compiled to provide an overview of studies conducted in past ten years. These studies will be further discussed to highlight the need for conducting a comprehensive study that can provide insight into collective legacy of the MS program, which gains its strength from the radical and unique organizational structure.
Table 4

Documents, Books, and Thesis: Research conducted with the Mahila Samakhya Program and their respective sites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of the document</th>
<th>Author - year</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>State/ Region</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women's development through &quot;empowerment&quot;: The gender of the state and the state of gender in India</td>
<td>Sharma, Aradhana. Stanford University, 2001</td>
<td>Thesis</td>
<td>Uttar Pradesh</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teaching women empowerment: Governmentality in postcolonial India</td>
<td>Rishi, Pooja. University of Delaware, 2009</td>
<td>Thesis</td>
<td>India</td>
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<tr>
<td>Empowering women or institutionalizing women's agency: An ethnography of the Mahila Samakhaya education program for women in India</td>
<td>Sharma, Shubhra. The University of Texas at Austin, 2006.</td>
<td>Thesis</td>
<td>Banda district of Uttar Pradesh.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Three essays on investments in child welfare in India</td>
<td>Kandpal, Eeshani. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2011</td>
<td>Thesis</td>
<td>Uttarakhand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpretive Policy Analysis on Enhancing Education Equity and Empowerment for Girls in Rural India</td>
<td>Watanabe, Miku. Arizona State University, 2011.</td>
<td>Thesis</td>
<td>Uttar Pradesh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Empowerment at the Local Level (WELL) - a study undertaken in the state of Uttarakhand</td>
<td>Dighe, A. (2008)</td>
<td>Report</td>
<td>Uttarakhand</td>
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Table 4 continued

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Study Title</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The power of women's organizing: Gender, caste, and class in India.</td>
<td>Sharma, A. (2008)</td>
<td>Book</td>
<td>Uttar Pradesh</td>
</tr>
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Note: Table 4 illustrates the studies undertaken over the past few years with the Mahila Samakhya Program.

Ramachandran (1999) presented a critical review of adult education policies of government of India since independence. The author is a prominent educationist from India and has done extensive work with government and grassroots organizations regarding rural education. This article is a reflection on the non-partisan role of the government that has believed in quick fixes and the magic wand approach to solve issues of adult education. The era after independence saw investment in infrastructure and the author provided evidence from the Education Commission report to highlight the lack of policies during 50s and 60s. The era of emergency from 1975 to 78 brought in the voluntary organizations that were actively involved at the grassroots level and dedicated for adult education. The initiatives such as National Adult Education Programme (NEPA) and Total Literacy Campaign (TLC) brought in shift in vocabulary of the government-
from education to literacy. The success of the grassroots campaigns was never realized into a lifelong learning opportunity. The author indicates the blame on “inherent structural deficiencies” (p. 877) and “quick-fix approach” through various campaigns (p. 880) as a reason for the missed opportunities for adult education. The article accentuates the six decade long failure of Government of India.

Seenarine’s (2004) book is based on qualitative research with the Mahila Samakhya program working with *dalit* (untouchable) women in India. The main objective was to provide insights into the lives of these subalern women who have not been focus of research, to understand their own perception. The study is based on ethnographic interviews (structured and open-ended) of 33 *dalit* women and girls who volunteered for the research. The need for this study arose from the fact that these women face caste discrimination, poverty, and issues related to gender; three factors that lead them to be the “triply oppressed” (p. 2). Furthermore, the author asserts that the prominent discourse on women empowerment doesn’t provide a space for caste empowerment in context of *dalit* women. The feminist literature and the multicultural education discourse are the two main theoretical framework applied by the author. The subalern studies are also illustrated by the author to verbalize through the female *dalit’s* agency the need for curriculum for the *dalits*. The author has compared the studies from US educational system to incorporate multicultural curriculum for ethnic minorities and provided recommendations for the Indian government for the *dalit* minorities.

Jain (2003) in a background paper, prepared for the UNSCEO, comprehends the confusion between grassroots reality and the theoretical framework of empowerment
applied for planned interventions. The author illustrates through three initiatives the need for women’s empowerment programs. One of these programs is Mahila Samakhya that generates the need for women’s and girls’ education at the grassroots level. The study is guided with three questions regarding the interpretation, implementation and future learning that can be drawn from these initiatives. The study provides historical and societal context for these initiatives. According to the author, the curriculum, teaching materials, and the pedagogy are critical for the empowerment through education. The spaces created by these programs allow equitable participation of marginalized community in the mainstream development discourse. The theoretical issues in implementing these programs are more related to funders and the state actors. The need is to differentiate between using the framework of empowerment as an ‘objective’ or the ‘strategy’.

Kandpal et al. (2012) in their quantitative study using survey of 487 rural women, regarding female empowerment, child welfare, and social networks. Further, the article is based on primary data from rural north India specifically in the Mahila Samakhya program area of Uttarakhand (9th Himalayan State in northern India). Restricted snowball sampling provided data to examine the significance in empowerment of treated and untreated women. The objective of the study was to understand the programs impact on women’s mobility, political participation, and employment through empowerment program. The study used Propensity Score Matching (PSM) and an instrumental variable approach. Furthermore, the study found significant spillover effects of the program activities on non-participant women. This study concentrates on analyzing the
community-level interventions rather than impact on individuals. The researchers disentangled the mechanisms of the program to better understand and measure the outcomes that are generally “difficult to measure” (p. 5). The researcher concluded that the Mahila Samkhya program empowers women through direct factors and indirect ones such as increasing mobility of women. The study by Kandpal et al. (2012) illustrated that the MS program has made a significant contribution by increasing mobility and bargaining power of rural women, a critical step toward their participation in the political and social systems, and further to believe in their own capabilities. This study is significant since it measures empowerment by using variables that “represent a wide variety of domains in which a program like Mahila Samakhya can empower women: economic, social, and within the household” (p. 4). However, the study was conducted in one state with a sample size of 487 rural women. The MS program works in 11 states (130 districts) with almost 14,41,928 rural women. Additionally, the MS program has been working since 1989. These factors indicate that there is a need to conduct a study a study that provides insight into the organization of the program.

Janssens, (2010) study was based on a quantitative study to evaluate the impact of Mahila Samakhya program on education and empowerment of rural women. The author utilized the data form 2000 households from 74 villages, to analyze the trust and cooperation in the community based development approach program. A quasi-experimental survey design was created for the study with a stratified clustered sampling methodology for program blocks and non-program blocks for comparison. The empirical analysis investigates the level of social capital through variables of individual and
community characteristics in both the sites. Furthermore, the researcher applies propensity score matching (PSM) techniques for matching the observed variables with a prior knowledge that the unobserved variables may be left out and create a bias. According to author, the spillover and externalities of the program emerge from the trust and cooperation of the women. The author credits the program’s approach of “slow approach” to build trust and confidence in the rural villages (p. 986).

Sharma’s (2006) study was primarily drawn from the ethnographic research for a dissertation by the author that led to its publication in a book form (provided below). The identity of the Mahila Samakhya program as a para-state government-organized non-governmental organization (GONGO) in contrast to an NGO is explored by the author. The study emerged from the field experience of the author wherein she witnessed the different forms of introducing the Mahila Samakhya program by the staff of the organization. The theoretical framework of neoliberalism by Michel Foucault was utilized by the author to explore the dual nature adopted by the staff. This was undertaken to explore the concept of “governmentality” (p. 62). The author has the premise that the neoliberal organizations such as IMF and the World Bank are trying to reframe the state’s agenda through investments in the para-state organizations. The intention is to divert the attention from state sponsored care for citizens to empowered marginalized subjects that would undertake their own development. Further, the “mobile positioning” of the staff ensures less liabilities on the state regarding the payments for services to the staff (p. 71). The neoliberal states prefer economic growth and less liability in terms of development for the marginalized and quasi-state structures such as MS provides them opportunity to
undertake austerity measures for reducing financial burden. They are also able to maintain the developmental role of the state.

Sharma’s (2008) study is based on an ethnographic study of Mahila Samkhaya program that raises its concerns regarding the politics of development through the lens of neoliberalism and notions/politics of empowerment. This study examined how empowerment is conceptualized at grassroots level through an array of activity through a government agency that often challenges the local governance through collectives of the marginalized women. The author did not evaluate the program. However, she is bringing out the theoretical nuances behind the everyday actions and interactions in the process of empowerment. The basic argument is that the local grassroots actions and activities create political activism at the local level for the redistribution of resources that are not an agenda for the neoliberalism. The role of state in context of citizenship is analyzed through daily interactions between citizens and the local officials to understand the anthropological nature of government. The theoretical framework of social justice and equality are examined from the perspective of “historically positioned actors/women” in their fight for survival without being fatalist or subjugated (p. xxiv).

Unterhalter and Dutt (2001) in their article provide a comparative study of two complementary organizations, namely the Mahila Samakhya and District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), from one state in India. The authors examined the complementary nature of these programs in providing social justice and education to women through the framework of empowerment. The lens of democratization, gender equity, and women’s empowerment are utilized to analyze the state sponsored equitable
delivery of education. The comparisons are drawn on the basis of working goals of the organizations along with their evolution over the decades. The MS program has social justice at its core and DPEP has education. Together these organizations have tenets for social change through curriculum and pedagogy. This study is important for me since it provides a lens for comparison that promotes compatibility rather than competition.

Jandhyala, (2003) reflected in her paper on evaluation reports of Mahila Samakhya program conducted at national and international level over the past few decades. The author aimed to highlight the complexity of the organizational structure of the MS program that has evolved over the years. The case studies from different regions have been provided to emphasize the organizational challenges faced by the program staff. These case studies also reflect upon the various program components and their existence within the program structure even though they do not necessarily reflect upon the agenda for education. The program strategies and interventions reflect the felt need and the demands generated from community activities. The diverse array of activities such as health, inter-loaning, livelihood, and local governance are just few of the issues that undertaken by the project. These case studies are an interesting way to present the picture behind the technical evaluation of the program. This paper also illustrates the underpinnings of the empowerment and the education that are emerging in the background of patriarchal constraints.

Jandhyala, (2012) illustrated the complexity of the program evaluation of Mahila Samakhya over the past two decades. The author ruminated upon the collective agency and its organizational structure that evolves from the grassroots level. Hence, there are
more than often no targets and indicators to evaluate the program within the parameters of the funding agencies. The intangible nature of the MS activities and interventions creates paradox in light of the increasing demand of the funding agencies to quantify the impact. The author provides insight into the donor and funders requirements that mismatch the realities faced by the grassroots staff in implementing the abstract ideas for empowerment. The program guidelines are not vague, however they do not define since the existing condition of one place may differ from another program area. Further, the program is intentionally not created for top-down interventions. Hence, the demand generates from the community and is addressed by program staff. This creates flexibility for the staff to work according to the need of the community but at the same time does not provide framework for tangible evolution of each and every activity. The author narrates from her personal experience the issues with evaluators who appreciate the program but at the same time discredit it based on lack of management information system to document each and every activity of the program. This study is noteworthy since it provides insights into the complexity of evaluating a program like the MS program which facilitates grassroots initiatives by rural women for education and empowerment. Secondly, the study also illustrates the magnitude of the organizational structure of the MS program, which has been subject to change based on evaluation and funding over the past two decades. This paper highlights the need to undertake a study that can provide insights into the organizational changes of the past and the future to better understand the implications for the staff, which is a critical factor in implementing the program initiatives.
Synthesis of the Empirical Research

Mahila Samakhya (MS) program has a multi-layered program approach that functions at the national, state and village level. The need for the women centric organization arose from the skewed female literacy rate along with presence of gender based social diktats that hampered the women empowerment. This national initiative for marginalized rural women stresses women’s and girls’ education as a step towards empowerment. The MS program was initiated at the national level as a government agency for empowering women through activities at the village level. The state and district level provides the medium for understanding the local requirements and executing the mission and strategy of the national office.

The studies presented in the previous section argument for a comprehensive study that can provide perspectives of the women district leaders from all the states of the MS program’s implementation field. At present, there is no study that provides a comprehensive picture of the critical level of implementing the organizational activities. Further, there is no study of the MS program, which explains the organizational change processes undertaken since its inception in 1989. The studies cited above have provided insight into the success of the MS program in terms of empowerment and grassroots initiatives for rural women. However, the large scale GONGO is largely unexplained phenomenon from the context of its organizational process especially regarding change undertaken to make the program more efficacious.
Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

I recognize that theories cannot always in themselves be ‘easy’ to understand, but surely it is necessary to re-assert the earlier emphasis put on the links between theory and practice and to remember how deeply rooted early discussions and actions were in questions of ideology. (O’Sullivan, 1982, p. 70)

Although there is a wealth of scholarship on empowerment and issues of educational deficit in rural women, relatively few studies in India examine these persisting issues through a theoretical lens. The plethora of statistical reports from international and national agencies highlights the need to have sustainable programs for women’s education and empowerment. Nevertheless, research grounded in theories bring “value and legitimacy” to a qualitative inquiry even though “methods can be separated from the epistemology” (Patton, 2015, p. 154). The range of the research questions is leading to exploration of more than one theoretical frameworks.

In this section, the theoretical frameworks and concepts on organizational change will be discussed.

The Fifth Discipline-The art and practice of the Learning Organization.

Senge (2006)’s seminal work on the theory of learning organizations through his widely acclaimed work on the Fifth Discipline. Senge (2006)’s work informs us about the organizational structures and processes to nurture the regenerative responsiveness, efficacy, and efficiency in education. His work, based on learning organizations-systems, building shared vision, and team learning has basis in the rationale of seeing wholes (Senge, 2006; Senge, Cambron-McCabe, Lucas, Smith, Dutton, & Kleiner, 2000). His
idea of creating a learning organization, in the backdrop of losing the bigger picture, is orientated towards an open organizational system. This discipline has tenets that lends natural blend to the educational system since he draws from Dewey’s “continual process” (Senge citing Dewey, 1993, p. 8). Moreover, this open system provides avenues to individuals for being lifelong learners through collective work in the team. In the following section, the theoretical constructs will be further discussed.

**First discipline - Personal mastery.** This discipline involves individual aspirations and their interplay with contemporary environment in the organization. This “dual awareness” can create conflicting situation that can be harnessed through personal mastery, for bringing together the personal vision and the organizational goals (Senge et al., 2000, p. 59). The realistic assessment of the situation presents opportunities for the personal mastery to work within the organization. The personal vision and commitment of an individual within an organization is critical for utilizing the human resource for creating a learning environment (Senge, 2006; Senge et al., 2000). Personal mastery is an ongoing process which encourages individuals to learn within an organization and in return the organization benefits from this process by further encouraging the process of learning for commitment.

This discipline encourages learner’s interest into the organizational activities. Individuals make choices everyday based on their personal interest and they master these skills accordingly. These explicit and implicit personal masteries are the unique facets of the human resource base that an organization can efficiently utilize. The natural systems as propounded by Mary Parker Follett (1924) (integration into synergetic whole) provides
a logical structure within classrooms and learning organizations to encourage personal mastery and creating avenues for aligning it with the overarching goals of the organization (Mendenhall & Marsh, 2010). This discipline also encourages an open system wherein the Barnard’s concept of cooperation is affected by the social environment. Similarly the Loosely/tightly coupled structures could provide opportunities for inculcating personal mastery that is symbiotic for the organizational culture of collective efficacy (Hoy & Miskel, 2013).

The current reality plays a major role in the channeling the personal mastery since they include the social environment of the individual. This reality is influenced by the community, climate of the organization, and organizational change factors. The conscious choices ensure engagement to accept the challenges; however, they also created barriers in utilizing the personal mastery for organizational change.

**Second discipline- Mental models.** Our mental models are created on the basis of our formative learning, as pointed by Senge through Deming’s philosophy (Senge, 2006; Senge et al., 2000). As human beings, we are the “creatures of interpretations” with tacit assumptions (Senge et al., 2000, p. 67). These are the basis of the mental models that are created all through our lives and are basis for difference in opinion. Senge (2006) suggested utilizing these models in favor of the organizational change by bringing out the differences in the open. These mental models can be utilized as mirror to reflect the inner systems of the organization, for learning to be adaptive to the changing environment. These internal pictures can bring out the institutional learning without dominance of any one particular power structure within the organization. The tacit mental models can be
constructively brought forward through transparency within the organization wherein everyone can share their thoughts and differences without any threat to be offensive or defensive.

The mental models are force of habit and they are an integral part of our attitudes and perceptions. These mental models are a limitation and challenge for an organization—for its culture, structure, and strategies for initiating change. The mental models of employees can create barriers for effective change even before the process of change is initiated. However, these mental models can be recognized by the organization to understand the humanistic aspect of employees. These models can be further encouraged and brought out in open through discussions to openly recognize the negative aspects without alienation or ignoring any particular group or individual concern. All the stakeholders have to be involved in this process to understand the wider nuances of the decisions leading to change. The openness would help in creating a facilitating environment of acceptance towards new mental models. This acceptance by employers and employees can bring visibility of issues and their collective solutions. Senge (2006) asserted that these mental models and be reshaped and directed towards positive approach within an organization. Similar assertion has been made by Mary Parker Follett (1924) regarding collaboration in organization and her first principle deals with openness to allow multiple perspectives (Mendenhall & Marsh, 2010). This discipline further illustrates the coexisting presence of the open and natural organizational system in Senge (2006)’s work. The mental models indicate a patronizing conceptual framework for the natural system.
**Third discipline - Building shared vision.** The shared vision is based on building an inspired organization that has genuine commitment for a common future (Senge, 2006; Senge et al., 2000). This shared picture of future vision assists the employees to translate goals and visions into achievements. This also provides a sense of identity to the employees to associate with the organization beyond the lofty goals. Every individual has many aspirations for their vision of the future and these can be proactively recognized within the organization to align (some of) them with the organizational goal. The vision for the organization is not the sole responsibility of the management or top officials. This vision should be a shared vision of everyone that involves working towards a better organization. This alignment of visions is not a simple task that can be undertaken through a short-term approach. It requires a concentrated effort from the respective leaders and administrative officials.

The shared vision is a form of collective commitment that provides a common ground to employees for working together towards a better organization. This process can be undertaken through formal and non-formal groups within the organization to involve the stakeholders at all level in working towards fulfilling the organizational vision. This involves building personal rapport as a part of the organizational culture. The technology can further assist in promoting the vision of the organization. However, the vision of the organization also poses a few questions. This discipline touches upon the goals of the organization and moral obligation of the employees/teachers to personally undertake the vision of the organization. This particular aspect indicates a contemporary rational system where the employees are dedicated to the organization through their activities. The idea
of having shared vision is more open for everyone however, the tenets of having desired ends indicates rationality, even though Senge (2006) is not implying formalization. In a sense this aspect raises the ethical/moral question for teachers or employees who aspire to achieve better things in life. This desire for achievement could involve moving to other organizations with better opportunities. However, this discipline expects the employees to be bound to the organization, through the blind faith in the shared vision. I accept the provision of identity through vision as a means of better performance or inculcating long-term commitment to the organization. However, in this day and age people prefer to move to seek better opportunities and allegiance\(^9\) with one vision is not a realistic discipline. Moreover, this behavior can encourage purposefulness and compliance in all the employees, which is essentially the part of a rational system (Hoy & Miskel, 2013).

**Fourth discipline- Team learning.** Senge (2006) describes this discipline through the chronicles of the ancient societies that used dialogue as a medium of bringing together the community or a team (Senge, 2006; Senge et al., 2000). The interaction within the team is the key to understand the dynamics within the group. The process of free flowing dialogue, for meaningful conversations, is designed to overcome the resistance in the process of learning. The organization is about the collective strength of the individuals in learning. Further, resistance can be brought forward, through open dialogue, to understand the impediments to learning (Senge, 2002). This dialogue can further ensure communication within the team for working as effective units within the organization.

\(^9\) Personally speaking, the concept of shared vision sounded like pledge of allegiance towards a nation.
This discipline indicates a natural system since it has the tenets of an organic model that is built upon human relations (Hoy & Miskel, 2013). The process of team learning acknowledges the differences between team members and builds upon bridging those differences through the initiation of dialogue. This process of dialogue ensures everyone’s participation in the decision making process. Human beings have their own level of comfort while working in groups along with acceptance of ideas. This discipline does not force the need to think alike. However, it attempts to inculcate the feeling of mutual purpose along with building communication channels between the teams and people. This discipline also has elements of open systems since it promotes the concept of cooperation in the decision-making process. Furthermore, it has elements of loosely/tightly coupled structures since teams are integral structures within the organizations that can be either formal or non-formal. These structures can assist in the organizational change process since individual identities are aligned towards collective objective. This discipline is also closely linked with mental models since it creates avenues to communicate the tacit and non-tacit thoughts within the group. The author has stressed upon dialogue in this discipline, however, it is in a way linked to all the five models since open discussions can bring out the differences in the open and initiate a process of collective work. Essentially dialogue can be part of any open and natural system since it acknowledges the presence of everyone in the process of organizational change. However, the low prioritization towards goals (as indicated in the natural system) is not the trait of this discipline since the ultimate objective to achieve the organizational vision (Hoy & Miskel, 2013; Senge et al., 2000).
*Fifth discipline- Systems thinking.* The organizations can perform better through the systems learning since they can enhance the understanding by bringing together the visible and invisible systems. These systems tend to be understood through the snapshot approach wherein the various departments work towards a common goal but in isolation from each other (the analogy of the blind man and the elephant). Again, Senge (2006) illustrates that these intuitive systems exist within our cultures to understand the interconnectedness (ripple effect) of each and every element (Senge, 2006; Senge et al., 2000). Furthermore, the ideology to find a problem to solve every time, is detrimental to the growth of the organization. The need is to understand the reasons for the small and big breakups within the system. The appropriate leverage for every situation can not only ensure solution to the problem but it can also assist in identifying the root cause of the problem. This root cause can be resolved with leverages in such a manner that they can be overcome altogether (Senge et al., 2000).

This discipline provides an overarching structure (as indicated in Navajo painting) to all the other discipline. This integration suggests an open system since it can provide insight into the inputs, outputs, throughputs, and boundaries within the system thinking. These open systems are closely linked with the whole systems approach since they provide the link to the external forces and the human values (social relations) within the organization (Hoy & Miskel, 2013). The organization works as a system and through an open system. The fifth discipline can work as a continuum that works together through dynamic feedback systems. The significance of feedback systems has been illustrated through the example of Gandhi as a creator of effective feedback loop of through non-
violent movement in contrast to the Tiananmen Square revolution in China. These feedback systems work as building blocks to provide information to the organizational leaders. The interdependence upon external environment can be better understood through these feedback systems. The cooperation and communication channels within the organization are placed through this discipline to create an open environment, where stability and flexibility exist together. The discipline also provides a framework for regulating the equilibrium through its feedback systems. The steady state can be achieved through identifying the problems in advance and creating leverage to solve these issues. The input-output transformation provides insight into problems even before they arise and simultaneously encourages a leverage to resolve the problem in its entirety. Furthermore, the open structures provide an opportunity within the system to generate energy and this resonates with the systems thinking since it encourages feedback mechanism for generating reactions from the employees. This feedback provides insights into the dynamics of the organization and the processes for countering/encouraging the negative and positive energies developing through social interactions.

In conclusion, Senge (2006) has been named as a top management guru and the most influential business thinkers (SoL, 2008) for his views on organizations as the dynamic system that is based on human values. The Navajo sand painting illustrated in the beginning of the book ‘The Fifth Discipline’ initiates the discussion on seeing wholes within a system with conclusive evidence from our cultural heritage, to integrate and understand the interconnectedness of our organization/world. Furthermore, the need to understand the human values also reflects in the reference made by Deming (1986)
regarding failure of managers to successfully manage organization lies in the systemic failure of “formative institutional failures” (Senge, 2006, pg.xii). Senge acknowledges catalytic role of the human aspect through his discipline and builds upon this criticism of the earlier management theories (Senge, 1993). Moreover, the spiritual aspect has been considered by the author and is a recurring theme, indicating that our social and cultural environment provides us the opportunity for achieving aspirations; we just have to stay committed to the process of learning. Overall, Senge (2006)’s Fifth Discipline, along with its eleven principles, encourages an acceptance of open system where flexibility and stability ensures the success of the organization. After all, there are no quick fixes to any problem, the slow process takes time but can provide everlasting solutions.

Critique of Senge’s Learning Organization. Learning organizations are organic structures within an organizational setting that evolve beyond the bureaucratic constitutions. The learning organizations learn through people and foster learning (Bui & Baruch 2010). In their paper, they have argued for a methodological approach for learning organization outcomes for Senge (2006)’s five disciplines. Further, they critique and indicate the lack of empirical evidences to support the impact of Senge (2006 )’s framework. Their claim is based on the analysis of the quantitative studies.

Another critique of Senge (2006)’s framework is presented by Caldwell (2012a) indicating that the learning organization’s “underlying assumptions of the learning organization are normative and functional, systemic and consensual” (p. 51). In other words, learning and knowledge can be created and distributed. Further, there is a “possibility of learning as ongoing social practices that simultaneously reproduce and
transform learning” (Caldwell, 2012a, p. 47). Caldwell (2012a) underlines that agency and power structure within the organization should be factored-in a learning organization. In another article, Caldwell (2012b) extends this critique to “call for new starting points or the final abandonment of the whole concept” (p. 145). He further argues that Senge (2006)’s theoretical framework is “underdeveloped… [and] could not theorize the inductive process of practice” (p. 147). The leading argument deals with the learning that is a collective process of ‘double-loop’ (Senge, 2006, p. 384). Caldwell (2012b) asserts that Senge (2006) professes learning by practice, which is a “disjunction between the utopian rhetoric of learning and change” (p. 147). Senge (2006) has been critiqued for professing an egalitarian and idealistic organization in which learning is practice-based. Further, there is an absence of sensemaking while actors shape reality. In other words, Senge (2006)’s system approach has limitations located within the agency and power structure that has not been adequately addressed.

Senge (2006) has been consistently involved in the practical approach of the learning organizations. Obviously, he has acknowledged, discussed, and addressed the critiques of his theory (Goleman & Senge, 2014; Senge & Crainer, 2008; Senge & Kim, 2013). In an interview with Crainer (2008), he asserted that the essential function of learning, in the context of organizational change, is about “changing individuals so that they produce results they care about” (p. 71). In response to the resistance and the culture of hostility to change, Senge (2006) extends the framework from the Fifth Discipline to a global revolution. He asserted that the organizational culture of resisting change have commonalities that can be reframed within the learning organization. Senge and Kim
(2013) illustrated from global meltdowns and failures of flagship organizations that there is a disconnect between practice and knowledge creation. The current organizational fragmentation highlights the thrust on blurring the gaps between institutionalized channels of knowledge. Senge and Kim (2013) asserted:

> We believe that the absence of effective learning communities limits our ability to learn from each other, from what goes on within the organization, and from our most clearly demonstrated breakthroughs. Imagine a learning community as a group of people that bridges the worlds of research, practice, and capacity-building to produce the kind of knowledge that has the power to transform the way we operate, not merely make incremental improvements. (p. 10)

The critique and the response to Senge (2006)’s theoretical framework indicate a need to study the sensemaking of the actors that explore perceptions on collective learning for the organizational change process.

**Appreciative Inquiry.** Appreciative Inquiry (AI) has been defined as “collaborative and highly participative, system-wide approach” to “co-construct the best and highest future of that system” (Watkins & Mohr, 2001, p. 14). AI is a collective approach, which brings together organizational actors to participate in a dialogue to generate images of an organization at its best. Cooperrider and Whitney (2001) explained that AI essentially seeks to “build a constructive union between a whole people and the massive entirety of what people talk about as past and present capacities” (p. 3). Social constructivism is one of the theoretical frameworks embedded in the AI with an intent of engaging people, beyond hierarchical structures, to share their views about possibilities
for the future. Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) asserted that the AI is a “reverence for life that draws the researcher to inquire beyond superficial appearances to deeper levels of life generating essentials and potentials of social existence” (p. 3). The generative aspect of the AI ensures that the engagement about future of the organization is authentic and emerging from a shared concern for an ideal place. In simple words of Watkins et al. (2011), “Appreciative Inquiry is a practical philosophy of being in the world at a day-to-day level... highly flexible process for engaging people to build the kinds of organizations and world they want to live in” (p. 117). AI encourages the employees of the organization to co-create with pragmatic approach, from their experiences, an organization with shared learning.

Appreciative Inquiry’s tenets “taps the generative potential of people and organization” (Bright, 2009, p. 2). The focus of the AI is not positive alone but learning from the “life giving dynamics across the full range of human experiences” (Bright, 2009, p. 2). The learning in this case is part of the “inner dialogue” (Bushe, 2005, p. 4). This facet aligns with the objective of the learning organization that is “dedicated to diffusion rather than isolation of knowledge” (Senge, 2013, p. 3).

Appreciative inquiry is used for highlighting the symbiotic aspects of the organization along with the egregious events. In particular, this study will employ Five-D Model (grounded in social constructionism) to explore the district leader’s views on definition, discovery, dream, design, and destiny (Watkins & Mohr, 2001, p. 25). The conceptual framework of Five-D Model has inherent aspects of creating narratives from ordinary organizational activities revolving around every day administrative and
management tasks. Appreciative inquiry (AI) can assist in providing insights into the MS organization’s resilient aspects that acknowledge the trials, tribulations, and triumphs over the past few years. Further, the AI conceptual framework can assist in creating an alternative view emerging from dreams of the organizational leaders (Watkins, & Mohr, 2001, p. 25). These dreams and aspiration open organizational dialogue about the expectations toward realizing organizational goals. The open conversation and dialogue encourages the participants to contribute toward a positive organizational imagery and at the same time bringing forward their concerns (in terms of challenges and diversions in the OC process). The Five-D Model of AI is a comprehensive conceptual framework to employ for the study with a GONGO that has employed women district leaders, who share a collective vision for education and empowerment of rural women. Their personal commitment towards broader social justice issues entrenched within the rural Indian society gives them a unique vantage point to share their definition, discovery, dream, design, and destiny.

The various reports (documents and internal report) and literature suggests that the MS has evolved through internal deliberations on these events and embraced the outcomes at the national level (Jandhyala, 2012). At this juncture, the organization is undergoing change and possible subversion. Ramachandran and Jandhyala, (2012) emphasize that “we fear [we] may get subverted if the programme is reduced to a very limited and formal framework of education” (p. 30). An appreciative inquiry can assist the MS as well other organizations, created for public interest, to learn from change processes in the unique organizational structural approach such as GONGO. This belief
emerges from the Senge’s (2013) assertion that the “absence of effective learning communities limits our ability to learn from each other, from what goes on within the organization, and from our most clearly demonstrated breakthroughs” (p. 10). There are opportunities to learn within the organizations even under the eminent threat of subversion by “integrate[ing] knowledge instead of fragment[ing] it” (Senge, 2013, p. 10). Integration and diffusion can thus be a part of consolidation of overall learning of the MS program over the past two decades.

**Appreciative Inquiry- Theoretical underpinnings.** Five core principles of the Appreciative Inquiry are the constructionist, simultaneity, poetic, anticipatory, and positive. These principles are illustrated in the following Figure 3. Although all the principles are vital to the AI philosophy, however for the purpose of this study only social constructionist principle will be discussed.
**Figure 3.** Five principles of the Appreciative Inquiry – the constructionist, simultaneity, poetic, anticipatory, and positive.

**4-D and other models of AI.** The 4-D model was the original model of the appreciative inquiry as created for the GEM Initiative (Watkins et al., 2011, p. 36). This model has been widely used for conducting organizational studies. There are other models, for example, 5-D model, 4-I cycles, Mohr and Jacobsgaard’s four I model (Reed, 2007; Watkins et al., 2011). The 4-D model of the AI includes four stages of inquiry, including discovery, dream, design, and destiny phases. The primary difference between the 4-D and 5-D model is the *defining* phase. The 4-D model does not include define phase and begins from discover phase. These models do not provide contradictory methods of conducting an appreciative inquiry. Different models are not “just a set of procedures… but this stems from the AI way of thinking about change” (Reed, 2007, p.
32). The selection of any particular model emerges from its efficacy for a study. This study employed the 5-D model discussed in the following section.

**5-D Model.** The 5-D model of appreciative inquiry has five phases, namely, definition, discovery, dream, design, and destiny phases. This model has been frequently employed by the organizational development professional. The key difference between this model and the 4-D model is the initiation of the dialogue by adding a *definition* phase. Watkins et al. (2011) “5-D process can be reduced to a linear explanation... [however] change begins with the articulation of the image... not at the end of a linear planning process” (p. 37). Lewis, Passmore, and Cantore (2011) indicated that the 5-D model is a systematic approach for following a process but its success depends upon the “process of engagement” (p. 55). They further elaborated that “energy generated by the event is supported by the action plans; it is a not a product of it” (p. 55).

**Definition.** This first phase of the AI initiates the process with basic query for change. Lewis et al. (2011) asserted that in this phase “Defining the change is a key component” (p. 42). Furthermore, this phase is recommended in cases “where the answer and possibly the future state is unclear” (p. 42). This phase can also initiate a dialogue for an icebreaker to build an initial rapport with the participants. Guided by the Principle of Simultaneity, this phase requires “thoughtful, and informed choice of topic(s) is important as it defines the scope of the inquiry” (Watkins et al., 2011, p. 121).

**Discovery.** The core of this phase is about answering “What gives life” to the organization (Reed, 2007, p. 32). Watkins and Mohr (2001) highlight that this phase assists in understanding the “life giving properties that are present in those exceptional
moments when the organization is performing optimally” (p. 25). This phase also reveals the proponents of past success that exist in any organization, namely, in there human resources, organizational structure, and resources.

**Dream.** The dream phase entails finding answers to the “What might be”. Watkins et al. (2011) reveal that this phase is “grounded in the history of the organization, and generative, in that this core process provides time and space to expand the potential of the organization” (p. 214). Lewis et al. (2011) cite research that positive talk garners positive behavior (p. 48). They argued that this process is “generative as it seeks to explore the potential” (p. 49). Articulation of dream further requires two steps, namely, “visual images” of the dream and “written expression” of the expected future for the organization (p. 214).

**Design.** This phase has also been termed as deliver phase (Watkins et al., 2011, p. 238). Watkins et al. (2011) expressed that this phase is about “Moving from a powerful image of the preferred future to an organization that lives breaths the essence of the provocative propositions” (p. 241). Lewis et al. (2011) explained that provocative propositions are “radical and visionary nature of the statements” that reflect the sentiments toward how the dreams can be designed to become a destiny (p. 53).

**Destiny.** The last phase of the model entails consolidating the steps undertaken in the four previous phases. Lewis et al. (2011) suggest that this can include “celebration of both the learning identified so far and the start of a process to move forward” (p. 53). The organizational images created from the narratives during the dream phase leads to
designing specific plans for the future and in destiny phase the organizational actors lead the work in the future ensuring sustainability (Watkins & Mohr, 2001, p. 25).

All the five phases of the AI are illustrated in Figure- 4.

![Figure 4. 5-D Model of Appreciative Inquiry - definition, discovery, dream, design, and destiny phases of the model with their explanations.](image)

**Appreciative inquiry- A critique.** Reed (2007) eludes that AI has been criticized for “naive and idealistic in the way that it concentrates on positive experiences… paints an unduly sanitized picture of human life” (p. 39). Further, AI has also been criticized for not “engage[ing] with issues of power, portraying the world as a benevolent place in which the possibilities for future action are unconstrained” (p. 40). These criticisms are
particularly directed towards projects that are commissioned. Additionally, empirical studies have illustrated that AI is not limited to a positive aspects of an organization. The overall purpose is to initiate dialogue (and micro-conversations) that can assist the organization to uncover its potential that lies within its people. The direction of the AI’s positive questions have inherent aspect of revealing the problems and challenges within the organization that can be discussed, either collectively or one-to-one interviews. McNamee (2003) illustrated from her empirical study that the “problems and weaknesses are often much easier to address when evaluation takes an appreciative stance” (p. 37).

The critique discussed in this section indicates that the AI has the potential to address problems during organizational change while using a positive form of inquiry. This study used the critique of the AI to understand better the perceptions, positive as well as negative, to extrapolate the root causes of resistance to change and probable strategies for the ideal organization in the future.

Appreciative Inquiry as Social Constructionism. Senge (2013) asserted that the “interdependent knowledge-creating system is the only way that human beings collectively learn, generate new knowledge, and change their world” (p. 4). Further, Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987), while introducing AI, suggested that “Social knowledge resides in the interactive collectivity; it is created, maintained, and put to use by the human group” (p. 8). The creators, Senge (2006) and Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987), used social constructivism to outline the theoretical foundation of their respective framework. In the following section, social constructionism will be discussed to further provide evidences for the alignment and complementary nature of learning organization.
and appreciative inquiry from the social constructionism’s perspective. Saha (2014) further illustrated the social constructivism aspect of AI from his empirical work in Ghana and Bangladesh with developing agencies. He underlined that AI is “Fostering hopes and possibilities through multiple voices” (p. 44). He demonstrated that the fragmented communities, disempowered by power and class structures, are collectively able to construct a vision for their community.

The theoretical framework of social construction emphasizes how knowledge is constructed through human interpretation of reality (Patton, 2015; Gergen, M. & Gergen, K. J., 2003). In particular, this philosophy posits on “capturing and honoring multiple perspectives” (Patton, 2002, p. 102). Thus, with the overarching goal of understanding better the context of organizational processes of the rural women’s initiative of the MS program, the theoretical framework of social construction can be used in this study.

Social constructivism has been augmented by many educational philosophers and psychologists; prominent among them are W. I. Thomas (1928), T. Kuhn (1970), and P. L. Berger and T. Luckmann (1966). Berger and Luckmann's (1967) brought forward the theory of Social Constructivist. They asserted that human knowledge, either basic or very specific, emerges from the common sense knowledge (Patton, 2002; Patton, 2015). Thomas Kuhn (1970) unraveled the myth of “heroic individual” contributions in the field of science (Patton, 2002, p. 99). The social construction of knowledge and interpretation of knowledge assists humans to acquire their socially relevant roles. In this study, constructivism was employed while acknowledging the distinction between the terms constructivism and constructionism. The constructionism deals more with the collective
level of experiences. In contrast, constructivism deals more with the meaning making from the individual’s perspective and their process of constructing knowledge about the reality.

Gergen, M. and Gergen, K. J. (2003) stated that social construction of knowledge is based upon individual’s relative interaction with community. The construction of social reality is contextual — culturally and socially. Furthermore, our immediate environment and our era also inform our realities. Thus, social constructivism shifts from place to place and generation to generation. The “individual minds are not the source of knowledge, but communities — people in relationship” (Gergen, M. & Gergen, K. J., 2003, p. 3).

The social construction of knowledge is also associated with human choices. The human choices with dynamism of multifaceted everyday life, and its realities, inform, and assist in creating knowledge. The other definitions of social constructivism underline that constructing knowledge involves understanding culture and context in society and evolves from our comprehension (Derry, 1999, p. 197). Furthermore, learning is emphasized at the center of social construction. According to Woolfolk (2004), “Learning is inherently social and embedded in a particular cultural setting” (p. 326). These interpretations emphasize the elements of knowledge, learning, cognition, society, culture and social structures. These tenets are essential for the educational studies since learning is a social process that involves a network of peers in an educational setting.

Human beings have the social ability to cognitively interpret the experiences around them and make social connections between these experiences. This is essentially
the process of constructing knowledge and is contextual since it depends upon the
individual's interpretation and cognition of the events. This study is guided by two tenets
of the social constructivist philosophy. Firstly, it explores the creation of knowledge
about the organization as a continuous and communal activity; and secondly, the
construction of knowledge, regarding the organization, as a group and collective.

The construction of knowledge is not a static process. It is a dynamic process that
is evolving with the human experience (Patton, 2015). Knowledge is constructed and co-
constructed through a constant process of analyzing daily life experiences and informing
the actions accordingly (Gergen, M. & Gergen, K. J., 2003). This aspect of creation and
co-creation is particularly appealing for this study. The MS facilitators and women
district leaders are engaged in the socially cohesive learning processes through
educationally empowering activities. Their process is dynamic and evolves through a
constant process of self-evaluation and self-correction. In this process, they learn from
each other and build a personal rapport to undertake social challenges that are
disempowering the rural women. These actions of daily lives evolve over a time and
leads to a gradual process of social change.

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Summary

In this chapter, an overview of the organizational change, its definition and theoretical frameworks, along with conceptual framework of the Appreciative Inquiry have been presented and discussed. Furthermore, a synopsis of the Mahila Samakhya program is offered to present an argument for a study that is multisided but focuses on a specific level of implementation level, which is the district level. Studies were discussed to provide empirical evidence from literature about organizational change, AI, the MS program to present a case for this study.
Chapter 3: Methodology

This qualitative study examined the perspectives on organizational change of the District Program Coordinators, working with the Mahila Samakhya (MS) program in India, using an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) framework. This chapter presents the methodology that guided the inquiry process. This chapter begins with the restatement of study purpose, overview of the study, and research questions. Then, in the next sections, research design, methods, data sources, data collection, credibility, protocols, data analysis, research quality, self as researcher, rationale, and conclusion are discussed. Additionally, this section will be steered by the case study methodology used for the study. First, a case-study approach was used to explore the MS organization as a unit to systematically examine the perspectives of the district leaders using Appreciative Inquiry’s 5-D model. Secondly, case study was employed with the objective to explore the individual cases of district leaders working with the MS program. Further, the case-study approach was used to explore the temporal flow and texture of interconnections within the 11 state offices of the MS program. The specific elements of the research design are discussed in the following sections.

Restatement of Study Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions on Organizational Change (OC) of the women district leaders of the Mahila Samakhya (MS) program, for empowerment and non-formal education in India. The organizational practices of the district leaders can assist in better understanding the challenges of translating the OC mandate in terms of appreciative inquiry’s Five-D model. The study aimed to understand
the challenges faced by women in managing a women’s organization—managerial and administrative tasks. Lastly, the study intended to contribute toward our current understanding of the organizational changes emerging in a rural Government Organized Non-governmental Organization (GONGO) educational program from a developing country.

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions on organizational change of the women district leaders of the Mahila Samakhya program for non-formal education in India using the 5-D model of the Appreciative Inquiry. The Mahila Samakhya (MS) program, initiated in 1989, is a “large scale” (Ramachandran & Jandhyala, 2012, p. 6), unique and radical case of a GONGO working for rural women’s education and empowerment in India (Janssens, 2010; Sharma, 2006; Sharma, 2008). The uniqueness of the MS program is inherent in its more than two long decade existence as a GONGO—government organizational structure (“with guiding non-negotiable principles” - Ramachandran, & Jandhyala, 2012, p. 19) designed as a non-governmental organization (NGO). Even though the MS has had success with education and empowerment of rural women, there have been policy-based suggestions to restructure the program toward extensive impact (Jandhayala, 2012; Ramachandran, & Jandhyala, 2012). A need for restructuring and reorganizing emerges from the internal and external evaluation reports along with literature on the MS program (Jandhayala, 2012). Further, the felt need is evident in the current change and restructuring of the MS program at state and district levels. In this particular case, the scope of organizational change (OC) is targeted toward
transformative structural change. OC literature indicates transformative change requires a vision involving “knowledge of their organization: its sources of funds,… and human resources, to mobilize action with an idea” (Pasmore & Woodman, 2007, p. 267). The research gap emerges from our limited understanding of organizational practices of women district leaders engaged with a GONGO for rural women’s education and empowerment.

The hybrid GONGO organizational structure has evolved from a flexible funding mechanism and undergone elaborate evaluation processes to produce evidences of success. The MS program is a long-term program and receives funding through the Five-Year Planning system. The evaluation mechanisms are part of the appraisal of the program and are undertaken by the National Program Office (NPO) of the MS program. Further, the evaluation process assists in extension, expansion, budgeting, and strategizing for the next plan phase. In between these funding negotiations, the MS program has maintained its autonomy and adhered to its principle values. Even though, there has been dissatisfaction within the program at different stage of policy-based change, yet the current organizational change has led to ambiguity, distrust, and chaos at the implementation level of the program (Ramachandran & Jandhyala, 2012). State units are witnessing mass exodus of staff at every level of the program leading to daily challenges of administrative continuation. The women district leaders working with the program are translating the ambiguity of the policy as a tool for culminating the program beyond the current Five-Year Plan. In this background, the study examines the MS program, with a conceptual framework of Appreciative Inquiry, to understand the broader
context of organizational change. The organizational practices of the women district leaders assist in better understanding the challenges of translating the OC mandate in terms of “appreciative inquiry’s Five-D model” (Watkins, & Mohr, 2001, p. 25). These women district leaders further assist in understanding the challenges faced by women in managing a women’s organization — managerial and administrative tasks. Lastly, the study contributes toward our current understanding of the organizational changes emerging in a rural GONGO educational program from a developing country.

The previous studies on the MS program are primarily focused upon the narratives and experiences of the rural women based on study in one state of India. These studies have not attempted to highlight the multi-faceted organizational facets of the MS program working in 11 states of India. As a result, there is a limited knowledge regarding the comprehensive organizational practices of rural women and the MS facilitators employing the bureaucratic and non-formal structure. The study employed appreciative inquiry (i.e. employing Five-D Model) to understand the perspectives of District Program Directors, on their struggle to achieve the common objective of education and empowerment for women’s equality. Additionally, this study draws upon both empirical qualitative data collection and secondary data analysis to achieve these aims. The significance of the study lies in the fact that there are many studies conducted with the MS program and rural women; however, these studies did not bring out the organizational facets of a bureaucratic and non-formal structure within the program.
**Research questions.** The following questions were framed to study the current organizational change undergoing in the Mahila Samakhya program:

**Research Question 1:** What are the perspectives of the women district leaders on organizational change in the Mahila Samakhya program?

**Research Question 2:** How do women district leaders identify and appreciate the best of organizational change in their Mahila Samakhya program?

**Research Question 3:** How do women district leaders envision the organizational transformation of the Mahila Samakhya program?

**Research Question 4:** What do the district leaders think are the best organizational strategies and resources that can create an ideal condition for the Mahila Samakhya program?

**Research Question 5:** What new structures do they think can be created to sustain the Mahila Samakhya program as a learning organization?

**Research Design and Methodology**

This study used a qualitative single case study design to explore the perspectives of women district leaders working with the Mahila Samakhya (MS) program as implemented in India. This case study is an attempt to understand better the phenomenon of the MS program, wherein subaltern women assist each other in social justice issues. Case study of the MS program is primarily based upon in-depth interviews with 28 women district leaders. The study is consciously restricted\(^{10}\) to “selected information-rich

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\(^{10}\) Even though this study is focused upon women district leaders of the MS yet during fieldwork there was conscious effort to include participants who have worked with the MS program for decades and may have rich experience to share (but may not be women or may have left the MS program during its turbulent transition phase).
cases” whose study could illuminate the “in-depth understanding rather than empirical
generalizations” under study (Patton, 2015, p. 264). The systematic qualitative inquiries
assisted in yielding thick description by generation of data to capture the perspectives of
the MS program’s district leaders. The methodology, guided by Appreciative Inquiry,
brought forward the in-depth perspectives of the women district leaders of the MS
program. However, this study offers “petite generalizability” (Stake, 1995, p. 7) since the
data pertains to limited sample of participants; 21% of the entire population of the district
program leaders. Additionally, this study only offers perceptions of the women district
leaders by offering their collective perspectives, to the fore, for the purposes of
organizational learning.

In this section, the case study method will be discussed along with data sources,
operational setting of the organization, unit of analysis, data analysis, and rationale for
this study.

Case study. This study is focused on the case study of a non-formal educational
organization, namely the Mahila Samakhya program from India. Research indicates that
there is a prevalence of qualitative case studies as a method of conducting empirical
inquiry in education (Merriam, 2001; Patton, 2015). The inherent qualitative aspect of
case study lends intrinsic criterion to learn from a case to elaborate and illustrate from the
experiences of the people associated with a contemporary phenomenon (Merriam, 2001;
Patton, 2015; Stake, 1995). Stake (1995) offers three types of case studies, namely,
intrinsic, instrumental, and collective case studies. The study employed intrinsic case
study approach. Intrinsic case study approach assisted in exploring the particular
phenomenon of the MS program as an organization from the perspective of different cases of the women district leaders. Furthermore, the uniqueness of “typical cases” (Stake, 1995, p. 4) can help to better understand the contexts of the hybrid organization that uses bureaucratic and non-formal educational strategies to reach marginalized rural women. Furthermore, it can assist in exploring the contemporary contemplations on collectivism leading to education and empowerment of rural women.

Case study approach is ideal for this particular study since it allows the researcher to explore the context of unique and radical phenomenon of the organization. The quintessential elements of the research questions indicate the use of research methods and tools that will facilitate the process of learning about the organizational change. The case study using the AI’s 5-D model offers perspectives on organizational change, existing within the daily processes, have a common thread of social justice for rural Indian women. The individual voices of the women district leaders are the collective case that is concentrated towards the common objective of rural women’s education through empowerment. The case study approach enhances flexibility to explore the myriad voices of the women district leaders while concentrating on the case of the organization as a means to converge their multitude experiences.

This case study can provide insight into “significant meaning in a single instance” (Stake, 1995, p. 78) by “delimiting the object of the study” (Merriam, 2001, p. 27). Merriam (2001) elaborates further upon the delimiting aspect of the case studies by citing Miles and Huberman’s diagram. A case study can be visualized as a circle with a phenomenon at the heart of the circle (Merriam, 2001, p. 27). This heart reflects the core
of the study and indicates the uniqueness. Analyzing one case through multiple voices
allows the researcher to isolate the analysis to reflect upon a particular phenomenon
(Merriam, 2001; Patton, 2002; Patton, 2015; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014); at the same time, it
helps to understand better the complexity of the case in relation to its immediate
pragmatic environment (Stake, 1994, p. 34). This pragmatic impression provides insight
into a larger picture of cases created through specific phenomenon and their implications
for the organization.

The other approach for the study involved employing case-study approach. Stake
(2006) asserts that the “case has an inside and an outside. Certain components lie within
the system, within the boundaries of the case; certain features lie outside. A few of the
outside features help define the contexts or environment of the case” (p. 3). In this light,
conducting a case study requires each context to be understood in depth with its
complexity. “Each case to be studied is a complex entity located in its own situation. It
has its special contexts or backgrounds” (Stake, 2006, p. 3). This aspect has been termed
as “quintain” to emphasize that case study requires a commonality factor between each
case while maintaining complexity in the background (p. 6). This approach was used to
study each women district leader as an individual context while preserving their
complexity and presenting MS as an overarching case. The following diagram visually
depicts case study in Figure 5. It is also a visual representation of quintain – case study
and their complex background within the commonality of the case. This approach can
assist in bringing together perspectives of the women district leaders (commonality) and
creating a case for better understanding the organizational change process in the MS program.

Figure 5. Visual representation of quintain. Modified from Multiple Case Study Analysis, by Robert E. Stake. Copyright 2006 by The Guilford Press.

Research through intrinsic case study offers reconstructions from participant’s common experience of the knowledge about the common phenomenon of the MS program. The description offered by the participants leads to aggregated analysis for
“intrinsic” cases (Stake, 1994, p. 34; Stake, 1995, p. 64). Intrinsic approach allows focus on the case rather than the issues behind the case. The complexities of the case remain the primary and provide the “reader time for deeper understanding of an instance” (Stake, 1994, p. 35). Lastly, the inductive approach of the case study allows the incorporation of other methods, such as field observation and program documents, to guide the researcher in the process of qualitative inquiry. In the following sections, other methods, tools, and their complementary role, in the study, will be discussed.

Data sources. The researcher used face-to-face interviews for the qualitative study with participants at district level from 11 states of the MS program implementation and administration. The researcher met the officials of the Mahila Samakhya (MS) program at their State Offices in India. Furthermore, the researcher initiated rapport building with one State Program Director and the few officials at the National Office. Then, the researcher recruited participants from the 11 states.

Operational Setting of the Study

Operational setting of the study is the Mahila Samakhya Program across the 11 states of India with membership of 1,441,928 rural women at grassroots level. The MS program also has 102 Mahila Shikshan Kendras (non-formal schools for rural women and girls), 325 federations, and 21,825 savings and credit groups. Additionally, the MS program is part of the schooling for dropout girls efforts in four states. It runs 187 Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidhalayas (KGBVs) and in one state, there are 802 National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL) centers. Among many social justice initiatives, the MS program is facilitating 481 Nari Adalats, women’s courts
which have dealt with, cumulatively, 30,410 cases up to now, (MHRD, 2014, p. vii). This statistical overview of the MS program provides an insight into the myriad activities that are undertaken at the district level by the women leaders. The non-formal educational activities for the rural women and adolescent primarily encompass facilitating bridge courses, education camps, and mobilizing rural communities to encourage equity in local school systems. At the same time, empowerment of rural women evolves with grassroots groups and their local strategies such as autonomous women’s court. Even though GONGOs have been criticized for masquerading as NGOs yet the few activities mentioned above and their expanse reflects that the MS program has an active involvement with rural women. The national level policies and state level strategies are a guiding force for the district level leaders to execute multi-pronged initiatives in socially and culturally challenging environments.

**Unit of Analysis**

The unit of analysis is women district leaders, who have been working with the MS program for five or more years. The women District Program Coordinator (DPC) of the MS program are termed as district leaders. The term *district* is used to identify district as distinct unit of identity between different levels of the MS program. Burke (2014) asserts, “As organization change progresses, these middle and lower levels become even more critical to the success of the overall effort” (p. 289). Next, the term *leader* is used to recognize the role of the DPCs as leaders and not managers. The typology of leaders is based upon the several characteristics illustrated by Burke (2014). He demonstrates that the definition and descriptive words for the term leadership are divers and contextual
“depend on who you are talking with and what your respective experience have been” (p. 280). Thus, the taxonomy of the *women district leaders* was created to identify the specific group of women leaders who have been working with the MS program for more than five years.

These women work in the socially and culturally challenging environment. Sharma (2008) described some of these as a Catch-22 situation. The critical aspect is to understand that the rural women educators are themselves social-justice leaders and have challenged social and cultural issues. Their work with the non-formal education program is part of the larger social movement and not just limited to being a job. In other words, these rural women accept socially and culturally challenging environment as part of their personal commitment. However, we do not see similar personal commitment and motivation in other adult education programs.

The District Implementation Units (DIUs) are the district level units for implementation of the MS initiatives. Each DIU has one District Program Coordinator (DPC). In a recent report prepared for the National Review of the MS program the following tasks have been outlined at the district level along with their ranking indicating importance.

Importance of work actually done in the districts (rank in brackets), according to DIUs [District Implementation Units]: a. Education (1, most important); b. Women's issues including violence against women (2); c. Health action (3); d. Gender awareness (4); e. Developing capacities within sangha/ federation (5); f. Networking and economic empowerment (6). (MHRD, 2014, p. xiii)
For the purpose of this study, the taxonomy of women district leader was created to include current DPCs and other organizational actors that have the experience of managing the districts. The ranking illustrates the critical role of the women district leaders in context of their roles and responsibilities in implementation of program for the government of India. The district leaders are a critical unit, which are part of the same socio-cultural system that they seek to change through organizational processes. Their perspectives, regarding organizational change in a large GONGO, operating since 1989, provides insight from their unique vantage point to share their definition, discovery, dream, design, and destiny for the Mahila Samakhya program.

The intersecting social and cultural challenges facing these women have a multi-layered context in which nuances of empowerment and education emerge and prevail. This study employed conceptual framework of AI to understand about the perspectives of the women district leaders on organizational change.

**Women District Leaders of the Mahila Samakhya program.** Jandhyala (2003) points out the characteristics for recruitment of the MS program staff at the different levels of the program:

…efforts are made to find women committed to the cause of women’s empowerment and with experience of having worked with poor women to steer the programme at different levels. This enabled capturing the “worm’s eye view and not a bird’s eye view” of situations of poor women. Grassroots level workers are in almost all cases poor women themselves from within the communities the programme works in and hence bring a radical edge to the interventions. (p. 4)
These women district leaders have evolved in the program over the past few years as activist and educational leaders. Their dual roles within the organization and the larger society gives them a unique vantage position that needs further exploration to better understand their perspectives regarding the organizational change.

The following data sources were used for the study:

**Sampling.** An enduring question for researchers in qualitative case study research is how many units of a particular case study they should choose for their research. This question is contingent upon considerations such as the purpose of the study. The study is based upon the “basic research” typology as defined by Patton (2015) with the purpose to “contribute to fundamental knowledge and theory” (p. 248). Two sampling methods for the study are discussed below:

**Purposeful sampling.** Participants were chosen through purposeful sampling method as defined by Patton (2015) “selected information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study” (p. 264). The specific criterions for the selection of participants were drawn upon the attributes, which led to discovering and gaining insight into the organizational activities of the participants (Merriam, 2001; Stake, 1995). Stake (2006) asserts that when the “cases are selected carefully, the design of a study can incorporate a diversity of contexts” (p. 23). The purposeful sampling is essential aspect of the case study to ensure a commonality between participants or the quintain (Stake, 2006). Specifically, the participants relevant to the study were selected. This ensured the selection of participants who are willing to share their personal stories and further assist the researcher as a Trojan horse or field observant. The purposeful sampling was based
on the selection of only those participants who have been working for more than 5 years with the organization and volunteered to be part of the study. Thus, sampling strategy of “selected cases of special interest” (Patton, 2015, p. 278) assisted in learning about the complex interconnectedness of women district leaders and social actors within a multi-level organization for empowerment and education.

**Critical case sampling.** Stake (1995) asserts on sampling based on the “opportunity to learn” (p. 6). This priority to learn from a particular case also reflects in critical case sampling wherein the key informants provide the “clue to the existence of a critical case” (Patton, 2002, p. 236). These participants were identified with the assistance of credible information from the key-informants from the MS program.

These methods of sampling may seem to encourage bias of the key-informants in the process of identifying the participants. However, these sampling methods were chosen purposefully to identify critical and unique cases within the MS program. The quintessential bias was a key dimension, in the selection of cases, toward those participants whose stories have the “greatest impact on the development of knowledge” (Patton, 2002, p. 236). Further, the criteria of five or more years of experience assisted in eliminating the bias of key-informants.

**Human subject protection and anonymity.** Human subject protection is an ethical requirement by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). For the purposes of protecting the identity of the participants, anonymity is suggested by using pseudonyms (Lahman et al., 2015). However, this is not a requirement by the federal government and there are possibilities of including legal names of the participants (Lahman et al., 2015).
Additionally, Plankey-Videla (2012), in context of organizational studies, has problematized the process of informed consent and the access to an organization, as a research site. She illustrates from her study that in a changing and shifting context there is an apprehension of “power dynamics of studying down” while not being able to maintain informed consent (p. 19). These aspects were considered for the study.

For the purposes of this study, the process of informed consent was limited to participants interviewed for the study and involved seeking permission to use participant’s legal names. Further, the study about the organizational change perceptions required interview and field observation of women district leaders of the Mahila Samakhya Program. The participants were given the choice to remain anonymous or share their names. Additionally, the participants were reminded about these choices before and after the interview. The researcher asked them to send an email or approach via telephone to share their choice for anonymity any time after the interview. All the participants chose to share their names and almost all of them wanted to be quoted in the study. The current organizational change process has created a dynamic situation for these women leaders and they have been proactive about sharing their concerns with the state and national governments. The researcher maintained a “middle ground, where upholding moral values in relationships is primary” (Plankey-Videla, 2012, p. 3) and balanced these relationships in context of the study outcomes.

The anonymity factor, in the context of this study, was tied to the research sites and the organizational change process. The MS program is being implemented in 11 states of India and all these states were part of the study. The participants were women
district leaders in these states and are active members of their respective communities. The anonymity factor could have been a very flimsy attempt to hide the identity of the participants since the participants and the organization are identifiable with basic internet research.

**Sampling size.** The purpose of the study and the rationale of the research questions require a rigor in the in-depth qualitative inquiry. Additionally, this study is based on understanding the organizational process of education and empowerment that these women undertake. A large sample size reflects the diversity of their experiences. However, it could lose the essential prerequisite of qualitative methods - better understanding and exploration. The sample size is critical in the process of research for meaningfulness and representativeness of the participants. Marshall and Rossman (2011) asserted that qualitative research can involve large number of participants for identifying frequencies and distribution for understanding patterns (p. 222). However, small sample sizes can illustrate information richness through criterion-based sampling (Merriam, 2001; Patton, 2002; Patton, 2015; Stake, 1995). A smaller number of participants were identified to better serve this case study using qualitative inquiry.

The sampling for this study is based upon a two tiers of selection process- (1) recruitment by involving key informants and, (2) voluntary participation after explaining the purpose of the study and using experience as a criterion. The selection of the MS program as a case study has been discussed earlier. This section provides information about the process of “sampling within the case” (Merriam, 2001, p. 65). About two or three women district leaders were encouraged to participate in the study from all 11
program states of the MS across India. The number of district in the MS program states range between 6 in the state of Chhattisgarh and 21 in the state of Bihar. The criteria of seeking two or three volunteer district leaders from each of the 11 MS program states ensured equal representation of each state in the study. The sample size for this study was 28 district leaders. This sample size reflects participation of women district leaders. The sample size is based upon the context of purposeful and critical sampling methods (Patton, 2002; Patton, 2015).

**Sampling plan.** The participants of this study were recruited from the 11 states across India. The MS program is currently being implemented in these states of India. Participants were encouraged to volunteer for the study and the focus was to recruit 2 to 3 district leaders from each of the 11 states of the MS program. These district leaders are the critical part of implementation body of the MS program. These activist/administrators are integral part of the collective vision of the MS program. The researcher recruited district leaders with five or more years of experience. Five years is the program cycle for the MS program under the 5-year planning system. This purposeful sampling ensured that the Appreciative Inquiry analysis involved participants who have had considerable experience with organizational change process in the GONGO program.

**Site selection.** Site selection process for this study was guided by Stake’s (2006) suggestion that sites should be “tease[d] out” to understand “how the situation at each of several different sites influences program activity or the phenomena” (Stake, 2006, p. 29). Based on this suggestion and purposeful sampling criteria, the sites were selected across the 11 states in India where the MS program is being implemented. All the 11
states have individual background of the evolvement of the program. Each state unit is a distinct entity and has evolved over the past two decades with particular identities. Here, it is relevant to mention that all the MS programs in all the 11 states, of implementation, were not initiated simultaneously and did not follow a specific program trajectory. At this juncture, especially after more than 24 years of work, the MS program needs a study that can provide a comprehensive picture of the gradual and pragmatic organizational changes. In this background, all the 11 states served by the MS program, have been selected for the study. The purposeful sampling further assisted in selection of specific locations of interviewing the women district leaders.

This section also draws from an anthropological concept “hierarchy of purity” of the field sites, to discuss the site selection as well as declare the positionality of the researcher (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997, p. 13). *Hierarchy of purity* is a phrase borrowed from anthropology, for the study, to discuss two aspects of positionality in the selection of the field sites, namely selection of the MS program and the states as a field site. In reference to the field site, Gupta and Ferguson (1997) state that “some fields are more equal than others” (p. 13). In the context of site selection, the phrase indicates a choice of sites that have some inherent value as research site. The selection of the MS program emerged from personal experience with the program 10 years ago. The personal commitment of the women associated with the program, at any level of the program, was a fascinating feature that is vibrantly visible in every day activity – menial chores around the women’s agency or collective actions in socially challenging situations. The unique aspect of the MS program exists in every person who has been associated with the
program for larger commitment to social justice. The researcher accepts the bias in selection of the MS program for a qualitative study.

The second aspect relates to selection of districts. All the 11 states of the MS program have been selected for the proposed study to avoid any bias. Further, the voluntary participation of the district leaders guided the selection of specific fields. The site selection for this study maintained inquiry and sense of fieldwork in a professional environment.

The researcher has been affiliated with the organization in the past. Nonetheless, the researcher maintains a hierarchy of purity even though this study may seem like a backyard research and may indicate subjectivity. The purpose of this study was to extrapolate “academic representation” (Down & Hughes, 2009, p. 85) of the women district leaders associated with the MS program for more than five years. The MS program is currently implemented at the village, district, and state levels by a national body for co-ordination. The site selection process included participants from all the 11 states of the program implementation to gather data using appreciative inquiry’s 5-D model for organizational change process of the program. Furthermore, this study encouraged the participants to be the co-creators of the knowledge and “speak for themselves” (Down & Hughes, 2009, p. 83). All the participants, who volunteered, signed the IRB forms with the knowledge that the data collection included their names and site of work. The participant’s willingness to share the names indicates their willingness to be co-creator of knowledge.
Data collection. The study design assisted in approaching selective participants to explore the personal experiences of specific events/factors of empowerment. The research questions guided the process of drafting the questionnaire (Appendix -D). These interview questions were translated in Hindi. After receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), an initial email for introduction and information was sent to the National Office of the Mahila Samakhya program. A brief overview of the study and its purpose were shared with the consultant at the National Office. The National Office provided a list of all the State Program Directors (SPDs) along with their contact information. An email was sent to all the SPDs followed up with personal phone calls (Appendix- F). The study purpose, flyer (Appendix- G) and the IRB form were sent via email. The SPDs shared the study information within their program offices. The study was initiated after the approval from the MS program officials. The MS program officials were involved in the process of indicating significant events and sites for the study. The SPDs shared contact information of the participants. The researcher made plans with the potential participants for meetings and telephonic interviews. The IRB forms were sent to participants via email. In four states, 11 participants agreed to sit down for face-to-face interview, namely, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Telangana, and Uttarakhand.

The document review (of existing case studies documented at national and state level) provided further information to finalize the sites, key-informants and the initial participants. The next step was to enter the selected sites with the assistance of key-informants, the State Program Directors assisted as key-informants. The cultural sensitivity was crucial at this juncture since the researcher wanted to gain a long term
rapport with these women. These participants were recruited after their approval and willingness to participate in the study. The interview (structured, semi-structured and unstructured) and observation protocol provided formal structure to document the lives of these women. Field observation provided further insight into the daily lives of these women within the organizational purview. After formal collection of data, a peer-debriefing and member check was undertaken, before exiting the site, for ensuring credibility.

In the following sections, an overview of the data collection process is discussed.

**Local communication.** Local secured mail services and emails were used to send out letters and recruitment instruments to the National, State, and district offices. Further, these local communications were conducted to seek necessary permission as well as make initial introductions. (Appendix -I)

**Posters and personalized letters.** Personalized letters and posters were sent out through the support of state offices to share the objectives of the study before initiating the study. This step ensured transparency, by involving the national and state offices of the MS program, and assisted in reaching participants. These steps for communication encouraged the participants to overcome inhibition and seek direct contact with the researcher. (Appendix -H)

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11 I generally avoid using my full name since it indicates my caste. And at the rapport building stage I will follow similar simple yet critical steps, to ensure rapport building with these women leaders. The ethical issues in data collection by Creswell (2013) will also be considered.
Interviewing. Contrary to Stake’s (1995) caution, for not interviewing the participants, this study employed interview as a research method. Stake (1995) observed that the researcher should not “disturb” the environment of the case, and should employ discrete methods, such as observation, to generate data for a case study. However, the researcher considered interview as a viable means to gather data since the objective was to understand the perspectives of the women district leaders regarding organizational change.

Interviewing as a means of qualitative inquiry is a systematic way of creating knowledge through conversations. These conversations have been an essential part of human civilization as a means of deriving information. In the process of qualitative interviewing, the researcher went beyond the common realm of conversation, with an eye for the unobserved and ears for the unheard. These unobserved and unheard phenomena provided a base for leading a qualitative researcher through the most naturalistic way of gathering information- the interviews. Interviews are the “inter-actions” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 2) to “cross boundaries of understanding” (Mears, 2010, p. 16) with an undulated impact upon the “personalities of both interviewer and the conversational partner” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 38). The exchange of views between the researcher and the participant is built upon a relationship of trust and empathy. The two strangers with reciprocal interests come together through research and create an understanding of an event or an experience.

12 Appendix D, E, F, and G provide guides for interview and analysis; these were finalized after the approval of the dissertation committee members.
The interview protocols were guided by the theory of organizational change and conceptual framework of appreciative inquiry’s 5-D model. Questionnaires were developed for structured, semi-structured, and unstructured interviews. These protocols also had probe questions to seek in-depth perspective from the women district leaders.

*Face-to-face interview.* After the formal introduction and the statement of the purpose of the study, the participants were asked about their willingness to participate in the study. The IRB form was discussed and the researcher answered all the queries. After the signature on the consent form, the researcher shared the purpose of the study with the participant and initiated informal conversation. The researcher shared her background of working with the MS program and her purpose of the study for building rapport with the participants. Participants’ engagement in the informal conversation led to the formal process of interviewing. The permission to record name, audio, and other information were restated and their consent was recorded in the audio. The participants were asked about the experience with the program and the year they worked as a district program coordinator.

The structure of the AI framework in five segments, namely, define, discover, dream, design, and destiny, were discussed with the participants to give them and overview of the interviewing process. The participants were advised to discontinue with the interviewing at any time during interview if they felt uncomfortable and did not want to participate any further. After the assent of the participant, the semi-structure questionnaire was used for interviewing. Unstructured questions were used for probing the participants for elaborating on their experiences and their perceptions.
Semi-structured interview. The research questions were addressed through semi-structured interview designed through the tour and mini-tour questions with a “specific topic” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 31). These questions have constituents of structural interview along with flexibility to probe further (Creswell, 2013). The idea here was to probe the thought-process of the participants while seeking information for rich-thick description.

Unstructured interview. The unstructured interview emerged from the naturalistic context and events related to the experience of the participants (Kvale, & Brinkmann, 2009; Patton, 2002; Patton, 2015; Salmons, 2010). The unstructured interviews were only to be used for probing issues and information that emerged during interview with the participant.

Telephone interviewing. Salmons (2010), presented theoretical and practical nuances for conducting online interviews. The emerging Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) provided access to the researcher to conduct scholarly research. The online research is a realm of many synchronous and asynchronous interview environments (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Salmons, 2010). A synchronous environment mediated via telephone was used for this project, since the objective was to have a mutually interesting conversation with the participant. The telephonic conversations were initially conducted with the key-informants, for providing information about the sites and assistance in disseminating information about the study. The researcher, after receiving permission and contact information from the national office, had a telephonic conversation with all the State Project Directors (SPDs) for formal introduction as well as
building rapport. The SPDs provided contact information for the probable participants after providing necessary permission. The researcher had telephonic conversation with 36 probable participants, out of which 28 participants were interviewed. The telephonic interviews were conducted with 17 participants. Two potential participants did not want to participate in the study due to personal issues. Three could not be reached via telephone and other means of communication due to frequent breakdown in the communication system and constant travelling plans of the researcher. The remaining three participants could not be interviewed since they did not match the criteria of five years of experience, working as a District Program Coordinator.

*Field observation.* The field observation provided “incontestable description” (Stake, 1995, p. 62) through “naturally occurring conversations” (Patton, 2015, p. 33). This method was used by the researcher for recording the undercurrent of events and as means of preparing notes for the additional information from participants and key informants. This method assisted the researcher to note unique episodes that are not shared by the participant through obvious statement. However, their presence is sensed through a keen eye and power of observation. These observations also provided insights into events that connect various activities of the organization. The similarities and differences between observations assist in subsequent analysis of qualitative research. As suggested by Stake (1995) and Patton (2015) the researcher ensured the least amount of intrusion into the lives of the participants. This was an ethical, moral, and a cultural commitment for the researcher.
Field observations occurred during the interviews and while attending meetings of the MS program. These observations were part of the introductory meetings with the participants and in some cases pre-arranged sessions by the state units. Information from these observations assisted in triangulating information provided by the participants. Further, observations from the four state offices visited provided information about the program activities. These observations are part of the findings section and analysis for the triangulation purposes.

**Credibility.** Member checking and reflective journal were part of the research design. The research questions required rich, thick description through personal narratives. The credibility techniques further provided opportunity to seek insights into stories during the process of reflexivity (Creswell, 2013). Peer debriefing enhanced the understanding of these events and further brought out the richness to the data through narratives. A reflective journal was maintained by the researcher as a measure for audit trail as well as for credibility.

The researcher will share insights from the study with the peers at national and state officials, and possibly members of the National Resource Group (NRG) and State Resource Groups (SRGs), after completion of the dissertation. Almost all the participants and state units’ officials requested the copy of the dissertation. The participants had agreed to share their names for the study and the representation of their voices is critical for the credibility of the study.

**Triangulation/crystallization.** This step in the credibility was included in the multiple methods for triangulation through crystallization. “Triangulation is mostly a
process of repetitious data gathering and critical review of what is being said” (Stake, 2006, p. 34). The interview protocols guided the process of triangulation. Interview protocol encouraged the documentation of the same story and its many facets. Additionally, protocols assisted to understand better the complex nature of the organizational dimensions that create challenges for the women and also provide them the courage to fight for the social change. The process of crystallization in particular assisted in better understanding the narratives from the perspective of participants regarding the same phenomenon (Patton, 2015; Tracy, 2010). The “evocative crystallization” process was used in accounting the steps taken for “ethical considerations about voice” (Patton, 2015, p. 690). Triangulation assisted in identifying different realities. The purpose of the study was to collect cases that have “diversity of perception, even the multiple realities within which people live” (Stake, 2006, p. 38). Further, triangulation also “requires going further afield, checking with people who know some of the Quintain or related activity” (Stake, 2006, p. 77). Triangulation was not used to validate (or evaluate) but to encourage district leaders to share their perspectives for understanding the complexity behind the process of education and empowerment within the organizational change process of the MS program.

The information from interview data was triangulated with document reviews and the field observations. Triangulation of data was done with the purpose of buttressing the information received from the participants.

**Prolonged engagement.** Prolonged engagement was part of the research design from the initial stage of planning. This ensured rapport building with the program
officials and the key informants. This prolonged engagement further assisted in generating factual accounts of events that have shaped the organization at the grassroots and district levels. The daily journals and field observations assisted in reflecting back on conversations and off-hand comments. These information sources were used to have telephonic conversations and engage participants in sharing anecdotes and their experiences.

**Member reflection/check.** The member check/reflection or review by inquiry participants was the next step in ensuring credibility. Member checking was done during and after the interviews were conducted. As mentioned above, the prolonged engagement can highlight many stories. Furthermore, the research question required investigation of the intersections of the organizational processes. The member check assisted in keeping the narrative factual to the account since the participants are essentially sharing their organizational experiences and assisting the audit trail for accuracy in documentation. At the second level of member check, the initial data from the study was shared with few participants. This ensured the credibility of the researcher to document these cases as accurately as possible. Further, this process assisted in rapport with these women and a measure to check the personal bias of the researcher too (Patton, 2015; Tracy, 2010).

**Protocols.** The protocols aiming to collect observation and interview data were developed using the conceptual framework of AI. These protocols were translated in the local language for ensuring trustworthiness and credibility. The Institutional Review Board’s (IRB) guidelines were followed for designing as well as disseminating the information with the participants. At a later date, the researcher also plans to share the
protocols with the MS program, national and state offices, so that they can initiate a more extensive study through their organizational structure. These protocols provided guiding material for the MS program to internally assess its organizational structure through appreciative inquiry framework. Protocols are provided in Appendices- D, E, and F.

**Data Analysis**

The plan for analysis is based upon the conceptual framework of AI and research methodologies. The appreciative inquiry within the case study of the MS program is presented in a manner, which “conveys an argument and an informing context as to how these details and facts interweave” (Van Maanen, 2011, p. 30). Further, Stake (2006) suggested that each theme of important aspect “needs to have at least three (often more) confirmations and assurances that key meanings are not being overlooked. Each important interpretation needs assurance that it is supported by the data gathered and not easily misinterpreted by readers of the report” (p. 33). Accordingly, the “pattern-matching” analytic technique was used for case analysis (Yin, 2005, p. 389). This technique included hypothesized patterns of organizational processes emerging from the Appreciative Inquiry’s Five-D Model.

The plan to analyze the research was based on a priori notion that rich and thick verbal and non-verbal data will be generated through the research. The data was arranged for analyzing, mentioned as “tidying up” (LeCompt, 2000, p. 148). Along with creation of taxonomies, the data was also arranged in patterns to understand the sequence for triangulation and summarizing while ensuring credibility, usefulness, and above all avoiding bias (LeCompt, 2000). The coding and themes was undertaken manually. The
coding of data included creating categories, lumping and splitting coded data (Saldaña, 2013, p. 51). Furthermore, structural coding for “Themeing the data” was undertaken to create themes and sub-themes (Saldaña, 2013, 175). The perceptions of women district leaders, on organizational change were coded, analyzed, and presented to understand better, the outlook towards organizational processes for education and empowerment. The challenge here was to bring together the data for coherence and triangulation.

Patton’s (2015) “cross-interview analysis” was used for analyzing data from multiple interviews (p. 534). The data was collected using the standardized interview protocol and field-notes were recoded for managing the data. The data from each interview, according to each of the five concepts of the AI framework, was analyzed with cross-case approach.

**Manual analysis.** The researcher used manual coding for analyzing the data. The data was arranged for “cross-setting pattern” analysis (Patton, 2015, p. 535). Based on the 5-D model of AI the taxonomies and patterns were created to understand the sequence for triangulation and summarizing while ensuring credibility, usefulness, and above all avoiding bias (Berg, 2012; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Patton, 2002; Patton, 2015). The balance between “description and interpretation” was maintained for qualitative reporting (Berg, 2012; Patton, 2002, p. 503). During the fieldwork, notes were taken and managed in a framework to organize the “voluminous data” to assist with the data analysis (Patton, 2015, p. 534). After transcription and translation, the data was organized for coding using the AI framework. The perceptions of women district leaders, on organizational change were coded, analyzed, and presented to better understand the outlook towards
organizational processes for education and empowerment. The researcher used manual coding for analyzing the data.

**Time Frame for the Study**

The project was initiated in July 2015 after necessary approvals from the university IRB and the officials of the MS program. The qualitative date collection was conducted in India over the period of two months (July and August). The researcher traveled to four sites, for the study, over the period of two months. Fall semester was used to code and analyze the data. The final results are expected to be completed by the end of the Spring Semester 2016. Additionally, this timeline was used to explore possibilities for sharing initial study results at the conferences.

**Changes to Methodology**

The face-to-face interviews were to be carried out in five states but due to monsoon rains and other logistical problems travelling was possible for only four states. Further, only one participants from Kerala could participate in the study since other DPCs had less than five years of experience. In the study proposal 2-3 participants were expected from all 11 states of the MS program. However, only one participant could be interviewed for the state unit of Kerala.

In two sites translators were used to assist in interviewing four participants. This was not an anticipated step at the research design phase. These participants were able to understand Hindi and English but they were hesitant to use these languages for the interviewing. The translators volunteered to assist with the interview and the member-checking process for credibility.
Two respondents chose to participate via email after an initial interview. These participants had emergent issues and could not be reached after via telephone, after initiating the interview. These participants requested the questionnaire via email in English. The researcher offered to assist with interpretation of the questions. Both participants emailed their responses after a few days.

**Self as Researcher**

The researcher’s social ecology involves being both an insider and an outsider to the MS program. The researcher was an urban social outcast who had worked for rural development with mountain communities in the Himalayan region of India. Firstly, the researcher has been associated with the program, but, on pro-bono basis. This provides an opportunity to work with these women as an insider through the structure of the MS program. The naturalistic and empathetic qualitative study will benefit from the researcher’s rapport with key actors and the stakeholders. Conversely, the researcher has studied in a US university. This also creates a barrier since the researcher could possibly be labeled as an outsider. The primary concern was that the participants may have hesitation to share the stories that have tenets of social stigma may not be shared in an initial discussion.

Secondly, Milner (2007) described the need to understand the seen, unseen, and unforeseen challenges that can jeopardize the study due to cultural factors. In this case, the researcher is an urban person, studying in a university in the United States, and also belongs to an upper caste (Brahmin) family\textsuperscript{13}. Moreover, the women from the region

\textsuperscript{13} Similar concerns regarding “positionality” raised by Mangala Subramaniam.
have been skeptical about the motives of the outsiders. Hence, the label of outsider researcher could potentially jeopardize the level of confidence and rapport with which these women can share their stories. Finally, the researcher had been working in the region, but has limited knowledge of the all the local languages and dialects. The idioms and phrases occasionally have dual meaning, and bringing them into narrative (without jeopardizing the colloquial beauty of the dialect) can pose a challenge for the researcher.

The positionality of the researcher was integral to the study since it was a way to acknowledge the power, privilege, and biases that are inherent aspect of the research and the researcher. Thomas (1993) suggests critical reflexivity as a means to overtly declare the positionality of the researcher to “demythologizing the knowledge-production process” (p. 47). The open acknowledgement brings out the power dynamics between the researcher and the participant (or the Other). This critical reflexivity also defines the origins and journeys of negotiating the margins and mergers of knowledge creation process. The paradox of challenging the status quo requires reflection on the backyard research especially in context of its value-laden aspect and personal subjectivity. The hidden stories within the human-experience are critical elements that ensure stability of the hegemonic structures. The positionality of the researcher has inherent power imbalances that can influence the superficial semblance of social equity even with the ethical position framed and fostered by the “ethical protocols” (Goldring, 2010, p. 132).

14 The social movements have attracted many researchers. Women have been subjected to many studies that have hardly been shared with them. Richa Nagar raised the issue of para-trooping researchers that jeopardize the existence of the women’s groups in India.
The researcher has been studying qualitative research methodologies since 2010 and has been part of three study projects for class assignments. These study projects have provided opportunities to learn from real life participants and face some ethical dilemmas emerging from the qualitative study projects. They have also provided an opportunity to seek guidance from the professors. The researcher is aware of the epistemology of qualitative methods requiring rigor and an ability to create knowledge through trustworthy and credible field-work/processes.

Rationale

The MS program has been considered as empowering\textsuperscript{15} in literature (Jandhyala, 2003; Kandpal, 2012) and has been supported by Government of India and external funding agencies (Jandhyala, 2003; Seenarine, 2004). The “MS women, both employees and participants, are keenly aware of some of the dangers their work inheres and attempt to confront and negotiate… perils on a daily basis” (Sharma, 2008, p. 199). The literature also indicates that the process of empowerment, as undertaken by the MS program, has social spillovers that are further facilitating the empowerment of rural women (Kandpal et al., 2012; Sharma, 2008). However, there was a need to understand better from the perspectives of the district leaders the organizational changes in the background of policy-based transitions. The participation and active engagement of these women district leaders (at managerial as well as grassroots level), through the hybrid organizational

\textsuperscript{15} “The involvement of a ‘progressive’ donor such as the Dutch, and leading Indian feminists as initial program consultants and directors, made this program unique in the sense that it is one in which a more conscious effort was made to be ‘empowering’” (Seenarine, 2004, pg. 52). Furthermore, the 5 year plan documents, evaluation reports of funding agencies such as DFID, UNICEF, Dutch government, and the World Bank indicate the need to finance MS program for its strides toward empowering marginalized rural women.
processes — GONGO, have supported radical social change and at times challenged the local governance. After, more than two decade, these women are expected to work and collaborate in the activities of the state educational department\textsuperscript{16}. In some places, the MS will be phased out and shifted to different regions\textsuperscript{17}. The pragmatic, planned, and strategic organizational changes are part of the larger mission to achieve ‘education for all’ (critical goal of the Millennium Development Goals). The creation of federations of the MS program’s grassroots groups is considered as a way to strengthen the mission and support the local activities. However, the MS’s women district leaders are considering this phase with enthusiasm and skepticism. The ambiguity of the organizational change process is creating inhibition about probable closure of the program after the completion of 13\textsuperscript{th} Five Year plan\textsuperscript{18}.

In this context, the case study could provide insight into the organizational processes and challenges of these women who co-create an empowering environment within the rural society. The case-study approach was used to explore the organizational change of the MS program. Further, the case study approach was employed to investigate the role of the MS’s women district leaders who have been an activist, educator, and administrators in challenging rural environments.

\textsuperscript{16} The merger with the state education department is under process and its outcome cannot be predicted at the moment. However, the resistance to policy based planned organizational change had emerged in the pilot study.

\textsuperscript{17} The phase-out (roll-back) policy will be finalized by 31 March 2016. At this juncture, I do not want to write too much about it since the policy (either exit or roll-back) can bring out different outcomes for these women.

\textsuperscript{18} Five Year planning for educational activities were briefly discussed in chapter 1 & 2.
Note on the Mahila Samakhya’s Current Situation

The Mahila Samakhya has been under a Five Year Planning (Government of India Initiative) process since 1989; it was first included under the 9th Five Year Plan. The strategy for the program was laid down and a Green Book (elaborating roles, tasks, and agenda) was distributed amongst the MS staff. The first five years of the MS program (between the years 1989 to 1995) included a broader agenda for women’s education and empowerment. The initial task was to mobilize (also called conscientizacion) women and no specific targets were laid down. The cultural and local context was a primary concern and accordingly conscious decision was made to include local rural women in the program. This also entailed developing specific activities and agenda that will be culturally sensitive and relevant to the myriad needs of the rural women. Thus, the MS program became a milieu of assorted activities that emerged from the rural women’s demand. These demands are generally about common issues faced by the women and the community. Some of the common issues include quality of education in rural schools, quality of mid-day meals served to the students, and security of girls while attending schools. These common issues are raised by women’s groups to collectively generate demand for better services in rural areas. The program staff consciously encouraged activities that rural women deemed integral for their empowerment. The array of activities can be broadly categorized under environmental, legal, health, and economic strategies that were planned, initiated, implemented, and sustained by rural women. The MS staff only facilitated in these activities through their educational program (with an
overarching agenda for social justice) at the village, district, and state levels. The primary task has always been to facilitate the activities through organizational processes.

The program has been funded by the Government of Netherlands, European Union, and the World Bank. Since 1995, funding based policy decisions have brought organizational changes in the program. These changes have been incorporated at the national level and percolated through various state offices. The combinations of the Five Year Planning agenda and the external funding mechanisms have brought changes in terms education and its wider role in human development. Today the program is scrutinized for elucidating its impact after more than two decade long pursuits and endeavors. There have been evaluations and assessments in the past but the current scrutiny has emerged from the recent change in the political scenario (national elections were held in April 2014). The current ruling party (Bhartiya Janta Party - BJP) has questioned the very existence of the Five Year Planning Commission and their strategy to plan and implement various programs. The MS program is one of the many programs initiated, planned, and managed by the Planning Commission. Earlier in May 2015, the 13th Plan was set-in motion but no specific plan was shared with the State Program Directors. An exit policy has been shared, but with no specific policy directive. At one point, a State Program Director (SPD) offered to resign due to the chaos emerging from resignations at various levels of the program. The same SPD has shared few internal documents from the National Office to highlight the lack of clarity in the policy documents.
The researcher has no agenda to challenge either the national government or any other state authority but, in the larger interest of social justice for rural women, the focus is to assist the organization. In short, there is relevance in the study that aligns with the assistance to the organization in sharing its overall impact and making a case for continued support in the future.
Chapter 4: Findings

The Mahila Samakhya (MS) program, currently operational in 11 of the 29 states of India, has been working since 1988-89 with rural women for empowerment through non-formal education. This centrally funded program was initiated with the assistance of the Dutch Government. Since then, the program has had changes in funding sources. Currently, the government of India is financially supporting the program. The MS program was initiated to create an environment for empowerment of women and girls through education. Using non-formal educational interventions, the program has been able to work with almost 1,441,928 women and girls from the 11 MS program states of India (MHRD, 2014, p. vii). This program is unique for its Government Organized Non-governmental Organization (GONGO) structure. The GONGO approach, for the organizational structure, assisted in converging the bureaucratic and grassroots structure to initiate program from the national level while having administrative units at state and district level. The district level units work with grassroots groups at village, cluster, and block levels. The MS program is currently under the process of creating federations of the grassroots groups at the district level. These federations are expected to provide sustainability to the grassroots groups in terms of organizational structure for the women led initiatives in villages. Furthermore, the district level units play a critical role in implementing initiatives working closely with rural women and girls. In this background, it is critical to understand better the perspectives of district program leaders in context of organizational change.
Restatement of Study Purpose

The study offers perspectives of women district leaders, of the Mahila Samakhya program from India, using an Appreciative Inquiry framework for organizational change. The organizational practices of the district leaders can assist in better understanding the challenges of translating the Organizational Change (OC) mandate in terms of local strategies of working with the rural women’s groups. The perspectives of these district leaders can further assist in understanding the challenges faced by them in managing a women’s organization—managerial and administrative tasks related to organizational change.

Theoretical Perspectives

The study combined the conceptual framework of Appreciative Inquiry (5-D model) with the theoretical framework of Senge’s Learning Organization, related to organizational change. The 5-D model of the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) was employed as a conceptual framework for exploring themes of definition, discovery, dream, design, and destiny during the organizational change process. The conceptual framework of Five-D Model has inherent aspects of creating narratives from ordinary organizational activities revolving around every day administrative and management tasks. In simple words of Watkins et al. (2011), “Appreciative Inquiry is a practical philosophy of being in the world at a day-to-day level... highly flexible process for engaging people to build the kinds of organizations and world they want to live in” (p. 117). The appreciative inquiry framework is aligned with the Senge’s Learning Organization theoretical framework. There are opportunities to learn within organizations even under the eminent threat of
subversion by “integrate[ing] knowledge instead of fragment[ing] it” (Senge, 2013, p. 10). Appreciation and integration of learning are essential elements of the two frameworks used for the study. These elements open organizational dialogue about the expectations toward realizing organizational change goals. The open conversations and dialogue encourages the participants to contribute toward a positive organizational imagery and at the same time bringing forward their concerns, in terms of challenges and diversions in the OC process. Further, the shared vision is a form of collective commitment that provides a common ground to employees for working together toward a better organization.

**Recapping Methodology**

The methodology for this qualitative case study design included interviewing and field observations as two primary methods of collecting data. Documents review was an additional method for triangulating data and providing background information about the study.

**Interviews.** The research questions guided the process of drafting the interview protocols (Appendix -D). These interview questions were translated in Hindi. After receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) an initial email for introduction and information was sent to the National Office of the Mahila Samakhya program. A brief overview of the study and its purpose was shared with the consultant at the National Office. The National Office provided a list of all the State Program Directors (SPDs) along with their contact information. An email was sent to all the SPDs (Appendix- F). Then, the researcher followed up with personal phone calls. The study
purpose, flyer (Appendix- G) and the IRB forms were sent via email to the SPDs. The SPDs shared the study information within their program offices. The SPDs shared contact information of the participants who volunteered to participate in the study. The researcher made plans with the potential participants for meeting and telephone interviews. The IRB forms were sent via email to participants. In four states, 11 participants were finalized for face-to-face interview, namely, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Telangana, and Uttarakhand. Telephone interviews were conducted with 17 participants in 7 other states. The total number of participants for the study was 28. Two participants chose to respond via email after a brief telephone interview. These two participants had some emergent issues and were not available for the telephone interview.

**Documents review.** The documents, internal evaluation reports, and reports from the website of the National Office of the MS program were reviewed for background information about the program. These documents were also used for triangulating data from the interviews. Additional studies, i.e., dissertations and external evaluation reports, were obtained from the university data-base and were also reviewed for information and triangulation.

**Field observations.** Observations were conducted while interviewing participants and attending meetings of the MS program. These observations were part of the introductory meetings with the participants and in some cases pre-arranged sessions by the state units. Information from these observations assisted in triangulating information provided by the participants. Further, observations from the four state office visits provided comprehensive information about the program activities.
**Triangulation.** The information from interview data was triangulated with document reviews and observations. Triangulation of data was conducted with the purpose of buttressing information received from the participants.

**Data analysis.** During field-work, notes were taken and managed in a framework to organize the “voluminous data”, and perform data analysis (Patton, 2015, p. 534). After transcription and translation, the data was organized for coding using the AI framework. The perceptions of women district leaders on organizational change were coded, analyzed, and presented to better understand the outlook towards organizational processes for education and empowerment. The researcher used manual coding for analyzing the data. The data was arranged for “cross-setting pattern” analysis (Patton, 2002, p. 439). Based on the 5-D model of AI the taxonomies and patterns were created to understand the sequence for triangulation and summarizing while ensuring credibility, usefulness, and above all avoiding bias (Berg, 2012; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Patton, 2015).

**Changes to Methodology**

The face-to-face interviews were to be carried out in five states but due to monsoon rains and other logistical problems, travelling was possible for only four states. Further, only one participants from Kerala could participate in the study since other DPCs had less than five years of experience. In the study proposal 2-3 participants were expected from all the 11 states of the MS program. However, only one participant could be interviewed for the state unit of Kerala.
**Presentation of Findings**

This study presents the perceptions of the 28 district leaders from the Mahila Samakhya program from the 11 states, of India, in which the program is being currently implemented. All the participants have worked with the MS program for more than five years, and their backgrounds are diverse in terms of experience, region, and association with the program.

The perspectives of the women district leaders on organizational change in the Mahila Samakhya program ranged from hope to despair. The two opposite sides of a continuum emerged in the study, using an Appreciative Inquiry framework. The Appreciative Inquiry (AI) framework has an affirmative process imbedded in its 4-D or 5-D model. The inherent aspect of the AI model is integrating individuals within the organization’s change process using generativity (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987). In contrast to deficit-based approach of organizational change, AI has presented space for positive actions and generating collective aspirations. However, AI is not about deliberately choosing affirmative or positive voices within the organizations. AI’s framework encourages all voices with equal chance for integration within the organizational change process. This equal opportunity for participation was used in this study to encourage the participants to share their perspectives. The data generated has voices of positive affirmation as well as concern and frustration. This study presents the voices of the women leaders associated with an organization that responds to social problems and issues in the most marginalized sections of the Indian society.
In the following sections, perspectives of the participants are discussed to present the findings using 5-D model of AI. These discussions have emerged from interviews with the participants. The interview protocol was designed using the five facets of the 5-D model, namely, defining, discovery, dream, design, and destiny. Further, semi-structured questions were used to probe and gather rich and thick descriptions.

Table 5 illustrates the number of participants from each state along with district numbers, and state names. Interviews were conducted with 28 participants out of 130 districts of the MS program, which is 21.53% of the whole population of district leaders. All these participants have more than five years of experience with the MS program.

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State name</th>
<th>No. of districts</th>
<th>No. of participants from each state</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Andhra Pradesh</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bihar</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chhattisgarh</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gujarat</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jharkhand</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karnataka</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerala</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telangana</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uttarakhand</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uttar Pradesh</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>130</strong></td>
<td><strong>28</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Interview was conducted with 28 participants out of 130 districts of the MS program, which is 21.53% of the whole population of district leaders.
Profiles of the participants. This study presents the perspectives of the District Program Coordinators (DPCs) from all the 11 states in which the program is currently working. These DPCs have more than five years of working experience. Their experience ranges from 7 to 27 years. The five years of experience criteria was selected as to identify participants since the program was being implemented under Five-Year Planning system. The participants with five years of experience would have an understanding and familiarity with the organizational change process. National Office of the MS program provided a list and contact information about the 11 state offices. An email was sent to all the State Program Directors (SPDs) along with information poster, concept note, and Institutional Review Board (IRB) forms. SPDs were asked to identify DPCs with five or more years of experience and disseminate information about the study. In all, 38 participants volunteered for the study, out of which 28 were interviewed. Table 6 describes the profile of the participants, by districts, state, the years when they joined the MS program, and their number of years of experience.
Table 6

Name of the participants with district, state, and their work experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Year- Joined the MS program</th>
<th>Year- Joined as DPC</th>
<th>Years of experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bhagwati Pandey</td>
<td>Champawat</td>
<td>Uttarakhand</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preeti Thapliyal</td>
<td>Pauri Gharwal</td>
<td>Uttarakhand</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geeta Gairola*</td>
<td>Dehradun</td>
<td>Uttarakhand</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nayna Joshi</td>
<td>Sabarkantha</td>
<td>Gujarat</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harsha Bhatt</td>
<td>Rajkot</td>
<td>Gujarat</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Varsha Bhatt</td>
<td>Surandranagar</td>
<td>Gujarat</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nirupama</td>
<td>Vishakhapatnam</td>
<td>Andhra Pradesh</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saritha</td>
<td>Nizamabad</td>
<td>Andhra Pradesh</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Padma</td>
<td>Hyderabad</td>
<td>Andhra Pradesh</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vidyaavati</td>
<td>Konnar</td>
<td>Telengana</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laxmi Damre</td>
<td>Warangal</td>
<td>Telengana</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santani</td>
<td>Dharwad</td>
<td>Karnataka</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sunindain</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T. Sharada</td>
<td>Chitradurga</td>
<td>Karnataka</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gowri</td>
<td>Kolar</td>
<td>Karnataka</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloria Purti</td>
<td>Jamshedpur</td>
<td>Jharkhand</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanjita</td>
<td>Chatra</td>
<td>Jharkhand</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rema Devi**</td>
<td>Thiruvananthapuram</td>
<td>Kerala</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poonam</td>
<td>Muzaffarpur</td>
<td>Bihar</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meera Kumari</td>
<td>Supaul</td>
<td>Bihar</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dipali Das</td>
<td>Nagaon</td>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iva Rajbonshi</td>
<td>Dhemaji</td>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bandana Devi</td>
<td>Morigaon</td>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mamoni Saikia</td>
<td>Goalpara</td>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nisha Chowdery</td>
<td>Bulandshahr</td>
<td>Uttar Pradesh</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr Safiya Zameer</td>
<td>Lucknow</td>
<td>Uttar Pradesh</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Varsha</td>
<td>Muzaffarnagar</td>
<td>Uttar Pradesh</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Babita</td>
<td>Dantewada</td>
<td>Chhattisgarh</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ambika Nair</td>
<td>Bastar</td>
<td>Chhattisgarh</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

* Geeta Gairola left the program in 1999 and joined as SPD in 2004
** Rema Devi left the program in 2002 and rejoined at the state level in 2008

Note- Both participants resigned from the formal positions, for a brief period from the program, but kept their association with the program and initiatives at state-level. Both participants chose to join the MS program later at state level.
Table 7 describes the number of participants in seven years range of experience, working with the Mahila Samakhya Program. Table 7 represents a snapshot of number of participants in each range to highlight the experience of the participants interviewed for the study.

Table 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Working experience with the MS program</th>
<th>Number of participants in each range of years</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7 – 14</td>
<td>9</td>
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<td>15 – 22</td>
<td>14</td>
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<td>23 and more</td>
<td>5</td>
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Figure 6 provides a visual, pie chart, of number of participants in year’s range of experience, working with the Mahila Samakhya Program. The following pie chart further illustrates the experience of the participants interviewed for the study.
Figure 6. Pie chart of number of participants in year’s range of experience working with the Mahila Samakhya Program.

The pie chart further indicates that 14 participants, i.e. 50\% of the participants, have more than 15 years of experience. Five participants, i.e. 18\% of all the participants, have more than 23 years of experience. These five participants joined the MS program at the initial stages of the implementation. Additionally, 68\% participants have more than 15 years of experience. Only four participants have less than 10 years of experience, i.e. 14\% of all the participants. These participants joined the MS program in 2009, during the 11\textsuperscript{th} Five-Year Plan phase, and have been part of the transition in the 12\textsuperscript{th} Five-Year Plan. This brief description of the participants indicates the significance and extent of the experience of being associated with the program.

**Research questions.** The following questions were framed to study the current organizational change undergoing in the Mahila Samakhya program:
Research Question 1: What are the perspectives of the women district leaders on organizational change in the Mahila Samakhya program?

Research Question 2: How do women district leaders identify and appreciate the best of organizational change in their Mahila Samakhya program?

Research Question 3: How do women district leaders envision the organizational transformation of the Mahila Samakhya program?

Research Question 4: What do the district leaders think are the best organizational strategies and resources that can create an ideal condition for the Mahila Samakhya program?

Research Question 5: What new structures do they think can be created to sustain the Mahila Samakhya program as a learning organization?

Defining or Perspectives on Organizational Change

Research Question 1 “What are the perspectives of the women district leaders on organizational change in the Mahila Samakhya program?”

The participants were invited to define organizational change in context of the Mahila Samakhya (MS) program. They were asked to share, from their experience, about a time when they witnessed a change in the MS program. Further, the participants were asked about the change and their perceptions. Lastly, they were asked about their learning during the process of organizational change.

Defining the status regarding organizational change process entailed opening a discussion about the challenges faced by MS District Program Coordinators (DPCs) at the field level during their day-to-day work. The individual level responses to
organizational change include historical perspectives, challenging events of within the organization, deviations, and departures. The defining phase also led the participants to share shock and denial, move to anger, bargaining, attempts to postpone the inevitable, depression, and finally the acceptance. These five stages are concurrent with Elizabeth Kubler-Ross's (1969) description of the five stages of grief that most people go through while facing a terminal illness. Furthermore, participants emphatically revealed the collective spirit of the MS program that has been integral to the process-oriented nature of the program. The collective aspect has assisted in shaping a distinct identity for the MS program that distinguishes it from other governmental programs. Further, they discussed the empowering aspect of the collective work that has created personal commitment for the rural women as well as women working with the organization. These DPCs have shared case studies of working with rural as well as female staff members who have faced social and personal challenges while working with the MS program.

**Individual level responses on the meaning of organizational change.** The Mahila Samakhya program has been operational since 1989 and participants discussed organizational changes from their individual perspective. Three themes emerged from the research question one and they have sub-themes to explain the participant’s responses to the organizational change.

**Challenging events and changes.** The history of the MS program is tinged with challenging events. The participants revealed some stories of significant change living within the institutional memory. However, these stories have not been discussed in terms of understanding their impact upon the program and the organizational change process.
The organizational structure has faced challenges from within the program and led to temporary suspension of activities. Such instances have been few but the program staff members have voiced them. “Major change in the MS program happened in the freezing time of MS Kerala. The State Project Director was suspended and the programme freezed [closed down temporarily] for two years” (Rema, Kerela). The researcher had to clarify with Rema the term *freezed*. According to her, the program was temporarily closed down and she chose to state that phase of the program as *freezed*. Rema’s statement raised concern about the sustainability of the organization that can be an issue in the future. The temporary closure of Kerala program was not an isolated event. Similar instances, but for different reasons, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, and Bihar state units of the MS program have faced temporary closure. The program in these states was revived with alterations in program administration. These events are discussed within the organization meetings. Conclusions and parallels are drawn by the participants with unease and caution. One participant, in an informal conversation during a state meeting, made a comparison of all these events of the past to tease out the options for the MS program in the future. This participant said,

> At that time things were different… we used to have plan [Five-Year Plan] and we could negotiate with the government. Now we do not have a plan and we do not know about anything… Problems with individual states and districts were managed… we were able to support each other. Now the whole organization is undergoing change and we are not sure any more. We will continue with our negotiation process and our experience with collective activism has been
successful in the past… we have a more challenging situation now but we will continue. (A participant)

Ambika Nair, from Chhattisgarh, shared the issue of stable leadership as a challenge that the state faced. “We did not have a State Program director for some time and many activities came to a standstill. We could not do anything”. She further added that the work she initiated with other districts had to be shelved because of the vacuum of leadership at the state level. Similar statement was shared by Babita from Chhattisgarh about lack of leadership at the state level for some time.

**Deviations and departures.** Reminiscing the historical changes, the participants of the study alluded to historical diversions and departures witnessed in the MS program. Their main concern has been that the MS program has become a government’s program to assist in the implementation of a myriad of rural initiatives. They shared their insights into the process of gradual deviation from the agenda for rural women’s empowerment. Even though the MS program has been primarily involved with assistance in government, programs were initiated for education of rural women and girls. Nevertheless, the participants of the study (coordinators of the program activities at the district level) mentioned that this aspect was in fact leading them to deviate from their primary mission and vision.

…The MS is a program with process-oriented approach; but now it is becoming more target oriented. Therefore, we have had very positive results from the MS program. Nevertheless, gradually, we have realized that we are moving more toward target-based approach and doing fewer process-based activities…
Government interference has increased… Over the past few years we have been more involved in many government programs especially for education - program like NPEGEL, KGBV- all programs for girls education - in this process we have diverged from a work with the women's group. (Meera Kumari - Bihar)

Participants also emphasized that their work focused toward working with the rural women at the grassroots level. They are working with the grassroots structure but there has been a gradual shift. Sharda, from Karnataka, shared “The program was working for providing information only for the rural women’s Sanghas. We used to provide information and facilitate activities in the Sanghas. The program gradually included activities for education like working for KGBV and NPEGEL”.

KGBV’s implementation was assigned to the MS program in few districts across India; few states, such as Uttarakhand, resisted undertaking additional responsibilities from the government. The residential school, for out-of-school girls, was part of the global agenda to provide ‘Education for All’. KGBV was part of the multi-pronged strategy to focus on education for girls, which have either no access to school or are encountering social barriers to quality education. The MS program facilitated the implementation of KGBV in few districts according to the discretion of state program units. Even though, the program such as KGBV relatively aligns with the MS program’s mission statement there were reasons for not undertaking the additional responsibility for programs such as KGBV. The participants shared that they have to put additional resources into the implementation process. The concerns were not in any way related to the opposition of girl’s education. These concerns, directed toward the neo-liberal
policies of the government, raised questions on programs for attaining total literacy but with inadequate resources. According to the participants, the MS program became government’s agency to facilitate varied program activities for state as well as national government. The participants were of the view that additional responsibilities led to a shift and divergence in the program’s mission and vision.

This factor is further illustrated in Safiya’s statement, a participant from Uttar Pradesh, about the current challenges faced by the program. “Because it is a transaction [or transition] period. The program has shifted/diluted in terms of implementation of new schemes like- Mid-Day meal, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidhyalay (KGBV), and others … the foundation of the MS program was neglected”. Safiya was alluding to additional responsibilities thrust upon the MS program and her concern for the core values of the organization. She raised these concerns and challenged the decisions of the state to involve the MS program in the implementation of other state sponsored programs.

Varsha, a participant from the state of Uttar Pradesh, narrated one more instance where a district was declared hundred percent literate by the local government. However, the national data indicated the need for a KGBV school based upon high number of out-of-school girls. Varsha had to work against the local government to ensure that the KGBV School could be initiated and girls recruited for admissions. Her fight involved challenging the local government’s decision for declaring the district 100% literate as well as establishing KGBV School with the support of the local community. In this particular case, the declaration of 100% literacy was undertaken to avoid the responsibility of identifying the dropout girls and mainstreaming them in formal
educational system. The community members demanded the school for girls who had no opportunities for education. Varsha was emphatic about the initiation of the KGBV School for the girls and emphasized the additional resources or *takat* entailed in the process.

Geeta Gairola, a participant from Uttrakhand, shared similar instances about the initial survey conducted for NPEGEL and KGBV. These surveys were undertaken to seek information about girls and their educational status. The local authorities did not accept these surveys, since the data reflected the failure of public educational system to admit and retain girls in the local school. The MS Uttarakhand unit had to raise this issue at state level with the education department and demand for KGBV School in many parts of the state. However, at the same time they refrained from the management of the KGBV Schools and initiated their own *Mahila Shikshan Kendra* (MSK) or Women’s Educational Centers, to provide some opportunity to the out-of-school girls. The MS Uttarakhand unit felt moral responsibility to create seven non-formal educational schools, in educationally backward places, where they conducted survey to identify the out-of-school girls. Their argument for such an initiative was driven by moral responsibility toward girls that they had identified and interviewed. They did not want to leave these girls without any option. These schools were eventually closed down in 2015 after the state unit faced many financial and administrative challenges at district and state level. These statements on the KGBV and MSK indicate the challenges within the organization about either creating their own alternate spaces non-formal education or working with
government agencies. In both cases, the MS program has to invest resources that create diversion and deviations from their own mission.

*Change for better or worse.* Participants of the study shared their perspectives on significant change events and their impact in historical context. One participant chose to question the organizational change to illustrate that change is not necessarily for better organizational structure.

> We could have done better if we had not made the initial changes to the program. Instead of removing the grassroots staff, we should have sustained them. If we had retained these grassroots level staff we would have been able to have a much stronger base at village level, through the *Sahayoginis* [village level female facilitator] we would have been able to work more extensively. (Geeta, Uttarakhand)

Geeta regretted the decision of changing the structure of the program and leaving the *sahayogini* structure for a consolidated cluster level approach. According to her, this change could have been avoided for a better community level work.

*Individual level responses to organizational change.* This study specifically focused on individual level response to organizational change. Participants were asked to reflect on the organizational change experienced by them in the MS program. They were further asked to share events of significant organizational change. They were encouraged to elaborate upon their experiences to understand better their statements in context of the event transpiring currently in the program. Some participants focused on administrative aspect of the organizational change. Most participants focused on the policy implications
of the organizational change - how it could affect the organization and their work of more than two decades. The following sections present five prominent pattern of responses in the data from the interview. The organizational change process is vague at the moment and the participants were still considering the options for the MS program in the future. The following statements are emerging from indecisive nature of the process.

**Shock and denial.** Similar to a terminally ill patient’s response, the participants from the MS program expressed shock, a feeling of distress, devastation, and trauma, for the organizational change process. Santani, from Karnataka, said “*MS ki koi life nahin hai*” – MS does not have a life of its own… *Dilchaspi nahin bachi hai* – No interest left”. Babita Pandey, a participant from Chhattisgarh, added that as a District Program Coordinator she feels more responsible for her staff working with rural women at grassroots level. She not only has to deal with her own sense of shock but also has to respond to queries of staff and the women. She was aware of the exit policy and transition to federation structure. However, she could not fathom the rapid impact of the change. Geeta (from Uttarakhand), shared interrelated statement in her interview. She said “*bilkul maan nahin hai... kuchh pata nahin kya hoga* - I have no interest anymore… Not sure what will happen next”. Her statement sends shock wave since she joined the MS program in 1989 and has witnessed all the phases of the program. Her shock is not the only sentiment she shared; she is closely working with grassroots organization to create a sustainable structure of the federations. However, her shock is noteworthy since she has been an observer and a participant of gradual changes in the organization. Furthermore, she is active in the region through women’s social movements and literary
publications. Nonetheless, she chose to share her sense of denial and shock in the initial phase of her interview.

**Moves to anger.** Many participants indicated frustration and anger with the matters related to finance and policies for implementing activities at the field level. The participants were not particularly appreciative about the lack of funds for the program activities; especially for the trainings and capacity building exercises for the federations. This concern is more obvious in their statements. Santani, a district leader from Karnataka, shared her concern “We have no budget for past 2 years; we have undergone training- given trainings but no funds to create federations.” Meera, from Bihar, added “I want the MS program to continue. I have a question” she repeated her answer and instead of sharing her views she questions me back.

Why government wants to close this program - the one and only program for women's empowerment. There are so many programs that the government has initiated. Why did they want to close down the MS program. This means that government is also against gender [gender-based approach to women's development]. Government should seek more information from us if they think that the program is not working properly. You are just closing the door for women's empowerment and the program- just like that. [She emphasizes with a sound of desperation and frustration] ‘just like that’ again. This is a big question that we have to work together… it is not just about the money... (Meera, Bihar)

The program is transitioning from a government program to a federation-led program. However, some participants expressed this phase as a closure. At the same time,
some indicated that the federations needed time and support before they could be operationalized. The participants favored the transition yet had anger emerging from inhibitions. These participants were concerned about sustainability of these federations in the future. “All federations will be left like this – it is not good that federations are in a pathetic condition” (Sharada, Karnataka).

**Bargaining, or attempts to postpone the inevitable.** Some participants were of the view that there can be attempts to negotiate with the government to extend the support to the program for some time. There have been demonstrations at the national level to seek government’s attention through the delegation of the MS program workers. These efforts emerged in the interviews and the need to negotiate. Few months back, almost all the MS State units supported an event in New Delhi. Few representatives, from each state, volunteered to participate in demonstration. These representatives wanted to meet the Education Minister for the Government of India and share their concerns. Their primary purpose was to draw attention to the program and the future of the grassroots organization. These women were able to present a letter and briefly share their matters. However, the outcomes of this meeting are still not very clear. Another phase of such negotiations is taking place later this year. In the view of many participants, there was a space to discuss the matter of continuation of the program. Santani, from Karnataka said “mere ghar ka kaam nahin” – this is not my personal household task, indicating that there is some responsibility of the government – state and national to ensure that the grassroots organizations have an avenue for survival and sustainability.
Depression. The statement resonating rejection, a sense of hopelessness, vagueness, and helplessness are discussed in this section. Few participants had thought provoking statements on the present state of affairs experienced and expressed by them. The confusion related to the future of the organization especially in the context of federation is emerging in the statements. The participants shared their concerns regarding the changes proposed for the organization. “It is not obvious as yet but there is a lot of confusion; confusion on federation level” (Santani, Karnataka). Additionally, there is no support from the state government for the grassroots groups. Sharada, a participant from Karnataka, stated that the “Mahila Samakhya is a national program and the state government is not interested”. She felt that the national level office could assist the state level MS program. For her the state level units are restricted to their geographical boundaries of the state. In addition, they have limited administrative powers. She also felt that the national level leadership could have provided guidelines and offered a more decisive strategy. Further, she elaborated that the state government are not interested in adopting the grassroots women’s groups. The state governments have their own initiatives for rural women and technically the MS program has always been a central government’s program. In this scenario, the state governments are using their discretionary powers to adopt or support the grassroots groups and federations.

Acceptance. Amidst shock, anger, bargaining, and depression there is an acceptance for the organizational change process. All the facets mentioned earlier emerged in the data and at the same time, the participants were accepting the changes within the organization. They were not sure about how and what form of the organization
will eventually transpire. Presently, among all the chaos, there were sentiments of hope in transitioning toward federation form of the organization. While interviewing Gloria, a DPC from Jharkhand, the formation of federation along with a possibility of a closure emerged. I had to ask her about the undercurrents of the organizational change. I wanted to know specifically about the gradual change within the organization. I wanted to know how this transition has taken place over the years and for what reasons. She shared:

This is a very big change because we have a federation at district level, even if there is no MS program in the future. However, these activities will continue through the efforts of the women. It does not matter if the MS program continues or not but these activities will forever be continued through federations. (Gloria, Jharkhand)

Gloria brought up the probability of closure and I had to probe her statement further. What if, I asked her, the MS program is closed or there is no expansion? She optimistically shared her strategy for sustaining the initiatives:

The reason we created federations was to provide sustainable structure that will ensure that the women have a structure to continue their own work. They can continue to work with the support of government schemes and the non-governmental organizations (NGOs). In addition, we will create executive committee of the members in case the MS program is discontinued. (Gloria, Jharkhand)

The concerns for the sustainability for initiatives in the future are motivated from the personal association and alliance with the rural women. Some participants perceive
the transition into the federation structure as an opportunity to work directly with the rural women even if it leads to monetary loss. This facet of acceptance is closely related to women’s empowerment while working with the non-formal structure of the organization that may evolve in the future.

The MS is not about earning money; we can earn money anywhere. Nevertheless, this program gave us the conviction to work with the rural women. Many people are receiving good offers but this program is not about money. Personally, for me it is about working with this program… till the time I can. (Meera Kumari - Bihar)

Meera’s statement emerges from her experience with rural women in Bihar, a state considered economically depressed and educationally challenged. Meera narrated a case of rescuing girls and women being trafficked from Nepal and Bangladesh. She is passionate about her association with the grassroots women. In future, she advocated fluid approach to seeking justice on issues of domestic violence using *Nari Adalat* – women’s court. She had questions about the policy of the government. Nevertheless, she specified her strategy with optimism.

In Figure 7 the link between the women and girl’s education is illustrated. Further, the structure of the sangha and federation is illustrated to provide an insight into the generation of demand for education at village level. Some participant’s indicated the need to initiate activities to sustain the sanghas to ensure sustainability of the structures.
Collective empowering identity. The majority of the participants alluded to the collective empowering identity of the MS program that has been the mainstay of the
organization. The program has worked as a government organization with grassroots village level women’s groups through its non-formal structure. Meera, from Bihar State, explained:

The MS, is known for working on one component but has its own identity; we work differently than other departments. The MS program has been a small component for the government - considering the scale of many other government programs- but still the MS program has been able to create its own identity - no matter what the circumstances. The program has been able to deviate from the regular approach for the government program- here we talk about empowerment- empowerment that is related to all facets of a woman's life - education, health, financial independence, etc. We work on all these aspects with the collective approach. Moreover, this is very visible about the MS program. (Meera, Bihar)

This facet of the organization is further apparent in a statement by Deepali, from Assam affirmed that “we change our working style but our vision is always empowerment”. This change in working style refers to the arrangement of the bureaucratic and non-bureaucratic structure that is the unique facet of the Government Organized Non-governmental Organization (GONGO). The MS as a GONGO has worked as a government agency and at the same time collaborated closely with the village level women’s group to provide them agency, to assert collectively their claims for addressing local issues.

Bandana, from Assam State, illustrated a case regarding land issues faced by women working in tea gardens. She stated that the “MS has given women a structure to
work and challenge land issues”. Eva, from Assam State, further substantiated the claim by highlighting the collective nature of the program that brings together the women to share views on common concerns and work on collective goals. We “work as a collective force” and the non- bureaucratic structure assists in organizing women’s collectives.

Women formed small groups. They worked with each other and formed these small groups. Then they formed sankul (cluster) level groups by combining few village level groups. We have federations at district level. Women working within the larger federation – they are simultaneously monitoring and evaluating their own activities too. They are ensuring admission of children at the local school level. They have emerged as panchayat pratinidhi (representative at local governance). We can see their participation at every level of governance- every social aspect of their life. Moreover, they involve other women in their work too.

(Gloria, Jharkhand)

Discovery: Women District Leaders and Organizational Change

Research Question 2 “How do women district leaders identify and appreciate the best of organizational change in their Mahila Samakhya program?”

The participants were asked to share, from their experience, about a time when they believed that the organization was at its best. They were further asked to share their insights on significant event/events witness by them and their role. Participants were given the choice to define and discus in terms of phase that could range from a month to few years. Further, they were given the freedom to define time in terms of unit that may describe a phase in the life of an organization. Even though these phases are different, the
participants shared their common justification in the approach of implementing the program at the grassroots level.

The MS program has more than two decades long history of working for women's empowerment. The program has undergone changes in organizational structure and implementation strategy. The MS program members have been an integral part of these changes. Many of these members have been associated since the inception of the program and have chosen to work for women’s empowerment and social justice. The discussion of past success of the program led to reminiscing of the best phase of the organization, namely discovery. The discovery entails understanding the life-giving forces that were part of the organization. Participants initiated working with the MS program at different levels and in different years. Nevertheless, this discussion provides a glimpse of many facets of the program. Data indicates varied responses forming patterns of energy of initiating a new program; the initial phase of establishing and encountering new official challenges. Their collective spirit, innovative approach to create opportunities for women's empowerment reflect in their statements. The vibrant facets of the program have a common aspect of collective approach to women empowerment using education. These collective narratives give insight into the longevity of the program and its enduring spirit.

**Uniqueness of the program.** Appreciative inquiry (AI) delves into unique aspects of the organization to understand the participant’s perspectives on elements of their appreciation. These aspects give insight into employee’s gradual initiation and continued association with the organization. Ambika Nair, a DPC from Chhattisgarh narrated her reason to join the MS program in 2009.
I had worked in many places before I joined the Mahila Samakhya Program… I had worked with many grassroots organizations… many women’s organizations…but I wanted to work with the Mahila samakhya program. My district is very backward and we have problems with the education of women and girls…*mahilayon aur ladkiyon ko vanchit rakha jata hai*—women and girls are not given equal opportunities. This program gave me opportunity to work with women. This program gave me a vision for education of women and girls… It is a gradual process…Now women step out of the house. (Ambika Nair, Chhattisgarh)

The past successes are apparent in the following statements of the participants in which they recount their initial days in the organization. These participants indicate an environment of learning opportunities for everyone. Further, these statements also illustrate that the MS program has recruited women not based on qualification but their commitment for women’s empowerment. The organization has created opportunities for learning about gender and organizational processes. Further, the statements also indicate that the participants chose to stay with the organization even in demanding circumstances. The uniqueness of the MS program, according to these participants, was the bond of sisterhood for women who had limited opportunities in life and were able to create a niche for themselves against all odds. Further, they discovered the resilient spirit of the program in their own personal life.

When I joined the MS program, it was very difficult… first few weeks were very difficult. I had to understand the gender perspective and education for the women. We had to understand the program, how to manage… and how to implement the
activities – we had to learn everything. It was not just for me, everybody in the program had to understand things about gender and not just gender but legal aspects related to gender issues. (Sharda, Karnataka)

The work was not particularly stress-free for Gloria, who had previous experience of working with women’s program. However, she chose to stay for the unique and diverse approach of the MS program.

I had worked on many social work projects before I joined the MS program and MS is a very different brand in itself. The work over here is very different. We work on many different things- education, health, panchayat, and governance. (Gloria, Jharkhand)

Geeta, on the other hand, stressed on the mission mode of the program that according to her has been the unique aspect of the program. The mission mode has given a platform to be a social change agent and at the sometime draw attention of local media about women’s issues in the respective regions. Her long-term association has brought her laurels and recognition by state government and local organizations. During interview, she narrated her share of stories in a room full of artifacts presented to her and the program. Her sense of belonging reflects in her statement:

We are working in a mission mode. We are not only working in a program but also as a social worker - social change agent. Government of India launched the MS program and gave us all an opportunity to work for social change. We have been trained to do this work. We have been praised by the media and other government agencies for our work. Obviously, we feel honored to have been part
of the MS program. Not pride but honor- that is what we feel. We also feel that we have been able to work a little differently. We feel substantially contented.

Not only us but the women from rural areas also tell us that they have been able to make a change. At this time, I feel that my life is a success. Everyone has a job but we in the MS work in a different mode - Mission Mode. (Geeta, Uttarakhand)

Poonam, from Bihar, enunciated in Hindi, “yeh karyakram hamare liye hai aur hum iske liye – This program is for us and we are for this program”. In her interview she narrated a personal anecdote about her father-in-law who used to accompany her when she first joined the program in 1994. He used to accompany her from Muzaffarpur to Samastipur every day. He used to escort her to ensure her safety while travelling from home to work. After few days, she had to discourage him and indicated that she could travel on her own. Her father-in-law was initially skeptic but gave her the permission to travel for work. Her statement on self-confidence to travel illustrates social change in own family. Furthermore, this event has given her resilience and encouraged her to share the story with rural women to foster social-mobility within the community.

**Golden age.** Unique aspects of the organization led to a phase of excellence, which is considered as a golden age. This segment of the interview focused on the factors and stories of high points and satisfaction of the people associated with the organization. AI framework recommends inquiry into generative aspects of the organization in order to understand the unique qualities of existence, innovations, camaraderie, relationships, and enduring factors. Participants shared animated anecdotal stories about their association and the facets, which appeal to them. The stories about relationship with rural women,
enthusiasm to work on diverse issues, and a sense of achievement reflect in these statements.

The best time in the MS program has been from 2009 to 2012. This was a good time for us. Women- be it at village level- women or the field staff – they worked with enthusiasm. They had the junoun - the will- to work on various issues and initiative. Everyone’s participation was good. In addition, the program- at every level - village to district - was very effective. (Gloria, Jharkhand)

The best time in the MS program has been from 2006-2009 and I can say up until 2010. It is not as if they have not been working well. We have always been working and our work speaks for itself. The main characteristic of the MS program is that it has worked on very low budget and has worked very well given all the constraints. (Meera, Bihar)

When asked to share more about the low-cost activities that she had mentioned about the MS program. She elaborated:

The MS is about empowerment - the first step to empowerment is the mobility - stepping outside the house. We have been able to mobilize women to step out of their houses, discuss their problems, and share solutions. We can create many ways for us if you just step outside the house. Mobility is the first step for which we have been able to work. I am able to talk to you and you are able to understand me - this is all what we have. Very low-cost and effective way to initiate dialogue about empowerment. (Meera, Bihar)
Some participants took the opportunity to share case studies of triumph and at the same time indicate the gradual collapse of the program. These participants acknowledged the best phase the program nonetheless shared their discontent regarding the current phase of organizational change. Varsha, a DPC working at Muzaffarnagar district in Uttar Pradesh, elaborated on the aspect of satisfaction of working with rural women. She said, “The personal challenges we face have become a motivation to work more closely with women”. At the same time, she did not want elaborate upon the golden age after stating that, “the best phase was till 2008”. She ended her statement with a dismissive note adding, “After that the government have thrust many programs on us for implementation. The uniqueness of the program is reduced - it has been burdened by many program”.

Nirupama, she prefers first name only and is a DPC from Andhra Pradesh, responded, “Every age is golden… every day is a golden age… every day is a learning day”. She was the only participant who did not want to specify any particular phase of the program as the perfect age. She considered everyday as a learning opportunity even though there have been problems within the program and issues with implementing some initiatives. Further, she indicated that implementation process of the MS program gives her an opportunity to learn. Empowerment and education for women has been a priority but the program also encourages tangentially unconventional activities. Nirupama has participated in staging protest against liquor policy of the government, to encouraging men to participate in the meetings, and she initiated kabaddi, a traditional sport, for women older than 50 years. She inspires to be a role model for everyone in her community.
Table 8 describes the golden age based on participant’s perceptions, their districts, states, and the year of joining the MS program.
Table 8

*Golden age according to participants and their work association with the MS*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Year-Joined the MS program</th>
<th>Golden Age</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bhagwati Pandey</td>
<td>Champawat</td>
<td>Uttarakhand</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>2008-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preeti Thapliyal</td>
<td>Pauri Gharwal</td>
<td>Uttarakhand</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>1997-2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geeta Gairola*</td>
<td>Dehradun</td>
<td>Uttarakhand</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>2008-13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nayna Joshi</td>
<td>Sabarkantha</td>
<td>Gujarat</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nirupama</td>
<td>Vishakhapatnam</td>
<td>Andhra Pradesh</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saritha</td>
<td>Nizamabad</td>
<td>Andhra Pradesh</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Padma</td>
<td>Hyderabad</td>
<td>Andhra Pradesh</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vidyavati</td>
<td>Konnor</td>
<td>Telengana</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>1995-97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laxmi Damre</td>
<td>Warangal</td>
<td>Telengana</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santani</td>
<td>Dharwad</td>
<td>Karnataka</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>2009-14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunindain</td>
<td>Chitradurga</td>
<td>Karnataka</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>2013-14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T. Sharada</td>
<td>Kolar</td>
<td>Karnataka</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gowri</td>
<td>Jamshedpur</td>
<td>Jharkhand</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>2009-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloria Purti</td>
<td>Chatra</td>
<td>Jharkhand</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanjita Mishra</td>
<td>Thiruvananthapuram</td>
<td>Kerala</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>2008-09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rema Devi**</td>
<td>Muzaffarpur</td>
<td>Bihar</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>2006-08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poonam</td>
<td>Supaul</td>
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<td>2006</td>
<td>2008-10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meera Kumari</td>
<td>Nagaon</td>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>1997</td>
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<td>Dipali Das</td>
<td>Dhemaji</td>
<td>Assam</td>
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<td>Iva Rajbonshi</td>
<td>Morigaon</td>
<td>Assam</td>
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<td>Bandana Devi</td>
<td>Goalpara</td>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>2005</td>
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<td>Mamoni Saikia</td>
<td>Bulandshahr</td>
<td>Uttar Pradesh</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>2000-12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr Safiya Zameer</td>
<td>Muzaffarnagar</td>
<td>Uttar Pradesh</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>2000-2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Varsha Babita</td>
<td>Dantewada</td>
<td>Chhattisgarh</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>2011-13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambika Nair</td>
<td>Bastar</td>
<td>Chhattisgarh</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>2009-10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Geeta Gairola left the program in 1999 and joined as SPD in 2004

**Rema Devi left the program in 2002 and rejoined at state level in 2008*
Figure 8 illustrates visually the golden age (range of years) and their involvement with the program.

![Life-cycle of the MS program 1989-2016](image)

*Figure 8. Participant’s indication of the golden age along with the year of their joining the MS program. Two participants did not indicate the Golden Age and the graph indicates blank space.*

**Personal discoveries.** The discovery of the past led to conversations about personal changes. Dipali Das, from Assam, shared that “*Mera bhi parivartan hua hai* - I have changed too- it’s not just the rural women”. She stated that today she could take her own decisions. Her father worked in a tea garden and had limited resources for her education. She was married at an early age. Her humble background has supported her while working with rural women. She narrated using bullock-cart to cross the seasonal rivers during monsoon, or rainy, season for attending meetings and supporting local activities in distant hamlets. Her compatriot, Mamoni Saikia, a district leader from Assam, narrated the abuse her mother had to face for delivering three daughters. Being
the eldest daughter, she observed these abuses daily, after birth of each of her sister. Her motivation and conviction to work with women emerges from her personal experience and her reasons to continue to support the grassroots women’s activism. She stated, “Mein hoon ya nahin hoon pur Mahila Samakhya ka kaam bahut zarori hai- The work of the Mahila Samakhya is more important than my own existence”. Her personal discovery is about the persuasion for a continued association with the rural women and engaging in the initiatives of the program. The current organizational change process has caused ripples in the organization and there has been an exodus of field-staff. The uncertainty of the organizational structure and the continuation of their work have led some people to leave the organization and support it from outside. Mamoni indicated in her statement that she wants to be associated with the women and further she considers that the program is more important than her own presence within the organization. She supports the program and the current initiative of negotiating with the government for the continuation of the program.

**Innovative approach.** The MS program, at the grassroots level, advocates for activities creating an environment for empowerment and education. The participants shared that the innovative strategies are pursued in consultation with the rural women. These strategies are diverse and reflect the comprehensive approach for empowerment. Additionally, these innovative strategies have assisted the MS program to be unique among other government programs.

The program is different like I said earlier- it different from the other government programs in comparison to others- that are being implemented. Because here we
are mainly emphasizing training on gender perspective, political education, human rights, and being a change agent to encourage them to contest in election. We have a very innovative strategy compared to other NGOs. (Sharda, Karnataka)

The participants further shared the bonds that exist between the MS program implementers, which emerged from innovative approaches of holding monthly meetings. These meetings are organized for organizational matters and discussions to share issues and solutions. The MS program staff can share challenges they are facing with administrative issues and seek structural support. Further, these residential meetings provided a space for women to share their personal problems and seek support and guidance. In contrast to meetings in government departments, these meetings were a space beyond usual administrative and organizational matters. One participant shared:

When I joined the MS program there was a culture of personal sharing. For example, if a member of the program shared their personal problems, we would all discuss the matter within the group. We would all be together – in other words – problem of one became a problem of everyone. She narrated me one incidence of a workshop where a staff member, who widow and a single woman, shared her problems related to social taboos. Everyone in the group had empathy for her. They all discussed the situation and supported her. So our staff member also felt that she is not alone during a problematic phase of their life. All the people of the group are with her. (Preeti, Uttarakhand)
For many participants, the support within the program structure has given them validation to assert their personal commitment to work on their areas of interest. Gloria shared:

My experience has been very good so far. I joined as a field-worker and I was able to work with the women. I belong to the tribal region. I realized after working with them that there are many women and girls from the tribal region who need assistance. We need information for their empowerment. The way I have faced problems in life- I do not want these women and girls to face similar kind of problems in life. This has been a good opportunity for me to work with them through education. Today women are working; they are using education for the empowerment; and they are increasing the level of education for themselves as well as their communities. For example, women are now participating in the panchayat. We recently had elections and they participated at every level. Women can create their own identity and forward their own empowering experiences. But they need the initial support they need a chance. (Gloria, Jharkhand)

*Innovation for social taboos.* The 2012 Delhi gang rape case made headline across the world. According to the National Crime Records Bureau’s (NCRB) 2013 Annual Report, 24,923 rape cases were reported in 2012. NCRB’s 2014 report indicates that there were 33,764 victims of rape. The incidences of rape have been increasing and have been an issue for the MS program even though there are police stations and legal redressal systems. The MS program has been approached, at the grassroots to state level, for assistance in such matters. The social taboo and stigma related to the rape victim
complicates situation for the rape survivors. The MS state units have strategies for providing immediate assistance to the rape survivors. The Kerala unit of the MS program implemented a strategy for Nirbhaya – the fearless one, named after the Delhi rape victim. This strategy for a short-stay home or shelter home for girls who were abused or rescued from trafficking. Rema, from Kerela, shared that “these women and girls are facing different situations and social problems… our approach is to provide us immediate support”.

These instances of innovation indicate a diverse approach of the MS program that have been possible due to the organizational structure. The state units work independently and encourage deliberations at all levels of program implementation for creating an enabling environment.

Discovering best practices. Laxmi Damre, of Telengana, mentioned the innovative participatory process of data exhibition undertaken by the MS unit of Assam. Geeta, of Uttarakhand, mentioned the same aspect and added that their state unit has arranged for a women’s group to attend a workshop in Assam. The interesting aspect of the MS program is that the state units are geographically dispersed and autonomously managed by state units. However, there is an aspect of solidarity and comradery between state units and rural women that creates avenues to share information and build on common learning. Assam is the northwestern frontier of India and a Laxmi hails from southern part of India while Geeta belongs to northern part of India. Between the conversation with Laxmi and Geeta the best-practice for undertaking participatory evaluation and presenting data innovatively emerged. Further, conversation with
Bandana, Dipali, Mamoni, and Iva brought forward the success of the data exhibition at state level that has been appreciated and adapted by rural women. This innovative practice has been part of the internal discovery within the program and fostering ties between rural women to continue their journey of discovery.

**Opportunities for education and empowerment.** Education and empowerment has been the primary mission of the program and all the participants reflected on the initiatives undertaken by the program. The participants discussed the non-formal educational systems as well as the underpinnings for the initiatives. The major challenge for the program is the accessibility of opportunities for rural women and girls. Creating opportunities for learning entails collaborating with state education department and facilitating learning opportunities. In addition, the MS program encourages the participating women and girls to seek certification and economic opportunities. Gloria shared:

The women are using every opportunity to learn and educate themselves. We are using the government initiative of, “Sakshar Bharat”- Educated India, to give them opportunity to learn and give exams. Additionally, they have residential school for women ages between 15 and 35 years. Women and girls can stay in this 11-month residential school for formal education as well as life skills. We also give them vocational training. Some of them are able to complete education up to level 5th grade; from 1st to 5th grade at times in just 11-months. In addition, their education continues after completing the residential 11-month school. Some of them have completed 10th and 12th grade and even graduation. Many of them
have found some jobs after completing their education. Some of them are working as night guard, teachers, or cook. Small-small jobs that are providing them financial independence and opportunities for empowerment. For us this is a big achievement because these women are able to stand on their own feet [colloquial use of language to indicate financial stability]. (Gloria, Jharkhand)

The education and empowerment is further extended to the social well-being of the family. The participants shared anecdotes about women using the non-formal educational settings to discuss family matters such as family planning, preference for son and its link with adverse sex ratio for girl-child. Women discussed these problems and shared their personal experiences. Matters such as accessing health center for services became a priority and led to demand for better health services at village level. Gloria shared further:

They are also supporting their families. Earlier I used to see that some of them are forced into having many children- 3 or more- for the sake of having a son- since it was a matter of priority. Nevertheless, these days I see that women, more and more of them, are opting for smaller families and they just want to have one or two kids. Even if it is a girl child- the woman, want to educate them and give them an opportunity, which they never had as a girl. And we see this in health also. Women earlier used to depend upon their family members for accessing basic health care. Now they access these services locally and also demand for them. They know about how to access these services locally and also demand for these services. They bring forward their problems and seek treatment. Along with
the health-related issues, I also see this in cases of economic independence. Violence against women has become a prominent issue for the women and us. Women raise such issues and assist any woman who is facing a problem at the local level. The women came forward and shared their problem—what has happened to them—how to access legal services. The women share all these issues within their groups. They work on these issues at local level. They look for solution at the local level. We have women's court at the local level. Women use the structure of these women's court to resolve the issues. They try to resolve the issue locally, as much as possible without the intervention of the police. At times, they even try for an amicable solution between the families. Another, dimension of empowerment is the financial stability. Women are opening bank accounts in their own names. Along with bank accounts, they have their own self-help groups and they are also taking up small scale business ventures. Women and their self-help groups are further associated with other government sponsored schemes.

(Gloria, Jharkhand)

**Mapping relationships and collective approach.** In this section social problems as a collective cause and personal resilience of these leaders will be discussed.

**Social problems: A collective cause.** The MS program, since its inception in 1989, has given opportunities to women, facing social issues, to work with the program. The participants shared their personal narratives about the social problems that have become a common ground for mutual relationships and resilience against adverse situations. Preeti, from Uttarakhand, elaborated about the seeds of collective cause:
The ideology is the main element – our ideology has been the mainstay of our discussions. The field-staff of the MS program have emerged facing personal issues. They have faced personal problems due to social issues entrenched within our society. We used to give more regard to such field workers. The leadership also matters – from top to bottom. Being a woman – and someone who has faced some challenges – creates that natural empathy with other women. Such women were encouraged to be the leaders even if they are not managing the activities properly. We would encourage them no matter what – because they could always discuss the problems and find solutions. So we were not scared of anything – we were not worried that somebody will scold us for doing a thing in a particular manner that may not be acceptable. So there are the few things that created an environment – a climate – in which we could work. The leadership at that time said that we were all learning and working together. There is no right or wrong. We are all in this together. (Preeti, Uttarakhand)

Preeti’s narrative indicates the support structure within the organization that supported the MS program implementers in their decisions. This support extended to official as well as the personal matters of the women working with the program. The program staff extended the same support to rural women in their personal challenges. Collective causes and challenging social problems gave rural women the resilience to encounter issues. Gloria, from Jharkhand, narrated the link between anti-liquor stand and collective cause, all part of educational program. She shared:
Woman are demanding for education; they were also raising their voice against liquor and its ill effects. There have been many social problems due to liquor related violence within the family, financial problems, etc. These common problems- that we women face- led us to raise our voice was against liquor.

(Gloria, Jharkhand)

Varsha, recounted a campaign initiated in 2002 to secure women farmers the title of Kissan, farmer. The government schemes and programs, for farmers, generally aimed at male farmers who hold the title to land. Women work on the farms but are unable to seek benefits of these programs since they do not hold the title to the land and cannot be recognized as farmers. The MS Uttar Pradesh Unit initiated a campaign to rectify the situation and seek government’s intervention. During one such event, a fair organized for women farmers, a discussion ensued about violence against women. A young girl shared an incident of sexual abuse by the principal of the school. The women, attending the event for female Kissan- farmers, decided to take action and went to the school to discuss the matter with the principal; he did not respond. They then took the girl to the police station but the case was not registered against the principal. Instead, the case was registered against the women. This case was fought for a long time at local, district, and High Court. Still women and the MS program officials could not do anything for the girl. Few months later, the community declared the girl insane. The principal was suspended for few days but was reinstated since he was about to retire. The women's group had to face the local court for cases registered against them. Varsha ended her story in a dejected
tone “we couldn’t do anything for the girl… and such court cases are used to personally harass us personally”.

These three snapshots of events indicate the wide range of issues associated with the MS program at the grassroots level. Rural women identify their common and collective issues and decide as a group about actions and strategy. Their approach is fluid and inclusive in a way that everyone can share their problem and seek support from the group. Collective approach for social problems is a common thread that women and girls can publicly approach. Camaraderie and social mobility ensues through such issues. Not every incident encountered by the MS program can be claimed as resolved or reconciled – for example, Vrasha’s incident. These incidents indicate factors that consolidate women’s collective spirit to fight for social justice and at the same time understand the challenges for the future. Some of the enduring factors will be discussed in the following sections.

**Personal resilience.** The participants of the study shared eclectic and extensive personal stories of their resilience. An extension their personal relationships, the MS staff members encourage each other for higher education. They have personally witnessed challenges in their life and education has been an upward mobility factor. Transcending the borders of organizational structure, these women work with the rural women and offer their support and suggestion in pursuing education.

Good education is very important; it is important for their empowerment.

Additionally, we provide information about various government projects. She [rural women] should be aware about her rights. And the MS program has worked
in this direction. We have worked extensively on the issues of girl's education.

(Gloria, Jharkhand)

I asked Gloria (Jharkhand) about her education. The intention was to explore her personal experience and the faith in the education and its link empowerment. She said that “after I joined the MS program my financial situation stabilized. I got financial independence; and I was able to complete my Post Graduate Diploma in Rural Development (PGDRD).” I asked her if seeking education while working was an issue. She replied that:

There are problems… There will always be problems. But if I have to study, I will study even at night. The good thing is that this is an educational program. I could get education while working for the organization. The only time I had to take a break was when I had to give an exam. (Gloria, Jharkhand)

A tale of caution. There were voices of concern regarding the current challenges due to the organizational change process. These participants enunciated the factors that led to the glory phase but were skeptical more about the future. Safiya from Uttar Pradesh added, “Organization had not prepared employees for the new initiatives… we had very less expertise…for newly introduced agendas and schemes among other things. I think if we are going to do convergence then at least we have necessary preparation”. Santani, from Karnataka, added that there was “No budget for past 2 years; we have undergone training… given trainings... but no funds to create federations.” They also drew parallels between the golden phase and the current problems and probable approach. Bhagwati Pandey, DPC of district Champawat in Uttarakhand “Implementation only is not the
factor… Review and constant update is needed.” Preeti, a compatriot of Bhagwati, elaborated on the problems emerging from the gradual shift the program strategy to recruit, train, and support the MS staff members. She said:

When we were recruited - we use to receive residential training for 10 days at a time. We had freedom to work in the villages. Women's thoughts were based on these conversations. Now we do not have training like that. So women are not motivated to work as if they are working for social change. Even the staff we have now is not fully motivated in the social movement aspect of the program. Yes, there are some people who are motivated to work as part of a people's movement but I do not see this very often. People’s participative mode has certainly decreased. (Preeti, Uttarakhand)

Dream: Perceptions about Organizational Transformation

Research Question 3 “How do women district leaders envision the organizational transformation of the Mahila Samakhya program?”

In this phase of the interview, the participants were encouraged to share their dreams and provocative propositions. The participants were persuaded to imagine that they have the power to transform the Mahila Samakhya program. They were informed that they have the power to change anything within the MS program. The participants were probed about their dream and the change they perceived. Further, they were invited to share the possibility of achieving the dream and the significance of the dream.

The dream, third phase of the Appreciative Inquiry framework, builds upon define and discovery phases of the data collection. The conversation so far has been regarding
the perceptions on organizational change. The interview with participants, at this stage, focused on imagining and predicting a future that the participants envision for the Mahila Samakhya (MS) program. In this section, their common aspirations are discussed to explore the possibilities of envisaging a future grounded in common experience.

**Creating a new system with roots in the old.** The MS program’s core strategy is creating an enabling environment for empowerment of rural women through education. Rural women discuss their issues, problems, and probable solutions at the village level. These solutions are discussed at length and women can decide to resolve matters using the collective bargaining power of the group or involve local panchayat, the local governance unit at the village level. They seek information to create an enabling environment, for example, how to participate in non-formal classes, register for open-examination process for certificates, etc. The MS program has been a primary source of information for diverse governmental programs such as education, governance, health, self-help groups, banking, etc. Participants indicated using the same information sources with an established information center. This information center could be a collective responsibility of the grassroots groups with the support of federations. In 2014, only four states had information centers at federation level (MHRD, 2014). Initial evaluations of information centers have been encouraging and other MS states want to initiate the center. Gloria, a DPC from Jharkhand, shared her dream for an information center:

*We are talking about this Information Center at the state level. We will be able to create a structure that is stable and useful for the women. We have to undertake many steps to make sure that this initiative is a sustainable solution for the*
women, so we are trying our best. We will need resources for such an information center. Simple things such as table, chair, notice board, carpet, and if possible a computer. We have planned for the district level workshop and training to create the Information Center. We have asked for support from the state level also specifically for the information. (Gloria, Jharkhand)

I asked her about how they will manage the information because they will need constant source for providing relevant information. I wanted to know from her about their plans for sustainability of this Information Center. Because the government schemes are updated and accessing, information in a timely manner can only be useful if the women know how to access such information from time to time. Gloria had few answers only; she is still under the phase of planning.

**Gender training.** During fieldwork as an observer, the researcher was able to participate in a joint meeting of the stakeholders from the recently bifurcated states of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. A joint proposal for gender training was discussed during a meeting of the district leaders, stakeholders, and rural women. The participants shared the view that the brand image of the MS program can assist in advertising a gender training for everyone. All women in in the two states can be encouraged to participate in the gender training. A nominal fee can be charged, maybe 100 rupees (about $2). This nominal amount of money can help to sustain the federations. This joint proposal was appreciated and critiqued by many in the same meeting. One participant raised the question about the brand image of being a gender-based program. The participant said, “We consider ourselves as gender-based but I am not sure if other people
will consider us or not - that is the question. What are you calling and telling us - that is a dicey situation”. District leaders and stakeholders did not want the rural woman to be burdened about the organizational set up or the identity of being a government led program or gender-based organization. Their view was that the rural women should be free to create their own identity for their own program - the way they want to carry it forward. The discussions at the moment should not be thrust upon the grassroots organization or the rural women. The participants in the Andhra Pradesh meeting were mostly of the view that the organizational structure should be fluid and flexible. Maintaining the gender-based identity has been integral part of the MS program but may not be an agenda for the future leaders of the federations. One local participant said- “we are talking about being a gender organization but is it not even a strong point for us to work in the future”.

The issue here is emerging from the image of a gender-based program. The government of India and many Indian states have initiated sub-programs within existing programs to address gender equity and equality. Some flagship programs have exclusive sector approach to ensure gender parity. These sub-programs and sector approaches have created a niche for carrying forward the government’s agenda of gender parity. The participants indicated this point and no consensus could be reached for gender training during the meeting.

**Common dreams and uncommon aspirations.** The common dreams for some participants revolved around the mission statement of the MS program. Gloria understood
the reality and limitation of achieving the mission and vision for empowering rural women. She states:

Not everything can be changed. However, there are always possibilities for a change. I will always keep alive the hope that even in adverse situations women will be able to create opportunities for themselves, their families, and especially girls. So that the girl can have access to education and personal growth in life. Also, they can find opportunities for some sort of work - and become a source of inspiration for others too - in their family and the larger society too. She can live her life with *samman aur gaurav* - dignity and honor. (Gloria, Jharkhand)

In contrast, some participants, in the spirit of visualizing a new form of organization, discussed expanding the program to local community. Bhagwati Pandey discussed that the program could possibly embrace the local community since working with women essentially extends to their family members, directly or indirectly. She dreams of “Making it [MS] a community program” and not restricting participation of community members by gender. At the same time her uncommon dream is for “Working with more single women”. She is an avid advocate for supporting single women of rural community. Her conviction is rooted in social biases against single women living in a rural society.

In a joint meeting of stakeholders, which included district leaders and rural women, there were other voices with common umbrella of the state, but uncommon strategy of fluid structure. One participant said “we are strong for what we are - a strong force of women and we want solidarity”. Another participant added that “a structure at
the state level can keep us together - give us the strength to stay together - otherwise we will existing within our districts and clusters and villages”. The consensus in this meeting was that state level structure is much needed for sustaining the federation in the future. These women were raising their concerns for a structure at the state level because they always had a structure- a structure that gave them guidance at the state level. Even though the participants wanted organization to be less restricted by the geographical and political boundary. However, in the same meeting some of the participants wanted a state level structure.

**Resistance to change.** In this section the resistance to change will be discussed.

**Ideological.** The ideological differences for change involving restructuring the organization led some participants to compare the past process with the current propositions. Preeti’s following statement illustrates the ideological shifts leading to resisting a dream for organizational change:

If we have to look at change [she is thoughtful and begins again], when we first started working we were working at the village level- we used to work with *mazbooti* - resilience. The other thing was that there was no time limit. We could work with the Sanghas for 8 to 10 years. Moreover, we can see that those Sanghas are very strong. However, since the 11\textsuperscript{th} and the 10\textsuperscript{th} plan [in that order] the program has been restricted to a time limit. We moved from the sahyaogini system to CRP and GRP- they manage the program at cluster and block level. The geographical conditions are not as such that it would be easy to work and manage many villages at the same time-not since the program has become time bound.
Since the program has become time bound we see that there has been an adverse effect on our ideology of gender and identity. Earlier, there was no bureaucratic interference with our work. But gradually government is bringing forward agenda on which we should work. They want data about many things. So our independence to work has been affected. So I asked her the question about what does she mean by time bound- when did this system started and how does it affect them. She said this has happened over the last it 8 to 10 years… I will again state that when we started working we had more independence. We did not have any particular stress about reports. We were more concerned about women's rights and their issues. However, gradually government started intervening and they were asked to focus more on education- to work on *anganwadi* (children's program), midday meal, and local public school systems. Government started using us for their work. This change has happened over the last 10 years. (Preeti, Uttarakhand)

The other ideological issue that some participants raised was regarding the sustenance and sustainability of federations. These participants described the process for federation undertaken by them and ideological problems. All the federations created so far are at varied levels of operations. This factor gives further insight into how the federations are planned for sustainable future. One participant raised an important point about the convergence of sanghas [village level women’s groups] into federations. Varsha raised the point about creating federations with village groups with different
levels of capabilities. She referred to the process of internally evaluating the women’s group undertaken for planning process.

I will give a simple example. If we create a Federation – from a hundred village level groups a single federation has to be formed. There might be 40 sanghas that are not strong - maybe 60 are strong. Now the question is how will the federation survive. (Varsha)

For the federation to survive and sustain it is important that all the sanghas should work together, with an equal capability and capacity. The participant asserted that it is a known fact that the sanghas cannot work with same capacity level. However, the rural women as well as the MS facilitators have to face these facts, at this juncture, while creating the federations as sustainable structures.

There have been discussions on structures to sustain federations. There is a concern about how the structure of federations will carry forward the mission of the MS program. What form will this organization take? How to support the Federation in the future? Should it be a research organization or a local organization or collective of grassroots organization or just as a *munch*, Hindi word for forum? These questions indicate ideological discussions within the organization. The open discussion on these ideological issues further indicates positive appreciation and concern about the sustainable existence of the organization in future.

*Political*. Few participants cautiously shared their views about the changes in the program emerging from political mandates. Other participants shared their views
emphatically about the political pressures. These statements reflected resistance to further change in the organizational structure of the program.

Political issues were a recurring statement in Preeti’s interview. She reiterated her statement that government is imposing its agenda on the MS program. Her statement intrigued me regarding government's interference in a government-funded program.

Preeti joined the MS program in 1997 when the program was not under the Five-Year Planning system. The external funding from international donors created opportunities for local activists to join the program for mobilizing rural women. However, during 2005-08 the policies for international funding changed and the government of India decided to accept funding from the Department for International Development (DFID) of the UK government for the 10th and 11th Five-Year Planning. This transition entailed policies from the Planning Commission of India for the five-year plan cycles with specific guidelines for deliverables and accountability. Preeti indicated this change in her interview. I probed her with few questions about this particular aspect of the program. I asked her why did this change happen? She said that:

The program belongs to the Government of India. At the time, when the MS was created, the structure was more leaning toward social movement. However, we were reminded that we were receiving funds from the government - since we were working under the Education Department. This has certainly brought forward the work related to education. We were given the additional responsibility for education program, for example, National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL) in 2004… This program was not data driven.
Government interference has increased. We did not have too many executive committee meetings. Now the bureaucrats ask us about how we have worked for the midday meal program. And what has been our contribution to the local schools? What activities we have arranged for the adolescent girl’s education?
Now we see the whole government bureaucracy hovering over the MS program. Now they have to take some work from us. (Preeti, Uttarakhand)

**Dream is difficult.** The dream phase again garnered some statements reflecting frustration within the organization. Santani, from Karnataka, stated “Sirf dream se kaam nahin- sirf dream to bolna kafi nahin – Only discussing dream and having a dream is not enough”. Sharada, from Karnataka added, “Dream is difficult”. These statements were made when asked about dreams for the organization in future. Both the participants had dreams for the organization, but the possibility of their success was not visible to the participants. These two participants did not consider dream as a positive concept for sharing their visions for the future. Instead, dream became a nightmare for these participants. These participants did not consider dream could succeed without due consideration to the factors inhibiting the current organizational change process.

**Design: Organizational Co-construction to Support the Dream**

Research Question 4 “What do the district leaders think are the best organizational strategies and resources that can create an ideal condition for the Mahila Samakhya program?”

To address the research question four, the participants were motivated to design and share their strategy for an ideal condition of the Mahila Samakhya program, in the
future. The participants were stimulated to share a strategy, grounded in their experience, which can be incorporated in the present structure of the program to achieve their dreams. Further, they were also encouraged to consider the resources that would be required for attaining a sustainable future of the organization.

Social co-construction within the organization is part of the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) framework to initiate a dialogue about possibilities. The dream phase assisted in contextualizing the expectations from the organizational change process. The designing phase of the study is one-step forward to understand the perceptions of the participants to create ideal conditions for a shared vision. Participants, after the dream phase of interviews, considered their expectations and linked them to possibilities and the strategies for organizational change. These dreams gave an image to the participants to share their provocative propositions and approaches for new initiatives. The design phase brought forward the collective approach along with action strategies to support the dreams. Participants shared challenges, especially in the context of forming federations, based on previous experiences. The federations are part of the exit strategy and the state units are at different stages of creating and sustaining these federations. The responses for the design phase of the interviews were mostly focused on the federations. Participants were using their previous experiences, of managing the program activities, and they shared their insights.

Profound propositions. Instead of initiating the discussion with provocative propositions, as per expectation, the participants began with past problems with the management of program activities, such as financial management and budgeting. As
activists these participants have had dreams in the past, too, along with their strategies for successful implementation. Since 1989, the MS program’s implementation has been an innovative approach for women’s empowerment. The fact that participants, in the past, have had dream and experienced the success and failures of these, is critical at this juncture in current organizational change process of the MS program. These participants had to be provoked to share more about the future of the organization and innovative approaches for women’s empowerment. Geeta Gairola, from Uttarakhand, joined the program in 1989 as a Resource Person in Tehri district. Since then she has worked at different levels of the program and is currently the State Program Director for Uttarakhand state unit. Her experience, in managing different levels of program, has given her the conviction that resources, especially financial resources, should be managed according to the need of the program and there should be some discretionary powers. Further, she believes in generating resources from diverse organizations. She said:

The funding is from Government of India - and there are norms to utilize this money. Well, if I had the power… I would change this funding pattern. In addition, if I had power I will seek funds from likeminded organizations… people who would support us financially toward our endeavor.

Preeti, from Uttarakhand, extended this conversation and shared that the program should have a fluid structure to support the social change process. In her view, the program could work with a more diverse approach with rural women for empowerment. She also advocated for discretionary powers, but for program implementation strategy.
If I was given the power to change… I would want the MS to work as people’s organization - the way a social movement is able to work - the flexible and fluid approach. There should not be any specific agenda for the program- not one specific target - we should be working more for the social change within our society. We should have the liberty and power to work for the change within the society. We should be able to work on our own will.

Her statement captivated me- she was constantly talking about social movement and people’s organization even though the MS program is government program. I tried to ask her about why and how she thought this change was necessary and why and how it can be undertaken. She replied, “There are many social problems within our society… that I think should be confronted. When will the change happen if we do not work for it now? There are many people who are struggling. If many people are associated in making a social change - there would be a possibility to actually have a change within the society”.

However, her answer was not sufficient to understand why and where this social change and people's movement was coming from. How she linked her experience and the current situation of the MS program in the background of social change. I probed her, about inclination toward social movement; and how she discerns and espouses them as a proposition for social change. Furthermore, how she relates and combines her conviction with the organizational change and long-term goals.

My father was a communist. I have grown up in that environment. My father used to share stories about the revolution. He would say, “One day there will be a
society where everyone will have equal opportunity. Everyone will have something - nothing more nothing less”. As a child, I used to think that this form of society is possible - but gradually I realized that it is not an easy task. My father led a life full of struggle and he included us in his struggles. I had to face similar struggle for my family. My father expired at an early age and I had to take the responsibility of everyone in my family. I had to find a job and move to Nainital from Lucknow. I faced all these problems but I also realized that… we can change the society… and, we are the ones who can make a lasting change.

My inspiration to join this program, and stay with it, is based upon the stories and words of my father that are part of my childhood. (Preeti, Uttarakhand)

Preeti is not alone; many participants share her thoughts. Gloria, DPC from Jharkhand state, had her own share of provocative propositions. She said:

Women and girls have to decide their own future - their own goals - they have to say that this is my goal - this is what I have to achieve. If we have a goal - we will be able to achieve - so it is important for every woman to decide a goal. It is possible to achieve if we have a goal. Yes, it can happen. In this context, it is important to have thoughts that converge with an ideology. (Gloria, Jharkhand)

I asked her why this issue was important for her- why she was so engaged and inspired to work for women who have been through very challenging situations. She had an urgency in her voice. Her voice was almost quivering while speaking about widows and girls who have no access to education. She was very enthusiastic and wanted to share
many stories. So it prompted me to ask her the question why she is so positive about women and girls education. She replied:

I had faced similar issues since birth. And at that time there were limited opportunities for education. Boys were given privilege for accessing education. Girls are not given support and encouragement for education. I had faced similar issues. I had limited access to education. But I worked for my own education and I supported my brothers too. These personal challenges in my own life give me the conviction. I will not allow others to face similar challenges. I will provide all opportunities to others according to my capability. I will provide all kind of support to women and girls. (Gloria, Jharkhand).

No man’s land. In past few years the MS program and rural women have reconsidered their women-based initiatives specifically aiming at gender and violence. An argument has emerged that only dialogue, trainings, and workshops with women are not leading to any solution. There has been advocacy for equal participation for women and men of rural community for an inclusive approach. Nirupama, a participant from Andhra Pradesh, asserted, “without men there is no dialogue about the issue of violence against women…only women discussing the matter with other women is not the solution”. She is currently encouraging men to participate in meetings at the village level. Further, she is initiating dialogue in women’s groups to discuss the possibility of men participating in the meetings. Bhagwati, from Uttarakhand, shared that the “we need change in the patriarchal society and we cannot do it alone. We need to discuss these things in our families and communities”. Bhagwati has worked in the region for more
than 20 years with different organizations. Her decade long association with the MS program reaffirms her conviction that there is a possibility for changing social norms and men have to be part of the solution. She discussed that the cases of violence against girls and women have increased in past few years. These cases have restricted the mobility of women and girls. Education and empowerment of rural women could be possible if men became part of the social change process. Vidyavati, from Telengana, articulated that such social problems are not women’s problem. She added, “equal participation of men and women is needed for such a change”.

The issue here is that the presence of men in the women’s program is a recent development. These women are considering the objective, purpose, role, and degree of men’s participation. Preeti, from Uttarakhand, elaborated further the current strategy:

When we started working, our main stress was on working without men. Lately we have been considering our past actions and changing our strategy. We are also creating groups for men- we are encouraging them to participate in our gender trainings, and join our discussions. This is a major change - we encourage them to participate in our work. For example, organizing meetings, they support us in these activities. (Preeti, Uttarakhand)

These statements reflect a change in the activities of the program that has emerged from the personal experiences while implementing the initiatives. These changes are emerging from the process of dialogue and consensus within the program. The process-oriented approach of the program provides space to discuss matters within the groups and discover an acceptable unanimity for a strategy.
Collaborative approach. Collaborative approach has been the mainstay of the MS program. The participants suggested that the organizational change could be an opportunity to collaborate with government agencies. Meera, from Bihar, said, “Collaboration can be a strategy for the future” she thinks and adds, “Government is talking about 'Beti Bachao - Save Girl, Educated Girl' - but why we are not involved in this kind of gender-based initiative. This was possible - wasn't it?” She asked me this question and waited for me to respond. I had no answer for her but I said to her that I would certainly share her thoughts and recommend. On the other hand, few participants discussed the possibility of collaboration with skepticism. They questioned the current strategy of the government that has been exclusionary toward the MS program especially in context of collaborating or assisting with new initiatives.

Actions to support the dream. Designing phase bridges the gap between reality and possibility by actions. The participants were asked to share their action plans to support their dreams.

Network of federations. Harsha, from Gujarat, emphatically stated, “there should be a network of federations. This network could collaborate at national level and give guidance to the state units”. On the other hand, participants from Andhra Pradesh, Padma, Vidyavati, and Laxmi, were of the view that the network of federations should be fluid and not restricted with state boundaries. Varsha, from Gujarat added another dimension by adding that the federations could collaborate according the common aspirations of the rural women. Poonam, a women district leader from Bihar, stressed for “a network of federation and consolidation at national level”. She articulated her vision
for consolidation by stating, “*hamse kya chhut gaya yeh toh waqt hi batayega* – only time will what has been lost… *yeh rishta na tuteh* - these relationships should not break”. She was stressed with the thought that federations have limited resources and technical support. Further, she was concerned about the grassroots groups that were not part of the discussions at the state or national level. Her apprehension led her to the state that the results of the current process will be apparent in the future. She had a plea in her voice along with a plan for the future – sustainability possible with consolidation at the national level.

**Changes in the current approach.** The participants also suggested that there should be some changes to the current approach for program implementation. This would entail generating alternate sources for funding and support from sources beyond government. The participants also indicated they want to continue with the current organizational structure.

We will work while deviating a little from our current approach of the organization. At the moment, we are just talking but if we have to materialize this on the ground then we will need resources. We will need information as to how to associate with other like-minded organizations. We will have to take an independent analysis and think about these things rationally. (Preeti, Uttarakhand)

How to approach social change and people's movement led me to wonder about how and what she perceived about the ideal conditions on the verge the MS program’s transition and approach after the government funding is over. She gave me response building on her thoughts that she had shared earlier.
As I stated earlier too, government’s interference has increased over the past few years. If we want to achieve some of these dreams that I have discussed so far - I would prefer to have less target approach. For example, data collection regarding the mid-day meal- if these agendas or target are reduced - and also if the MS is focused on few of the women's issue - this would be a better approach. We work on many issues but these issues are not considered legal- our approach is not considered legal. We have worked closely with the local institutions and police and other legal departments. Whatever we have achieved so far is based upon our experience and the identity we have been able to create for ourselves. So we should have some recognition for our work- at least a legal status that can assist us in working on social issues of women. (Preeti, Uttarakhand)

Resources for action. Participants were keenly aware of the resources that would be required for designing a feasible strategy for the future. Bhagwati Pandey, from Uttarakhand, shared, “We would need support for capacity building, computer training, and management skills”.

Challenges: Anticipated and encountered. Actions need reflection on challenges, rooted in experience, to anticipate and strategies. The participants shared the anecdotes about the creation and initial activities in the federations. These challenges are indicative of the endeavor and enterprise required for creating federations of villages. Further, their sustainability depends upon the foundation of the federations. Additionally, the federations are reliant on grassroots structures to liaise for sustaining them in future.
The current challenges have given an opportunity to learn from the process of creating federations from grassroots groups.

My personal learning, while creating the cluster and district level structures, have been very rewarding. I have been associated with this process of creating federation at every step of the way. The biggest challenge that we had was that women questioned the viability of these structures. They ask us what was the gain from creating and investing their resources in a larger structure. We had women who wanted to hold a prominent position within the larger bodies, and they were proactive in the formation of a larger structure. At the same time, we had smaller women's groups that could not find resources and support for during the initial phase. These women found it difficult, raised the issue with us, and at times almost gave up the process of forming a federation. They said that such a structure would not be beneficial for them. Even in this background of extreme reactions of women – we were able to form of the federations. (Gloria, Jharkhand)

**Destiny: Organizational Structures to Sustain the Organization**

**Research Question 5 “What new structures they think can be created to sustain the Mahila Samakhya program as a learning organization?”**

In the last phase of the interview, the participants were persuaded to share the destiny that they visualize for the organization. The participants were invited to share their version of the destiny for a sustainable organization endeavoring to achieve dreams and designs that they have discussed in the earlier phase. Lastly, they were asked to discuss new structures and policies to assist the organization - to learn and reinvent itself.
The vision of dream phase combined with the designing for co-constructing paves way for delivering a destiny. Appreciative Inquiry’s last step, in the framework, brings together the discussion for cohesive planning and commitment. Participants have defined and discovered their perceptions. Further, they have explained their dreams and design for a desirable future. In this final phase of the AI, the participants are generating interconnected possibilities with specific structures for team building.

**Actions and plans to move forward.** In this section, the approaches of these leaders will be discussed.

**Self-directed approach.** The self-directed approach emerged in the meeting at Hyderabad, which is the capital of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. The participants were curious about the knowledge base of the MS program. The MS program has conducted studies, in all its program states, on different issues related to rural women’s education and their empowerment. Some of the participants were of the view that the studies, part of the knowledge base, belong to the MS program. These studies could be transferred to the federation such that they can be part of the future strategies. It was also suggested that the State Gender Resource Center (SGRC) could be part at the state level organization, if such an organization was created. This knowledge base could then become a resource for any entity that might be interested in working with rural women. There has to be organic links, connections between grassroots organizations and federation along with state level organizations that are not restricted with bureaucracy. Networks and links could evolve, as the organization would take shape in the future - as it would move forward. One participant shared “We are currently looking at binary entities - either this or that. This
should not be the case for the future of the MS program”. She further added, “Especially since the women associated with the program for more than two decades”. There should be solution out of this situation of indecisiveness where we are not sure how the organization will move forward. Another participant added, “We should be thinking about networking with the government and have faith that the women can decide to take forward their own voice and their own issues.” A senior stakeholder animatedly added, “The blessing in the disguise is that the women well be at the helm of all the affairs related to their organization”. In this scenario, the federation members will be free to ask questions and seek clarification. Their role will not be limited to an affiliated organization of the MS program or as a subsidiary entity that has to follow the MS program. The Federation of women would not have to agree to all the suggestions of the MS program or every new survival tactic of the MS program. At the same time, the MS learnings are at the crux of all the activities. The issue is that the deadline for the phase out is March 31st, and is a very short time to arrive at the clarity for all the federations and the rural women. The clear and present danger is that these situations can be hijacked or taken over by political entities at local level. In this scenario, it is very important for the MS program to ensure that sustainability is certainly an issue but at the same time, the federations remain an independent entity. The rural women understand this matter and can decide to continue with the definition and philosophy of the MS program. These discussions are not archaic or bureaucratic way to define gender agenda but keeping an open dialogue between the women's group and raising the critical voice.
Redirecting and redistributing resources. Patton (2015) provided alternative strategies of an observer’s involvement during research. According to him the “observer may begin the study as an onlooker and gradually become a participant as fieldwork progresses… [using] multiple and overlapping data collection strategies” (p. 336). These variations in observer’s strategy are a balancing act between being an insider while remaining outsider. In this particular study, the researcher used etic approach for being an observer. The researcher used conversations, notes, journal, photographs, and video to observe and record the MS program activities during the fieldwork. The researcher, during her fieldwork in the four states, met state officials and administrative staff of each of the MS program state units. Apart from giving a brief overview about the study, the researcher engaged the MS officials in conversation about the organizational change and what it would entail for them in day-to-day organizational activities. One of the participants discussed the transfer of assets that would entail moving items such as cupboard, tables, chairs, account books, and office stationary. She took me to the storage area of the office where many office items were stacked together in the cold dark room. She shared that they had to move all this office paraphernalia after the closure of a block office. Now they are considering moving it to a federation office. However, the issue is that the office furniture and other materials are government property; these office items have been bought over the years from the government funding. These office properties cannot be transferred or trashed without the due process in executive committee meeting at the state level. The participant further added that they have to maintain even the broken chairs and dustbins for audit teams. Some of the broken furniture have been transferred
too many times and are beyond repair. Nevertheless, these broken items have a value since belong to the government. Further, the state may be required to seek further permission from the National Office. The dusty office equipment is only one of the many issues related to sustain federations in the future.

**Team building.** Team building within the MS program entails building on mutual trust with rural women. These strategies of the past will continue to assist in future while working with federations to initiate program activities in the other parts of the state.

The first thing we have to understand is that we will have to create personal relations with these women. These women do not trust outsider easily. The other problem that I see is that there are many government schemes that are initiated for women. But they do not have access to information about these initiative. So I want to work on some opportunity that can be created for providing information as well as ensuring that these women get all the benefit of such programs. So that the women can create opportunities for themselves. (Gloria, Jharkhand)

I asked her what kinds of opportunities are available for women. My intention was to understand the options that could be created for women in case the MS program was completely closed down or in the event of a transition into federations. She shared:

At the moment, we are thinking about creating an Information Center. This information center will be at every village level. It will have information about all the government schemes that are currently being undertaken. The women's group members will manage and sustain this information center. They can work for two or three hours every day. Women will provide not only the information but also
assist everyone in filling out the necessary forms. This kind of information center will be very useful for women since they face challenges in accessing information and they can most benefit from such schemes. (Gloria, Jharkhand)

Bhagwati Pandey, a women district leader from Uttarakhand, emphasized for strong grassroots organizations and sustainable federation network, “grounded in women’s movement and women’s issues”. She underlined the frequency and magnitude of women’s issues across India. Her belief in the collective approach and team building emerges from the initiatives undertaken with the women’s groups. She illustrated few cases where her district has supported women working with the program. In particular, she mentioned Kamla Kothari and Hema Rasyara who have been office messenger since 2008 and 2006 respectively. Kamla is a widow, with responsibility of children, and education until 8th grade. Hema also had limited education with family responsibilities. The district office of Champawat assisted both women to pursue education and learn technical skills. Both women chose to stay with the program and are now assisting rural women and girls with education. Hema assists the women and girls with logistical arrangements for undertaking examination for National Institute of Open Schooling. This team-building initiative has fortified the district office with skilled staff as well as generating a spillover effect within the rural community. The office messengers extended their roles within the program and are assisting others facing similar challenges. This illustration from the Champawat district assists in understanding that team-building for the MS program extends beyond collaborative tasks. The term includes building social relations within the organization while procreating similar relations with the community.
Further, Bhagwati is planning to use strategies for team building, such as goal setting and critical-thinking for problem solving, of the federation members for education as well as empowerment.

**Intergroup: Mutual dependence.** The participants were mostly of the view that women’s groups at the local level and the federations should continue with the support of each other – intergroup activities with mutually accepted strategies. Ambika, a women district leader from Chhattisgarh, asserted, “I am not working with women as a job. I do not consider this as a job. It is the women’s groups and my social commitment for these groups”. She further added that she had a prior strategy of linking the groups from her district with other groups in the neighboring districts. She works in the tribal regions of Chhattisgarh, facing challenges of geographical isolation. Her strategy is based on her experience with the women’s groups by overcoming isolation with mutually cohesive approach. Meera, from Bihar, added that local level leadership should be encouraged to take lead in building a network. These women have the experience and they can create opportunities for each other.

Women from the MS can be recognized in the village level meeting. They discuss the issues and know how to respond and answer or understand the common problems. Then this program has been able to show the women a way. (Meera, Bihar)

At the same time some participants want to continue with the current negotiation with the Government of India and at the same time share these new emerging strategies. The idea here is that these new strategies of federations and inter-group networks could
sustain in the future but they need some support at the nascent stage of intergroup formations.

We are already in the process of registration of the federations. We can also put pressure on the government, she reiterated her statement, we can at least put forward our suggestions that there can be and alternative strategies - at least we can share our suggestions with the Government of India. It is up to them to accept or not. It is their program after all. (Preeti, Uttarakhand)

Many participants further discussed the handholding and support. These participants reiterated that the abrupt exit from some of the places would be a jeopardizing for the sustainability of these groups and federations.

We have to provide some support from time to time. Monitoring and evaluation, meeting with the women's group from time to time will ensure that we will be able to sustain these groups for a long time. We have created committees for many of the women's issues. These committees will need some support from us - they will need some encouragement and information from us. These women's group can sustain but we will have to work with them for some time - a little bit of handholding. We want to ensure that we are connected in some way. Otherwise, women will think that the MS program created groups and started working but left them in the middle. We have shared with women that the MS program will be closed sooner or later. Therefore, they have to take more responsibilities to sustain their groups. Some of them have taken initiative and started working on getting projects from National Bank for Agriculture and Rural
Development (NABARD) and National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM).

Some of the women are struggling with the idea that the MS program will leave and how will they manage their activities at a later stage. (Gloria, Jharkhand)

Bandana, a district leader from Assam, concluded with an assertion that this a “program in which only women can work for themselves”. She further added that women at grassroots level have emerged as leaders in their communities. They can take a lead in the future and build on their natural alliances with other women’s groups.

**Ideas to life: Inspiration from the past.** The participants discussed the strategies based on their experiences.

*Strategic alliances (district, state, and national level).* The strategic alliance with other organizations at the district, state, and national levels.

I am looking at the future in two ways. First, there is a possibility of convergence with the programs such as NRLM. The second thing is that we can work with the Education Department for women and girls education. The State Government of Jharkhand can give support to the women's group - it would be a better thing for everyone. Women's group can work for student's enrollment, retention, construction of public toilets in the schools, etc. (Gloria, Jharkhand)

*Joint ventures (district, state, and national level).* The participants discussed joint venture within the program. The participants shared their perceptions about collaborating within the program without the bureaucratic hierarchy. They also shared that this joint venture should be more aligned with the mission statement of the MS
program. Further, other stakeholders can be involved with the program activities for review of progress and evaluation.

We should create a quorum of activist women, some people from the government, from the MS program, people who are working at the grassroots- and then there should be an analysis of what the MS program has been able to achieve over the years- for so many years. Where we have been able to work- where we have not been able to work - what are the things we can do that there should be some review of the process that can help us to strategize for the future. There should be a mutual dialogue between all the concerned stakeholders about the best approach for the MS program. (Preeti, Uttarakhand)

Mamoni Saikia, a district leader from Assam, summed up her interview with the affirmation that “Hamne bahut kuchh kiya hai par bahut baki hai- We have worked a lot but more needs to be done”. She reflected on the past success and indicated that the work for women’s empowerment and education has still some unfinished missions.

**Summary of Findings**

In this chapter, the data was presented using the 5-D model of the Appreciative Inquiry. The first phase was “defining” in which the organizational change process was the starting point of conversation. The participants reflected upon the organizational change process, past and present, along with their notions on the current phase of the organizational change. The themes included individual level responses on the meaning of organizational change and the process of the organizational change. The participants discussed challenging events and changes along with deviations and departures in the
past. The defining phase was also analyzed, using Kübler-Ross’s emotional responses including shock and denial, moving to anger, bargaining, attempts to postpone the inevitable, depression, and finally acceptance. These five stages overlap. Participants may have different emotional levels. The collective empowering identity of the MS program emerged in the data from all the participants.

The second phase “discover” provided insights on the aspects that create a niche in terms of uniqueness of the program. The golden age, as perceived by the participants, was discussed and visually presented to highlight the source of inspiration. Furthermore, the opportunities for education and empowerment were discussed along with interconnected relationships and collective approach of the MS program. The participants discussed some of the social problems that have become a collective cause for rural women’s groups. The data also indicates a tale of caution regarding the current organizational change process.

The summary of findings for research question three is discussed under the theme of the dream. The data suggest a need for creating a new system with old roots by building on the facilitative role of the program and supporting information centers for rural communities. There is resistance to change that is ideological and political. The dream can be difficult, as discussed by some participants, wherein they could not perceive a plan that may succeed in the absence of resources.

The fourth research question was summarized in the design phase wherein the participants were motivated to share provocative propositions for sustainable future of the organization. The participants indicated their continued support for the collaborative
approach that has been successful in the past for the MS program. The data indicates egalitarian prospects, which illustrates the gradual changes in the approach of the women’s agency. The program known for being a women’s agency is creating avenues for including men in the grassroots groups to confront the social problems such as domestic violence, and dowry. Furthermore, strategies and actions to support the dream were also discussed in this chapter.

The last theme of this study was “destiny” that are perceived by the women district leaders for the MS program’s organizational change. The actions and plans to move forward with a self-directed and team-building approach were discussed. The data also indicated strategic alliances and joint ventures, at district, state, and national levels. The participants discussed approaches for collaborating with the state government for local projects to be undertaken by the rural women. There was some skepticism about the success of such an approach. Nevertheless, the majority of the participants indicated possibility of collaboration with the state governments.

In the next chapter the analysis and the recommendations from this study are presented.
Chapter 5: Reflections, Recommendations, and Conclusion

This chapter presents the reflections, recommendations, and conclusion from the qualitative data, categorized in themes and sub-themes, discussed in the previous chapter. In the following section, the data is further discussed in the context of answering the research questions for the study. This chapter begins with an overview of the study and follows in three sections, namely, reflections, recommendations, and conclusion. Additionally, this section will be steered by five conceptual framework of the Appreciative Inquiry (AI), namely, definition, discovery, dream, design, and destiny.

Restatement of Study Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions on Organizational Change (OC) of the women district leaders of the Mahila Samakhya (MS) program, for empowerment and non-formal education in India. The organizational practices of the district leaders can assist in better understanding the challenges of translating the OC mandate in terms of appreciative inquiry’s Five-D model. The purpose of the study was also to understand the challenges faced by women in managing a women’s organization – managerial and administrative tasks. Lastly, the purpose of the study was to contribute toward our current understanding of the organizational changes emerging in a rural GONGO educational program from a developing country.

Research Questions

The following questions were framed to study the current organizational change undergoing in the Mahila Samakhya program:
Research Question 1: What are the perspectives of the women district leaders on organizational change in the Mahila Samakhya program?

Research Question 2: How do women district leaders identify and appreciate the best of organizational change in their Mahila Samakhya program?

Research Question 3: How do women district leaders envision the organizational transformation of the Mahila Samakhya program?

Research Question 4: What do the district leaders think are the best organizational strategies and resources that can create an ideal condition for the Mahila Samakhya program?

Research Question 5: What new structures do they think can be created to sustain the Mahila Samakhya program as a learning organization?

Summary of Findings

Summary of findings for research question 1: Define. Defining the organizational change process was the starting point of conversation with the District Program Coordinators (DPCs). They reflected upon the organizational change process, past and present, along with their notions on the current phase of the organizational change. Their responses are summarized below:

1. Individual level responses on the meaning of organizational change
   - Challenging events and changes
   - Deviations and departures
   - Change for better or worse

2. Individual level responses to organizational change
• Shock and denial
• Moves to anger
• Bargaining, or attempts to postpone the inevitable
• Depression
• Acceptance

3. Collective empowering identity

**Summary of findings for research question 2: Discover**

1. Uniqueness of the program
2. Golden age
   • Personal discoveries
   • Innovative approach
     o Innovation for social change
     o Discovering best practices
3. Opportunities for education and empowerment
4. Mapping relationships and collective approach
   • Social problems: A collective cause
   • Personal resilience
5. A tale of caution

**Summary of findings for research question 3: Dream**

1. Creating a new system with roots in the old
   • Gender training
2. Common dreams and uncommon aspirations
3. Resistance to change
   - Political
   - Ideological
   - Dream is difficult

Summary of findings for research question 4: Design

1. Provocative propositions
   - No man’s land

2. Collaborative approach

3. Actions to support the dream
   - Network of federations
   - Changes in the current approach
   - Resources for action

4. Challenges anticipated and encountered

Summary of findings for research question 5: Destiny

1. Actions and plans to move forward
   - Self-directed approach
   - Team building
   - Intergroup: Mutual dependence

2. Ideas to life: Inspirations from the past
   - Strategic alliances (District, State, and National Level)
   - Joint ventures (District, State, and National Level)
Discussion of Findings

Research question 1: Define. The framework of definition was explored to better understand the perceptions of women district leaders regarding personal and professional definitions and dimensions, from the standpoint of a district leader, about the organizational change process. All the District Program Coordinators (DPCs) shared their perspectives on organizational change process past and present.

Analysis of findings. Defining is the first phase of the Appreciative Inquiry framework, and necessitates “focus on the positive as the focus of inquiry” (Watkins et al., 2011, p. 112). This requires an understanding of the “choice of focus” to define a trajectory of the whole process of AI (p. 113). This phase of query aligns with the mental model “surfacing, testing, and improving our internal pictures of how the world works” (Senge, 2006, p. 163). Further, mental model encourages “personal awareness and reflective skills” (p. 171). Together, the AI and mental models, assists in analyzing the individual level responses to change, perceptions regarding historical and current organizational changes. Similar to the literature review, the findings revealed that the participants chose their point of focus to discuss the definitive aspects of organizational change. Participants discussed organizational changes of the past and the aspects of the organization that were critical to the success of the program. Few participants shared that the original program structure of the program had grassroots level women leaders called Sahayogini – or village level facilitator. The MS program invested human resources in recruiting and training the village facilitators. There was one facilitator for ten villages and they were integral part of the community. These women could arrange meetings,
planned and impromptu, to discuss matters with the Sangha women. In this structure, the sangha had the key agency role and sahayogini the nodal person, playing a key catalytic role in mobilizing the marginalized women. Sanghas were retained but the facilitators, or sahayoginis, were not part of later program cycle. Instead, the cluster level resource persons were appointed to manage 25 villages. Participants indicated that the strong network of village level facilitators could have used a better approach. Few participants, Geeta, Varsha, Harsha, and Preeti, raised the issue of changing the level of managing the sanghas. Reflecting upon the past structure, the participants asserted that the MS program was able to reach rural women and work with depth and close collaborative ties.

Participants from Kerala state unit of the MS program raised the issue of the temporary closure activities in their state. The brief discontinuation of the program was described as an event that led to a frozen status and a problematic issue. However, this event also strengthened the network of the MS staff members. They collaborated with each other, and discussed the problems openly within the program implementation units. Similar instances of closure or re-organizing state or district units have occurred in the past. These events have created spaces within the organization to reflect upon the crisis and collaborate to assist each other. In this particular instance, elements of team learning are visible with predisposition toward reflective practices and generative learning. The event shared by the participants from Kerala has underpinnings of participation for organizational actors. Organizational actors from different states discussed issues within their state units and at national level. All efforts were made to revive the state unit with institutional support.
The participants frequently discussed the collective empowering identity of the MS program. This facet of the MS program extends from its program level activities at the sangha level to the organizational structure. Furthermore, the collective identity of the program has assisted in creating a niche for itself among a plethora of governmental programs and non-governmental programs working for rural development projects. Participants indicated that this aspect creates a brand image for the MS program to be identified as a unique organization created as a GONGO, with diverse approaches for rural women’s empowerment. This facet can be identified as a life-giving force for the organization and its actors. Collective empowering initiatives have elements of generating and reinvigorating rural women to mobilize community for social change. In many cases, rural women utilized the structure of sangha and federations to demand schools for their children and specifically for girls. Women, using collective bargaining approach, have been able to access banking services, health centers, and participate in local governing bodies – a step toward gaining mobility and empowerment.

Burke (2014) compares the organizational change process to responses of the terminally ill people based upon psychiatrist Elizabeth Kubler-Ross's (1969) description of the five stages that most people go through. The response begins with “(1) shock and denial, (2) moves to anger, (3) to bargaining, or attempts to postpone the inevitable, on to (4) depression, and finally to (5) acceptance” (Burke, 2014, p. 108). Further, Burke illustrates that these behavioral phases are not universal and unanimous in terms of acceptance and endorsement. He states “Not everyone moves through all these stages; some never move beyond denial. And so it is with organizational behavior…. Most
people are somewhere in between and move through all stages” (p. 108 -109). All the five responses emerged during interviews with the District Program Coordinators. Furthermore, very similar to Burke, the behavioral phases are unique to each individual and varied in intensity. Participants expressed anger and denial about the fate of organization after the current phase of change. Two participants did not want to discuss their perceptions after sharing their complete denial. This aspect is similar to literature and adds another dimension when participants share their lack of will to participate in furthering organizational change activities. These participants remained non-committal toward the organizational change process. Additionally, these participants have had the longest association with the MS program. In this scenario, the leaps of abstraction, an element of mental models, indicates that the participants have restricted their conscious mind to an expected abstract outcome. Participants, with significant experience with the program, are critical assets of the organization and their generalized negative outcome requires particular attention in terms of AI approach. The ingrained positive facet of the AI has to create a space for such participants, with considerable experience, to include their inability to identify a positive gaze in organizational change.

**Research question 2: Discover**

**Analysis of findings.** The “discovery” phase of the AI is about exploring what is, the factors that bring life and synergy in an organization (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). This phase leads the discussion into the aspects of the organization that have worked well in the past, and the elements contributing to the subsistence and sustainability of the organization. Further, in this process of discovering
appreciation “people sense that their relational connections are enriching, improving, or expanding… leads to learning and collaboration” (Bright, 2009, p. 5).

The “discovery” phase of the study gave participants to share their personal stories about the unique aspects of the program that have been the mainstay of their initiatives. The participants shared their personal testimonies about the problems that they faced at initial stages of their association with the MS program. Further, the rudiments of the program were discussed to illustrate the factors ascribed as a unique status to the program. These elements have been indicated in the literature for the program. This study focused more on the connection between these unique aspects and personal associations of the women working with the MS program. These women shared personal stories of resilience, and attributed the GONGO form of the organization that gave opportunity to women who had limited opportunities in life. The training and personal support from the organizational structure assisted these women to overcome their personal challenges and maintain an empowering relationship with the program.

The golden era of the program garnered responses that varied in terms of experience with the MS program. AI literature on golden phase of an organization primarily focuses on the aspects related to such a phase. The process is primarily undertaken to understand the aspects of the organization that have inherent aspects of generativity. In the current study, the participants were asked to indicate specific duration of time that they consider was the best in the organization. Interestingly, a pattern emerged from the reflection on the golden age. The range of the golden age, in years, varied according to the association with the program. Further, the participants with
experience of more than 15 years leaned toward a fluid form of organization that focused more on social change issues. In contrast, the participants with less than 14 years of experience focused more on the professional aspects of enhancing capacities and skills in the future.

Discovery of the past is not a pragmatic experience for some participants. These participants communicated their frustration that the MS program has a glorious legacy that could be difficult to maintain in the future. Currently, the MS program is facing problems primarily due to transition and lack of funding. Many activities were planned for the federations but these activities remain partially achieved. The participants referred to the glorious golden age and identified the facets of success of the organization. However, some participants also indicated that the golden phase alone could not be a benchmark. These participants stressed the need for investing resources for a sustainable future requires fund for various trainings and workshops. Further, these participants were concerned about the activities undertaken for sustaining federations. They shared that the capacity-building activities have to be either delayed or undertaken partially; in either case their purpose is jeopardized in the future.

A study from southern part of India, with Mysore Resettlement and Development Agency (MYRADA) project, illustrates the success of AI and social capital to overcome the link between mobility and social restrictions, such as covering head by rural women (Singh et al., 2013). The elements of similarities, between the MYRADA project and the MS program, are apparent in approach indicated by the MS participants while mapping relationships and collective approach. The recurring theme of restrictive social mobility
was evident in narratives and anecdotes collected during the interviews and field observations. The snapshot of urgency to confront social problems is evident in the narratives of the MS participants. The social problems entrenched within the Indian society have been a common ground for mobilizing women and creating collective initiatives. Participants shared case studies of success and failures, especially in the context of violence against women, highlighting the need for a structure that can balance activism and unwavering collaboration with rural women.

**Research question 3: Dream.** The dream phase is mid-point of the study where participants were inquired about their aspirations for the organization.

**Analysis of findings.** The discovery phase leads into the dream phase, a step toward building possibilities grounded in experience of the past. Organizational actors are encouraged to participate in constructivist conversation and share their dreams about the organization. Dreams and aspirations for the organization are part of the generative process exploring the ideal condition for the organization. The positive mode of inquiry guides the process to illuminate a common ground of understanding and constructing a shared vision (Bright, 2009; Bushe, 2010).

The primary purpose of this phase was to ascertain the positive aspects in the organization that could be retained and further adapted to the changes. Participants, mostly, were eager to share their personal dreams for the organization except for few. The mainstay of the MS program is the facilitative approach to provide information to the rural women and their groups for the purposes of education and empowerment. This aspect has been discussed in the literature. During the dream phase, the participants used
the similar approach but stressed on creation of the information centers. These information centers could be an integral part of the federation and sustained by the rural women’s groups. Information centers are visualized as spaces that will support the women’s initiatives by networking and providing resources from government agencies. Some information centers are currently operating and their success is encouraging participants to replicate and augment the legacy of the MS program. At the same time, participants are keenly aware about the challenges in sustaining a structure that is autonomous from the MS program. The conversation regarding the information center reflects the impact of globalization on the rural communities in developing counties. One participant mentioned support for computer and Internet while others indicated technical skills for the information center.

Few participants resisted to discuss their dreams, and stressed their concerns for dreams that do not have adequate resources for sustainability. These participants had more than 15 years of experience with the organization and had witnessed funding problems in the past too. The current phase of the organizational change was not appealing to these participants.

One observation made during meetings was that the participants wanted to discuss the federations and there structures. The participant’s decision to discuss the independent organizational structure in the future reflects their aspirations for the future. Some stakeholders suggested to the rural women that they should not depend on the MS program. Solidarity and gender are the strong points and have been an integral part of conversations and discussions within the program. Certainly, there can be options for
handholding and support structures to provide some input from time to time. However, the women have to think about how they want to work in the future. Further, the other concern was that if the federations were to be registered as an NGO then, it would be another NGO. There should be a horizontal growth within the federation and they should be the primary force to support the grassroots movement; and NGO structure may not fulfill this objective. The question should not be about ownership or the ultimate structure. The question should be more about what the women want for their own organization - how they want to work in the future with the grassroots organization. This discussion on federation’s structure draws attention to the dreams that are part of micro-conversations within the organization. These conversations, in the current phase of transition, seem abrupt and inconclusive submissions, but there presence indicates aspirations for a common good.

Lastly, participants shared their dreams entrenched in resistance to change emerging from political and ideological stances. These participants indicated that the program has already changed the strategy for implementing the program activities. Further, these participants were ideologically opposed to the current target approach of the program that necessitated time-bound activities, results, and phase-out from the program area. Some participants also discussed the political influence for the funding mechanism. This form of resistance leans toward the resistance to neo-liberal agenda of the government activities that are undertaken for the development of rural communities. The pattern of resistance assisted in locating the source of grievance. These grievances are aimed toward the accountability system that is established by involving bureaucratic
agencies. Even though the participant’s statements reflect resistance to neo-liberal agenda, there are elements for the AI process to utilize the information in the organizational change process. For example, the accountability and transparency could become part of participatory evaluation process in which the community is the primary stakeholder rather than the government agencies.

Research question 4: Design. Aspects of Senge (2006)’s Fifth Discipline model, such as mental model, team learning, systems thinking, and shared vision, contributed as part of the organizational change process in understanding the perspectives of the district women leaders. Primary critique of Senge (2006)’s System Theory is its practical applicability that “narrows rather than expands the critical exploration of agency, learning and change in organizations” (Caldwell, 2012, p. 52). In the design phase, Appreciative Inquiry assists in expanding the Senge (2006)’s System Theory with empirical evidences to understand the provocative propositions and collaborative approach for organizational change.

Analysis of findings. The design phase inspires the participants to share their creative ideas and co-create a future with possibilities.

The MYRADA study, with the women’s community-based organizations in India, by Singh et al. (2011), illustrates the success of appreciative inquiry by providing a common vision and generating social capital for sustainable approach. This study is noteworthy for demonstrating the empirical evidences from marginalized women’s collectives based on workshops and concentrated efforts since 1999. Further, the case study demonstrates that rural women visualize and design common future while tracking
their trajectory. The participants of the current study initiated a dialogue about their
dreams or vision for the current organizational change process along with probable
designs. Similar to the MYRADA study, the participants indicated inclination for
changing the social practices that restrict the mobility of the women. In the case of the
MYRADA, after using AI, some women have discontinued the practice of covering
heads and hiding the details of the meetings from husbands and family members. In
contrast, the MS women highlighted that they have given up these practices and are now
demanding better social standing for their daughters. The MYRADA’s long-term
approach using AI with women’s groups signifies that similar initiatives could be
designed in developing countries such as India. The primary elements illustrated in the
MYRADA study are mobilizing local resources and social capital. The participants
discussed at length the need for information about government programs and
collaborating on projects that are relevant for rural women. Participants also highlighted
that there is possibility of collaborating with other organizations beyond the
governmental organizations. The rural women associated with the MS program undertake
momentous tasks of challenging social issues such as domestic violence and violence
against girls and women while working for empowerment and education. These
challenging circumstances indicate an approach with practical implications for design.

According to Senge and Kim (2013), in a learning community, “people view each
of the three functions – research, capacity-building, practice – as vital to the whole.
Practice is crucial … tangible results [are produced] that show that the community has
learned something” (p. 10). This learning community approach is visible in the findings.
The statement by Nirupama, Bhagwati, Vidyavati, and Preeti indicate a gradual change in the MS program to encourage participation of men in empowerment and education of women. These statements are not isolated; other participants indicated similar sentiments. These changes have emerged from observations, discussions, and experience while working with rural women. Particularly, in cases of domestic violence, the participants indicated that discussions within the women’s groups did not seem appropriate as a stand-alone strategy. Men from the community had to be part of the conversation and the social change process. The current strategy encourages the participation of men in the group activities. Additionally, the women groups can take steps to decide the level, form, and actions related to men’s participation. These changes are emerging from the program and are deliberated and consensually accepted. The change in approach is not forced upon the program and participants indicated the long-term GONGO approach has assisted in shaping such conversations. Program has been able to work with rural women on common issues and changing strategies according to the need. Practicing on strategies and adapting them, has been integral part of the MS program and indicates elements of a learning community. The MS program has had the time to assess and adapts its strategies, unlike the other time-bound programs of the Government of India. This factor has assisted in sustaining the learning community. The current phase of the MS program will further indicate the success and sustainability of the learning community when federations will evolve.

Contrary to the traditional mode of social change, employing grievances to demand justice for the marginalized, the MS program has facilitated grassroots groups for
collective actions. These collective actions have common factors of social problems and needs. Their strategy has concentrated on mobilizing rural women for common solutions while seeking assistance from the governmental agencies. This facet aligns with the literature on generative mobilization. Boland (2013) illustrates generative mobilization through appreciative social movements from three case studies, namely Rustbelt City, New England City, and Occupy Rustbelt City (p. 379-80). These case studies emphasize the organic nature of appreciative movement using aspirations, collective responsibility, and nonhierarchical structures (p. 383). Parallels could be drawn from these case studies and the collective mobilization process of the MS program. Participants illustrated, from their experience, the possible course of action to design a strategy for the future. Some participants indicated the need to retain the federations in a fluid and nonhierarchical structure to ensure their autonomous status in the future. Preeti, a women district leader from Uttarakhand in particular, asserted that the need to mobilize as we, in other words stressing for collective actions. Further, her statement reflects the social need to have autonomous form of organizing in the future. She and other participants viewed federations, in future, as a form of organization that would continue mobilizing rural women for empowerment and education. Their aspiration also echoes the sentiments of the current sangha women who would prefer to have an autonomous body that can chose their own initiative and agendas. Further, the discussion about activities for Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) and National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL) indicates that the participants agree to the need to participate in government programs. However, they would prefer to have discretionary
powers to accept the initiatives according to the need and capacity of the local grassroots women. Their primary concern regarding governmental initiatives, such as KGBV and NPEGEL, was about additional tasks that did not entail management or administrative powers to change the problematic issues. According to the participants, the MS program diverged from their original mission while becoming an extended agency for the government. Given the background of tussles, triumphs, and tribulations with initiatives for the government, the generative mobilization emerges as a probable strategy for the federation. The elements of the appreciative movement are visible in the statement of the participants and have been part of the strategy since inception.

**Research question 5: Destiny.** Appreciative inquiry’s last phase aims at identifying resources for planning and inspiring actions to support, in particular, the dream and design phase.

**Analysis of findings.** The destiny phase is the last step in consolidating and unifying the generative aspects discussed in the previous sections. The coding process and emerging patterns indicate that the participants support the continuation of handholding activities for the federations. The primary concern for some participants is that the rural women have a long-term experience of working at the village level, but managing a federation is in its nascent phase. The evaluation report of the MS program indicates that the federations have received training and capacity development workshops to manage financial and administrative attributes. During my observations of meetings, it appeared that the federations were at different stages of progression. The participants shared the information about the different stages of forming the federations. This facet
was discussed during the interviews to triangulate the observations and information provided in the evaluation reports. Few participants stressed that for this very reason they wanted the MS program to continue its facilitative role with the federations.

Collaborating with government agencies for local projects emerged as a primary source for establishing and marinating the federations in the future. Some participants, based on the inhibition for influential power structures and elitism, problematized the process for collaboration. This skeptic pattern of data reflects the further exploration of evolution and trajectory of federations in the future. At the same time, there is a need to understand the form of organizations that could be culturally and socially relevant without being threatened by inhalation or co-option.

The literature on learning organization supports the notion of provocative changes emerging from common ground of dreams and aspirations. “Imagine a learning community as a group of people that bridges the worlds of research, practice, and capacity-building to produce the kind of knowledge that has the power to transform the way we operate, not merely make incremental improvements” (Senge & Kim, 2013, p. 10). The possibility of achieving a learning organization with the assistance of appreciative inquiry could be a reality. In the next segment, reflections on the findings of the study are discussed.

Reflections

In his book ‘The Fifth Discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization, Senge (2006) initiated the discussion on visualizing wholes within a system. He presents an ideology for generative learning to create an empowered and
decentralized organization with an ability to shape its own future. Further, the five principles contribute to integrate the interconnected knowledge with collective aspirations (Senge, 2006). Senge’s advocates for creating a learning organization and system’s thinking with shared values, personal mastery, mental models, and team learning. This study employed Appreciative Inquiry’s 5-D model, namely, define, discover, dream, design, and destiny. Organizational change has many trajectories of restructuring, merger, conflict-resolution, downsizing, and transformations among others. Additionally, the process of organizational change is non-linear, and involves dynamic human relations and “actors’ unique contexts” (Lockett et al., 2011, p. 1102). In this section, a reflection is presented on the study with a discussion on the frameworks and the organizational actor’s perception on the current change process.

One of the major criticisms of the AI framework is a focus on the positive with little regard for generativity (Bushe, 2007; Bushe & Kassam, 2005). Bushe (2007) challenged many studies that are changing the dynamics of deficit-based inquiry and are focused on identifying positive and claim alignment with the AI framework. Bushe (2007) recommends to focus on the generativity aspect of the AI rather than straightforward positivity. The generativity aspect is fundamentally “new ideas that are compelling to people” (Bushe & Paranjpey, 2015, p. 311). This body of literature argues for empirical research with evidences for informing the theoretical and conceptual frameworks. The limited focus on the positive aspect of the AI could limit the creation of knowledge about the future possibilities for practitioners. In this regard, the generative potential of the AI has to be embedded in the studies. This study presents empirical
evidence with generativity to learn from the positive as well as the cynical statements of the participants. Appreciative inquiry could be better served with acceptance of statements without limitations on positive focus.

Participants discussed the change in the training systems within the organization over the past few years. Further, they indicated that the residential trainings of the past gave them the opportunity to engage with others and generate a collective spirit. This form of training has gradually changed, and participants indicated the change in the cohesive organizational practices. During the AI framework’s discovery phase, the participants raised the concern about the length and content of the current trainings. Further, some participants shared the need for capacity building for the federations. Some participants view the process of creating federations as an independent entity and a threat that could jeopardize the self-governing structure of the federations in the future. The collective approach of the organization has been a mainstay of the MS program. During the interview with the participants, the discovery phase assisted in building rapport and exploring the sense-making of the actors. In contrast to the define phase, the participants engaged in sharing organizational processes and intersections with their life. In other words, the discovery phase provided more space to the participants for reflecting. The discovery phase was a personal journey of revisiting the life-giving aspects of the MS program. The discovery phase of the AI assists in identifying the best of the organization. However, in this study some participants shared the best practices of the past and the challenges for the future. The discovery of past brought forward the concerns and cautionary notes indicating generative potential existing within the AI’s framework.
These concerns could be overcome by combining elements of the personal mastery at the design stage of the AI. Senge (1990) observed, “organizations learn only through individuals who learn” (p. 139). These participants have been associated with the program, possess considerable experience, and their perceptions are grounded in practices at the grassroots level. They indicated evidence of personal mastery by “integrating reason and intuition” (Senge, 2006, p. 157). However, their unenthusiastic and cautionary approach illustrates a disconnect between them and the future of the organizational change. Integrating the knowledge of these participants with the future of the organization is lacking in the AI framework. All the participants have a vision for the organization, but the challenge here is about using the knowledge further inculcating a “commitment to the whole” (Senge, 2006, p. 161). Undertaking the AI process with a large group will encourage aspirations, however the need would be to integrate the diverse visions.

Personal mastery and mental models could assist in a unification process by encouraging participants to share their perceptions within their organization. Organization could assist by creating an authentic communication channels for the flow of information about the organizational change process. In the present study, the participants shared limitations of funding and vagueness about the organizational change process. Both recurring aspects indicate mental blocks on the part of the participants for not being able to perceive a future without the constant support of the government. Further, this also illustrates the lack of AI approach to address the concerns of the participants. The AI approach encourages the participants to dream a destiny. However,
in the case of the organization depending on an external funding, many participants may not appreciate the positive approach of inquiry. This study illustrates from participant’s narrative that the participant’s view of golden age does not lead to an overall positive inclination for the organizational change. Personal mastery could assist in identifying and creating a chain of local line leaders, executive leaders, internal networkers, and community builders to disseminate information about the organizational change. Further, AI and personal mastery could assist in creating alternate channels of sharing the positive as well as cynical information with the leadership of the organization. This could encourage the commitment to the whole while blurring the bureaucratic channels. Lastly, it could foster positive conversations at all levels of the organization with no space for vagueness and skepticism.

The disconfirming comments of the participants reflect in the statements about dreams which are not enough for visualizing an ideal organization. The mental models, testing and adapting internal pictures, could pose a challenge in the organizational change process and “limit an organization’s range of action” (Senge, 2006, p. 176). The possibility here is that few members of the organization may not accept the new structures evolving in the organization. The mental models can assist in “balancing inquiry and advocacy” and with equanimity and perseverance (Senge, 2006, p. 183). In this study, few participants felt dejected with the changes and questioned the relevance of having dreams. These participants have had a long association with the program and they have been part of the past organizational changes. These participants are unable to discuss and share their dreams even with a positive mode of inquiry. These participants
reiterated that the dreams are not a possibility and there is no space for the dreams. The dreams are a nightmare for these participants. A positive form of inquiry could further lead to a sense of dissatisfaction about the future of the organization. This aspect indicates the limitation with the Appreciative Inquiry framework. Inherent positive form of inquiry may not be adequate for some participants to be part of the collective process of organizational change. The limitation of the AI could be prevailed by integrating elements from the theoretical frameworks such as Senge (2006)’s Learning Organization. In this particular case, mental models could be an efficacious since it blends “genuine inquiry… without polarizing or terminating discussions” (p. 185). The limitations within the AI conceptual framework could be better served with combination of Senge (2006)’s theoretical framework. For example, incorporating mental models and team learning in the defining phase; borrowing elements from system’s thinking, personal mastery, and team learning for the discovery phase. A convergence of frameworks and their elements is given in Table 9. Both the frameworks have social constructivism at the core and could blend for creating sustainable organizations.
### Table 9

**Appreciative Inquiry’s 5-D Model and convergence with Fifth Discipline**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AI’s 5-D Model</th>
<th>Learning Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Defining</td>
<td>Mental models, Team learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discovery</td>
<td>System’s thinking, Personal mastery, Team learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dream</td>
<td>System’s thinking, Personal mastery, Building shared vision, Team learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design</td>
<td>System’s thinking, Personal mastery, Building shared vision, Team learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destiny</td>
<td>System’s thinking, Personal mastery, Building shared vision, Team learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: This convergence of the two frameworks, conceptual and theoretical, was created for the purposes of this study.

Table 10 illustrates Appreciative Inquiry’s 5-D model and Senge (2006)’s Fifth Discipline with themes and sub-themes from this study.
Table 10

Appreciative Inquiry’s 5-D Model and Fifth Discipline with themes and sub-themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5-D Model</th>
<th>AI’s 5-D Model</th>
<th>Convergence with Fifth Discipline</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| “Who Are We, and Who Can We Become?” | Mental models, Team learning | 1. Individual level responses on the meaning of OC | • Challenging events and changes  
• Deviations and departures | |
| | | 2. Individual level responses to organizational change | • Shock and denial  
• Moves to anger  
• Bargaining  
• Depression  
• Acceptance | |
| Life giving properties; reflect & celebrate; strengths/abilities at “Best” | System’s thinking, Personal mastery, Team learning | 3. Collective empowering identity | 1. Uniqueness of the program | • Personal discoveries  
• Innovative approach  
• Innovation for social change  
• Discovering best practices |
| | | 2. Golden age | | |
• Enduring factors |
Table 10 continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provocative propositions; articulate potential</th>
<th>Personal mastery, Building shared vision, Team learning</th>
<th>1. Creating a new system with roots in the old</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Common dreams &amp; uncommon aspirations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Resistance to change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct attention &amp; action; How can it be?</td>
<td>System’s thinking, Personal mastery, Building shared vision, Team learning</td>
<td>1. Provocative propositions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Collaborative approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Actions to support the dream</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4. Challenges anticipated and encountered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Actions and plans to move forward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consolidating the steps; being &amp; becoming</td>
<td>System’s thinking, Personal mastery, Building shared vision, Team learning</td>
<td>1. Provocative propositions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Collaborative approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Actions to support the dream</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4. Challenges anticipated and encountered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Actions and plans to move forward</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: This table is an extension of Table 8 and provides themes and sub-themes along with the convergence of the AI and 5th Discipline.

Senge (2006) used four core principles of shared values, personal mastery, mental models, and team learning that are integrated with the conceptual cornerstone of the
system’s thinking. AI has five independent concepts and no space for integration of define to destiny phase of the inquiry. AI encourages positive conversations, and in some cases, could generate commitment of the participants toward an ideal organization in the future. The plethora of literature on the success of AI indicates that it has been successful in organizations with a for-profit base, such as corporate and business organizations. However, there are limited studies with other forms of organizations. The present study was conducted with a Government Organized Non-governmental Organization (GONGO) form of organization. This form of organization has a combination of bureaucratic and non-governmental elements with funding from a government source. The lifecycle of such an organization is dependent on the funding. The participants of this study highlighted the issues with funding and the future of the organization. These issues led the participants to share their despondent and cynical thoughts even with a positive inquiry. In future studies, AI could be considered for exploring alternate forms of organizations and provide approaches to generate ideas for sustaining organizations. For example, integrating social-entrepreneurship or any other mechanism of generating funds could emerge from the AI framework’s inquiry. In the present study, some participants shared networking with the like-minded organizations. However, the researcher could not seek more information about alternate sources of funding. The MS program, in its current GONGO structure, has limitations for accepting funding from other organizations. However, the federations could explore options such as social marketing for sustainable organizations while ensuring their independent status. Organizational actors, in their current fragile state of vagueness, can be reignited with passion for the organization but
that would require change in mental models with the use of personal mastery. The recommendations emerging from the study are discussed in the following section.

**Recommendations**

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, recommendations for the Mahila Samakhya program, the Government, practitioners, and future research are presented in the following sections.

**Recommendations for the Mahila Samakhya program (or any long-term GONGO)**

**Federations for sustainability.** The creation of federations for sustaining the grassroots organization has been a benchmark strategy for the MS program. There are few recommendations in this regard:

1. State level units should have transparent process to assess and internally evaluate the grassroots organization before initiating the process for forming federations.

2. Grassroots organizations and state level units should have participatory approach to finalize the structure of the federations. For example, if the federation should be registered as Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) or a Civil Society organization.

3. Transparent and inclusive approach, such as Participatory Rural Appraisal at state level, should be adopted and adapted to hold mass meeting of women’s groups. This process would be able to generate ideas and strategies from the grassroots at an earlier stage of implementing program activities. These
women will lead the federation in the future. Their confidence and perspective could assist in establishing the federations.

4. Handholding activities should be initiated at the initial stages of forming the federations. These activities could provide support to the federation in terms of financial management and generating funds in the future. Some activities have been initiated, such as opening bank account and taking contract for mid-day meals in local schools. At the same time, a future strategy should include more administrative tasks for the federations considering the timeline for the exit policy. This could assist in establishing federations and assist them to sustain independently even before the MS program or any GONGO has to exit completely.

5. Institutionalizing skills for reflection and inquiry within the program structure and the federations on a regular basis. Using Fifth Discipline for learning organization model, the MS program could encourage inclusive approach to discuss and reflect upon key strategies. This could foster a culture of gaining understanding of organizational actors at an early stage of introducing new initiatives. Rather than waiting for a crisis to encourage reflection and inquiry for rectifying problematic issues.

6. Inculcating generative mobilization for appreciative social change in federations. This form of social change emerges from collective responsibility instead of co-optation by the traditional power structures or privileged few. The discussion on federation and their future independence emerged as an
issue during the data gathering process. Encouraging generative mobilization could foster transparency and participation of many rural women – a step toward fortifying and consolidating the gains of more than two decades of endeavor for empowerment.

7. Network of federations could be created at the state level and national level. These networks could assist in overcoming geographical and political limitations. Further, these networks can be based on themes and interest areas.

**Diversify strategies at different stages.** The MS program and other GONGOs should apply diverse strategies at different stages of the program, especially if the implemented programs are in multiple states. Diverse strategies related to internal and external evaluations along with implementation of exit policy could assist in giving more ownership to the state units. The State units should have more power in implementing these strategies since they are in a better position to assess their capability and contribute to the national level policies. This is critical in cases of initiatives introduced in diverse cultural settings.

**Fortifying the functional aspects of the program.** The MS program has a diverse range of activities implemented by the grassroots groups. Simultaneously, the program supports the functional aspect of literacy, such as providing information about other government programs, and opening bank accounts. Such functional aspects should be fortified and the federations can take responsibility at an earlier stage. This could reduce some resource burden for the MS program and become an initial handholding initiative for sustaining the federations.
**Consolidating gains and converging change.** The MS program has been a proponent of empowerment and education for rural women and girls. A process for consolidating the gains of the grassroots groups should be initiated. The grassroots groups, according to their priorities and interest, could undertake consolidation of diverse activities at district and state level. Further, the convergence of these groups, according to their interest area, and linking them beyond geographical terrain and political boundaries could contribute in sustaining federations. The consolidation of diverse initiatives could especially support in fortifying the social change movement. Additionally, these groups could be linked with various state agencies for initiating village level projects. For example, a participant mentioned the acknowledgment of grassroots groups by the state government could assist them in the future. The state government could recognize these groups according to their work for girl’s education, women’s educational certification process, legal assistance in domestic violence cases, etc.

**Recommendations for government**

**Choice of participation.** The primary purpose of creating and funding governmental programs, such as the MS program and other GONGOs, is to implement initiatives for development. GONGOs are considered government’s extended arms to implement developmental programs. The government should give more choice of participation to GONGOs in context of programs that are beyond the realm of the primary mission. For example, in context of the MS program, the additional tasks related to KGBV and NPEGEL could have been a matter of choice for the state and district units.
Accountability for deliverable targets. Targets and accountability mechanisms should be part of the program initiation statements and included as an afterthought. The changes in these programs are at times essential and can be discussed with at different levels of the programs to generate consensus rather than adding them without a democratic process. The current phase of organizational change is fraught with uncertainty and there have been criticisms regarding accountability and deliverable targets for the MS program. These could have been avoided and more focus could have been sought for sustainability in the future.

Avoiding an overdue expiry date. Initial designs of the GONGOs and developmental programs should have a timeline of implementation and exit policy. This is generally the practice in the current programs. However, in the case of the MS program the timeline was not the part of the program documents. The program was continued under the Five-Year Planning system with extensions after review process. Now, the expiry date for the program is being considered as an afterthought.

Recommendations for practitioners

1. Practitioners should use approach that is more inclusive for Appreciative Inquiry (AI) and balance between the positive focus of inquiry and positive voices. The process of AI has an inherent aspect of generativity or in other words, the focus of inquiry is positive while avoiding deficit framework. Practitioners should extend the inquiry to include positive as well as voices with negative aspects, to discern the factors of resistance to change. Organizations choosing to undergo change have to include everyone in the process. The
narrow focus on positive aspects of the organization can isolate the critical voices within the organization.

2. Participants, from government-funded programs, can be involved using a workshop approach for Appreciative Inquiry process. AI encourages inclusive approach for organizational process and sharing nuances of methodology could assist the organization for sustaining there work after the funding is over. AI’s generativity aspect could assist the participants in identifying resources and their future aspirations; they could manage the organization with limited resources with knowledge that they have common dream for social change.

3. Practitioners should consider creating models or merging seminal theoretical concepts of organizational change with AI. AI is a framework with practical applications for organizations. Considering the changes within the forms of organization, blending bureaucratic and grassroots organizations, the mixed models could assist in building understating for the future research.

**Recommendations for further research**

1. Research is recommended for alternate forms of organizations having diverse forms of structures. Appreciative Inquiry has been associated with organizational change in commercial organizations. There is very limited literature and empirical evidences for other forms of organizations such as Non-Governmental Organizations, Civil Society, Government organizations. AI would be able to evolve as a more rigorous form of organizational change process with empirical evidences from different forms of organization.
2. Further research on GONGOs should be focused on their unique form of organizational structure. Current studies focus on neo-liberal aspects of such organizations.

3. Researchers should consider follow-up studies in programs, such as the MS program. The studies are generally one-time assignment and researchers or scholars working with the program again could better serve academia, with new and better understanding.

4. Sharing results with the organization

5. Generational aspects in participants with varied experience in long-term programs.

6. A research for the future is recommended to understand the perceptions of the rural women regarding organizational change. Programs with longer lifecycle generate a social capital between program implementers and the beneficiaries. The impact of the organizational change could be a research area for scholars in the future.

Conclusions

This study offers perspectives of 28 women district leaders on organizational change for a non-formal educational program from India using 5-D model of the Appreciative Inquiry. The study contributes to our current understanding of organizational change process in a GONGO, namely Mahila Samakhya program, from a developing country. Further, the study informs about women district leaders dreams and designs for a sustainable destiny of the organization. All the participants have working
experience between the ranges of 7 to 27 years indicating their involvement with two
experience with education and empowerment for rural women, and their involvement
during transition between the plan cycles, provides them a unique social position to share
vision provocative propositions for the future.

These women leaders have evolved with the Mahila Samakhya program, a
process-based program, and created a niche within their organizations and rural Indian
society. AI, a process-based conceptual framework, could offer a sustainable option for
organizations undergoing change with potential to overcome ambiguity and uncertainty
for middle managers working at the implementation level of the program. These middle
managers have the social-position to dream and design an organization with their sense-
making to guide their initiatives in the future.
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## Appendix A: Adult Education in India

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approaches</th>
<th>Cycles and periods</th>
<th>Key Concepts</th>
<th>Government Programs/ Social Movements/Reports</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>Pre-Independence-First cycle (1882-1947)</td>
<td>Basic literacy</td>
<td>Night schools; Social Reform Movements for women and girl’s education; Report of the Adult Education Committee of the Central Advisory Board (1939)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work-oriented</td>
<td>Third Cycle (1967-1977)</td>
<td>Functional Literacy</td>
<td>Vocational Training; Shramik Vidyapeeth or Vocational Adult Education Centers (1967);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Change</td>
<td>Fourth Cycle (1978- to date)</td>
<td>Developmental Literacy</td>
<td>National Adult Education Program (1978), National Literacy Mission (1988), Continuing Education Centers (CECs); Skill Training; Training &amp; Visit (T&amp;V) System for farmer education (1981-82); Total Literacy Campaign (TLC) (1989); Post Literacy Campaigns (PLCs); Quality of Life Improvement Programmes (QLIP); Individual Interest Promotion Programmes (IIPP)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Appendix B: Barriers to Education Faced by Girls in the Mahila Samakhya States

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issues</th>
<th>States</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child marriage</td>
<td>Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trafficking and child prostitution</td>
<td>Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Assam, Jharkhand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic violence</td>
<td>All states</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discrimination</td>
<td>All states</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harassment/violence in schools</td>
<td>UP, Bihar, Kerala, Uttarakhand,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child abuse/sexual abuse</td>
<td>Kerala, Andhra Pradesh (joginis), Karnataka (devadasis),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Assam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honour killing</td>
<td>Uttar Pradesh (western Uttar Pradesh)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caste conflict and political violence</td>
<td>Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix C: Mahila Samakhya Federation Structure

Structure of the federations of the Mahila Samakhya program.

Appendix D: Semi-structured Interview

Thank you for participating in the study. It will take 30-40 minutes for interviewing. I have a few questions for you that are part of my study with the Mahila Samakhya program. Please feel free to tell me when you do not feel comfortable in answering any of the questions. We will have a brief conversation after the interview is over.

Protocols for semi-structured interviews based on conceptual and theoretical framework:

These questions will be asked immediately after initial formal and informal introduction. Questions 1 to 8 provide basic information about the participant. Questions 9 to 14 are designed to initiate a dialogue about the organizational change in the MS program.

1. Participant’s Name-
2. Gender-
3. Contact information-
4. Experience with MS program in years-
5. Permission to use the participant’s name-
6. Permission to publish the story-
7. Permission to seek further information (through semi-structured interview) about the story-
8. Permission to record audio of the interview-
9. Define – Defining the change
   A. Tell me about a time when you witnessed a (major?) change in the MS program
   B. How did you come to know about these changes?
   C. Why do you recall it as a major change?
   D. What has been a major learning for you during the process of organizational change?
10. Discovery – Discovering ‘best of what is’
    A. Tell me about a time when the MS program was functioning at its best
    B. Tell me about this time and event that were unfolding to make the organization work at its best
    C. What are key elements that made this time unique – what do you remember about it the most – what are the images that you recall? (Probes- Leadership, Strategic management, Communication, etc.)
    D. What was it that made the difference? What were the life giving forces at that time?
    E. What did it feel like- to be part of the organization at its best?
11. Dream-
    A. Tell me about your personal dreams within the MS program. (Probes- Leadership, Strategic management, Communication, etc.)
    B. Why is this dream important to you?
    C. Why is your dream a possibility/How can your dream become a possibility?
    D. What can you do to achieve this dream?
12. Design-
   A. Tell me about a challenging decision that you had to make during the phase of organization at best.
   B. What were your actions that supported your decision?
   C. What were your actions that supported the MS program?
   D. What are your radical and unique dreams that can be part of the strategic plan for the organization?

13. Destiny-
   A. Tell me about how you perceive the MS program in next ten years.
   B. What are the life-giving forces within the organization that can help in achieving this destiny? (Probes- Leadership, Strategic management, Communication, etc.)
   C. So far we have discussed defining, discovery, dream, and design. Now tell me about the destiny that you see for the organization. What were the successful steps that can be part of the future of the MS program? What are learning that you can use personally and collectively to achieve a desired destiny for the MS program?

14. Learning organizations
   A. System’s thinking- What were the key resource people who assisted you (or you interacted with)? How did these people help you? Have these people been helpful after the change too? (Probe- Interrelated actions and actors)
   B. Personal mastery- How has the change process helped you to learn about the MS program? (Probes- Continually Clarifying and deepening persona vision)
   C. Mental models – What is the first image that comes to your mind about the organizational change in the MS program (metaphor)? How does this mental image help you to be a lifelong learner? How can you share your images with others? (Probe- Balance inquiry and advocacy, expose their thinking, open their thinking to others – an integral part of being an empowered person)
   D. Building shared vision- Dream, design, and destiny
   E. Team learning- What are the collective decisions – Leading to design and destiny
**Probes for semi-structured interview:**
These probes will be guided by the events in the participant’s perception and insights into an organizational change system. Furthermore, probes will be used to understand the events and their significance in participant’s life. Broadly these probes will cover:

1. Please share a story about engagement with the MS program where you were able to make a significant contribution. What was creative about these contributions? How were these contributions meaningful for the whole organization (at district and state level)?
2. Can you talk about your dreams? How can you achieve them? Do you have any specific plans? What kind of organizational support is needed to achieve the decision?
3. Probe the timeline of the change events. This probe is to seek information and not cross check the validity of answers.
4. Major changes in their life since joining MS program- Leadership, strategic planning, etc.
5. Their experience in general with MS program.
6. Their experience with MS program – in terms of future aspirations.
7. Probing specific information from the participant that align with the concepts from AI’s 5-D model and Senge’s 5th Discipline from the Learning Organizations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AI’s 5-D</th>
<th>Learning Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defining</td>
<td>Mental models, Team learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discovery</td>
<td>System’s thinking, Personal mastery, Team learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dream</td>
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<td>System’s thinking, Personal mastery, Building shared vision, Team learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: This convergence of the two frameworks, conceptual and theoretical, was created for the purposes of this study.
**Appendix E: Coding Scheme**

Coding scheme based on conceptual framework and supported by the theoretical framework:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coding term</th>
<th>Coding definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Defining</td>
<td>A significant change event of the organization, role of the participant in the event,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discovery</td>
<td>Discovery of past successes, Organization at its best/peak, Reconnecting outcomes, From discovery to dream</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dream</td>
<td>Positive belief in the organization, future within the organization,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design</td>
<td>Actions to support the dream, making decisions and taking actions to support delivery of a dream (common dream too)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destiny</td>
<td>Learning identified, planning for the future, inspiring actions from the past that can be used in the future.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: This coding scheme was created for the purposes of this study using AI’s 5-D model.
Appendix F: Recruitment Instruments- Local Communication

The researcher sought official addresses and mobile numbers from the national and state level officials for the women district leaders. The formal letter were sent out to the participants to encourage them for voluntary participation.

Local communication

Local secured mail services were used to send out letters and recruitment instruments to the National, State, and district offices. Further, these local communications were conducted to seek necessary permission as well as make initial introductions.

| Title of Research: Rural Women’s Education and Empowerment in India: An Appreciative Inquiry of Organizational Change from a Government Organized Non-governmental Organization (GONGO) for Non-formal Education |
| Researchers: Rashmi Sharma |
| Contact us if you have worked with Mahila Samakhya for more than 5 years |

| Shoudh ka Vishay: Bharat mein Gramin Mahilayon ki Saksharta aur Sashaktikaran: Gair-aupcharik shiksha ke liye ek Sarkar dwara sangathit gair-sarkari sngathan (GONGO) mein sangathan badlav ki sarhana jaanch |
| Shoudhkarta: Rashmi Sharma |
| Sampark kareyn- Agar aapney Mahila Samakhya ke saath paanch ya zayada varsh key liye kaam kiya hai |
Appendix G: Recruitment Instruments- Poster

The researcher sought official addresses from the national and state level officials for the women district leaders. Emails were sent out by the researcher to encourage voluntary participation. The formal letter and a poster was sent out to the Mahila Samakhya program officials at national and state levels. The following poster was shared for display at national, state, and district levels to encourage voluntary participation.

**Mahila Samakhya (GONGO) ke karyakartaon ke liye soochna**

*Information for Mahila Samakhya program implementers*

**Yeh shoudh Mahila Samkhaya key barey mein aapke samajh aur anubhav ko jananey ki aaur ek pahal hai.**

This study is being done because we want to understand how you define and understand the Mahila Samakhya program.

---

**Title of Research:** Rural Women’s Education and Empowerment in India: An Appreciative Inquiry from a Government-Organized/Non-governmental Organization GONGO for Non-formal Education

**Researchers:** Rashmi Sharma

**Shoudh ke Vichar:** Gram Niti Ayog aur Sankalp Sampadon ke liye samajh aur anubhav ko jananey ke liye

**Sampark Karyayen:** Rashmi Sharma

**Contact Person:** Rashmi Sharma

**Phone No.:** +91-941-231-9311
Appendix H: Photo and Video Release Form

Photo aur video hetu sahmati prapatra
(Hindi translation in italics)

Event Title (Karyakram ka naam): _______________________________

Event Location (Karaykram ka ayojan stahl): ______________________

Event Date (Karaykram ki tithi): _________________________________

Event Time (Karaykram ka samay): ______________________________

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Signature __________________ Date _________________

Printed Name __________________

Hastakshar ___________________ Dinank _________________

Naam________________________
Appendix I: Format for Case Study Assertion and Evidences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Assertion</th>
<th>Evidence in which participant</th>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
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</table>

*Figure.* Adapted from Worksheet 6. Multi-case Assertions for the Final Report. Modified from Multiple Case Study Analysis, by Robert E. Stake. Copyright 2006 by The Guilford Press.
Appendix J: Map of India and the Mahila Samakhya Program coverage

![Map of India](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>State name</th>
<th>No. of districts covered by the MS Program</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Chhattisgarh</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Gujarat</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Jharkhand</td>
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<td>Uttar Pradesh</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>130</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Figure.* Map of India indicating the Mahila Samakhya Program coverage and the study sites.