“Jagoron: Awakening” to Gender in Non Governmental Organizations in Contemporary Bengal

DISSERTATION

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By

Raili Roy

Graduate Program in Women's Studies

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Dissertation Committee:
Cathy Rakowski, Advisor
Wendy Hesford, Co-Advisor
Wendy Smooth
Mytheli Sreenivas
Abstract

The recent history of women’s movement in India is dominated by discourses on roles of Non-governmental Organizations fostering women’s empowerment. This dissertation responds to the gaps in such discussions through a study of three women’s rights NGOs Sanlaap, Jabala and New Light in Kolkata, India working primarily with sex workers and trafficking survivors. The study challenges simplistic conclusions about the role of NGOs to promote women’s empowerment by addressing the following questions: which conceptualizations of empowerment prevail in an organization? Are they contested and under what circumstances and with what results? How do women targeted as beneficiaries perceive projects, the organization, its staff, and their own potential empowerment? And, in a more general sense, how does the shifting socioeconomic framework of neoliberalism in India in general and in West Bengal specifically constrain or contribute to women’s rights advocacy on the part of women’s rights NGOs? Further, the study has situated the three NGOs within their history, culture, and political and economic context, all widely recognized as critical to the understanding of the opportunities and constraints under which NGOs make strategic decisions, establish goals, and develop and implement programs. The dissertation identifies circumstances that play key roles in the conceptualization of empowerment and that influence not only the goals and strategies of the organizations but also the relationships among the multiple actors that contribute to the financing, management, and outcomes of NGOs.
Dedication

This document is dedicated to the memory of my dad Partha Sarathi Roy.
Acknowledgments

Though only my name appears on the cover of this dissertation, a great many people have contributed to its production. I owe my gratitude to all those people who have made this dissertation possible and because of whom my graduate experience has been one that I will cherish forever. A lot happened in my life in the course of this production, I became a mother, and I lost my father rather unexpectedly. This project would not have been completed without the constant support and encouragement of the people in my life.

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I have realized in the course of the past eight years of my life how fortunate I am when it comes to having friends and family. I would like to thank my near and dear ones
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I hope this dissertation lets the voices of the women I interacted with in Sanlaap, Jabala and New Light be heard loud and clear. I will be forever indebted to the women of these three organizations for showing me what courage is all about. I am grateful to my mother, Kanka Roy, from whom I learned the lessons of humanity and kindness. It is from my dad, Partha Sarathi Roy, that I learned the most important lesson of life: never give up. I wish he was here to share this feeling of accomplishment with me.

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work. So thank you for being there, always. And Ms. Enika, you are the light of my life; keep shining, and I hope you forever remain the kind angel that you are.
Vita

1995.........................................................B. A. History (Honors), Presidency College
1997.........................................................M.A. Modern History, Calcutta University
2002.........................................................M.A. History, University of Cincinnati
2003 to 2009 .................................................Graduate Teaching Associate, Department
                                                  of Women Studies, The Ohio State
                                                  University
2009 to present........................................Assistant Director and Lecturer, South Asia
                                                  Center, University of Pennsylvania
2010 to 2011.............................................Adjunct Professor, Drexel University
2012.........................................................Adjunct Professor, Penn State University

Fields of Study

Major Field: Women's Studies
# Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................ ii  
Dedication .................................................................................................................................. iii  
Acknowledgments ....................................................................................................................... iv  
Vita .............................................................................................................................................. vii  
Chapter 1: Introduction .............................................................................................................. 1  
   Overview and Introduction to the Research Problem ............................................................... 4  
   Objectives and Research Questions ......................................................................................... 6  
   Organization of the Dissertation .............................................................................................. 8  
   The Outsider Within: The Researcher and the Researched .................................................... 12  
Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework and Research Methods .................................................... 19  
   Discourses on NGOs ................................................................................................................ 22  
   Assumptions about NGOs ....................................................................................................... 29  
   The Organization of NGOs ..................................................................................................... 32  
   Literature on Gendered Organizations and Institutions ........................................................ 35  
   The Concept of Women’s Empowerment .............................................................................. 41  
   Trafficking and NGO work in India ....................................................................................... 46  
   Research Design and Analysis ................................................................................................. 48
Chapter 1

Introduction

On a rainy afternoon in a dingy room in Kalighat, Kolkata, in India, I was talking to a group of sex workers who use the services of the non-governmental organization New Light, when one of the women excused herself to go and cook dinner before her husband returned from work. This simple domestic act performed by a sex worker not only challenged stereotypes about sex workers that I had brought to the field but intrigued me to learn more about their perceptions of “being empowered.” As I interviewed groups of women that day about the NGO, its empowerment initiatives, and their effects on their daily lives, their responses compelled me to challenge what I knew about theorizing NGOs, their empowerment projects, and what such projects meant for these women. This dissertation reveals how the sex workers and trafficking survivors1 in West Bengal, India, create their own meanings and goals for the empowerment initiatives that the three NGOs of this study conduct with a different agenda and outcome in mind.

I arrived in the field (Kolkata, India) with the intention of studying the ways in which three non-governmental organizations, “Sanlaap,” “Jabala,” and “New Light,” use “gender” in their work. This would be achieved through a close study of the organizational structure, staff perceptions, and overall organizational culture to identify

1 I prefer to use survivor and not victim, although victim is most commonly used by the NGOs, funders, and other state agencies
the dominant ideology of gender at work in these organizations. Influenced by the
literature on “gendering of organizations,” which primarily looks at male dominated
organizations to theorize how they create distinctly “male” organizational structures, my
intention was to test this theory in self-proclaimed women dominated organizations like
the three NGOs of this study. However, the beneficiaries of the three organizations, their
perceptions, and my own observations of the day-to-day operations of the three
organizations compelled me to divert my attention to complicating existing claims about
the role of NGOs in empowerment of sex workers and women who have survived sex
trafficking. Because I am a feminist scholar, I am politically drawn toward interrogating
and looking into the women’s lives and experiences within my project (Lather and
Smithies 1997; Swarr and Nagar 2010). This shifted the focus of my study away from
just interrogating the organizational management practices. Rather, research focused on
the multiple actors involved in the empowerment projects and the ways they reshape
them. I still used the theoretical arguments presented by scholars on gendering of
organizations as an analytical tool to discuss the day-to-day workings of the three NGOs
and used the organizational hierarchy providing the context in which empowerment
projects are conceived and operationalized.

At the onset, I want to briefly discuss how I am using the term neoliberalism and
why it is central to my argument. Neoliberalism commonly refers to a set of monetary
and trade policies. These policies, even though contested, are associated with a pro-
corporate “free market economy” that has dominated western politics and emerging
global markets (such as India) since the early 1990s (Duggan 2004; Nagar et.al 2006), as
well as social policies concerned with defining personal, sexual, and domestic life, including welfare reform, education, and recognition of domestic partnerships. The Indian economy broke from its socialist planned economic model in the early 1990s and began to engage with free-market practices, especially emphasizing the multinationalization of media networks and private investments in social service sectors.

Inderpal Grewal, in her book *Transnational America*, claims that women’s rights NGOs around the same time also began to heavily rely on multinational funding and free-market-based entrepreneurship models as roads to empowerment for women. She claims that the late eighties saw the increased production of liberal subjects, who imagined liberal democracy as equal access to consumer culture and market operations (Grewal 2005).

This study departs from a homogenous conceptualization of women’s rights NGOs as primarily agencies for structuring neoliberal consumers, to favor a more complex conceptualization of NGOs. The relationship of women’s rights organizations with state agencies is a contested terrain in feminist literature. Feminist scholars such as Raka Ray have argued that the state, in the garb of providing benevolent support for the development of women, enters and co-opts autonomous women’s movements. Further, the notion of women’s rights interventions has been problematized, since the category “woman” does not exist in isolation from other social assemblages such as caste, class, citizenship status, and linguistic backgrounds. Thus feminists such as Oza (2006), Kamat (2002), and Nagar (2006) argue that women’s rights NGOs’ relationships with the Indian state and “disempowered women” are mostly negotiated by middle class or elite women
(often western educated). Hence a large portion of my discursive analysis delves into understanding the ways in which NGO leaders navigate, and at times contest, the state and foreign funding sources to crack open spaces for women’s empowerment.

**Overview and Introduction to the Research Problem**

This emphasis on the “grassroots” in development and on their agendas is evidence of the importance now being attached to civil society, including women’s groups and organizations and the intermediary NGOs\(^2\) that serve and support them.

NGOs as part of the civil society are included in this discourse.

The World Bank defines intermediary NGOs as “private organizations that pursue activities to relieve suffering, promote the interests of the poor, protect environment, provide basic social services, or undertake community development” (World Bank Operational Directive 14.70). Scholars from diverse disciplines, including feminist scholars like Mayra Buvinic (1986), Sonia Alvarez (1999), and Sangeeta Kamat (2002), among others, have analyzed NGO motivations in women’s empowerment. These feminist scholars expose in particular the limitations to NGO claims of empowering

\(^2\) Recent literature on NGOs identifies diverse types of NGOs defined by their programs and beneficiaries. “BINGO” is short for business-oriented international NGO or sometimes stands for big international NGO; “CSO” is short for civil society organization; “DONGO” refers to donor organized NGO; “ENGO” is short for environmental NGO, “GONGO”s are government-operated NGOs, which may have been set up by governments to look like NGOs in order to qualify for outside aid or promote the interests of the government in question; “INGO” stands for international NGO (Education Charter International is an international NGO); “QUANGO”s are quasi-autonomous non-governmental organizations, such as the International Organization for Standardization (ISO); ”TANGO” is short for technical assistance NGO; ”GSO” is used for grassroots support organizations; “MANGO” is short for market advocacy NGO. ([http://www.adb.org](http://www.adb.org) retrieved July 6 2009)

This study primarily uses the acronym “NGO” to refer to INGOs and GSOs, as will be explained in the text. For this study, I have defined NGO types through careful perusal of the existing literature (Kimmel 2008; Fernando and Heston 1997; Korten 1990). NGOs, in general, are a “third sector” separate from state institutions and for profit corporations.
people, especially women. They theorize an unanticipated or even subversive reinforcement of gender differences in NGO work, particularly intermediary and internationally funded NGOs. In recent years, critical studies on the role of NGOs have failed to highlight the complexities in the outcomes of empowerment initiatives, by characterizing most NGOs as vehicles for creating neoliberal citizens (Kamat 2002). A new generation of scholars like Aradhana Sharma (2008) and Aditi Mitra (2011a) call for a need to “awaken” to challenging the all encompassing and generalized role of NGOs as neoliberal enterprises. This dissertation is a response to this call. The research was designed originally to uncover the ways in which gender is constructed and operationalized in specific NGOs but evolved to focus on the ways in which empowerment outcomes are often different from the expected goals of the NGOs. Although I do not dispute claims of scholars like Kamat (2002) that NGOs are vehicles for creating neoliberal citizens, the research design emphasized identifying and understanding why and where neoliberal ideology and NGO efforts to create neoliberal citizens can be identified and whether this ideology is supportive of NGO goals of “empowerment” of women they served or an obstacle to them and how the beneficiaries deal with such efforts.

India was the appropriate setting for such a study. India is considered to be the NGO capital of the world (Kudva 2005). NGOs and civil society organizations such as voluntary organizations play a major role in poverty alleviation schemes, development programming, and programs designed to achieve women’s empowerment. This dissertation research built on previous studies by researchers who have assessed multiple
kinds of women’s empowerment projects in India and who analyzed NGO roles vis-à-vis the globalizing Indian state and economy. However, careful review of these studies revealed that very little attention had been paid to specific organizational practices and their role in the empowerment initiatives of a growing sector of the NGO community—women’s rights NGOs. These NGOs have proliferated since The United Nations Human Rights Conference in 1993 and profess, on the one hand, to fight against human rights abuses (such as violence against women, sex trafficking, etc.) and, on the other, to work with women to empower them to end the abuses to which they have been subjected. In particular and directly relevant to the dissertation, it became clear that little information was available on the ways the organizations themselves may challenge, reinforce, and/or create new notions or conceptions of empowerment. Through examining the gendered nature of the practices of the NGOs, I intended my dissertation research to “shed light on” these issues, contribute new empirical information to the study of NGOs, and provide critical insights into the way empowerment is promoted in NGOs (as defined by NGO staff, by intended women beneficiaries, and through the lens of feminist theory). The discussion that follows analyzes research findings on three NGOs in Kolkata, India. Each was an appropriate site for research because of their stated goal of “women’s empowerment.” All three serve the same intended beneficiary population—women and girls in the sex trade and trafficking survivors.

**Objectives and Research Questions**

This dissertation has two primary objectives. First, I tried to understand and complicate the process of women’s empowerment in non-governmental organizations in
West Bengal, India. Second, I studied how and under what circumstances specific women’s empowerment initiatives are conceived and operationalized and how these programs contribute to or interfere with the organizational goals of specific NGOs. Fieldwork was initiated with a set of clear and compelling questions. These included: Which conceptualizations of empowerment prevail in an organization? Are they contested and under what circumstances and with what results? How do women targeted as beneficiaries perceive projects, the organization, its staff, and their own potential empowerment? And, in a more general sense, how does the shifting socioeconomic framework of neoliberalism in India in general and in West Bengal specifically constrain or contribute to women’s rights advocacy on the part of women’s rights NGOs? Further, the study has situated the three NGOs within their history, culture, and political and economic context, all widely recognized as critical to the understanding of the opportunities and constraints under which NGOs make strategic decisions, establish goals, and develop and implement programs. The dissertation identifies circumstances that play key roles in the conceptualization of empowerment and that influence not only the goals and strategies of the organizations but also the relationships among the multiple actors that contribute to the financing, management, and outcomes of NGOs.

As the following chapter suggests, I discuss the findings through a focus on issues that connect or differentiate across the three NGOs studied as a way of theorizing empowerment across these organizations. Earlier studies in the area of women and empowerment in non-governmental organizations suggest the role of organizational structures is a key factor in framing notions of empowerment. This dissertation extends
the arguments of previous studies to incorporate internal structures of NGOs as the sites of both framing and operationalizing perceptions about empowerment. In many ways, the study can be considered a multi-site analysis that departs from a “case study” approach of individual organizations. Rather, the discussion of findings focuses on issues that connect or differentiate across the three NGOs studied. As a result, the study, which began as an intended comparative case study, shifted to a focus on the discussion of empowerment initiatives in the three NGOs and their outcomes. Data were gathered through qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analyses. Each was analyzed within an organizational development framework; keen attention was paid to decision-making structures and relationships between multiple stakeholders in order to evaluate the success of organizations towards meeting their stated goals (and the conceptualization of those goals).

**Organization of the Dissertation**

In Chapter 2 an understanding of what constitutes empowerment as proposed by these NGOs emerges from the literature on the history of the transnational women’s rights movement, the evolution of the NGO sector internationally and nationally, and the specific histories of the NGOs studied. Assessment of the logic and effectiveness of empowerment goals of women’s rights NGOs is grounded in an interdisciplinary body of literature drawing from studies of organizations and organizational theory, feminist methodologies and practices, history of a women’s movement transnationally and locally, and studies of and debates surrounding gendering of organizations and women’s empowerment. The literature on gender, development, and empowerment was useful for
introducing and engaging with the existing discourses on definitions of empowerment for women in the Third World and their influence on how developmental projects are conceived and implemented by NGOs in Kolkata, India. The theorization of organizations as “gendered organizations” was used to analyze and provide details about the daily workings of the three NGOs, the roles of the different staff members in the organizations, and the environment in which empowerment initiatives are introduced.

Among the other key bodies of literature discussed in Chapter 2 that greatly influenced the construction of the research problem and the research design, the following were the most important. First was the literature on NGOs, which spans different disciplines like sociology, anthropology, geography, and political science. These mostly focus on NGOs as agents of governmentality and provide the definitions and the trajectory of NGO activities in the last few decades, especially in the Third World. This body of literature was particularly useful in this study for illuminating the conceptualization of morality that NGOs propagate and shape in their work. Second was the feminist research on women’s movements and NGOs in the Third World that primarily traces the rise of NGOs as a legitimate space for feminist activism in the Third World and issues emerging from intersections of feminist goals and NGO objectives for women’s empowerment. Third was the literature on gender, development, and empowerment. As I said earlier this body of literature introduces and critiques the existing discourses on definitions of empowerment for women in the Third World and their influence on how development projects are conceived and implemented by NGOs.
There are other areas of research important to the analysis, and these are discussed where relevant in other chapters. Chapter 2 also discusses the research design and the methods used for this study. The specific history and contemporary socioeconomic conditions of India were important for providing the context within which to understand the history of the NGOs studied, their precursors, and the transformation of their work and goals over time; these are discussed in Chapter 3. This was necessary toward understanding the three NGOs’ current conceptualizations of women’s empowerment, sex work, and the ideology of neoliberalism that infused their work at the time of the study.

Chapter 3 consists of two major sections. The first traces the emergence of the three NGOs selected for this study within a historiography of women’s empowerment NGOs in India. Further, the section discusses the organizational structure of the three NGOs by deploying gendering of organizations as a theoretical framework. In my analysis, I correlate the process of gendered workspaces within the three NGOs (Sanlaap, Jabala, and New Light) and prescriptions for empowerment of women in the sex trade with larger socioeconomic processes such as notions of self-regulating citizens within neoliberal states and the globalizing Indian economy. In this section, I also situate the emergence and growth of the three NGOs within the development of women’s rights and feminist thinking and practice in India, and specifically in West Bengal.

The second section of Chapter 3 highlights the definitions of gender and empowerment that these organizations publicly invoke and evaluates the personal and site-specific operationalization of these concepts.
Chapter 4 begins with an analysis of the frameworks deployed by key actors who have financial and/or judicial power over the NGOs, such as the police, court system, and funding agencies. All influence perceptions of the different staff members, beneficiaries, and organizational definitions of women’s empowerment. The analysis focuses on key themes such as the power of international funding agencies, the role of professional development training in constructing discourses about gendered empowerment, and the interconnections between state governments and hegemonic notions of empowerment. This chapter also focuses on contested sites of empowerment and elucidates the management and collective maintenance of these sites. I conclude this chapter with a critical reading of NGOs and their claims to empowerment. There are several “complications” that are considered, such as the overt and covert negotiations that take place between state as funder or regulator, international financing bodies, NGOs, and women beneficiaries. Here I conclude that NGOs are simultaneously sites of reiteration of gendered notions of neoliberal citizenship as well as fragmented spaces where multi-layered contestations occur, creating openings for critical renegotiations with gendered, neoliberal notions of empowerment.

In Chapter 4 and the concluding chapter I theorize the process of empowerment of the women beneficiaries of the NGOs in light of the gendered/contested notions of empowerment and citizenship introduced in earlier chapters. I also raise questions about whether collective identities created and re-created in NGO work can be read as fissures

Here I am referring to phrases like “NGO women,” “Sanlaap women,” or “Jabala women,” which were often used in reference to the beneficiaries of the NGOs by the staff, funders and other entities.
or breaks in an all encompassing structural conceptualization of NGOs as sites for the construction of neoliberal, gendered notions of citizenship.

**The Outsider Within: The Researcher and the Researched**

Since feminist ethnographies attempt to avoid the objectification of the subject and the hierarchical ordering of the research to “the other,” I use Marlene Fine’s (1995) feminist epistemological and methodological commitments to inform my research. Fine’s commitments highlight feminist researchers’ responsibility towards the processes of both knowledge creation and acquisition, through research and theory building as a collaborative process rather than something imposed. A thorough understanding of the processes that result in inequalities in a specific context is a necessary step toward changing women’s position.

The methodological understanding for this dissertation evolves from a theoretical perspective rooted in feminist, Marxist, and critical theories (Acker 1989). As a women’s studies graduate student, I believe that it is imperative to situate gender as central to constructing all social relations and taking individual women’s lives as problematic (Hartsock 1983). Feminist scholars strive to explain what actually happens in women’s everyday lives through the lens of gender. Although they view people as active agents in their own lives and, as such, constructors of their own social world, they do not see that activity as isolated; instead their work locates individual experience in society and embeds history within a set of social relations, which produce both possibilities for and limitations to such experience. Thus, I approached my research questions not only
through the lived experiences of my subjects but also through the analysis of the relations (both human and organizational) within which they operate (Acker 1989).

I believe that the content of any thought cannot be separated from the historical and material conditions shaping the lives of the producers, in this case the urban women of Kolkata. Patricia Hill Collins’s article “Learning from the Outsider Within” (1990) encouraged me to place greater trust on my location as an integral part of my research field because of my personal and cultural biography and to generate a distinctive framework for understanding and contextualizing the role of gender in the NGOs of Kolkata. According to Collins (1990), regardless of the actual content of Black women’s self-definitions, the act of insisting on Black female self-definition validates Black women’s power as human subjects. Thus, drawing on Collins, as a Third World feminist researcher in western academia I hope to enrich contemporary feminist discourse on Third World women as powerful human subjects. Coinciding with these goals as an implicit extension of my own stand, I believe that the groups of urban women I study have themselves remained “outsiders within” mainstream discourses on the process of NGOization both in the West and in India.

Therefore, I hoped that by studying this diverse group of women and their role in the process of empowerment in NGOs, a more complex picture of women in postcolonial civil society in India would emerge, advancing existing feminist scholarship and comparative research on social inequality and women’s empowerment.

I am also aware of the role of the researcher in the production of this body of knowledge, and my methodological approach is a direct result of my faith in feminist
ethnographic methods of knowledge production. As a result, my own position as a researcher is interwoven into my analysis of the data. Being a feminist scholar guided by social science research methods, I intend for my standpoint to contribute to the credibility of the interpretation of the data collected.

In building a basic premise for feminist research methods, Fine (1995) identifies women as important sources of information for their own lived experiences. Thus, feminist research rejects positivist notions of research and instead values subjective knowledge as important to the research process. Fine (1995) argues that by centering women’s lives and experience, feminist researchers move women from the margins of knowledge and give them a central position in the generation of new thought and certain practices like inequalities, harassment, and discrimination as structural problems requiring investigation. The centering of women’s experiences also helps women negotiate their position within social institutions. In addition, centering women’s problems gives women the voice to express themselves rather than being silent subjects. In this study, the women’s voices, their daily activities, and their feedback not only influenced the interview questions but also determined the direction of the research.

Feminist scholars argue that women are trained to view the world differently from men, thus creating distinctive ways of interpreting the world. One of the most common ways of knowing for women is through subjective knowledge, which locates the place of truth within the individual and equates the scientific with the personal (Fine 1995). This is a shift from earlier notions of “objective” knowledge, which trivialize the credibility of lived experiences as unscientific to a feminist position, while the latter recognizes that
“truthfulness” of personal knowledge has important implications for research (Fine 1995, 153). First, feminist research values the importance of data generated and gathered from women through self-reporting in the form of interviews, personal narratives, questionnaires, and diaries as valid and important research data. Second, researchers and their personal experiences become an integral and acknowledged part of the research. Harding (1987) argues that feminist research places the researcher in the same critical plane as the research subject matter: “the beliefs and behaviors of the researcher are part of the empirical evidence for (or against) the claims advanced in the results of the research” (Harding 1987, 9).

This method of conducting research not only helps researchers to understand how women view their world around them but also breaks the boundaries between them and the organizational, cultural fields within which they operate. In other words, this method connects the experiential level of knowledge in everyday lives with the micro and macro analysis of everyday world practices. Feminist research rejects theories and methods that treat people as mere objects of study and is not grounded in the basic assumptions of positivist research. This kind of research methodology calls for a more holistic, person-focused, and constructive approach, which are the guiding principles of this dissertation (Wittig 1992).

Fine (1995) also asserted that feminist research must be revolutionary to make it feminist in the true sense. Feminist methodology that informs Third World women’s lives invariably challenges the existing status quo and argues for change as it builds on existing theories and methodologies but also seeks to change them. These principles dominated
my state of mind as I embarked on my data collection and analysis endeavors. Thus, I find it necessary to introduce myself as the researcher within the context of “the outsider within” through a brief discussion of my biography and stake in this project. I took up this research with the idea of combining both my interests in studying feminist theories in U.S. academia and the lives of Third World women.

Narayan (1997) argues that such labeling is similar to labels identifying one as an Indian, a feminist, or a woman; all these identities are not simple givens but are open to complex ways of being. I choose to speak as a Third World feminist because I have lived a great part of my life in India and came of age there both politically and socially. As is true for Narayan, for me, “a significant part of my sensibilities and political horizons are indelibly shaped by Third World national realities” (Narayan 1997, 4).

I was born in a middle class family in Kolkata, India, and grew up hearing stories of displacement that my family experienced due to the partition of India, Pakistan, and what became Bangladesh. On a very personal level, even as my adolescent self eyed my mother, the model homemaker, silently making sacrifices for her family, I also sensed a craving within her from not achieving anything for herself as an individual. Thus, I was aware of some of the structurally embedded oppressive social and cultural conditions that women from the middle and upper classes of urban India face in their lives as both homemakers and professionals. During my college days, I was exposed to the reality of a gender oppressed world, and later I was also a witness to some of the major socioeconomic changes that swept through India during the early nineties with the spread of globalization, successive national elections resulting in unstable governments,
communal strife, and the beginning of a new age of economic liberalization. I was very much aware of how these shifts brought about major changes in life opportunities for women in both urban and rural areas and that they provided the backdrop for the rise of the NGOs in this country. Because of this, in my research I have paid great attention to the shifts in notions of citizenship and empowerment espoused by the NGOs of this study in light of neoliberal definitions of citizenship and empowerment.

During my undergraduate years, I volunteered in a local women’s NGO; this was the beginning of my involvement with this sector. These were the early years when the Indian women’s movement was not as dominated by NGOs as it is today. Today, there is a convergence between feminist and developmentalist perspectives in women’s rights NGOs and empowerment projects (Srivastava and Unninathan 1997). My early experience with the Kolkata NGOs exposed me to the mechanisms of NGO work and generated my early interest on the subject. It helped me to forge long lasting relationships, which were useful when I returned for my fieldwork quite a few years later.

My early interactions with NGOs and the women they served also gave me a sense of the social and cultural processes of gender inequality at work in male-dominated, urban Indian civil society, where gender discrimination is an everyday reality. I witnessed new groups of working women in civil society organizations struggling, compromising, and negotiating new roles as NGO professionals. I saw them grapple with the larger prescribed, and more traditional, gender role stereotypes of an ideal of Indian womanhood made up of mothers and homemakers, especially in the upper echelons of the society. In conclusion, these early interactions and experiences, coupled with
exposure to works of feminist scholars like Jayati Lal (1996), and Kathleen Canning (1996) on feminist methodological concerns, paved the way toward my dissertation research problem and the subjects (NGOs) I selected for study.

Finally my training in feminist theories made me question identities beyond constructed dualities like insider-outsider. It was my intent in this dissertation research to disrupt the boundary between the categories (insider-outsider) and locate the researcher as subject within the same historical and political forces that affect her subjects.
Chapter 2

Conceptual Framework and Research Methods

The research design and the methods used for this study owe their inception to a wide body of literature across disciplines like Women’s Studies, Political Science, Anthropology, Sociology, and History. This chapter reviews the relevant literature used in grounding this research. I begin with the literature that informed my conceptual framework and then move on to discuss the different methods used for this study. The discussion of the methods pays keen attention to its commitment to feminist methodologies and its relevance for the research questions explored.

In 1995 the United Nations Beijing Conference confirmed the important role of NGOs as women’s rights advocates locally and globally. The importance given to NGOs as sites of women’s empowerment required feminist scholars to pay attention to the empowerment work of NGOs. During the 1990s, scholars like Korten (1990), Ferguson (1994), and Gupta (2002) called for an evaluation of the word “NGO”; however they continued to refer to the International NGOs, or INGOs, as primary representatives of the whole NGO sector. Feminist scholars and especially feminist scholars from the global south like Raka Ray (1999), Richa Nagar et.al (2006), Sangeeta Kamat (2002), and others challenged this by studying local NGOs and their roles as new vehicles of social change for women. Since the end of the 1990s there has been a growing body of literature criticizing NGOs and their work on women’s empowerment as restrictive and influenced by a western, neoliberal agenda. Scholars like Sonia Alvarez demanded feminists pay
attention to the complex relationship between state agencies and intermediary NGOs, in
the construction and use of gender as an analytical category in women’s empowerment.
The relationship between the Indian state and women’s rights NGOs has been
interrogated by scholars like Raka Ray, Richa Nagar, Saraswati Raju, and recently by
Aradhana Sharma. This relationship became intriguing for feminist scholars with the
adoption of neoliberal economic policies by the state of India in the early 1990s, which
coincided with a proliferation of a number of NGOs in the country. By the end of the
1990s, India became an “NGO nation” (Kudva 2005). In 1999 Raka Ray showed how
independent organizations like Suchetana in West Bengal, India, were quite open to
networking with the state. Aradhana Sharma (2008) characterizes a “re-formation of the
Indian state,” as a cross-breeding of institutions in response to the rise of NGOs as agents
of neoliberal governmentality. This theoretical framework dominated the work of a
generation of scholars like Leve and Karim (2001), Sangeeta Kamat (2002), and Richa
Nagar et al (2006) through the 2000s as each one of them interrogated the ways in which
NGOs were complacent with the neoliberal agenda of the Indian state and their primarily
western, privatized funding agencies. Feminist scholars were also increasingly
interrogating the phenomenon of professionalization of women’s rights NGOs and the
gendered nature of NGO work on women’s empowerment. Although scholars like
Michels (1962) had very early on argued that feminist organizations could be oligarchic
by nature, not many scholars studied the organizational structure and its implications for
empowerment work in the women’s rights NGOs. This gap in the literature on NGOs in
India, more precisely on West Bengal, led me to the literature on gendered organizations
as an appropriate theoretical framework for my study. This framework was used to interpret the organizational structure and the daily workings of the three NGOs of this study.

Each body of literature discussed in this chapter contributed to the following key aspects of this dissertation. First and foremost, to identify one or more NGOs to do research in and subjects to study, it emphasized the need to research not only NGOs but also the state and the private funding agencies that fund them. The body of literature on gendering of organizations helped me to understand the context in which each NGO was operating, its organizational culture, and the role of the perceptions of the staff members in their work on women’s empowerment. The literature on trafficking and sex work helped me to understand the construction of sex work and trafficking in the context of my organizations, as they were primarily working with sex workers and trafficking survivors. The body of literature on women’s empowerment not only informed the questions that I asked during the field work, it also helped me to balance the perspectives between those working in the NGOs and their beneficiaries.

Generalized studies about “all” NGOs have multiple theoretical consequences. Without looking at how individual NGOs in a Third World environment like India negotiate the neoliberal age and operate in it, there is always the danger of generalizing their work as merely representative of specific western, neoliberal agendas. Second, we need to treat analytical tools such as frameworks for conceiving empowerment with the
same care and skepticism with which we treat NGOs’ claims about their progressive, empowering agenda.

**Discourses on NGOs**

Discussions of civil society have proliferated in the last century, with feminists scholars like Sonia Alvarez providing new ways to evaluate the role of NGOs in women’s empowerment. The private pursuit of public purpose is a unique feature of civil society, and in the nonprofit sector in a Third World country like India, it remains crucial for addressing problems facing modern, industrializing communities (Markham and Bonjean 1995). Recent scholars have emphasized the importance of the development of civil society to ensure the success of modernization and democratization in the context of globalization (see, for example, Hawkesworth 2006, 228). The proliferation of civil society is arguably beneficial because it encourages citizens to organize as alternate power centers outside the state to promote their interests. They constitute a voluntary sector of organizations and interest groups across divisions of class, race, ethnicities, and gender.

The term *non-governmental organization* was first used by the United Nations in 1949 (Fernando and Heston 1997); in substantive terms, NGOs are generically defined in opposition to the state and for profit organizations. In the 1980s, the term “NGO” was used to describe all nonprofit organizations (both international and national) working with civil society. CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation defines civil society as “the arena, outside of the family, the state, and the market where people associate to advance common interests.” For Karl Marx, civil society was the “base”
where productive forces and social relations were taking place, whereas political society was the “superstructure.” Agreeing with the link between capitalism and civil society, Marx held that the latter represents the interests of the bourgeoisie. Therefore, the state as superstructure also represents the interests of the dominant class; under capitalism, it maintains the domination of the bourgeoisie.4 It was Antonio Gramsci (1982) who rectified the negative representation of civil society by locating civil society in the political superstructure. He underlined the crucial role of civil society as the contributor of the cultural and ideological capital required for the survival of the hegemony of capitalism. Rather than posing it as a problem, as in earlier Marxist conceptions, Gramsci viewed civil society as the site for problem solving. Thus in modern times the term “civil society” occupies an important place in the political discourses of neoliberals.

In the 1990s any generalized use of the term “NGO” was questioned by scholars like Korten (1990), Gupta and Ferguson (1997), as limiting and problematic in understanding the work of the NGOs. These kinds of studies primarily focused on the work of the INGOs (international NGOs) as representative of the entire NGO sector. Such focus had multiple theoretical consequences. The scholarship about NGOs in the global South, built on studies of international NGOs and their visions alone, underplayed the worldwide boom in numbers of NGOs at the local level with their unique, localized ideological positions and practices. As a result, many studies attribute importance to the INGOs even when looking at the work of domestic NGOs associated with these INGOs.

4 For a detailed discussion of Marx's thought on the state and civil society see Draper, 1977 & 1986 (Volumes 1 and 2)
Thus, this study paid careful attention to the use of the term “NGO,” in this case meaning the work of local organizations.

There is a growing body of anthropological NGO literature that focuses on NGOs as agents of governmentality. The definitions used here draw from Foucault’s notion of governmentality (Foucault 2010). Foucault elaborates governmentality as a mode of power via which life is actualized. In his Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at College De France and Society 1978-79 (2008) Foucault points out that since the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries a form of power different from sovereign power emerges, one he terms “bio-power.” Foucault includes governmental institutions such as the census and initiatives such as public health campaigns (mass immunizations, family planning) within bio-power, and he coins the term “governmentality” as a set of social and governmental processes that then begin to regulate life. Finally, scholars such as Escobar (1995, 2008) deploy Foucault to understand development as discourse, in the sense of being a “regime of truth” (Foucault 2010). Escobar extends that to analyze the ways in which dominant definitions of the term development have been constructed in the West and how global power differences therefore undergird the term and its operation. Along with Escobar, Ferguson’s critique of a World Bank development project as an “anti-politics machine” (1994, 28), Gupta’s postcolonial critique of development as “Orientalism transformed into science” (Gupta 2002, 37), and their later elaborations of transnational governmentality (Ferguson and Gupta 2002) have influenced a whole generation of scholarship on development and NGOs. Their studies opened up new ways of studying the role of NGOs in development discourses by emphasizing their increasing importance.
in replacing state functions. Peterson writes, “Up until at least World War II, the primary agency of governmentality was located in the state, in both national and international contexts. In the past couple of decades, a new agency has come on the scene: the non-governmental organization (NGO), principally an extra-statal and extra-national institution” (Peterson 2001, 78).

In her work on NGO involvement in environmental treaties, Peterson (2001) bemoans the new roles of the NGOs, although she does not differentiate between INGOs and NGOs. She argues that NGOs’ involvement in policy-making and their collaboration with industries leaves little room for “public debate” and “alternative viewpoints” (2001, 86). In this sense, like Ferguson and Gupta, Peterson emphasizes “morality” as a precondition for NGO work and emphasizes that NGOs need to be clear about whose interests their work supports. The work of these and other scholars focus on interrogating the kinds of moral values that NGOs propagate and shape.

In line with the larger field that analyzes development as a site of governmentality, some anthropologists studying NGOs also ask how NGOs (re)make subjects of development and tie them to neoliberal values and aspirations (Pigg and Adams 2005). Bornstein, for example, writes, “Development makes distinctions among human beings and attempts to make new persons in the process” (Bornstein 2012, 59). Bornstein’s (2012) ethnography of faith-based development centers in the competing discourses between the Christian-leaning and mainstream development industries reveals the links between funders and NGOs and the transmission of notions about the empowerment of women between the two. These discourses on development and
accumulation, relational and morally charged, reconstitute previously existing ethical
ground in the lives of those who do the “developing” and those who are being
“developed” (Bornstein 2012, 60). Her work is relevant to my research because of the
changes taking place in the INGOs that fund the three local NGOs I studied, including the
ways in which faith-based funders may have profound ideological positions shaping their
approaches that are imposed on NGO work.

Other anthropological studies of NGO projects as subject-making efforts also
shed light on the ideological predispositions of the NGOs and the funding agencies of this
study. Leve and Karim also studied NGO projects as subject-making, following a call to
count empowerment programs “among the ‘technologies of citizenship’ that liberal
democracies rely on to constitute their subjects as the kind of disciplined, productive
citizens that such a state requires” (Leve and Karim 2001, 109). They concluded that
NGOs help the Nepali state and “international hierarchies” (Leve and Karim 2001, 109)
extend the exercise of power. They write, “Empowering people is based on remaking
individuals or encouraging individuals to remake themselves in conformity with those
ideals of personhood implicit in neo liberal thought, such as agency, autonomy, economic
rationality and public participation.” Their work largely draws on technologies of
citizenship and concepts such as subject-making from Foucault’s theorization of
technologies of self, which I also use in my analysis. According to Foucault a new kind
of selfhood emerges within neoliberalism, wherein individuals learn to actualize
themselves and therefore become self-policed entrepreneurial projects. In Birth of
Biopolitics (2010) Foucault uses the example of American neoliberalism wherein social
security measures (provided by the state) are removed, and individuals are left to become self-actualizing agents in order to deal with social insecurity. Similarly, feminist development scholars such as Aradhana Sharma discuss the emergence of a new kind of subjectivity within development-related NGO projects (Sharma 2008). For analysis, I used Foucauldian scholarship by feminist scholars such as Sharma and Leve and Karim to elucidate women’s empowerment projects as sites for creating a new kind of citizen-subject, one who is empowered to act as a responsible entrepreneur and consumer within the globalized nation-state of India.

Lisa Duggan (2004) also claims that within a neoliberal framework, NGOs as civil society organizations uncritically replicate ideas such as participation in market capitalism, self-actualization in isolation from a collective process, and participation in electoral organizing as markers of achieving equality or empowerment. According to Leve and Karim (2001), the expected outcome is an individualized citizen-subject who shares the fundamental principles of the neoliberal state (Leve and Karim 2001, 19). In fact, excellent research on India confirms that some NGOs play this role. The work of Sangeeta Kamat specifically interrogates the complicity of NGOs in India with the emerging neoliberalized Indian nation-state (Kamat 2002). Combining Leve and Karim’s above claims with Sangeeta Kamat’s arguments on the liberalization of India and the role of NGOs generates an interesting and useful hypothesis, raising important questions about the motivations of NGO work. However, none of the authors discussed provides an actual account of how the individual “beneficiary” responds to subject-making techniques, raising questions about the effectiveness of such projects on the perceptions
and the day-to-day lives of the targeted women (so-called beneficiaries). Leve and Karim acknowledge this when they write, “The empowered woman, or at least the bourgeois version of her envisioned by major aid agencies working in Nepal over the past twenty years, is defined by those forms of rationality and subjectivity that correspond to what Kamat has identified as ‘advanced liberal’ (Kamat 2002) strategies of government being promoted through international development work of the NGOs” (Leve and Karim 2001, 109). Thus, while the NGOs Leve and Karim studied envisioned a new, advanced liberal subject, these visions may not correspond to the transformations of real women’s subjectivities.

In order to understand the role of empowerment initiatives, which are also characterized as rehabilitation efforts for women in sex work and trafficking survivors in this notion of a neoliberal subject/citizen constructed through NGOs’ work, we need to distinguish between the discourses and the practices of NGOs. Both are valid factors in my analysis. I propose that caution is needed when studying or assuming the transformation of subjectivities. Such claims fail to acknowledge the agency of the targeted women and fail to document the effective changes (desired or unexpected) that the NGOs do and do not foster in the lives of women. It also fails to consider the possibility of NGO women operating differently from what the NGOs prescribe as empowered subjects.

Scholars who claim that NGOs remake subjects often uncritically accept NGO claims about the empowering effects of NGO work. For example, Leve and Karim (2001) and others may scrutinize NGOs on diverse issues but seem to accept uncritically the way
that NGOs emphasize women as subjects of discourse and intervention. Such claims about the creation of an individualized citizen-subject by the NGOs beg the question as to whether the process of creating them is devoid of any challenges and manipulations from the beneficiaries of the organizations.

My research documented NGO claims and the day-to-day operations of their empowerment initiatives.

As the literature on the contradictions between the external rhetoric that NGOs deploy and their actual practices reveals, NGO discourses and practices are often incongruent. My research engaged with the different discourses and practices of NGOs working for sex workers and trafficked women in the city of Kolkata. Since, ironically, Indian NGO discourses primarily focus on rural women of Bengal when urban women are also the focus of NGO interventions and practices, I found it important to contextualize the economic, political, and cultural institutions within which the interventions are taking place. I also show in Chapter 3 that the envisioned subject of NGO development projects is not the only subject that the three NGOs actually produce in specific “empowerment” projects. For example, my research documents how some NGOs work more on making their staff members into effective, modern, gender-conscious political subjects, rather than working on or with beneficiaries (sometimes unintentionally).

**Assumptions about NGOs**

Too much of the analytical discussion that purports to analyze the role of NGOs is not based in scholarly methods. Much of it is ideological and cannot be tested. Many
“studies” of NGOs do not incorporate in-depth ethnographic analyses or even theoretical discussions. Fisher raised this as a problem in 1998, claiming that “theories” about NGOs are based more on faith than on fact (Fisher 1998, 441). Igoe and Kelsall also wrote, “Much of what is known about NGOs is based more on what is believed about them than on empirical observations of what NGOs actually do in practice” (Igoe and Kelsall 2005, xi).

Many scholars, feminists or not, and too many development practitioners discuss NGOs as if everyone agrees on what NGOs are. Nevertheless, as other scholars point out, different things are meant by the term “NGOs.” The acronym NGO encompasses “everything from multi-million dollar organizations that operate on multiple continents to agencies that de facto represent commercial interests, grassroots alliances, or village-based religious or cultural groups” (Leve and Karim 2001, 53). For example, Peterson calls NGOs “extra-statal and extranational institutions,” implying that they exist outside of state sovereignty (Peterson 2001, 78). Yet this definition only applies to a small number of international NGOs, not the thousands of domestic (intermediary) NGOs that have emerged, and certainly not the NGOs of this study. The three NGOs of this study rely on funding from both domestic and international funders. Although there are clear transnational connections (mostly western) and influences evident in their work, they primarily operate at the local level, working in partnership with the state at times directly and at other times indirectly with the different state agencies like the Women’s Commission.
In this work I differentiate between the international NGOs working in Kolkata as INGOs and the three organizations for this study as NGOs (although the latter could also be called GSOs or grassroots support organizations). In my research I paid particular attention to the dynamics between the NGOs and INGOs and their impact on the diffusion of concepts related to women’s empowerment. In Kolkata, several dozen INGOs that work in partnership with local organizations pale in comparison with the several hundred domestic NGOs.

It is extremely important to understand how the operations of specific NGOs (e.g., those primarily involved in community service programs, development projects, or campaigns related to women’s social problems) can create different perceptions about the role of the specific NGOs in promoting women’s empowerment. Critics of NGOization are suspicious, skeptical, and sometimes outright hostile to NGOs; they argue that the social processes that these organizations generate are reactionary in content, elitist in terms of the interests they represent, and insensitive to the real interests of the poor and dispossessed (Fernando and Heston 1997). Further, by claiming a universal interest, these organizations function as a mask for the interest of the dominant classes and are nothing more than another manifestation of the ideology of the ruling class (Fernando and Heston 1997). These arguments remind me to interrogate the class differences between the staff and the beneficiaries and the issues that emerged as a result in the day-to-day operations in the three organizations. Literature on women’s volunteerism suggests several typologies based on roles played by individual workers. Two main types, as suggested by Metzendorf and Cnaan (1992), are the service volunteers and the policy volunteers.
Based in these categories, the nature of power relations within the organizations can perpetuate social inequality and gender oppression. Moreover, the advantages that elite women gain through their privilege can also lead them to exert social control over those in other classes, whom they help in their volunteer efforts or who serve in staff positions in the NGOs (Kendall 2002). Because of this I also researched the dilemmas and challenges of the women engaged in feminist activism and women’s development in the NGOs that I studied.

The Organization of NGOs

In a contemporary democratic environment like India, most NGOs are staffed by well-educated professionals and funded by international agencies. They have become the primary vehicle for “women’s development” and interact with government institutions, the corporate sector, and civil society. In developing countries like India, NGOs have become extremely important in keeping women’s issues on the political agenda and in providing essential services for women of certain classes. During the early 1990s, NGOs evolved. Some continued to be voluntary organizations relying on donations, while many had professional staff employed full-time and depended on grants and contracts to fund their work (Korten 1990).

Sonia Alvarez (2009) and Sangeeta Kamat (2002) have critiqued such professionalization of NGOs, or NGOization, in Latin America and India. They raise important questions regarding the ways in which women’s organizations and a women’s rights agenda have been shaped by the characteristics of staff members (feminist/nonfeminist, professionals/volunteers, political and class affiliations, etc.), the
imposition of transnational feminist approaches and goals by funders, and political pressures or competition from local and national policy makers (including national women’s institutes and local governments). For example, Alvarez points to national women's institutes as an important arena of feminist activisms. Feminists and women’s groups then become the “gender experts” (Alvarez 1999, 191) hired by women in these state agencies, while women’s groups in low-income neighborhoods may be paid to administer government programs targeting women. These scholars argue that relationships among actors and institutions have become increasingly complex and are tied to both global and local politics. This affirms the fact that the work of NGOs cannot be understood without considering the broader political and decision-making context.

Feminist scholars like MacKinnon (1983) have argued that the state unqualifiedly and unconditionally acts on behalf of men, but other scholars maintain that even deeply gendered state institutions can be both a friend and an enemy to women.

Sonia Alvarez’s (1999) work on Latin American NGOs is applicable to this dissertation because of her attention to the complex relationship between state agencies and intermediary NGOs in the construction and use of gender as an analytical category for NGO projects. In actuality, the feminist activists working on gender issues in Bengal have always had a highly ambivalent relationship to the state (Ray 1999). For example Ray (1999) shows how autonomous organizations like Suchetana in Kolkata are quite open to networking with the state despite knowing well that the state is often an agent of exploitation and a barrier to their agenda. Therefore, one argument explored in my
research is the consequences when women’s organizations and NGOs work with the state, either from within or from outside (Jenson 1987).

On the one hand, according to Plemper (1996), women’s NGOs can act as independent social service agencies or as interest and self-help groups designed to pressure the government to change laws for the development and empowerment of women. This could potentially create a parallel power structure in the public sphere. On the other hand, some development practitioners and funders would characterize “development” as an industry and not a political actor. Weisgrau (1997) seems to agree when she notes that there are institutionalized NGOs and professional careers to be made from development “work.” Although self-proclaimed feminist organizations are expected by society to form a nonhierarchical, community-like environment in which volunteers and paid staff members are treated equally (Epstein et al. 1988), there are those who believe that even feminist organizations are oligarchic by nature (Michels 1962).

There is an important aspect of gendering that focuses on the role of women versus men in development work and the NGO sectors. For example, Plemper (1996) claimed that female participants in community activism and NGO work around the world outnumber male participants. Does this suggest that there is an inherently gendered nature to the work that the NGOs do? Does this suggest a continuation of the historical construction of a relation between women and social service work and the “moral role” of women in society? My fieldwork documented factors such as the professionalization of NGOs, NGO structures, and the relationships with government and funding agencies that shape the gender dynamics of the NGO sector in Kolkata. I found that these factors
directly contributed to the kind of empowerment initiatives these NGOs engage in and provide a detailed discussion of this in the next chapter.

Another critical issue regarding the conceptual labels that dominate the discussions in the NGO circle pertains to the role of volunteers, activists, and feminists and nonfeminists. In this discussion, it is prudent to keep in mind that volunteers may or may not be activists, and the work of self-proclaimed nonfeminists may resemble feminist activism. In addressing the differences among the above mentioned groups, Blackstone (2004) argues that the question of whether we can or should ascribe the label activists to those who choose not to identify themselves that way resonates with feminist debates on labeling someone as feminist who does not claim to be one. Research on working class women’s activism by Pardo (1995), Naples (1998) and Samita Sen (1999), demonstrates that much of the activism conducted by self-proclaimed nonfeminists resembles feminist activism. Pardo suggested that those who do not define themselves as feminists but who employ “implicit feminist practices” might best be described as “border feminists” (1995, 357). In her research on women’s nonprofit organizations in New York, Bordt (1997) found that organizations differed in terms of the philosophies that informed how they defined themselves. This is very important in understanding the role of gender in NGOs because there is always the danger of assuming a self-proclaimed feminist organization to be gender sensitive in its practice.

**Literature on Gendered Organizations and Institutions**

Another body of literature was extremely useful in framing the research questions and analysis. The literature on gendered organizations and institutions was useful to
understanding the environment in which empowerment projects are conceived and operationalized in organizations. That is, for the three NGOs of this study, their organizational structure, their internal dynamics, and the role of their staff members in constructing definitions of empowerment for their beneficiaries had to be studied. In framing research questions, I was conscious of the fact that these self-proclaimed feminist organizations should not be assumed gender sensitive in their practice.

Kimmel (2000) argues that every known society is founded upon assumptions of gender difference and a “politics” of gender inequality. Gender differences are often expressed and normalized by fundamental institutions of every society like the family, education, and the workplace. NGOs are no different from institutions or other civil society organizations. In fact, scholars like David Korten (1990) have both welcomed interventions and questioned the politics of non-governmental organizations in the arena of people-centered development. Others have explored why WID (women in development) projects often failed to empower women by documenting how NGO work is influenced by factors such as staff members’ beliefs regarding gender roles and their backgrounds and areas of expertise, often in health care and social work (Buvinic 1986). These questions led to a series of studies focused on identifying barriers to successful implementation of women-centered projects in diverse regions including India, Latin America, and Sub-Saharan Africa. These studies provided insights that could be applied to my dissertation research.

Key concepts from the literature on “gendering of organizations,” also were profoundly important to the research design and conceptual framework of the study.
Scholars like March and Olsen (1989), Richard W. Scott (1987), Meyer and Rowan (1991), and Powell and DiMaggio (1991) challenged earlier perceptions about the functions of institutions and the process of change within institutions by emphasizing the influence of mitigating factors such as relationships with other institutions and the societal environment. This body of literature emphasized how action is structured within an institution/organization by shared systems of rules that constrain both the inclination and capacity of actors to optimize and privilege some groups whose interests are secured by prevailing rewards and sanctions. It also usually downplayed conflicts of interest within and between organizations or noted how organizations respond to such conflicts by developing highly elaborate administrative structures (Scott and Meyer 1991). While the earlier approaches to institutions emphasized the vesting of interests within organizations as a result of political tradeoffs and alliances, the new approach identified different sources of constraint for certain groups, like women in development organizations, by stressing the relationship between stability and legitimacy and the power of “common understandings that are seldom explicitly articulated” (Zucker 1983, 83).

This approach to studying institutions helps to identify organizations as gendered institutions/organizations. The approach has existed for quite some time now and has evolved significantly, to the extent that it has become commonplace to speak of organizations as gendered. Although some studies examined the role of gender in institutions like corporations (Kanter 1977; Yoder 1991), law (Epstein 1993), and legislatures (Lahti and Kelly 1995), the framework proposed by these scholars was useful
for exploring the gendered nature of NGOs in this dissertation. Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1977) argues that perceptions about gender in an institution depend on how the actors within an institution perceive themselves, and how they perceive themselves depends on their numbers within the institution. Janice Yoder (1991) expanded Kanter’s study by highlighting the role of combined rather than individual influences of behavioral norms along with gender status (i.e., numbers, structural positions) within an institution as key to understanding the process of gendering of the institution. These two studies were important to this dissertation for examining the role of NGO activists in the organizations’ conceptualization of women’s needs and the methods used to address those needs. Both demand a focus on the organizational structures, practices, and actors as major factors for understanding the process of gendering in an organization.

The definition of genderedness used for this study draws on leading feminist theorists like Joan Scott and her definitions of gender. Scott (1998) defines gender as having no universal content and as produced and reproduced in daily interactions. Her definition of gender and her explanation of the process of production and reproduction of gender in an institution are useful for analyzing the ways gender is conceptualized not only by NGO activists through implementation in NGO programs and policy, but also by the women who are their intended beneficiaries and with whom they interact. Scott’s reminder that gendering is a continuous process—one that takes place repeatedly at the seemingly trivial level of inter-personal interactions—was extremely helpful in designing the research methods used during my fieldwork.
Any attempt to understand NGOs as gendered organizations must begin with an explanation of the phenomenon of gendering the institution. In simpler terms, how do we identify an organization as gendered when we see one? Although many scholars like Acker (1989) acknowledge that organizations are inherently gendered, few agree on just what that means. After studying various interpretations of “gendered,” I settled on two definitions. Both are from Joan Acker’s work; the second one is an expansion of her earlier definition. These two definitions provide ways in which the process of gendering in an organization can be effectively identified and analyzed. She argues that to claim that an organization or any analytic unit is gendered means that the advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity, are patterned through and in terms of distinctions between male and female, masculine and feminine (Acker 1989, 146). In her later work (2006), Acker expands this definition and suggests that this process of gendering is so deeply embedded in organizations that the phenomenon itself will serve to further create, support, and reproduce a gendered organization.

To say that organizations are inherently gendered implies that they have been defined, conceptualized, and structured in terms of a distinction between masculinity and femininity and will thus inevitably reproduce gendered differences (Britton 2000, 419). According to these scholars this patterning and structuring in terms of distinctions between male and female is precisely what leads to overt and latent discriminatory practices in organizations. The theoretical framework for my study used these definitions but within the framework of each organization’s unique cultural paradigm. The cultural
values of an organization consist of the individual values of board, staff, and volunteers, along with formal and informal structures of decision-making and the values that the organization seeks to operationalize. Unquestionably, an organization’s cultural paradigm is valuable in furthering our understanding of gendered organizations. Acker identifies five general categories of processes that lead to gendered organizations, which are relevant for this study. The first set of processes involves the production of gender divisions: specifically, “ordinary organizational practices produce gender patterning of jobs, wages, and hierarchies, power and subordination” (Acker 1989, 252). Acker’s second set of processes is described as gendering cultures in the organizations and in the society within which they are operating. She explains this as “the creation of symbols, images, and forms of consciousness that explicate, justify, and more rarely oppose gender divisions” (Acker 1989, 253). Her third set of processes, described as gendering interactions, relates to the interactions between individuals, men and women, in the multiplicity of forms that enact dominance and subordination and also create alliances and exclusions. Policies emerging from these interactions at various levels of hierarchy create divisions, while images of gender are created and affirmed (Acker 1989, 253). In other words, this category emphasizes the importance of interaction at the individual level as a \textit{gendering} instrument. The fourth set of processes centers on the internal mental work of individuals as they consciously construct their understandings of the organization’s gendered structure of work and opportunity and the demands for gender-appropriate behaviors and attitudes (Acker 1989, 253).
The final set of processes is centered on organizational logic and the gendered substructures that are reproduced in daily organizational activities and the writings of organizational theorists (Acker 1989). These processes are manifested in the forms of the written work rules, labor contracts, and other documentary tools in an organization.

Acker’s model is relevant to what I have identified as a debate regarding the culture of the organization and the importance of gendering as a critical aspect of that culture. Her categories present us with a good picture of the elements to look for while studying the gendered nature of an organization. Thus, it provides inputs to a framework that allows us to capture elements that make up organizational culture without being exclusionary. For example, the questions for the qualitative interviews used for this study were framed with the above-mentioned categories in mind.

In sum, this body of literature not only helped to identify the three NGOs of this study as inherently gendered institutions, it also helped to analyze the context in which these organizations frame notions about empowerment and apply such notions in their empowerment projects. I used the theoretical framework of gendering of institutions to research and analyze the organizational culture, staff dynamics, and day-to-day activities of the three NGOs discussed in Chapter 3.

**The Concept of Women’s Empowerment**

Gender equality and the empowerment of women is the third of the Millennium Development Goals to which all United Nations member nations agreed in 2000. In 2006 the Institute of Development Studies in England launched a five-year research program to examine what factors enable women to empower themselves and how changes in
gendered power relations can be sustained (Esplen, Heerah, and Hunter 2006).
International donors are examining with increasing frequency the ways in which women's empowerment can be measured in order to evaluate the impact of their aid policies. In the neoliberal era of governance, the word *empowerment* has successfully replaced the word *welfare* for the work of NGOs in neoliberal settings. (Sharma 2008). During fieldwork in 2006, I was able to see how the three NGOs negotiated women’s “empowerment” with a neoliberal Indian state, a communist local government, and a network of transnational funders ranging from faith-based organizations to other international private donors. As a result, I found it necessary to contextualize the use of the word “empowerment” in relation to my ongoing research and analysis. To do so, I referred to the different ways in which interdisciplinary scholars and practitioners have defined empowerment in relation to their work on women and/or with development. Feminist scholars like Kabeer (1994), Rowlands (1997), Townsend et al. (1999) have engaged with questions of power and empowerment in the relations between marginalized women and the economic and cultural institutions that oppress them. Their research has shown how variable the concepts can be. In fact, definition of empowerment is highly contextual. It was this aspect for research and analysis that contributed to my shift in focus from “organizations” to “empowerment” projects.

Since the 1990s there have been various attempts in the literature on women and development and feminist literature on women’s empowerment to develop a comprehensive understanding of “empowerment” as it relates to women. This term now is used to represent a wide range of concepts and to describe a proliferation of outcomes.
Batliwala (1994) characterizes empowerment as “control over resources and ideology” (1994, 128), and in 1996 Chen et al. claimed, “Resources, perceptions, relationships, and power,” as the main components of empowerment. My research led me to conclude that, in this context, resources and agency (in various forms and by various names, e.g., control, awareness, voice, and actual power) are the two most important components of empowerment. Various studies throughout the eighties and nineties also attempted to measure empowerment by measuring women’s “autonomy” “agency,” “status,” “land rights,” “domestic economic power,” “bargaining power,” etc. Often these terms are used without clear demarcations. Notwithstanding the differences in meaning underlying many such terms, the concept of empowerment can be distinguished based on its unique definitional elements.

For example, feminist scholars and activists have provided many definitions of the word “empowerment” based on context and situation. The first essential element of empowerment, according to Naila Kabeer (1999), is that it is a process. Some saw economic gain as a primary route to women's empowerment. The popularity of micro-credit programs targeted at women is an outgrowth of this belief. However, others question whether increased income for women automatically leads to their empowerment. Joy Deshmukh-Ranadive (2005) argues that income generation alone does not necessarily empower women without corresponding changes in family hierarchies and household structures. Similarly, Anne-Marie Goetz and Rina Sen Gupta (1996) note that in Bangladesh women seek, and have high rates of repayment on, microcredit loans, a factor that is often interpreted as indicating empowerment. However, their research
found that a significant number of loans were controlled by male relatives rather than by the women directly, despite the fact that the latter are legally responsible for loan repayment.

According to Gita Sen, the empowerment approach must integrate women’s agency into the existing configuration in order to improve their wellbeing (Sen and Grown 1987, 3). Sen and Grown define an “agent” as “someone who acts and brings about change, and whose achievements can be judged in terms of her own values and objectives” (Sen and Grown 1987, 19). In other words, an agent is someone who determines what aspects of life are unsatisfactory and then takes steps to implement those changes in a culturally relevant and personal way. By focusing on agency rather than charity, program participants can not only gain physical or financial benefits but may actually start to view themselves and their abilities in a new light.

A commonly used definition of women’s empowerment is greater control over oneself and one’s circumstances achieved through activism (Dutta 2003, 252). Activism itself takes many forms, including being able to acknowledge injustice and express one’s dissension. Feminist writer Naila Kabeer characterizes empowerment as “the ability to make choices” as attained by someone who has not had opportunity in the past (Dutta 2003, 14). According to Rowlands (1997), empowerment needs to take place at internalized, interpersonal, and collective levels. By synthesizing these different definitions for the context I studied, I defined empowerment as self-management of women’s lives and the ability to make individual choices realized through women’s agency (Dutta 2003, 353; Kabeer 2005, 15). As a result, this study explored the meaning
of trafficked women and sex worker women’s perceived and actual powerlessness in order to better understand the reasons behind the adoption of different empowerment initiatives by the NGOs in this study. Deploying such a multi-layered notion of women’s empowerment within this study helped to delineate the many levels that each of the components of empowerment adopted by the three organizations addresses, along with the gendered processes inherent in the empowerment projects.

In recent years feminist scholars have cautioned about the anemic forms of “empowerment” that are promoted by international development agencies and their national government partners and that fail to acknowledge global inequities. This raises the question of how women can be empowered within disempowering structures and systems. Cecilia Sardenberg’s (2010) account of discourses of empowerment in Brazil juxtaposes the notion of “empowerment,” linked to external institutions like the World Bank, with notions of autonomy and solidarity that resonate with grassroots social movements’ struggles for rights and recognition. Writing from the Palestinian Occupied Territories, Eileen Kuttab (2006) finds in the practice of resistance and community organizing a vision of empowerment that brings power back into the picture. Kuttab draws on the philosopher Judith Butler to help us to imagine the possibilities of empowerment under occupation, bringing the notion of resistance back into the heart of how “empowerment” is conceived. This was particularly helpful in analyzing how some of the beneficiaries and NGOs negotiate with each other. Drawing on such critiques, this dissertation challenges representations of women as abject victims or as heroic figures—a mainstay of gender and development as well as mainstream development discourse. My
experience in the field reinforced this idea of the complex realities of women who have
been trafficked and women in the sex trade. All-encompassing assumptions about them
and their empowerment do not reveal the ways in which these women negotiate and
renegotiate with the different actors dedicated to their empowerment with one objective
in mind, the wellbeing of their family and themselves.

**Trafficking and NGO work in India**

The complex reality of women seeking empowerment in the three NGOs of this
study is also a product of the ideological struggles that dominate Kolkata and its NGO
circuit. Many contemporary NGOs in Kolkata focus their work on the trafficking of
women and children; the subject of trafficking, in turn, is dominated by debates about the
legalization or criminalization of sex work. Sex work has been and is the critical
reference point for the majority of the discussions that have taken place regarding the
trafficking of women and children (Doezema 2002, 25). Since the mid-1980s, trafficking
of women and children for sex work has received increased international attention. In
*Hollow Bodies: Institutional Responses to Sex Trafficking in Armenia, Bosnia and India*
(2008), Susan Dewey highlights “the nuanced nature of sex trafficking” as a social justice
issue that has received dramatically greater amounts of international attention and donor
funds in the past decade than prior. This has led to a divide among feminists
internationally. Some hold the position held by the Coalition Against Trafficking of
Women (CATW), led by Kathleen Barry, which sees all sex work as a violation of
women’s human rights. Others hold the position of the Human Rights Caucus, which
views sex work as legitimate labor. The two opposing groups clashed during the lobbying
process for the ratification of UN Protocol to Combat Trafficking in Women and Children (2000). According to Doezema (2002), while there are some similarities in the representation of Third World women by the two groups, CATW, in particular, views Third World sex workers as helpless victims in need of rescue. She suggests that such constructions are part of a wider western feminist impulse to construct a damaged “other” as the main justification for its interventionist impulses (Doezema 2002, 20).

I witnessed the presence of both sides of the debate in the NGOs working for women in Bengal. The adoption of these two oppositional positions by different women’s NGOs served as an indicator of the transnational feminist networks within which the professional leaders of the NGOs in Kolkata operated during this study. It also meant that beneficiaries are often caught in the middle of this struggle, since much of the time organizations’ ideological positions influence the kind of empowerment projects they take on. However, this study will show in later chapters that such organizational ideological affiliations are not all-encompassing and often lead to different outcomes from what organizations state are the goals of their empowerment initiatives.

Susan Dewey’s study (2008) was extremely important for this dissertation, and my research confirmed her claims that there are not many sources that offer these women sustainable and long-term economic support. The NGOs in this study reflect her claims; all the women of this study, just as in Dewey’s work, have several things in common: they are poor, they are desperate, and they do not have economic alternatives to sex work. While Dewey goes on to present the limitations of the cultural construction and definition of sex trafficking in largely Western European and North American terms, in my work I
study how women who are at the receiving end of such definitions and “victimization narratives” respond to it. I agree with Dewey that the idea of “victimization” has become institutionalized despite the agency demonstrated by women identified as victims of trafficking and sex work (Dewey 2008, 177), and in this dissertation I attempt to identify examples of such agency. It was useful for me to remember from Dewey’s work that women she studied never saw themselves as victims but rather as actors and agents who sought to improve their lives by making a choice. My work studies the role of the three NGOs in perpetuating the “victimization narrative” as it interacts with its funders and other social institutions (police, courts, and government agencies like the Women’s Commission of Bengal).

**Research Design and Analysis**

*Towards a feminist methodology*

This dissertation is primarily based on ethnographic research. I used qualitative research methods and feminist theories to understand the process of gendering in NGOs in a Third World environment and to interrogate approaches to empowerment.

Qualitative methodology is not intended to prove or test a theory. Unlike positivist methods such as hypothesis testing and quantitative modeling of causality, my use of qualitative methods are grounded in discursive methodology. The selection of this methodological tool is rooted in the assumptions that researchers cannot make claims of objectivity and must situate themselves actively in the world that they seek to explain. However, as Lal (1996) points out, the researcher’s location within the context does not
guarantee an immediate understanding of the participants’ life experiences. Interpretive methods are well suited to the task of feminist research because of their ability to produce intersubjective rather than reductive examination of subjects’ everyday life experiences (Van Manen 1990). Such methods allow feminist scholars to be both participants and co-commentators on the phenomena on which they are reflecting (Orbe 1998).

Like Lal (1996), I strived to use diverse methods and multiple tools to make sense of the questions and issues that arose in the field. In many ways, my approach is grounded in a tradition of qualitative inquiry and in relatively conventional methods of conducting qualitative interviews. As I mentioned, my own methodology involved reviewing NGO literature and performing fieldwork, including attending lectures and workshops at local NGOs at Kolkata. I also referred to other ethnographic studies on Indian women, literature, and articles (both in English and Bengali) on the Indian women’s movement and gender training. This helped me to understand the organizational mechanisms of each NGO and the environments created in the organizations in which empowerment initiatives were taking place. At different points, I was an active participant in the workings of NGOs, which raised important questions for me as a feminist researcher. Although feminist researchers have employed reflective practice to counter the reproduction of inequalities in ethnographic investigation (Naples 2003), it is important to note that my participation in these NGOs was more complex than can be conveyed by simply stating the number of days and hours that I spent with them. I formed relationships with both staff and beneficiaries of the organizations that cannot be easily qualified as mere researcher-participant working relationships, since some women
also shared their deepest, most personal experiences during the research and even after interviews were completed. My methods were also influenced by the work of Richa Nagar (2006) in *Playing with Fire*. In her work Nagar brings forth the collective voice of women employed by a large NGO as activists in their communities and is based on diaries, interviews, and conversations among them. Together their personal stories revealed larger themes and questions of sexism, casteism, and communalism, and a startling picture emerges of how NGOs both nourish and stifle local struggles for solidarity. Her use of interviews and stories helped me to merge self reflexively the voices and stories I heard in the field to seek answers to questions concerning empowerment of the women in Sanlaap, Jabala and New Light. Although I did not replicate her methods, Nagar’s work encouraged me to change the direction of this study on the basis of what I heard and observed in the field and focus on the complex intersections of difference that distinctively imbue all aspects of the lives and work of the women I studied.

Research that necessitates forming relationships with participants poses certain challenges for both the researcher and the subject. I was conscious of the relationships generated from my work as a volunteer workshop facilitator and organizer in these organizations, and my analysis is informed by self-reflection on the training sessions.

*Data Collection*

This study was multi-method, and I triangulated data from several sources. The primary data were generated from the ethnographic fieldwork conducted in the three NGOs in Kolkata and interviews at funding and state agencies. Qualitative methods were
most appropriate for exploring my research questions, since these methods avoid preconceived notions and allow eliciting key concepts and their interpretations from those interviewed. I also analyze key NGO and funder documents such as training manuals, mission statements, and annual reports and policies. This multi-method approach illuminated the role of gender within the organizations, especially how gender is conceptualized and constructed by the actors who use it in their work aimed at women's empowerment.

Regrettably, I found limited research on NGOs in contemporary Bengal but drew information from such research to identify and sample possible contemporary issues affecting women’s lives and sample rhetoric on discourses generated and circulating within NGOs. I gathered and studied discursive material available in the form of reports, academic papers, organizational literature, and newspaper articles (both in English and Bengali) as my primary textual sources. In addition, I met with activists and members of various women’s social action groups, government officials and politicians, and academics to gauge their perspectives and insights on the role of NGOs in general and the three NGOs in particular in urban Kolkata. My in-depth inquiry into the perspectives and work practices of multiple stakeholders engaged with women’s empowerment NGOs helped me to understand feminism in this context.

While the framework of this study was greatly influenced by the transnational and US feminist literature discussed in the first part of this chapter, I was able to adapt this framework more closely to the local context throughout the research process, particularly through document research and the spectrum of interviews. I found ways in which
theories such as Joan Acker’s five ways of identifying gendered organizations useful in organizing what I saw and learned about the day-to-day activities in the three organizations. I also saw how transnational discourses on women and sex work were being used locally to justify a certain kind of empowerment agenda based on an anti-sex work disposition in the three NGOs.

**Interviews (Sampling)**

I collected data through a combination of participant observation and in-depth field interviews conducted between December 2004 and September 2006. A sample of thirty-six men and women from three NGOs in Kolkata were interviewed with open-ended questions as part of this study. I used a snowball sampling method, where my initial contacts identified further key informants from their work and friendship networks. I have used their reflections, views, narratives, and discourses to explore links between their everyday life experiences and empowerment initiatives in the NGOs. This group included a diverse set of women between the ages of 20 and 50, married and unmarried, self identified as belonging to either lower or middle class, educated (including abroad in western countries) and uneducated, from different walks of life. These women can be broadly divided into two groups as the benefactors and the beneficiaries. The benefactors included regular NGO professionals, founders of NGOs, members of the board, prominent activists, government liaisons, and grant officers. The beneficiaries of the organization primarily included women and girls from different marginalized groups, like members of the sex workers community and trafficking survivors (see participant profiles in Appendix 1 for more details).
The interviews were in English, Bengali, or both and typically lasted for 45 to 60 minutes. Once the interviews were tape recorded with the permission from the interviewee, the data was translated to English and then transcribed. I also conducted one group interview with nine women in one room, which was a unique experience. Interviews are my primary source of data, and I use them to establish the ways in which officials, activists, and women beneficiaries perceive the role of gender in their organizations and in women's empowerment. The questionnaires were structured according to the affiliations of the person interviewed. Although there were overlapping issues, I had different and focused questionnaires for the women of the funding agencies, the activists, and the beneficiaries so that each interview focused on aspects most relevant to those interviewed. The questions were designed to elicit answers for topics like tokenism, personal beliefs (about gender and empowerment), organizational principles, and positions on gender and empowerment, sources and types of pressures from outside, the political environment in which each group operates, the history of each organization or program, ties to political parties or other organizations, sources of funding, operating guidelines imposed by funders or by government agencies, etc. The perceptions of intended women beneficiaries can shed light on the extent to which their ideas and stated needs are taken into account by staff and politicians and how these women conceptualize (or not) empowerment—the stated mission of the NGOs. I also include focus group interviews with women involved in NGO-sponsored projects in order to observe and note their interactions and how they frame issues when conversing with each other as opposed to during one-on-one interviews (Appendix 2).
I found relevant information in government documents in archives in Kolkata. These include annual labor and crime reports, the census, detailed national surveys conducted by the National Sample Survey Organization, and statistics provided in the reports of international agencies and the National and Bengal Women's Commission. I supplemented these sources with information found in local newspapers like *The Statesman, Anandabazar*, and *The Telegraph* and with information previously compiled by other scholars working in the area. These other document sources were used to establish background information before the interviews and helped me to prepare more focused semi-structured questionnaires. I compared the data gathered from the newspapers and archives with interviews in order to explore the inconsistencies or contradictions with the interview answers and to determine if interviewees needed to be revisited.

**Interpretive Methods**

My analysis was based on data gathered from interviews, document research, participant observation, and field notes that I maintained while engaging in the research. My field notes are in the form of hand written notes during meetings, events, and interviews; some complemented the interviews as my own reflections on the things around in the field helped in the analysis of the data.

In the analysis phase I employed interpretive analytical tools that are widely used in qualitative studies. My observations and participation in training programs and community meetings provided critical insight into specific locales and modalities of contestation, renegotiation, and emergence of innovative tools for empowerment. They
included discourse analysis, historical analysis, and analysis of themes detected in interviews and documents.

Discourse analysis was used to identify how problems, goals, strategies, and beneficiaries are conceptualized and to detect and analyze how the different actors in the organizations perceived and operationalized notions about empowerment for targeted women. I feel this method was particularly useful for this project as it is an analysis of speech units larger than the sentence and of their relationship to the contexts in which they are used. This qualitative method helped to identify the ways in which “gender” is constructed and operationalized through discourses by the different actors and in organizational documents, publications such as newsletters, funding proposals, evaluation reports, press releases, etc. Discourse analysis also helped to identify the actors who contributed to or departed from hegemonic definitions of empowerment.

To assess the flow of ideological influences on the three organizations, I used historical analysis to trace the trajectory of relationships between the three NGOs, the funders, the beneficiaries, and the staff of the organizations, with an emphasis on the influence of external factors (like the political environment) on these relationships. Historical analysis is supplemented with contextual and document analysis of the interviews to provide a more complete understanding of the relationship between the funders, the NGOs, and the women beneficiaries.

I worked on documenting and illuminating the context in which empowerment initiatives are conceived and operationalized in the three organizations first, and, second, the relevance of these empowerment projects in the day-to-day lives of their targeted
beneficiaries. I also paid special attention to documenting and understanding the role played by characteristics both internal and external to an organization. In particular, I documented how and under what circumstances the actors I studied resisted, coped with, adapted to, or even managed to navigate complications that arose from the conflicts between their personal notions about empowerment and the stated goals of the organizations, the beneficiaries, and the political forces and funders with whom they must interact.

Using NVivo

This study used the qualitative software NVivo for data storage, organization, and analysis. NVivo allowed me to store and catalogue various types of data sources used for this study, like interview transcripts, field notes, and documents. NVivo helped the analysis for this study through capabilities such as linking documents and finding passages that are relevant to specific themes that I created. I used coding to disaggregate the data and break it down into manageable segments and to name each segment. These were especially useful in their time-saving potential in data analysis. The interviews conducted were analyzed as a whole once they were organized in NVivo to produce a general picture and to answer the main research questions. I also created specific subquestions, some planned from the onset and some emerging from the field, but slightly divergent from the main project scheme, to analyze the interviews. For example, one overarching theme considered the work history of specific staff members and the shifts in their work profile (if any) over the years in light of their interaction with the beneficiaries. Another subtheme focused on the work history (if any) of the women who
leave the NGOs once they are deemed rehabilitated in the eyes of the organizations. The presorting of data began with a very broad, thematic coding (with nodes in NVivo) of the collected material. As the interviews and other evidence were organized under the initial themes, there emerged other subthemes that were coded later, for example, men in the NGOs, motherhood and sex work, and so on. This method allowed selections of data under each node to be further investigated and assigned some other code. What emerged is a classification of the material by different themes with data enriching some themes over others. This kind of theme strategy was particularly useful for this study, as it is a multisided project, and this is appropriate for a research situation that is purely not inductive but started with more or less well defined questions that evolve in the field.

This study revealed the importance of individual experiences in answering the research questions for this study. However, these individual experiences made more sense within the themes that emerged from the interplay of different nodes and subnodes in NVivo.

Harding has said that feminist research locates the researcher in the same critical plane as the subject matter, that “the belief and behavior of the researcher are part of the empirical evidence for or against the claims advanced in the results of the research” (Harding 1987, 9). Accordingly, I would like to acknowledge that my reading and interpretations of the meanings and texts of the data I gathered for this research are informed by my own personal experience as an NGO activist in Kolkata and as a women’s studies student in the US. Likewise, my personal assumptions and biases may have informed the design of this study to an extent. However, I strongly believe that surely does not minimize the significance or the relevance of this study for women’s
movements and women’s empowerment in contemporary discourses and practices, as this study will provide a peek into the lives of a group of women (sex workers and trafficking survivors) from Bengal, India, often neglected in academic writings. This study will complicate oversimplified notions about the role of NGO-conducted empowerment initiatives in these women’s lives and expose the ways in which the women creatively negotiate, challenge, and align with the NGOs to further their own wellbeing.
Chapter 3

In Between Nation Building and Self-Regulating Citizens

In this chapter, I discuss the emergence of the three NGOs selected for this study within a historiography of women’s empowerment NGOs in India. Further, the chapter discusses the organizational structure of the three NGOs, deploying gendering of organizations as an analytical concept. In my analysis, I correlate the processes used by gendered workspaces within these three NGOs (Sanlaap, Jabala, and New Light) and prescriptions for empowerment of women in the sex trade with larger socioeconomic processes such as notions of self-regulating citizens within neoliberal states and the globalizing Indian economy.

The Indian state since the late eighties began to adopt a set of economic practices that opened the hitherto nationalized state enterprises to multinational corporations and foreign investments and contributed to an emphasis on consumer culture. Feminists such as Sangeeta Kamat (2002) have documented the indelible impacts of these transformations on changing images and organizational processes of women’s empowerment, through a shift from state-funded programs to an increasingly privately funded NGO sector, and have highlighted NGOs’ compliance with processes of economic liberalization.
The shifts in the Indian economy have also altered notions of citizenship-based rights and the relationship between the state and its disempowered subjects. From the years following Indian independence from British colonial rule until the early eighties, most women’s rights activists targeted the state as the agency for undoing oppression. The opening of the Indian economy signaled the adoption of notions of citizenship rooted in privately nurtured skills for access to income and wealth, reflecting a clear move towards neoliberal notions of citizenship, wherein citizens are privately responsible for the achievement of social and economic equality. Such private ventures are facilitated and even at times coordinated by NGOs, which are citizen-led, oftentimes privately funded, and complicit with the state’s increasing disinvestment in social services.

Several scholars such as Lisa Lowe (1996) and Aihwa Ong (1999) have shown, in their studies of Asian immigrants in the US, how some projects that explicitly seek to support immigrant communities that are marginalized in reality work in tandem with complex neoliberal, global regimes to incorporate and “tame” marginalized subjects within the US nation-state. I engage with feminist scholarship specific to NGOs in India such as that of Raka Ray (1999), Sangeeta Kamat (2002), Richa Nagar et al. (2006), Saraswati Raju et al. (2006), Aditi Mitra (2011a), Aradhana Sharma (2008), and Susan Dewey (2008) to interrogate the connections between women’s empowerment projects (as in the case of the three NGOs) and neoliberal notions of citizenship.

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5 By this I specifically mean women who are marginalized and economically disadvantaged for various reasons.
This chapter is composed of three sections. The first section delves into the growth and constraints of NGOs working with women and the relationship between voluntary agencies, NGOs, and the Indian state. I include a brief historiography of women’s roles in leadership and the decision making process of NGOs and of women’s roles in advocating for changes within the patriarchal power structures of society to provide the historical context for the rise of the three NGOs. The three organizations discussed in this chapter directly emerged out of the history of leftist organizing in West Bengal, as part of a growing trend of disgruntled intellectuals within the Leftist movement founding alternative organizations outside party politics.

In the second section, I begin with a discussion of the beginnings of the three organizations, their current organizational structures, objectives, and management practices as narrated in the interviews and stated in pieces of organizational literature like manifestos and newsletters. I analyze the “official” descriptions of the NGOs and their empowerment goals. The chapter ends with a third section pertaining to the day-to-day operations of the organizations as I came to understand them through research and observations. In this section, based on ethnographic research, I discuss everyday practices within the NGOs and consider them in relation to the NGOs’ “official” self-descriptions.

**History of NGOs in India**

The current state of NGOs in Kolkata is the result of the history behind the rise of NGOs in the whole of India. Historically, these NGOs, or social welfare organizations, started up as an alternative to governmental policies and roles in national and local development. Following independence in 1947, these organizations established their own
independent group identity, separate from the nationalist movement. The current NGO movement in India in general, and Kolkata specifically, is a product of a long but uneven history of voluntary organization actions and initiatives in India associated with the nationalist movements of the 18th and 19th centuries. I confine my overview here to the historical trajectory of NGOs from the 19th century onwards because the 19th and 20th centuries were the periods that witnessed the rise of various important social reform movements and missionary activities in India (Ramusack and Sievers 1999). Although the social reform movements and missionary activities were very different in organizational structures, goals, funding mechanisms, and relationships to state and society from contemporary NGOs, it is necessary to trace the historical trajectories of these movements to understand the “women question” in Bengal and India and the context in which NGOs came into existence. The question of reform and reforming women continued to remain a central agenda for different organizations leading up to the NGOs of this study, although their class affiliations and the objectives for reform changed over time. While many 19th and 20th century reform efforts were directed towards bhadrolok, middle class women (Borthwick 1984), civil society organizations and the Indian state began to turn their attention to the reform and upliftment of poor women after 1947. Thus since the colonial period we see the reform movements and, later, the NGOs responding to and working within colonial and postcolonial state policies in their efforts to improve the lives of women in India. Recognizing this history is important for understanding the contemporary relations between the three NGOs of this study and the government of West Bengal and India. The threads of continuity and
change over time continue to influence how the NGOs conceptualize empowerment for their beneficiaries in the light of the construction of womanhood and the role of “morality” in their work.

Barbara Ramusack argues that the history of women's empowerment in India often fails to underscore the role of missionary work. The lack of studies on the influence of missionary work on women’s empowerment in India limits understanding of some of the ideological premises of organizations tied to or originating in religious ideologies, nationalism, and other social reform movements. This is important for this study because the organizations studied are working with women in the sex trade, a field fraught with moral debates. All the organizations of this study continue to receive funding from faith-based international funders, which directly contributes to their stated ideological positions on sex work.

Historical accounts show social welfare organizations were initially considered selfless endeavors with little political significance (Ramusack and Sievers 1999; Kumar 1993, 93). Aditi Mitra notes that over time the voluntary sector became more heterogeneous and professionalized, and NGOs emerged, fostering oppositional and alternative political ideologies among the poor at the grassroots level (Mitra 2011a). Scholars such as Mitra have argued that women’s NGO formation in India has been largely led by middle class women (Mitra 2011a). In the following sections, I analyze the historical factors that shaped the growth of the social services sector in India and its complex relationship with the state.
NGOs and the State of India

International NGOs (INGOs) have established a significant presence in local, national, and international settings. The nation of India is one of the Third World sites where international and local NGOs have played an important role in 20th century development. Some NGOs (INGOs and domestic) in India date back to the pre-independence era (19th and early 20th centuries). Early organizations, through various reform measures, tried to stop practices including child-marriage, Sati, the dowry system, the caste system, and discrimination against widows and girl children (Kumar 1993). Political movements such as trade union movements, the Quit India movement, and student movements all derived assistance from voluntary initiatives and civil society organizations. In post-independence India, NGOs as we understand them today became active in the 1960s and ‘70s as vociferous critics of government policies. Many ideological trends in the contemporary NGO movement in India originated in the roles and ideological positions of early organizations. This is especially true of NGOs dedicated to women’s empowerment.

Many INGOs and national and local NGOs also have worked in cooperation with the state to highlight issues such as the rights of girl children, the empowerment of women and the poor, and the rescue and rehabilitation of trafficked women. Indian NGOs ranged from “Mahila Mandals” (women’s groups) to multi-group federations, as well as Gandhian and Marxist organizations. The tensions between Gandhian nonviolence principles and Marxist notions of the need for fundamental alterations in the structures of the state and society are especially relevant to understanding the historical context of
women’s rights NGOs in West Bengal. West Bengal boasts one of the largest cadres of grassroots Communist (Marxist) organizers in India, many of whom are rural and urban women (Ray 1999).

During British rule in India, the Charter Act of 1813 was important to the evolution of the voluntary sector and contemporary NGOs (Kumar 1993). It removed all restrictions on the activities of Christian missionaries in India and unleashed a new era of “cooperative” voluntarism between the East India Company and the missionaries (particularly in India’s tribal areas) (PRIA 1991). Although the missionaries dominated the early voluntary sector in India, Hindus and Muslims began to establish organizations of their own to address similar issues like women’s education, education of the “untouchables (Harijan),” and “upliftment” (a word commonly used by the early social workers of India) of the deprived and marginalized sections of the society. Prominent organizations in the sector were Atmiya Samaj (the first known voluntary association in India that focused on reforms), founded by Raja Ram Mohan Roy in 1815, Paranhans Sabha, Hindu Dharam Sabha, and the Faradi Movement initiated by Haji Shariatullah.6 Elite women started participating actively in social services around the mid-nineteenth century by taking on issues that already were issues under the umbrella of the male-dominated social services; that included education, widow remarriage, and child marriage (Butalia 1998). In Bengal, the first women’s rights organizations emerged from the Brahmo Samaj movement in the 19th century. They emphasized the need for

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6 These were some of the prominent early civil society organizations in colonial India, which took up the issue of reform based primarily on different religious dictions. In the course of reform they often engaged with issues related to women although these issues were not always emancipatory, nor did they demand empowerment for women (Kumar 1993).
“improvement” rather than “emancipation” of women (Ramusack and Sievers 1999). Their emphasis was on women of all classes becoming more responsible wives and mothers while becoming involved in appropriate charitable activities outside the home (Borthwick 1984).

By the second half of the 20th century, the social services sector was dominated by the influence of nationalism referred to as the Swadeshi movement (1905-1908) against the partition of Bengal. Bengal became one of the early sites for a new wave of mass involvement in the form of nationalist struggles against British rule, and thus voluntary activities took a back seat to movements against British rule. Massive protests also occurred throughout the country with the involvement of people from all walks of life.

Women played a key role in the economic boycott campaigns and were at the forefront of both moderate and radical nationalisms. Women also gained visibility in the Indian National Congress Party with the rise of Sarojini Naidu, Sarladevi Chaudharani, and Annie Besant. Sarojini Naidu, the first Indian female president of Congress, led a small delegation of women in 1919 with Margaret E. Cousins, an Irish feminist, to the British government, demanding equal rights of representation for women with men. The newly emerging women’s movement brought together a group of middle class Indian

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7 Moderates and extremists are used by historians to highlight the ideological shifts within Indian nationalism and Indian National Congress. While moderates believed in self governance under the British, the extremists demanded complete freedom and advocated for more direct anti-British methods in their struggle for “swaraj” or “freedom.”
8 These women were some of the prominent leaders of Indian National Congress and the Home Rule Movement in the early 20th century who assumed leadership roles in the nationalist movement (Kumar 1993).
women and sympathetic British feminists like Margaret E. Cousins and Annie Besant to the forefront. The British government rejected it on the grounds that a “backward” country like India would never accept the idea of equal political rights for women (Kishwar 1998). However, eventually these women’s struggles led to the adoption of women’s suffrage in India through the provincial legislatures in the 1950s (Kishwar 1998) with the adoption of the first Independent Indian constitution in 1950.

In 1928, the first All India Women’s Conference (AIWC) was convened; following its huge success, the AIWC became a prominent women’s rights institution in India. Among its activities, AIWC, along with several other women’s groups, successfully demanded a Hindu Code Bill that resulted in legal requirements of monogamy for men and daughters’ rights to inheritance under Hindu laws. This early mass activism by women was important to the history of NGOs in India for two reasons. During the early 20th century, they channeled the voluntary spirit of political action and mass mobilization for nationalist struggles, and they intersected with the initiation of an emphasis on “self help” in voluntarism following the principles of Mahatma Gandhi (PRIA 1991).

Mahatma Gandhi’s philosophy influenced the voluntary sector in India in many ways. Gandhi’s arrival and adoption of “Swadeshi” (self help) and “Satyagraha” (civil disobedience) became the ideological inspiration for definitions of economic and social justice in voluntary work in the years after independence from colonialism in 1947. His early experimentation with Satyagraha and later mass mobilizations in the Non-
cooperation and Civil Disobedience movement had revealed the strength of civil society as a legitimate site for struggles against an oppressive government (Sarkar 1985).

Thus, his influence lingered long after he departed from the scene and was prevalent in issues such as village reconstruction, reestablishing traditional handicraft industries, and challenging social evils like caste discrimination and illiteracy. Large numbers of women participated in Gandhian movements and many later became leaders in civil society organizations. They drew inspiration from Gandhi’s emphasis on nonviolence as a legitimate path for social change.

Contemporary (late 20th and 21st century) movements like Narmada Bachao Andolan under Medha Patkar,9 the Chipko movement,10 and SEWA share ideological similarities with Gandhian traditions in their goals and methods of agitation. Gandhi’s philosophy of women’s equality is also reflected in organizations like SEWA (founded by Ela Bhatt in Gujarat), which emphasizes women’s own leadership initiatives and self-help (Kapadia 1995).

The most significant contribution of the Gandhian tradition in social welfare work is his pioneering work in challenging the institutional violence of the state. He did this by emphasizing nonviolent actions like refusing military service and refusing to pay taxes to

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9 The Narmada Bachao Andolan arose in protest against the displacement and the state’s plans, or lack thereof, of the rehabilitation and resettlement of the “displaced” as a result of a dam built on the Narmada River. The movements strengthened and grew to incorporate dozens of international NGOs. Such groups, which deal with the environment as well as human rights, internationalized the movement. The fight against the Indian government and the dam’s principle investors developed tremendous support and challenged state sovereignty.

10 The Chipko movement began in 1973 in many districts in the Himalayan region of Uttar Pradesh. It was the result of hundreds of decentralized and locally autonomous initiatives led primarily by village women acting to save trees, which were a means of subsistence for their communities.
a militarized state. Gandhi’s leadership in the national movement combined local issues (like control over indigo or salt) with national politics of the time and paved the way for later mass participation based on the ideals of comprehensive progress, which included not only freedom from the British (Swaraj) but also economic self-reliance (swadeshi) (Kapadia 1995).

Gandhi’s ideological position is both controversial and significant. The interest in Gandhi among feminist scholars led to a perception of him which is intrinsically related to an analysis of the relationship between his ideology and the participation of women in the national movement. According to Veena Majumdar (1976) Gandhi’s greatest contribution was in his approach based on “personal dignity” without “belittling women’s roles as mothers and wives.” Majumdar’s arguments find reflection in the works of Geraldine Forbes (1979) and Devaki Jain (1986). Although his views on the role of women in the nationalist movement reverted to traditional gendered roles for women, he demanded equal participation for women in every sphere of colonial (pre-independence) public life. Perhaps the greatest effect of Gandhian philosophy on women’s participation was in the ways in which women from all classes and castes set aside their traditional gender roles and came out of seclusion to enter the public domain in the face of police atrocities leading up to independence. However, some contemporary scholars criticize Gandhi’s claims that women were better able than men to practice Satyagraha, or nonviolent resistance, because of their greater capacity for self-sacrifice. This reinforced traditional stereotypes of ideal feminine qualities that subordinated the individual to the group (Mies 1982). One of the more comprehensive and sophisticated critiques of Gandhi
came from Madhu Kishwar (1985) as she pointed to the existence of inherent contradictions within Gandhi relating to his ideas of women. Kishwar pointed out that Gandhi sought change “not so much in the material condition of women as their ‘moral’ condition” (Kishwar 1985, 1691).

Women’s issues also drew support from a parallel radical segment of the leftist movement within the nationalist struggle. In the early twentieth century, Bengal became known for terrorist attacks by young women on British officials and institutions. Women in this kind of movement stressed the importance of political freedom to bring about social change for all of Indian society, including for women (Forbes 1996; Kumar 1993). Women active in the Communist movement generally subordinated gender issues to class struggle. This was especially important for the ideological framework of social organizations in Bengal because it became a Communist-run state in the 1970s. The early Communist women in Bengal worked to secure food and other relief measures during the devastating man-made famine of 1943-44. They were active participants in the Tebhaga (land rights) movement of 1946, which demanded a greater share of crops for sharecroppers’ own use (Chakravarty 1980).

During the twenty years from independence to the mid-1960s, India went through a phase of nation building. Many NGOs involved with social reform-based voluntary action and “constructive work” joined the new Indian government in nation building. This was an era of new found civil society support for the government as it extended its work in the fields of agriculture, health, and community development. Scholars like Fernandes estimate that before the 1960s over 80 percent of all social service
organizations (at the time all were voluntary organizations) were either Gandhian or church-related (Fernandes 2004). Many of these organizations were hired to administer government-run programs and to implement projects initiated by the government’s Five Year Development Plans. The Plans focused mainly on “productivity-oriented technology… functional literacy-oriented extension work” (Fernandes 1986, 67). In other words, they did not question the system or the role of the state in community programs; rather, they sought effective implementation of the schemes conceived by the government (Fernandes 1986). From this period until the late 1970s, the Indian state can be characterized as the “Nehruvian State,” focused on social reconstruction (Zachariah 2004). The role of NGOs during this time was that of cooperation with the state to help administer its social development goals.

**NGO History in West Bengal**

The 1990s saw the liberalization of the Indian economy (open door policies), which was accompanied by the rise of NGOs as legitimate and primary fields of social reform (Ray 1999). While many NGOs concentrate in the state of Gujarat, in the late 1990s there was a dramatic proliferation of NGO activities in the state of West Bengal, which is now in fourth place with about 1.52 million (Bagchi 2005) people working in this sector. Yet West Bengal remains conspicuously absent both in the academic literature and in public debates about NGOs in India. This is especially problematic in light of the rich history of women’s participation in India’s nationalist movements and Bengal’s socialist and student movements. West Bengal, located to the east alongside
Bangladesh, has a long history of women’s activism. Bengal was one of the pioneers and leaders in the 19th century reform movements in colonial India.

The early women’s organizations of Bengal were greatly influenced by the ideals of the social reform movement, which was initiated and dominated by the urban elite. Kumar argues, “Calcutta became an exciting intellectual center, and most of the early reform campaigns were launched here by an eagerly developing intelligentsia” (Kumar 1993, 8). She goes on to show how the Young Bengal Movement took up the cause of reforming women by defying caste bans through gestures like meat eating and wine drinking. Women of Bengal also actively participated in the workings of the Indian National Congress Party since its inception in 1885. They fasted, burned foreign goods, marched, and threw bombs. They formed a major portion of the 17,000 women arrested in Mahatma Gandhi’s Satyagraha (Jayawardena 1986). Bengali women in the 1920s and ‘30s were encouraged by revolutionary leaders like Subhas Chandra Bose, who spearheaded the boycott movement (Sarkar 1987). Today women continue to remain one of the most politicized groups in Bengal, which makes their absence in the literature on contemporary women’s movements conspicuous and problematic. Scholars such as Bharati Ray (1995) describes the early women’s movement as “inconclusive” (Ray 1995, 218), while Ford (2001) suggests that in some places West Bengal’s women’s movement in the past has forged linkages between lower caste and working class women.

The structure of the women’s movement in West Bengal is highly decentralized and composed of innumerable organizations in both cities and rural areas. In the 1990s, with the rise of the NGOs, social movement politics became an alternative (sometimes a
tool) in electoral politics. Kolkata, the setting of this research, was a bit late in joining the NGO movement, but when it did, NGOs became the mainstay women’s movement in this state. Raka Ray (1999) ascribes the lack of data on women's NGOs in Bengal to the way that such movements are created in response to the political field within which they operate. Ray argues that in Kolkata, for example, a city of 12.7 million, women’s NGOs emphasize issues of literacy, employment, wage discrimination, water, and electricity that have been described as economic—or serving the “practical” survival interests of women as wives and mothers, not their “strategic” or empowerment interests (Molyneux 2001). Ray claims that it is this focus on survival strategies and economic projects that has led to the lack of information on Kolkata as a site of women’s organizing in India. Ray’s arguments become more interesting in light of the debates surrounding a proposed role for NGOs as legitimate arenas of feminist organizing and the empowerment of women who are poor.

The history of West Bengal remained largely similar to the rest of the nation until the late sixties. The early seventies saw a rise in leftist and Marxist political organizing in West Bengal. In 1974 the Communist Party of India (Marxist), also referred to as the CPI(M), emerged as the victorious political party in West Bengal, and since then it has been the undisputed ruling party (until its recent defeat in 2011). The CPI(M) operated in West Bengal with the help of its massive grassroots organizational structure and faced little competition from rivals in the center (Congress Party) or the right (BJP or Bharatiya Janata Party). The CPI(M) has built a substantial base of women political activists at its grassroots levels and among prominent women intellectuals who hold higher offices,
such as seats in the state legislature (Ray 1999). The women’s wing of the CPI(M) is the Pashchim Banga Ganatantrik Mahila Samity (PBGMS). According to Raka Ray,

The PBGMS is in the peculiar position of being dominant in the women’s movement in Calcutta but ultimately subordinate to the CPI(M). It thus operates on two levels: on the one hand, it must be responsive to women’s needs, and on the other, it must carry out the party’s agenda, since it is, after all, dependent on the party for resources and is accountable to it. (Ray 1999, 86)

Further, Ray delineates two phenomena that led to skepticism and disillusionment among women activists in the CPI(M). First, she mentions the fall of the Soviet Union and its shocking effect on leftist grassroots women activists. Secondly, issues of particular interest to women activists, such as domestic violence, were often co-opted by the CPI(M) to avoid political fallout. For example, in her study, Raka Ray reports that domestic violence occurred among couples belonging to the party. According to Ray, when such incidents of violence were discovered by the party, sometimes the party would expel the husband and help the wife become independent. Such measures ensured that domestic violence did not achieve importance as an issue in the public arena. The issue of domestic violence is a classic example of issue co-optation by the CPI(M) to fit both Kolkata’s political culture and the paternalistic culture of the CPI(M) (Ray 1999, 89). This generated skepticism and disillusionment among both leftist women grassroots activists and prominent intellectuals and set the stage for many of them to directly or covertly set up autonomous NGOs or to support other independent women’s rights organizations in West Bengal.
Between 1984 and 2000, the twin impulses of Hindu nationalism and neoliberalism altered the face of politics in India (Kamat 2002). The country experienced a wave of short-lived governments and political assassinations. Two events, the Muslim Women’s Bill of 1984 and the Mandal Commission of 1990, marked the breakdown of Nehruvian ideals\(^\text{11}\) of democracy, secularism, and socialism by exposing the continued rifts on the basis of caste and religion. It was also the year when under the prime minister ship of Manmohan Singh the government of India unleashed an era of economic and social reforms based on the principles of free market and free trade. The fragmented political field created by events like the Mandal Commission and the Muslim Women’s Bill of the eighties was replaced by a new kind of institutionalism based on the twin ideologies of market and Hindu nationalism. The shift towards economic/market liberalization accelerated in 1991, followed by a remarkable ideological transformation for many bureaucrats and some sectors of the intelligentsia who had come to place far greater faith in the market, in entrepreneurship, and in the private sector with a much reduced role for the state (Ray and Katzenstein 2005). The Marxist party, during the latter half of its rule until 2011, remained Marxist in ideology while adapting to the liberalizing trend of the rest of the nation. The CPI (M) government actively sought out foreign investment from both corporations and bilateral aid agencies.

According to Ray (1999), Kolkata has two types of women’s organizations; she characterizes them as politically affiliated with or autonomous from state and national

\(^{11}\) The Nehruvian ideals emerged from his vision of a socialist, democratic Republic in India and manifested in policies that led to a balance between public and private sector-based industries in India. His vision emphasized the key role of the state in ensuring economic opportunities for all through the five year plans introduced in 1951 (Zachariah 2004).
politics. The autonomous organizations are dedicated to development and empowerment projects and are mostly headed by well-known elite women who publicly eschew politics. The politically affiliated organizations mostly have ex-party members as their activists. However, Ray characterizes some of the autonomous organizations as subordinate within the political field of Kolkata. This labeling grows out of her analysis of Kolkata’s political culture, which was dominated by the CPI(M). The hegemonic presence of the CPI(M) relegates, according to Ray (1999), a majority of the autonomous organizations (NGOs) to a subordinate position, unable to compete with the politically affiliated organizations, since they do not have the hegemonic CPI(M) party on their side.

Although I found similarities between my field experiences and Ray’s depiction, I also found strong agency among the women, both staff members and beneficiaries in such organizations, as they negotiated with the party or their leadership in Bengali civil society.

Class is another major aspect of the nature of activism in Kolkata, as evident in the works of Ray (1999), Ford (2001), and Mitra (2011a). Ray argues that Kolkata’s political culture “has for years been more open to the borrowed ideologies of class struggle than the borrowed ideologies of feminist struggle” (Ray 1999, 69). This helps explain why Kolkata NGOs, including women’s NGOs, are more concerned with economic empowerment rather than with social evils like violence and sex-selective abortion. In agreement with this description, Ford (2001) argues that the women’s movement is so fragmented that there is no unified attitude towards the patriarchal structure of society or any agenda to deal with it. This lack of unity was especially
evident in my research as I encountered different ideological positions in the organizations I studied on the question of sex work and an assumed connection between sex work and trafficking by staff and funders of some organizations.

According to Alexander and Mohanty (1997), feminism in the Third World cannot escape state intervention. State institutions attempt to control, survey, and discipline women’s lives and to facilitate the movement of transnational capital within their borders (Ray 1999, 13). In the case of women’s NGOs in Bengal, the West Bengal Women’s Commission (WBWC) is charged with overseeing the NGOs’ work. The activists working on gender issues have always had a highly ambivalent relationship to the state in Bengal (Ray 1999). As feminist scholars like MacKinnon (1983) have pointed out, the state can unqualifiedly and unconditionally act on behalf of men, though others maintain that even deeply gendered state institutions can be both a “friend and an enemy” to women. Therefore, the women's organizations must work with the state and constantly negotiate on programs, objectives, and even beneficiaries (Jenson 1987). In Kolkata, the fact that the leadership of NGOs is dominated by middle or upper class women is frequently criticized (Gandhi and Shah 1992).

Although women’s organizations in Kolkata may have the potential to facilitate change through their support of women’s resistance to economic and political marginalization, the consequences of these changes are quite likely to be complicated (Ford 2001). The need for radical change in Indian society is asserted by most women’s groups, yet there is a paradox confronting women’s activism in Kolkata. Those who espouse causes akin to western feminism or feminist thought may find themselves
accused of troublemaking and derogatorily labeled as “feminist” (Ray 1999, 97). Women working in politically affiliated groups may be unable to address the underlying causes of women’s problems because of their parties’ priorities and ideological positions (Ray 1999). Other organizations that are autonomous from government and Western NGO funding can be accused of merely doing trivial charity and social work (Ray 1999, 58). According to Ford (2001) some autonomous groups also face these challenges as they focus on diverse areas, from health care to consciousness raising. However, Ray does point to some organizations (NGOs) that do not hesitate to use explicitly feminist approaches, even though feminism is a contentious ideology in Kolkata that is associated with both imperialism and decadence.

According to scholars such as Rupal Oza (2006), the liberalizing of the Indian economy actually began in the early 1980s as the government shifted its focus from programs for the poor to consumer-oriented programs for the middle class. The early liberalizations led by the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, followed by her son Rajiv Gandhi, marked the beginning of the era of economic liberalization in India. Although it is significant to highlight this shift as a precursor to liberalization, it fails to consider reasons like financial crisis, pressure from international financial institutions, foreign debt (Guha 2008) for the adoption of open-door economic policies by the government in the 1990s.

The liberalizing of the Indian economy and culture plays another important role in the emergence of multiple forms of cultural images, signifiers, and economic opportunities for women’s rights organizing. In the 1990s, economic liberalization took
full swing in the form of the World Bank and IMF (International Monetary Fund) sponsored structural adjustment reforms, disinvestments in public services, and state encouragement of foreign investment. The economic liberalization programs were associated with shifts in culture too. In her analysis of the protests against the 1996 Miss World Pageant in India, Oza (2006) mentions the emergence of satellite television and how it resulted in India being bombarded with “foreign images.”

Two different strands of women’s responses emerged during this time. One was led by women in Hindu right-wing parties. The women’s leadership and cadres of the Hindu Right protested the emergence of sexual imageries of women. The other was led by progressive women’s rights activists, who were critical of neoliberal economics and framed the emergence of economic and cultural liberalization as opportunities for women to further organize on issues specific to women’s rights (Ray and Katzenstein 2005).

Scholars like Ray and Katzenstein have raised questions about the competing nature of the discourses on the role of the market to that of the state in NGOs. Historically NGOs in India have adjusted their relationship with the state, from supporting the state by providing welfare and relief immediately following independence, to a more sharply oppositional role in the eighties, to the current “uneasy partnership” where NGOs accept money from both selected state and global sources, even as they continue to oppose other parts of the state and its neoliberal policies (Ray and Katzenstein 2005). Sangeeta Kamat analyzed how organizations within the voluntary social service NGO sector have shifted from using a social development approach to emphasizing a more market-oriented, entrepreneurial model. In her analysis, Kamat
mentions how international financial institutions, such as The World Bank, increasingly seek to collaborate with NGOs to provide essential services to marginalized communities (Kamat 2002, 165). This emerging shift from a Gandhian and Marxist-based developmental approach to a more market-oriented model marks a new phase of NGOization in India. The new phase of NGOs is also marked by an influx of foreign aid to NGOs from bilateral donor agencies, foreign governments, and foundations (Kudva 2005). The emergence of neoliberal economics, coupled with the rise of foreign funding and Hindu right wing organizing, set the stage for understanding the specific histories of the three organizations studied.

The Three Organizations Studied

Sanlaap is one of the first NGOs to work on women’s issues in Bengal, and it emerged at a time when the CPI(M) dominated the social service sector of the state. It was formed in 1987 as a development organization under the Society’s Registration Act of 1980. Sanlaap is currently one of the leading NGOs in Kolkata, West Bengal, with a presence felt all over the state. Their current focus is on working against the trafficking of women and children and the commercial exploitation of girls. Sanlaap works in the red light areas¹² and the source areas of trafficking in West Bengal. The organization’s focus in recent years has included working in the porous border areas of West Bengal with Bangladesh and Nepal. Their mission statement claims Sanlaap works towards the correction of social imbalances, which manifest in gender injustice and violence against

¹² In Kolkata, the areas like Kalighat and Sonagachi, where the sex workers dwell and practice their trade, are called red light areas.
women and children.\textsuperscript{13} Sanlaap received its first official funding from the state of West Bengal in 1988 from the Bay of Bengal project, to work with women in a prawn catching system in Kakdeep and Namkhana.

The founding director of Sanlaap came out of leftist student politics of Bengal in the 1970s and started working in foreign funding agencies like Oxfam. A self-proclaimed feminist, Indrani Sinha was actively involved in the founding of the main feminist network (Maitree) in the state. The early emphasis of Sanlaap’s work was on economic empowerment leading to social empowerment for marginalized groups of women, like sex workers. In 1989, the organization conducted a study, supported by NORAD,\textsuperscript{14} of sexually abused children in the red light areas of Kolkata and South and North 24 Parganas/districts (refer to Appendix 3). During the nineties, Sanlaap emerged as a leading voice for women’s empowerment issues and shifted their focus to the trafficking and exploitation of children. For example, in 1995 a court stay order was obtained by the efforts of Sanlaap’s staff members on the eviction of women and children from a red light area in Bagerhat under Bishnupur Police Station in 24 Parganas that insisted on rehabilitation before eviction.

Towards the end of the 1990s, with funding from local and national governments and foreign funding agencies, Sanlaap became a prominent site for what they characterize as “women’s empowerment projects.” In 2006, Sanlaap received a large grant from the US State Department to work on trafficking issues. According to Indrani Sinha, “We

\begin{itemize}
\item This is from Sanlaap’s mission statement and from interviews with Indrani Sinha, the organization’s director.
\item NORAD is the Women’s Economic Programme, a source of Indian government funds for NGOs that was started in 1999-2000.
\end{itemize}
turned our attention to trafficking when the women in the red light areas drew our attention to this issue being one of the leading sources of exploitation of children in the sex trade.”

Sanlaap’s close alliance with CATW (Coalition Against Trafficking in Women) and funding from the State Department under Bush’s gag rule clearly shape its current ideological position on sex work. Sanlaap, as an organization, is against the legalization of prostitution and considers the sex trade a major site for exploitation of women and children. Even though many of the founding members of Sanlaap emerged from leftist movements and had worked with CPI(M), the ruling political party, its growth and development as an organization relies on a cooperative role with the state government even as they analyze certain policies. This is primarily due to their continued reliance on government funding for their shelters for women and children.

Jabala, the second organization studied, is a human rights organization that started working in 1992 in the red light area of Bowbazar. The history of the organization dates back to voluntary efforts of a group of young social workers who wanted to restore rights that were denied to the children of a sex worker. In the literature of NGOs like Sanlaap,

15 Interview with Indrani Sinha. Refer to Appendix 1.
16 CATW, or Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, is a non-governmental organization that promotes women's human rights by working internationally to combat sexual exploitation in all its forms. Founded in 1988, CATW was the first international non-governmental organization to focus on human trafficking, especially sex trafficking of women and girls. CATW obtained Category II Consultative Status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council in 1989 (source: http://www.catwinternational.org/).
17 The Mexico City Policy, also known by critics as the Mexico City Gag Rule and the Global Gag Rule, was an intermittent United States government policy that required all non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that receive federal funding to refrain from performing or promoting abortion services as a method of family planning with non-US Government funds, in other countries. Since 1973, USAID has followed the Hyde Amendment ruling, banning use of US Government funds to provide abortion as a method of family planning anywhere in the world (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Global_gag_rule).
Jabala, and New Light, “child rights” refer to rights to education and health care and, most importantly, the right to leave the sex trade.

Their work later extended to other red light areas and slums in Kolkata. Jabala strives to use innovative methods\textsuperscript{18} to instil values and self-esteem in children. The organization’s primary effort has been to build confidence and gradually make them feel that they were not the children of a lesser god and, given a chance, that they were as capable as their privileged counterparts were.

Jabala, led by a group of professionally trained social workers, represents the new kind of NGOization of the 1990s in Bengal, which emerged as a product of critique of the leftist state. It is an apolitical, autonomous, women-led organization. The founder and director of Jabala, Baitali Majumdar, characterizes their approach as one of cautious partnership with the state. Jabala had developed a training module to sensitize panchayat (village government) members. The module was supported by UNICEF and accepted in principle by the government of West Bengal. Jabala is also one of the founding organizations for the feminist network Maitree.

The organization continues to work on issues of human trafficking, child marriage, child labor, and HIV/AIDS, focusing on different blocks of the border areas of Murshidabad, North and South 24 Parganas, and Nadia. In their mission statement, they claim: “Jabala seeks to empower women and children in a difficult situation to meet with

\textsuperscript{18} This was claimed by Baitali, the director of Jabala during her interview (Appendix 1). She gave the example of soccer training camps run by the organization to build confidence and self-esteem among girls.
confidence and imagination the challenges of life." Jabala also aids in the pursuit of physical wellbeing and strives to serve others with a "generous, compassionate spirit." According to Baitali and other staff members of the organization, Jabala works in partnership with supportive local families and communities to prevent all forms of abuse against children and lobbies to policy makers for equal rights for vulnerable children. Jabala’s community-based approach is similar to that of the third organization of this study, New Light, in that the two organizations are located and do advocacy work primarily where sex work takes place or in areas that are otherwise most vulnerable to trafficking. They network with grassroots organizations based in the communities. Both organizations tend to supplement their professionally trained staff by hiring members of their target communities into the organizations.

New Light, a secular nonprofit charitable trust, emerged during the same time frame (1990s). Led by a group of professionally trained social workers, New Light set out to work for the rights of sex workers and their children in the red light area of Kalighat in Kolkata. It is a five-minute walk from Nirmal Hriday, Mother Teresa's home for the dying destitute. This is one of the oldest red light areas of Kolkata and houses sex workers from the city, the districts, and neighboring countries like Nepal and Bangladesh.

New Light, a secular nonprofit charitable trust, set up a day care center-cum-night shelter to protect and educate young girls, children, and women at high risk. The program has been operating since 1999 and provides safe shelter, educational opportunities, 

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19 Mission statement of Jabala and interview with Baitali, the director of Jabala (refer to Appendix 1).
20 Jabala manifesto.
21 Baitali interview continued (Appendix 1).
recreational facilities, health care, and legal aid for the girls and women in the community. New Light has evolved into a comprehensive community development project with a special emphasis on HIV/AIDS prevention, care, and treatment. The demographic composition of beneficiaries of New Light consists of women from Kolkata and its districts (70%), from Hindi-speaking areas of the country (20%), and from Nepal and Bangladesh (10%) (New Light manifesto, collected 2006). Women from all religious communities are invited to take part in this program, and the ratio is representative of the rest of India. The mission of New Light is to promote “gender equality” through education and life-skill training, thereby reducing harm caused by violence and abuse to women and young children.

What began as a crèche (day care centers are referred to as crèches in India) for eight children in two rooms in a dark alley of Kalighat twelve years ago has evolved into a 24/7 program for more than 150 children today. The crèche-cum-shelter, located in a permanent structure above a temple situated deep inside the Kalighat red light district, offers comprehensive care and support to children ranging in age from a few months to sixteen years. This was the first crèche operating in a red light area that accepted children as young as three months old. According to the New Light director, the appeal of the New Light crèche lies in its easy accessibility, as it provides the sex workers an opportunity to keep their young kids in the safe and loving custody of the caretakers.22

The histories of these organizations reveal a continuation of some of the major trajectories of the NGO movement in West Bengal. Middle class women founded all

22 Mission statement of New Light and interview with Urmi Basu, the director of New Light, Appendix 1.
three of the organizations. Though the respective founders differ in their professional training, they have all directed their organizations within a professional organizational framework. Each of the organizations began as a community empowerment project, as described by the three founding directors, yet they have all adopted terms such as “beneficiaries” to frame the relationships between the staff and the community members, reflecting a growing trend toward professionalization among community-based organizations within a neoliberal India. What emerges is a complex combination of social reform values along with growing neoliberal values of professionalism and entrepreneurship.

**Day-to-Day Workings in the NGOs**

The three organizations studied differ in staff, funding, and program size, and yet they revealed definite commonalities. Below, find a brief summary of Sanlaap’s organizational profile. It is the largest and most organized organization in this study. It was difficult to schematically represent Jabala and New Light’s structures, as they were at the time of the study smaller and less rigid in organizational hierarchy. Nonetheless, from what I learned about the two organizations’ histories, they seem to be moving in the same direction as Sanlaap. This evolution is necessary for appealing to funders, as they prefer funding hierarchical and organized NGOs.
Sanlaap is the biggest organization of the three and employs more than two hundred people as full time workers, part time workers, volunteers, and partners. Since Sanlaap has been around longer than the other two organizations and is better funded, it was easier to gather information from this organization because they had more information available. As a result, my analysis relies heavily on information from
Sanlaap, supplemented by data from the other two organizations. This study revealed that the sex ratio in all three organizations is very similar, with women outnumbering men in the overall staff numbers. However, when it comes to job profiles there is a clear gendered division of labor, with men mostly in charge of financial departments and in jobs that require an extensive presence in the field.

When asked about structure, all three directors described their organizations as feminist entities with a semi-formal organizational structure. This resonates with Gottfried and Weiss’s (1994) definition of a “compound feminist organization.” Two of the founding directors of the NGOs represented the structure of their organizations as not especially formal or rigid. They claimed that this was to encourage the participation of women professionals who need flexi time and hours and a flexible approach to the contributions that they are making. Field observations and interviews with lower ranked and older staff members revealed that, over time, the internal structure of the NGOs have become more hierarchical and vertical rather than egalitarian and horizontal. This leads to the question of how the women and men reconcile their egalitarian ethics with an increasingly hierarchical organizational setting. What does this mean for the processes of empowerment in the NGOs? These questions provide the basis for the analysis of the NGOs as vehicles for neoliberal empowerment in the following chapter.

During fieldwork, my research focus shifted in response to my growing knowledge of and familiarity with the organizations, their programs, and their beneficiaries. The most important shift was away from a comparison of the three organizations to a focus on the key features of their conceptualization of gender
empowerment, particularly when it became clear that the differences across the organizations in terms of divergent histories, goals, rhetoric, and targeted beneficiaries became less relevant to understanding their engagement with gender empowerment than certain similarities. These will be explained below. Subsequently, during analysis of the content of interviews with NVivo software, it became clear that those interviewed emphasized certain issues over others when answering my questions and conversing with me. Therefore, the findings discussed in this and the following chapters include both issues and processes identified as important by me through participant observation, document analysis, interviews with non-NGO respondents (i.e., funders and government employees) and identification of key themes. Analysis was influenced by theories of the gendering of organizations; but since key features (such as tokenism) were identified in studies of organizations in the US, my findings highlighted the priorities and insights revealed as important to NGO staff and beneficiaries during their interviews.

The literature on gendering of organizations was useful as a tool for analyzing the inner workings of the three NGOs. For example, the study draws upon a definition of “genderedness” coming from Joan Scott’s work. That is, in the study I began with the principle that “genderedness” means “that the advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity, are patterned through and in terms of distinctions between male and female, masculine and feminine” and that “this genderedness is so deeply embedded in organizations that the phenomenon itself will serve to further create, support, and reproduce a gendered organization” (Scott1988). This definition of genderedness was extremely important for contextualizing how
empowerment projects for beneficiaries are conceived and operationalized in these NGOs. Nonetheless, the research also revealed the significant role that participants’ perceptions about gender play in framing discourses about effective ways of empowering the women.

Three questions formed the basis of the interviews conducted with the subjects of this study. They were: Which conceptualizations of gender and empowerment prevail in each organization? Are they contested and under what circumstances and with what results? How do women targeted as beneficiaries perceive projects, the organization, its staff, and their own empowerment? During fieldwork, the first and third questions turned out to be the most useful, and the focus on beneficiaries’ perceptions was expanded to include perceptions of directors and staff members in general (some of whom were or continued to be beneficiaries also)\(^\text{23}\) and those of non-NGO interviewees who also had much to say about the NGOs.

Analysis of the three organizations revealed certain similarities in the gendered patterning of the organizations, the notions of empowerment being prescribed, normative notions of citizenship-based rights, and women’s eventual incorporation into the Indian nation-state as citizens, not outcasts. My analysis ultimately complicates Ackerian notions of hierarchy based on gender duality. In her seminal essay, Joan Acker (1989) elaborated on five major processes of gendering of organizations: the gendered patterning of jobs, wages, hierarchies, power and subordination: gendered cultures revealed through

\(^{23}\) Some of the staff members of the NGOs were originally beneficiaries of the organizations who acquired certain skills and continue to work in the same NGOs.
symbols, images, and forms of consciousness that “explicate, justify, and more rarely oppose gender divisions”; gendered interactions in a multiplicity of forms that enact dominance and subordination; how individuals consciously construct their understandings of the organizations’ gendered structure of work and opportunity and its demands for gender-appropriate behavior and attitudes; and organizational logic and gendered substructures that are reproduced in daily activities and writings. Further, in her analysis of inequality regimes within workspaces, Acker complicates her fundamental notions of gendering of organizations to include intersections of race, class, and gender. Through an intersectional analysis, Acker suggests that race, class, and gender, along with political economic processes such as globalization, create “inequality regimes” within workspaces (Acker 2006).

The analysis of the three organizations in this research concurs with the complications of the original Ackerian notions of gendering. Fieldwork revealed the need to study the process of empowerment instead of the role of perceptions about genderedness exclusively in the work of the NGOs. However, for a better understanding of the empowerment projects it also was imperative to study the role of gender in organizational culture within the three organizations as the backdrop in which empowerment projects are conceived and implemented. During field research and subsequent NVivo analysis, I discovered that processes of gendering in these organizations were related to staff and beneficiaries’ professional and personal notions of gender. These, in turn, were shaped by intersections of education, class privilege,
knowledge of the sex work profession, and familial networks.\textsuperscript{24} Finally, the analysis of men’s roles in all three of the organizations revealed the creation of a hierarchy that, while resting on notions of gender duality and its subordination-dominance patterns, also rests on other intersectionalities. This will become clear in the analysis below and in the next chapter.

Much like the way that notions of gender shift, the practice of gender mainstreaming as deployed by the three NGOs has departed from the original notion of mainstreaming as proposed by planners from major international feminist organizations like Oxfam. The organizations’ staff members repeatedly referred to mainstreaming as one of the goals for women’s empowerment, and so it is useful to look at how their use of the term compared to the concept of mainstreaming in broader policy discourses. The concept of gender mainstreaming was first proposed at the 1985 Third World Conference on Women in Nairobi. The idea has been further developed in the United Nations development community. The idea was formally featured in 1995 at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. Most definitions conform to the UN Economic and Social Council’s formally defined concept:

\begin{quote}
Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{24} I arrived at this assumption after careful analysis of interviews with the staff members and of their relationship to the contexts in which they operate. This theorizing of the role of staff members in creating the three gendered NGOs of this dissertation helped to identify the ways in which “gender” and “empowerment” are constructed and operationalized through discourses and programs by the different actors in organizational documents and publications such as newsletters, funding proposals, evaluation reports, press releases, etc., in addition to my interviews. This framework also helped to identify the actors who contributed to or departed from hegemonic definitions of empowerment within the three NGOs.
programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality. (1997 consulted at http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/GMS.PDF on 10/20/2005)

However, while the mission statements and proposed rhetoric of the three organizations relate to these original notions of mainstreaming, in practice the planners and managers of these three organizations actually emphasize the idea of creating projects that facilitate reintegration of sex workers and trafficking survivors through gender appropriate behavior and other forms of economic livelihood. This shift in itself is a gendered process. The construction of gender appropriate and inappropriate conduct is both implicit and explicit in the day-to-day interactions among management, counselors and other staff, beneficiaries, and funders. My analysis therefore supports the idea that notions of gender mainstreaming are, at times, operationalized and localized in ways that intersect with local and culturally specific meanings of gender, along with class and cultural processes that frame and intersect with the gendering of organizations and their outcomes.

The key components related to the gendered patterning of management practices that emerged from the content analysis of the interviews, and that were confirmed during participant observation, were power hierarchies in financial and rhetorical decision-
making. These power hierarchies are composed of “rungs” that individuals can climb and on which they may hit a “glass ceiling” based on gender, age, access to education, knowledge of the sex trade, and personal relationships with state actors and funders. Organizational structure is critical to this.

As discussed above, the Indian women’s movement historically had incorporated emerging structures such as networks of groups, collectives, and cooperative models. There also was a self-conscious attempt to create organizational forms in which women become empowered psychologically and socially. With this in mind, I closely studied each organizational structure, asking questions of both women and men about their perceptions of the work environment in each site. When asked about the structure of their organizations, most women respondents in the study claimed it was either a semi-formal or a complex feminist organization. The founding director of Sanlaap claimed that, “Our organization tries not to have hierarchies, but of course there is; there are both men and women working under me, which makes them my junior. Surely, such hierarchy is not as formal as in the corporations. But we do have a governing body and specific posts assigned to individuals according to their expertise.”

A few staff members, like Mrinmoyee of Sanlaap, claimed that their NGOs were deliberately informal, although field observations and further questioning revealed that over time the internal structures of these NGOs have become more hierarchical rather than egalitarian. Nine respondents of this study described the structure of their organization as formal. Most of these respondents (seven) are from Sanlaap, the largest organization.
One justification for a more formal and less egalitarian structure was that it was forced on them from outside, not something from within. One woman mentioned the NGO’s obligation to international donors for their funding, which would be impossible to apply for without a formal structure in place where staff members are accountable for their job assignments. While there are variations in staff size among the three NGOs, both formal and informal hierarchies are found in all three of them. The informal hierarchy rests upon familial ties with founders and senior management, and with age, professional training, and gender. It frames staff as either management or field workers and influences their pay scales and access to decision making.

NVivo analysis confirmed this. My NVivo search employed key words and concepts that helped better identify the key components of the organizational hierarchy in these self-identified “feminist, egalitarian” organizations. One of the top features identified for organizational hierarchy is that of professional experience and training. A clear understanding of this was illustrated by shifts in the backgrounds of women and men joining these organizations. There were two different kinds of staff members who worked in these organizations. The first group is made up mostly of grassroots organizers who, with experience and proven loyalty, eventually moved up the organizational ladder and are mostly older in age. The second group mostly came from a background of political activism coupled with western education.

Rikhiadi is one of the oldest staff members of Sanlaap and has been with the organization from its very beginning. She has never worked in any other sector. She is a commercial artist and has been an activist since college. Her interview revealed the
hierarchical process at work as she was elevated from being an unpaid volunteer to an important paid staff member:

It was in April 1993 that I started working in the red light areas in Kolkata with the sex workers. I had no idea about what red light areas were like. I learned everything about the lives of the sex workers, their troubles in the field, and became an activist for Sanlaap. Initially I never imagined this could become a professional job, as my initial work was mostly unpaid. Everything that Sanlaap has achieved is according to the demands of the sex workers themselves. I worked directly with the government agency to lobby for funds for the shelter and the drop-in/child care center that I am now a part of.

There was a sense of pride in the words of senior activists like Rikhiadi. They proudly claimed that they can perform any role in the organization as needed. My findings suggest that often they do perform multiple roles in the organization, even when they are not professionally trained in the field in which they are working. For example, Tanika is the lead legal aid staff person at Sanlaap and also the primary guardian of the girls in the shelter. She does not have a law degree, but she is one of the most influential persons in the organization, especially among the beneficiaries. She ascribes this to:

The requirements of the funding agencies and partly due to the fact that we are getting more and more professionally trained persons ready to join the sector. This is because of the availability of private funds in our work, which has increased the salaries of the activists considerably. When we started working for Sanlaap in the nineties we never thought this would be our primary occupation.
We hung around because we were dedicated to the cause, and even our beneficiaries realize that and they trust us.

Tanika is an example of one of the two groups of NGO staff members identified above. Members of this group are mostly women, older in age, who rose up the organizational ladder through years of experience working in the field. They are not formally trained in the language of gender or in feminist notions of empowerment. They do exercise considerable influence within the organizations, especially over the beneficiaries. In interviews, some women from this group expressed some disdain towards members who just do administrative work in the organization and do not have any field experience. This is an expression of the tensions that manifest from the “unequal regimes” within the organizations (Acker 2006).

The second group of staff members, consisting of both men and women interviewed, were the professionally trained workers who provide the “public faces” of the organizations. In addition to doing counseling, they occupy positions such as marketing, communications, publishing, grant writing, etc. They are the ones who interact with the funding agencies on a day-to-day basis, and most of them come from middle-class backgrounds. This group runs the major programming in each organization, attends training sessions both in and outside of the organization, and mostly entered the sector already professionally trained—and in many cases western-educated—social workers.

In the open-ended interviews, when asked about their background and training, members of each group emphasized “preparedness” for their work-related skills. The
older group emphasized experience as their major asset in understanding how to address the needs of their beneficiaries, while the younger group drew on their professional training in explaining how they use methods of empowerment as the key to their effectiveness.

There are other differences among staff members. Most of the older activists (women) in the organizations are not married and have dedicated their lives to their cause. Among the newer generation of staff (women), most are married and balancing their roles as wives, mothers, and activists. This has an impact on the beneficiaries. While the beneficiaries look at the older activists as a source of strength and support, they want to be more like the younger women. Younger activists’ bodies (dress, behavior), in addition to how they speak and the work they do in the NGOs, have become another source of the perceptions of empowerment held by the beneficiaries. There is clearly a fascination among the organizations’ beneficiaries with the western elements that the young activists embody in their personal and professional lives. So, while there is a greater level of comfort that the beneficiaries have with the seasoned workers, often manifested through referring to them as elder sisters (didi) or mothers (ma), beneficiaries are clearly drawn to the younger generation because of how they look, what they wear, who they marry, and how they balance work and life at home.

My interviews with the different actors in all organizations (NGOs and others) often began with questions related to each individual’s personal involvement with his/her work, as a way of gauging the interplay of internalized notions of gender empowerment with the interviewee’s professional development and practices. Because of the gender
constraints that women still face in India in terms of balancing home and family responsibilities and the pressure that men face in living up to their role as primary wage earner, NGO work provides an interesting scenario for both sexes. In general, women’s participation in community activism and volunteer work, especially through NGOs, far outnumbers that of men (Plemper 1996). However, experience with the three NGOs revealed a slightly different ratio. There are growing numbers of men working in these organizations, and the ratio is currently about 60 to 40 in favor of women in the organizations I studied. This reveals an increase in men over time.

An understanding of men’s roles in the organizations needs to begin with examining changes in the gendered division of labor. My initial intention in this study was to interview different groups of women about their perceptions of gender empowerment. However, the reality in all these NGOs founded by women and whose stated goal is the empowerment of women is that men play a very significant role in each organization. Their roles reflect the reiteration of the gender binary, along with how such a binary frames the division of labor in the NGOs.

Women lead each organization, with invariably a man (in most cases a family member) as second in command in charge of the financial affairs of the organization. While women staff and manage the legal, counseling, and other in-house affairs, men act as primary decision makers in the marketing of the organizations. My interactions with each NGO revealed that these men’s roles were often downplayed, even though they exercised considerable power in the decision-making and operations of the organizations.
This suggests an inherent disconnect between perceptions about gendering labor and the reality of organizational management.

The men from all three study NGOs came from different social, economic, and intellectual backgrounds. For example, Pradip, a senior and very influential member of Sanlaap, is in charge of marketing and programming of the organization and has a background in NGO management (degree) and training from the London School of Economics. He was also involved with the leftist student movement in college and clearly proclaimed his leftist lineage and certain disillusionment with the leftist movement in his interview. He characterized his organization as a “learning organization” with a holistic approach to anti-trafficking programs. He described his role in the organization as twofold. First, as the program manager, he oversees all programs undertaken in the organization. Secondly, in the role he feels is more important, he creates systems and mechanisms within the 230-member organization to make it a “force” or a “movement” that fights trafficking. When asked about his commitment to gender issues, Pradip replied: “I think obligation to gender issues is definitely a matter of personal interest. Because if it is only professional (even though I am indebted to my professional training on this issue), or if it is only a job, I would choose a job which will pay me more. I would choose a job characterized by others as a career building job and not come into this sector.”

If Pradip represents the group of western-educated, professionally trained male staff members, Raju and Gopal represent another kind of men in the organizations who became involved because of their community connections. Both these men work for New
Light, have no formal training in NGO management, and only have high school degrees. It is evident from their interviews they were primarily asked to join the organization because of their influence in the area as para (local) club members. For example, Gopal said, “When New Light first arrived in the area they needed the support of the local club members to survive, and we came on board. I do multi-tasking in the organization. From taking care of the kids in night care to helping sex workers with alternative economic resources, I work in different capacities as needed by the organization.” When asked about his ideas about women’s empowerment, he pointed to how things have improved for the local sex workers with the presence of New Light. He indicated that he took this job through both financial (job) motivation and his personal commitment to the struggles of the women in the area. Although not trained in the definitions of gender empowerment, Gopal’s interview revealed some gender consciousness as he described the reasons why sex workers cannot be expected to leave their profession:

You cannot expect a sex worker to give up what she is doing when asked. This is her livelihood, which takes care of her family and, frankly speaking, it pays well even if temporarily. It does not matter how they got into this profession; now that they are here this is the only thing they know. We cannot judge them for what they are doing or forcibly try to stop them. We can only provide them with options, which can pay them equally or more over their lifetime. We can also provide them with the support they need to survive and that is what we do.

(Gopal, interview)
Gopal’s comments are emblematic of a sentiment that resonated through all the men’s interviews concerning the process of questioning one’s own gender role. All the men interviewed acknowledged that there is a long road ahead of them when it comes to achieving women’s rights in the outside world, but claimed the organizations provide a space where they (men) are exposed to alternative notions about gender roles that influence not only their work in the organizations but also their personal lives.

I contend that the gendered divisions of labor evident in the organizations also results from intersections in women and men’s professional training, family ties, and knowledge of the field. The interviews revealed a level of gendering in the organizations that might at times be constrained by gender duality and yet, at moments, especially in the case of men’s participation, led to moments when interviewees appeared to question their own gender roles. Those providing services to the women directly were most engaged in questioning their own roles as men and most open to non-judgmental attitudes towards the sex trade. According to Sushmi, a woman staff person from Jabala, “Earlier, organizationally we were very careful about the presence of men in different positions, especially positions which had direct contact with beneficiaries. However, over time this has changed as men have become more comfortable working under and with women and vice versa.” Quite a few staff members from the different organizations emphasized the importance of gender training workshops in addressing this issue. Both men and women reiterated that they found these trainings useful. In many cases the workshops also were their introduction to the role of gender in their own lives. It was evident that the hierarchies produced among staff at all three organizations are gendered but not in the
way predicted by western feminist theorists, and these hierarchies simultaneously intersected with age, professional training, and field knowledge.

The literature on gendering of organizations claims that organizations are not only hierarchical and unequal based on the intersections of race, class, and gender, but that they also create certain symbols and an organizational consciousness, as well as an internal culture that is gendered. This is very clear in organizational training manuals and training workshops that are used and attended by the staff to raise their gender consciousness. According to Pulak (male) of Sanlaap:

We have developed a comprehensive gender-training manual and use that as part of our orientation for the staff members that includes a gender awareness workshop. The manual draws heavily from western theories on gender in its definitions and was funded by a foreign funder. Although we disagree with the radical elements in the feminist movement and emphasize a more nuanced, culturally sensitive approach towards gender empowerment, feminist theories help us to explain more effectively the reasons for trafficking and the behavioral issues that these women have. (Pulak, interview)

Also based primarily on western feminist theories on gender, workshops often generated excitement among staff members who attended them. Textual analysis of the manuals reveals use of key concepts such as “gender mainstreaming” and “gendered socialization,” along with standards of conduct for the staff while interacting with beneficiaries.
Sabita (female) of Sanlaap said of the trainings, “The most exciting part of these sessions was the sections when we were asked to provide examples from our own lives about the definitions we have learned. It is really funny to see men giving examples of how they go home and expect their wives, who are also working, to make dinner for them.”

However, these training sessions are not universally compulsory across the three organizations; only at Sanlaap are they a required part of the staff training schedule. What does this mean for the staff members who are never exposed to these definitions of gender in this way? It would be too extreme to argue that they are not aware of the role of gender in their lives and the lives of the women they work for and with. Interviews with Raju (male), Gopal (male), Rikhiadi (female), and Rinadi (female) revealed the level of consciousness that can also be achieved through field experience and personal commitment.

Training sessions are often supported by foreign funding sources and, according to the director of Jabala, “They keep going back to funding the organizations they have already funded. The foreign funders look for the large established organizations when they fund training sessions and workshops, and smaller organizations like Jabala lose out on that.” However, the program manager of Sanlaap, Shomik (male), argued that, “There are lots of workshops and training sessions which are open to staff members from different organizations, and organizations need to be proactive and send their staff there as they provide opportunities for your own growth and expansion. I personally have benefited a lot from attending the different training sessions.”
Field observations revealed that while staff from all three organizations undergo certain forms of training and often refer to organizational gender manuals, the use of these manuals and egalitarian notions of gender are reinterpreted through the lens of local gendered cultures and personal perceptions of gender-appropriate reintegration of the women beneficiaries. This is not a unidimensional process. The continuous creation, prescription, and contestation of what is considered gender-appropriate conduct become evident through the operationalization of these concepts in the empowerment projects. This will be shown in the detailed analysis of the empowerment projects and their role in the construction of gendered culture in the NGOs in the next chapter.

In conclusion, a close study of the organizational structure, management practices, and staff profile revealed the continued influence of traditional notions about gender roles in the day-to-day operations and staffing of the organizations. Gendered management structures, along with organizational rhetoric frames that emphasize dominance and subordination, were identified at three principle sites: the organization offices located in Kolkata, the field, which included the offices in and around Kolkata, and the shelters run by the NGOs.

As discussed earlier, the multilayered management hierarchies themselves are gendered and classed and continue to frame forms of interactions within each organization that recreate dominance and subordination. The patterning of such dominance and subordination is implicit, and yet the organizational public rhetoric explicitly mentions “democratic and egalitarian” values. While the rhetoric/veneer of a “participatory” ideal continues, in essence power remains concentrated in the hands of a
certain “elite”—the original founders/trustees/promoters—who in this case come from a certain socioeconomic background. The location of power within this elite group is often justified by the need to conform to the needs of funders. However, most funders interviewed revealed flexibility towards management structures. While a more detailed discussion of the complex negotiations between the NGOs and state and transnational actors is taken up in the following chapter, it is important to mention that notions of “victimhood” and “savior,” which frame the women beneficiaries as “helpless women” and the NGO staff as their saviors, are often framed by interactions with the state, judiciary, police system, religious foundations, and churches. It can also be the product of the personal perceptions of the staff members about gender and empowerment. I also unexpectedly found in my research that not only do the three organizations differ in their staff size, budgets, and programs, but they have relatively differential levels of power in terms of framing the debate around notions of gendered empowerment, sex work, and strategies for trafficking. Sanlaap is the oldest and most vocal within transnational anti-sex work organizations among the three; it also has the most connections to international agencies, enabling them to frame terms of debate locally.

The process, which I characterize as gendering, follows a cyclical pattern, wherein external conditions such as the state, the judiciary, and transnational funding agencies, along with interpersonal interactions within the NGOs, create a gendered organization. The gendered organization in turn prescribes certain gender-appropriate modes of “mainstreaming marginalized women,” continuing the cyclical gendering pattern. This process need not be conceptualized as an overtly deterministic process but
is, rather, a process where both social determinations along with individual and/or collective contestation continuously happen, a process that is revealed in the analysis of empowerment initiatives.
Chapter 4

Women’s Empowerment on the Path to Neoliberal Citizenship

The three non-governmental organizations studied are engaged in practices (informed by rhetoric) that seek to emulate a neoliberal form of empowerment, although the deployment of such a project remains incomplete. My research in the field and interactions with the beneficiaries, staff member of the NGOs, funding agencies, and state machineries like the Women’s Commission, police, and judiciary revealed contradictory discourses that exist there. Thus, in the first section this chapter departs from a homogenous conceptualization of contemporary women’s rights NGOs as primarily agencies for structuring neoliberal consumers, to favor a more complex conceptualization of NGOs. Building on my discussion in Chapter 3 of the organizational environment, I pay keen attention to the multiple actors (in addition to their rhetoric) within NGOs, the state agencies they interact with, and the women who are defined as “beneficiaries.” In the second section, I highlight the contested notions of empowerment emerging from different sources such as the NGOs, the state and other funding agencies, and the beneficiaries. These notions provide the moral and ideological basis for economic skill building, as well as gender and other cultural empowerment projects, and this study exposes the gaps between the NGO rhetoric and the outcome of the projects. In the next section I do not disqualify any contact with the state as inevitably tainted; rather, while recognizing the efforts that have been made to stretch the boundaries of formal politics, I offer a contribution to a critical engagement of women’s rights NGOs with the state. This
is similar to Aradhana Sharma’s (2004) claims that sealing oneself off from processes of government that permeate all of society may not be an option; rather it may be more useful for activists to assume tactical positions within the regimes of governance themselves. In the last section, this chapter examines the alternative paths of empowerment introduced by the three NGOs of this study through an analysis of two specific projects: Sanved and Kalam.

As shown in Chapter 2, this study builds upon the work of scholars such as Richa Nagar, Raka Ray, Sangeeta Kamat, and Rupal Oza, who highlight the shifts in Indian economic policies towards a liberalized, private market-based model and its antecedent influence upon women’s rights non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in India. According to Kamat (2002) the growing trend within NGOs in India is their complicity with neoliberal economic policies pursued by the Indian government along with the World Bank and the IMF. Rupal Oza makes similar claims while speaking about beauty pageants in India. Oza conceptualizes women’s empowerment (and the NGO movement) as shifting towards consumer culture (Oza 2006). In addition, as discussed in Chapter 2, Richa Nagar et al. (2006) claims women’s rights NGOs in India navigate the contested intersections of class, caste, and the state’s complicity with neoliberal policies of retrenchment from social services (2006).

My analysis of women’s empowerment NGOs breaks away from such all-encompassing readings of NGO complicity with neoliberal practices. Central to this analysis is the possibility of women’s rights NGOs enabling their women staff and
beneficiaries to discover their own power, as well as raising the consciousness of male staff on issues relating to gender-based power differences as discussed in Chapter 3. The three NGOs discussed within this chapter are engaged in empowerment projects that are operating within the globalized nation-state of India. These projects are informed by neoliberal consumer-based models of citizenship, and yet they also create spaces within which fertile resistance to patriarchy and neoliberal individualism is being cultivated. Often, resistance is nurtured not within the officially espoused “economic empowerment projects,” but rather within the associative networks that the project participants form as a result of these empowerment projects. These networks emerge in shelters, at child care drop-in spaces, and during cultural projects, and they take form in identities such as “NGO women.” “NGO women” is a phrase that emerged from my interviews with different project directors and staff members. Each staff member laid claim to the beneficiaries of their projects, repeatedly employing phrases such as “Sanlaap women,” “New Light women,” or “Jabala kids.”

Analysis of field practices, organizational literature, and participant observation within the three organizations demonstrates the limitations in the deployment of the neoliberal empowerment project within these NGOs. In this study, the analysis of NGOs as sites of empowerment is conceptualized within the framework of neoliberal discourses of citizenship. The idea of citizenship as the claim to rights tied to the terrain and imagination of a nation-state has been called into question in recent scholarship (Ong 2006). According to scholars such as Aihwa Ong, citizenship conceptualized as entitlements and benefits is realized through specific mobilizations and claims in milieus
of globalized contingency. Ong suggests, “as rights and protections long associated with citizenship are becoming disarticulated from the state, they are re-articulated with elements such as market based interests, transnational agencies, mobile elites, and marginalized populations” (Ong 2006, 697).

Specific to this study, the disaggregation of claims to citizenship is revealed in the rhetoric of the three NGOs, which claim that they are sites within which “marginalized, immoral” women are transformed into self-regulating economic agents of the globalized Indian nation-state. I identify such disaggregation of the claim to rights of citizenship from the state, to claims made within the private realm of NGOs through a discursive analysis of their organizational literature, as well as through participant observation of their everyday management and project operations. Hence, a large portion of my discursive analysis delves into understanding the ways in which NGO leaders navigate, and at times contest, the state to crack open spaces for women’s empowerment. In this process, a multilayered understanding of what is conceived as women’s empowerment can be derived.

**Contesting Notions of Empowerment**

*Empowerment* is a contested term in feminist and development discourses, as shown in Chapter 2 of this dissertation. Often empowerment is substituted with the term *development.* However, empowerment from a feminist perspective implies a simultaneous shift in power relationships between marginalized women and the economic and cultural institutions that oppress them (Rowlands 1997). Further, according to Jo Rowlands, empowerment needs to take place at an internalized and interpersonal as well
as collective level. Deploying such a multi-layered notion of women’s empowerment and building on the definitions of empowerment discussed in Chapter 2, I delineate the many levels addressed by each component of empowerment adopted by the three organizations, along with the gendered processes inherent in the empowerment projects.

A discursive analysis of the official mission statements of these organizations enables us to understand the frameworks being deployed in organizing for gender empowerment, the intersections of emerging neoliberal notions of empowerment, and local and international organizational discourses on gender empowerment. Emergent from this analysis of mission statements and organizational tactics to further women’s empowerment is the theme of women’s rights NGOs as saviors of women engaged with the sex trade or trafficking. The narrative that emerges assumes that women working in the sex industry are victims of “patriarchal exploitative institutions,” namely the sex trade and the global trafficking industry. These victims are in need of rescue, a function that the NGOs claim to fulfill (Sanlaap, manifesto; Indrani Sinha, personal communication). The rescue operations conducted by the NGOs of this study also work with state regulatory agencies such as the police, the judiciary, and the state Women’s Commission to prescribe rules for rescue and rehabilitation. While the use of such contested terrains has been theorized in the past by scholars like Kamat (2002) as complicity, I posit a more pragmatic understanding of the relationship between the three NGOs of this study and their funders. For these NGOs, a relationship with local and global governance structures is inevitable, and it is often required when working with women’s communities that lack access to basic amenities such as identity documents and that are marked as “criminal”
habitat by the state. Hence NGO (Sanlaap, Jabala, and New Light) interventions for trafficking survivors and sex workers are messy and disjunctured, but they are also pathways to certain forms of collective empowerment.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the NGO Sanlaap is a Kolkata-based developmental organization that works towards the correction of social imbalances such as gender injustice and violence against women. In its mission statement it focuses on making “this world a safer place for girl children by protecting their rights” (Sanlaap, manifesto). In reality, Sanlaap also works with marginalized young boys and women. Currently it is primarily dedicated to working against the trafficking of women and children for commercial sexual exploitation, sexual abuse, and forced prostitution. In doing so, it relies on a wide range of networks to further its mission. These include:

1) End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children For Sexual Purposes (ECPAT)

2) Coalition Against Trafficking of Women (CATW)\(^{25}\)

3) Action Against Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation of Children (ATSEC)

4) National Alliance of Women’s Organizations (NAWO)

5) Maitree (A West Bengal-based Feminist Network)

6) NGO AIDS Coalition (West Bengal)

The range of these networks shows the presence of local, national, and international alliances in their work. According to Valentine Moghadam, transnational affiliations for

\(^{25}\) The ideological position of Sanlaap on sex work is in line with the position of CATW, which characterizes sex work as the commercial exploitation of women and children. CATW is against the legalization of prostitution.
NGOs in social movements suggest a conscious crossing of national borders and a superseding of nationalist orientations (Moghadam 2003, 115). Such diverse interactions make Sanlaap an important ideological and practical site in the formation of notions of empowerment for survivors of trafficking.

Background experiences of leaders in the organization also reveal transnational connections. For example, director Indrani Sinha worked extensively with international agencies such as UNIFEM and Oxfam. Oxfam defines gender empowerment as a process where “many more women will gain power over their lives and live free from violence through changes in attitudes, ideas and beliefs about gender relations, and through increased levels of women’s active engagement and critical leadership in institutions, decision making and change processes” (Oxfam 2010). The pivotal concept around which Sanlaap organizes its empowerment project is that women engaged in sex trade and trafficking networks are “victims of patriarchy,” borrowed from Oxfam’s definition of empowerment.

The formation of the “victim narrative” in relation to transnational anti-sex work networks like CATW is a major aspect of Sanlaap’s ideological disposition and ability to gain financial support as a site of gender empowerment for women. Sanlaap is thus a nodal point for the diffusion of a very specific kind of transnational notion about trafficked women as victims of the sex trade in Kolkata. The official literature of Sanlaap claims to end such continuous “victimization” of women in two ways: firstly, direct intervention through shelters in the process of rescue, rehabilitation, and reintegration of trafficked women, and, secondly, indirect intervention through community awareness in
partnership with other NGOs. The empowerment programs of Sanlaap comprise three major areas: rehabilitation programs, child protection initiatives, and youth programs.\(^{26}\)

The rehabilitation program consists of four shelters for women in and around the city of Kolkata. Sneha (Affection) is the largest shelter and the primary site for this study. Sanlaap claims that Sneha was started in response to requests from women in the sex trade for “protection of their girl children from the violence of the prostitution which they faced day in and day out for want of a place to go” (Sanlaap, manifesto; Tanika, Interview 9, 04/08/06). The four shelters in the city house about 250 women from varied backgrounds. They include the trafficking survivors handed over to Sanlaap by law enforcement under the Government of India’s Swadhar program,\(^{27}\) as well as girl children of women in sex work.\(^{28}\) One of the shelters takes in very young girls ranging from newborns to ten-year-olds. Another care home takes in women from ten to eighteen years, and the working women’s hostel is a transit home for women who have been initiated into and have advanced in the process of reintegration. These women either have jobs outside Sanlaap or work in some capacity in the organization itself. Sanlaap positions Sneha as a space for providing a holistic psycho-social rehabilitation experience.

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\(^{26}\) Sanlaap’s organizational term for describing women in sex trade is *prostitution*. However, I prefer to use *sex trade* in my analysis.

\(^{27}\) Swadhar is a source of government funding available to promote economic self-reliance for women.

\(^{28}\) These children often arrive from the red light areas, the primary areas of commercial sex trade in Kolkata, like Kalighat, Bowbazar (Harkata gali), and Sonagachi. Although the sex trade is practiced in many other pockets in the city, including affluent middle-class areas, the red light areas dominate the discourses on the sex trade and the activities of the NGOs because the women in these areas are mostly poor and belong to the marginalized sections of society.
through education, mental health interventions, vocational training and economic initiatives, dance movement therapy (Sanved), and legal aid (Salah, or “advice”).

The organizational brochure of Jabala, the second organization studied, begins with a mythological story from the Puranas, an ancient Hindu text. In this story a single mother and her son contest society’s patriarchal demand that a father must be involved in child-rearing (Jabala, unpublished data, Manifesto). This story was the inspiration behind Jabala’s primary role as a consciousness raising organization working directly in marginalized communities. Their geographic sites include areas near the India and Bangladesh border (a very poor area that is a major site of trafficking); the Barrackpore industrial area (a town outside Kolkata where failed industries have led to increased poverty and greater vulnerability for women and children); and Bowbazar and Kalighat (two leading red light areas and dwelling areas of sex workers) in Kolkata. Jabala runs drop-in centers for children of sex workers in these areas, as a tool of relationship-building with the women sex workers. According to Baitali, the director of Jabala, the NGO started off as a network of educators for children of sex workers. Their brochure publicly contests the notion of a beneficiary-versus-educator binary and envisions an active, participatory role for children in planning educational programs. Educational

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29 This was mentioned both in the interviews with staff members and the literature of the organization.
30 Drop-in centers are common spaces run by most NGOs in the red light areas like Kalighat, Bowbazar, and Sonagachi. Here, children of the sex workers are typically left or dropped off by their mothers. There are both women and boys in these centers, which provide informal education and other social activities for these kids. These are not permanent arrangements, and many of the children return to their mothers, with some exceptions. The kids who are left permanently are moved to the shelters like Sneha. Jabala was trying to establish a shelter of its own during the course of this study, and New Light had just started a shelter for women in Tollygunj that provides a home for women who permanently wish to leave the environment of commercial sex trade.
projects focus on providing support for formal education, along with extracurricular activities such as yoga, dance, painting, and singing.

The brochure further mentions that Jabala works with different actors for projects in vulnerable areas to end trafficking of women. These actors include village panchayats (local governments), district administrations, police, health professionals, and the media. In addition, Jabala works closely with the state Women’s Commission to organize workshops and awareness programs for different groups. According to Baitali, “One of our biggest achievements has been the gender sensitization workshops for the law enforcement agencies. This helps to initiate a new and more sensitive approach to handling trafficking cases, especially the women who are often treated as mere criminals” (Baitali, Jabala, Interview 20, 03/12/2006). Thus, consciousness raising and challenging gender norms are the two primary frameworks for empowerment projects of this organization.31 Interviews with staff members at Jabala revealed clear aspirations for alliances with transnational organizations, as the NGO competes for funding from foreign funders with larger, older organizations like Sanlaap. There is a similarity in the ideological premises of Jabala, Sanlaap, and New Light, and they strive for attention from similar kinds of funders. Like Sanlaap, Jabala espouses an anti-sex work stance in their activities, although closer analysis reveals that this is somewhat strategic. Often the organization departs from such a position in its day-to-day interactions with sex workers. For example, the crèche run by New Light was used by sex workers as a safe place to

31 For example, Jabala organized a soccer workshop for trafficking survivors led by a prominent female soccer player from West Bengal.
leave their kids when they walked the streets. This, according to some of the sex workers interviewed for this study, helped them to stay out longer and look for more profitable clients as they did not have to worry about their children.

The third organization of this study is New Light, which was established with the goal of setting up an HIV care center for sex workers within their communities. New Light is located and works with sex workers in Kalighat, one of the leading spaces for commercial sex work in south Kolkata. According to Urmi Basu, the director of New Light, “after considerable struggle we were able to forge enough contacts with high risk groups in the Kalighat area and establish ourselves as one of the few support systems available to these groups of women” (Urmi Basu, Jabala, Interview, 06/10/06). The organizational structure includes direct participation and feedback from the sex workers and ex-sex workers of the area. Sex workers sit on the board and part of the staff of New Light. The organization provides a care center for the children of the sex workers throughout the day and a crèche for when the mothers (sex workers) walk the streets of Kalighat.

New Light insists on the importance of providing equal care for both male and female children of sex workers. If any of the girl children choose to enter the trade of sex work after they are eighteen, New Light as an organization does not prevent them and provides necessary care facilities, if needed. However, organizationally, New Light discourages the children of sex workers from entering the trade. The director of New Light uses the analogy of an inverted pyramid to persuade sex workers to leave the trade. She argues that much like an inverted pyramid, sex workers start at the highest salary, but
with every new client they face a price drop in addition to facing violence while engaged in the trade. As the women age, they end up being socially ostracized and economically impoverished, struggling with their children. Urmi further claims, “an economic skill like home care aide might not start with the high pay level of sex work; however the pay in home care aide remains consistent and there is less ostracization.” The organization New Light, being rooted in preventing HIV among sex workers, also facilitates sexual health workshops among sex workers (Urmi Ghosh, New Light, Interview 24, 02/11/06).

Several frames emerge from the stated missions of the three organizations. Organizational leaders from the three NGOs use the frameworks of gender mainstreaming and “rescuing of women from trafficking” as the basis for their empowerment work. From the perspective of the NGOs, women who are trafficked are victims of a violent system and need to be saved, healed, and re-trained in order to be mainstreamed. This notion of “mainstreaming” is different from feminist discourses of “mainstreaming.” While feminist planners in transnational organizations like Oxfam define mainstreaming as engendering all policy related processes and outcomes (Oxfam 2010), the NGO managers of this study interpret “mainstreaming” as the reintegration of the women beneficiaries into their original social and geographic milieus with new economic skills, in the hopes of preventing future participation in the sex trade.

According to the Director of Sanlaap, “in case of trafficking victims our primary objective is to provide the women with certain skills so that when they are returned to their family (which is the primary motivation of the government and the law enforcement after the rescue) they are economically viable and that will decrease the possibility of
future trafficking.” Her words resonated with the explanations from the leaders of the other two NGOs, who claim that true reintegration means that the beneficiaries are economically independent and can lead their own lives without help from any organization or otherwise.

In order to test the above claims by the NGOs of this study I also used discursive analysis as a tool for identifying key themes and frameworks that inform the official empowerment rhetoric of these organizations. Certain key themes emerged from the interviews of NGO leaders, staff, and organizational literature. The three organizations working on prevention of trafficking focus on two areas primarily:

1) Intervention in source points of trafficking and working to raise “gender consciousness” in neighborhoods that are major routes and sources of trafficking.

2) Collaborations with police to locate women being trafficked.

In regards to “rehabilitation” of women, all three organizations engage in three strategies in order to reconnect marginalized women with the mainstream of Indian society. First, as already mentioned, the NGOs design and manage shelters funded by the state and private funders that house the women transferred to their custody by the law enforcement agencies following a rescue operation. Secondly, they design and manage projects that develop the entrepreneurial skills of the rescued women (beneficiaries), such as block printing, sewing, and computer literacy. Finally, they design and manage projects that promote the “holistic development” of “beneficiaries” and their children, such as dance (Sanved), poetry writing (Kalam), day care centers for children of women engaged in the sex trade, and sports.
The narrative that dominates the rhetoric of the three NGOs assumes that women in the sex trade are victims of “patriarchal exploitative institutions,” namely the sex trade and the global trafficking industry. The economic empowerment projects are rooted in the goal of creating individual entrepreneurs, who are self-regulating consumers within the globalized Indian nation-state. I argue that these skill-building projects are largely failing because women beneficiaries struggle with the stigma of being “sex workers” and often are unable to find or retain other economic options. These women return to the NGO seeking a collective space, especially within the holistic dance therapy or poetry writing projects. The dance and poetry writing projects, while not economically focused, are important spaces of collective identity formation. Finally, the agency of the beneficiaries is given a creative shape, and resistance to patriarchal violence is manifested in these spaces.

**Negotiating Empowerment: The State, Private Donors, and the NGOs**

The official frameworks on empowerment mentioned earlier for the three NGOs are directly influenced by their interaction with their funders like the state (local and national), transnationally funded networks such as CATW, and private donors. This study revealed a complex relationship between the state and the NGOs in Bengal, as the state (in this case the local state government) actively funds different projects for the NGOs. Although most NGOs in Bengal started up in reaction to inaction on the part of the government, my experience in the field indicates “the need for strong support at the macro-level. For this there are two alternatives: political parties on the one hand and institutions and organizations with a national standing” (Fernandes 1986, 24-25).
Fernandes’s argument resonates with the role of the Women’s Commission in Bengal in their work on anti-trafficking. This is important for tracing the perceptions of gender empowerment that influence the NGOs that collaborate with the commission on different projects. In other words, the perceptions of empowerment that inform the different rehabilitation projects for trafficked women in the three NGOs, and the outcomes of such projects, are the result of various forms of collaborations and frictions with the state and foreign funding sources. What follows is an explanation of the role that each of the actors plays in such interactions, as well as a link between theory and practice in interactions between funding agencies and NGOs dedicated to women’s empowerment.

From my interviews, field observations, and interaction with members of the NGO circle in Kolkata and Delhi, it became clear that the neoliberal Indian state is still projected as a guarantor of rights and the institution that provides policy, programs, and services. Civil society is everybody else (mainly NGOs), and their role is to advocate for policy. NGOs are most complicit with neoliberal governance mechanisms in their relationship with the state and transnational funding agencies. Transnational neoliberal governance structures (which include international agencies, the United Nations system, along with bilateral funding bodies and the body of literature emerging around development standards from these agencies). These frame the conceptual and material terrains within which the “civil society sector” operates globally. I chronicled the trajectory of the relationships between the three NGOs of this study and changing governance mechanisms. The relationship between the NGOs and their funders is vital for understanding the frameworks of empowerment currently espoused and/or challenged
by these organizations. Several researchers like Richa Nagar, Sangeeta Kamat, and Aradhana Sharma, working in the field of gender and sexuality studies, claim that transnational neoliberal government structures such as the state, the judiciary, and international funding agencies frame and impose neoliberal frameworks of citizenship and empowerment on the NGOs. At the same time, several critical feminists and Queer theorists dismiss engagement with the state as compromising empowerment projects (Young 1997 Puar 2007). However, goals that might be labeled as reformist, such as obtaining ration cards and voter identification cards for sex workers, can have real material and symbolic effects in peoples’ lives. In this section I do not disqualify any contact with the state as inevitably tainted; rather, while recognizing the efforts that have been made to stretch the boundaries of formal politics, I offer an analysis of a critical engagement of women’s rights NGOs with the state.

In analyzing interviews with several actors (both NGO and funding agency staff), I paid attention to highlighting the disjuncture between practice and rhetoric. This section analyzes the relationship between the organizations of this study and regulatory agencies such as the state, the judiciary, and international funding agencies. Collaboration was used as a key word in my interviews with the actors to pinpoint the power relationships (if any) that exist among the organizations and the funding agencies (state and international funders) and how this affects the work of the NGOs.

A Ration Card is a document issued under an order of authority of the State Government, as per the Public Distribution System, for the purchase of essential commodities from fair price shops. State Governments issue distinctive Ration Cards to Above Poverty Line, Below Poverty Line, and Antyodaya families and conduct periodic reviews and checking of Ration Cards. A Ration Card is a very useful document for Indian citizens. It helps save money by aiding in the procurement of essential commodities at a subsidized rate. It has also become an important tool of identification nowadays.
The West Bengal Women’s Commission works on behalf of the state in its collaborations with NGOs that work on the empowerment of women in Bengal. Currently, most collaboration takes place on the issue of trafficking, and the maximum amount of funding is awarded to organizations that collaborate with the state on this issue.33 Central to understanding the role NGOs play (especially within neoliberal economies) is the fact that state agencies and international funding agencies are both constructed as regulatory bodies, not simply as collaborators in women’s empowerment. NGO leaders must navigate this dual terrain and open spaces within the neoliberal Indian state and transnational funding agencies to implement their objectives (Nagar et al. 2006). Analysis of interviews and field notes reveals two primary roles of the state in its interaction with the NGOs: State as Funder and State as Regulator. In order to understand these two roles, it is first necessary to contextualize the various aspects of the state government, particularly in a parliamentary form of democracy, in relation to the NGO movement. The vast diversity of the voluntary organizations and the complexity of the state government in a country the size of India, with local, regional, and national dimensions, make it difficult to narrowly focus on a specific set of relationships between NGOs and the state. The following is an attempt to highlight some dimensions of such a relationship and the nature that it acquires when it comes to issues of women’s empowerment in the three NGOs of this study.

33 This point was emphasized in my interview with the chairperson of West Bengal Women’s Commission Dr. Jasodhara Bagchi and by a study of Women’s Commission’s yearly reports from 2003-2006.
One of the historically approved functions of a state (I refer specifically to the government of West Bengal in this chapter) is to regulate the social, political, and economic space. Although the Indian constitution is federal in nature, which means it gives more authority to the central government, the state government does exercise limited power when it comes to regulatory mechanisms, through its local organs and agencies as well as through laws and legislation. Two type of legislation directly affect voluntary organizations in India today. The first set relates to laws of registration. The most common form of registration is established by the Society Registration Act, which was introduced during British colonial rule in 1860. The Society Act was subsequently modified and amended by several state governments, and West Bengal now has its own set of registration laws. The second set of legislation that regulates NGOs is that related to finance. Two specific laws apply to this area. One is the Income Tax Act of 1961, which always treated the work of NGOs as similar to that of Trusts, educational institutions, and charitable hospitals. Another important law is the Foreign Contributions Regulations Act (FCRA), which was enacted during 1976. Through this law, an effort was made to keep track of those who received foreign funds, all foreign money had to go through a single account, and reports had to be presented to the Home Ministry every six months by the organizations. The Kuala Commission of 1981 strained the relationship between NGOs and the state further as it inquired into the workings of the Gandhi Peace Foundation, which the NGOs considered a direct interference by the government in their affairs.
As I discussed in Chapter 3, historically, the state of India actively funded different voluntary organizations. Immediately after independence from the British the Indian government began to utilize its access to vast resources to provide land, facilities, infrastructure, and funds to a large number of Gandhian social welfare organizations. In fact, the government actively encouraged the work of NGOs by setting up agencies like the Women’s Commissions (both center and state). They also set up the Khadi\textsuperscript{34} and Village Industries Corporation (KVIC), a unique institution set up to finance the activities of those NGOs that are engaged in promoting Khadi and Village industries for the upliftment of the poor through grassroots income generation, as well as for providing marketing outlets for their products. Subsequently a large number of government departments and ministries of both national and state governments began to introduce schemes for funding voluntary organizations. The most common ones have been in adult education, literacy, and health care, and in recent years in environment and social forestry. In 1986, the Council for Advancement of People’s Action and Rural Technology (CAPART) was set up as an autonomous institution to finance NGOs under various funding schemes/programs. It is important to put this act in context, as the central government since the mid-1980s has agreed to make structural adjustments while signing to receive loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

\textsuperscript{34} Khadi (pronounced Khādī) refers to handspun and hand-woven cloth. The raw materials may be cotton, silk, or wool, which are spun into threads on a Charkha (a traditional spinning implement). It was launched as a political weapon by Mahatma Gandhi in 1920 during his Swadeshi (nationalist) movement.
Government funding schemes\textsuperscript{35} like 2001’s Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana (SGRY) were launched as a result of collaborations between the central and state governments and NGOs. These various laws reinforce the role of the state as both the regulator and funder of NGOs. However, in the case of women’s organizations, the government’s role as regulator often overrides its role as funder. For example, it is said that the Society Registration Act is more like a form of bondage for women’s NGOs and organizations, as every successive amendment to the Act in different states of the country has taken away more and more power from the NGOs by giving “unilateral and inordinate powers to the agents of the State to intervene, regulate and check the fates of voluntary organizations registered under the Society of Registration Act of those states” (PRIA 1991). In terms of government schemes and the availability of state funds, there are massive communication gaps between how the schemes are designed and the real needs of the women in the field.

According to Indrani Sinha, the director of Sanlaap, “We have to fit our proposals into these schemes and programs according to the listed requirements of the project rather than our immediate needs” (Sinha, Interview 1, 03/10/06). The result is that the NGOs become mere implementers of the “ideas, concepts, and programs created by the state.” According to Sinha, this “narrowly confines” and “predefines the work of NGOs.”

According to Pulak, the project manager of Sanlaap, “Often government money is returned unused as we are unable to fit the needs of our beneficiaries according to the

\textsuperscript{35} “Schemes” as a term is often used by both NGO and government actors to mean government funded programs.
stringent requirements of the schemes, although the need in this case may be very close to the requirements” (Pulak, Interview 4, 02/06/06). In cases of organizations that are totally dependent on state funding, complaints are often made about increasing state bureaucracy and corruption. As dependent recipients from the state donor, such voluntary organizations are forced to experience the tension of attempting to work with bureaucratic and corrupt institutions in order to continue to receive grants from the State for the completion of their projects.

Most activists interviewed for this study claimed that in order to escape any dependency on the state for funds, NGOs turn towards international donors and agencies for funding. Foreign funding does not only bring foreign exchange to the Indian economy. Since the 1990 liberalization of India’s economy, foreign funders have become more interested in the affairs of the NGOs in India. Undoubtedly, as claimed by both NGO activists and beneficiaries, the presence of foreign funding has led to many innovative experiments as well as to new ideas, new initiatives, new approaches, and new modes in a wide range of areas. The participants of this study credit the foreign funding agencies for the inclusion of gender awareness programs in their work with both men and women. However, foreign funding is a much more complicated and sensitive issue in India than perhaps in many other countries of the world.

There are several reasons for this complex state of foreign funding in India. The first reason relates to how the agendas of the NGOs have been influenced by the representatives of foreign funding agencies. In different periods of NGO history in India over the last forty years, different issues have taken primacy in the eyes of many NGOs,
partly because they were accorded priority by the funders. In a specific sense, many times the representatives of foreign funding agencies influence visibly, openly, and directly the programs and activities of the organizations and, at times, force organizations to take ideological positions according to their own agenda, clearly favoring one organization over another. Sometimes these programs are inconsistent with the realities on the ground, leading to the failure of the projects.

Fernandes’s argument regarding the effects of competition among organizations for foreign funding is reaffirmed in this study (1986, 22). This leads to a lack of unity and strength among organizations, unleashing an environment of unhealthy competition among NGOs. On the issue of trafficking there is a clear divide evident in West Bengal based not only on the local organizations’ ideological positions on the issues of the legalization of sex work and its connections with trafficking, but also according to the ideological dispositions of the foreign agencies that fund each organization. Thus, the politics of NGO funding are a critical issue and demand further in-depth investigation.

On the one hand, there is concern among the staff members of the NGOs interviewed for this study regarding dependence on external sources of funding as well as government funding, and on the other hand there is the urgent quest to find alternative and sustainable ways of financing unpaid work to ensure the autonomy of these organizations.

Research highlighted how, due to the complex relationship between the NGOs and the funders, the availability of resources from the state and from foreign funding agencies can be useful on the one hand but also limiting, controlling, and “dependence-creating” on the other. It is in this light that I argue in the following section that the
NGOs’ adoption of gender empowerment frameworks is a direct result of the interrelationship and collaboration between the government and private funding sources and the NGOs. These collaborations are always hierarchical in favor of the funding sources, although NGOs often strategically use such hierarchy to further their own agendas.

**Different Organizational Views on the Role of Funders in Defining Empowerment**

According to the founder of New Light, Urmi Basu, there is a clear indication of a lack of direct or indirect government support for their work. She argues:

> The state government is more or less aloof to our work. One reason for that is that we are not working on trafficking as much which is one of the primary focus of the government right now…. while we do require government support for overcoming various social and political constraints, it only come if we adhere to their policies completely. (Urmi Basu, Interview 23, 02/11/06)

Although Urmi Basu was not critical of the role of the state government in the NGO’s work, she made it clear that it has to win over government officials (in this case the panchayats or local councils) in its work in both rural and urban areas.

Baitali Chakrabarty (Baitali, Interview 20, 03/12/06) of the organization Jabala is more critical of the role of the government. Although she claimed that her organization has a good relationship with the Women’s Commission, and that it participates in different projects funded by the organization, she has seen distinct favoritism towards certain organizations that toe the leftist party line. Both these views reflected the concerns pointed out by scholars like Fernandes about problems of co-optation by the government.
When it comes to the largest and most influential organization (Sanlaap) of this study, however, the answers to the question need to be contextualized in the personal history of the staff members interviewed for this study. All those interviewed have a history of direct involvement with leftist activism, beginning with student activism. Most participants from this organization claimed a positive collaborative relationship with the state government in their work. They also received the largest amount of government funds for their shelter for rescued trafficked women, As Pulak said in our interview, “I was actively involved in the leftist politics in the ‘60s and ‘70s, and the so-called political parties of that movement were closer to the common people than they are now. This organization is a coming together of like-minded people who were part of that movement” (Pulak, Interview 4, 02/06/06).

Pulak’s statement reveals the early leftist affiliations of their founding members, but also a sense of disillusionment with the current state of things. This begs a closer look, as the relationship between the state and this particular organization reveals a variegated picture of strategic collaboration between the NGOs and the government. It is sort of a marriage of convenience, and in this marriage of convenience the NGOs often sacrifice their progressive notions of immediate gender empowerment for long-term gains.

It is in their program on providing shelters for trafficked women that this organization has the most interaction with the government. They run four shelter homes in and around Kolkata. These four shelter homes house approximately 250 women who are:
1. Rescued women from the sex trade or who are minors handed over to Sanlaap by the government of India under the SWADHAR program;

2. Girl children of women who are in the sex trade;
   a. One care home takes in girls ranging from birth to 10 years
   b. Another care home takes in girls from 10 to 18 years

3. There is a working women’s hostel that operates as a transit home for the women who have been initiated into the “process of rehabilitation and reintegration into the mainstream society” (www.sanlaap.com Jan 3 2006);

4. Victims of trafficking who were rescued in police raids;

   The government of West Bengal is the primary funder of Sneha (“affection”), the largest of these shelters. This establishment has to follow rules laid out by the Department of Social Welfare in its operations. This shelter is located on the outskirts of Kolkata and houses about one hundred women and children at one time. The shelter claims a holistic approach in its programs, encompassing Education, Mental Health Interventions, Vocational Training and Economic Initiatives, Dance Movement Therapy, and Legal Aid. It stands like a fortress in a quaint village called Elaichipur. Inside the shelter there are open spaces, a pond, the main living quarters, the office building, and a school hut. Although the organization receives additional outside funds for this shelter, the Government of West Bengal is one of the primary funders and recognizes this establishment as a safe house for women who have survived trafficking.

   Tanika (a senior staff member who manages the shelter) claims that the government lays out very specific rules regarding the operations and the profile of
women who can be housed in this facility. Most of these rules are archaic. For example, there is clear gender policing going on in the shelters, as men (without proper permission) are not allowed in shelter premises, and there are clear directives regarding the appointment of a female matron for the women in the dorms.

The trope or metaphor of motherhood is prevalent all over the institutional mechanisms of the shelter. According to both government officials and the staff of the shelters this is a result of the collaboration of ideas that dominate government expectations and perceptions of the staff members. Repeatedly, Sanlaap women refer to the organization and its director, Indrani Sinha, as either sister or mother. As one woman I interviewed told me, “When we have difficulty we go home to Sanlaap” (Reshma, Interview 14, 03/02/06). In the words of the women, there is a clear emphasis on “reintegration to the mainstream” of society, as if Sanlaap is the mother’s house where the women acquire the necessary skills to navigate the outside “patriarchal” society (mainstream). The words of government officials like Jasodhara Bagchi, the chairperson of the women’s commission, reaffirmed this as the primary objective of the shelters: “Helping these women to return to the mainstream is our primary objective, and we do everything possible, like educating them, training them in vocational skills so that they are economically independent and socially aware of their role in the larger society and cannot be mistreated” (Bagchi, Interview 29, 05/14/06).

When asked the meaning of reintegration, the staff members unanimously agreed that “Marriage is the most common and encouraged path, because of the social stigma attached to these women, it becomes difficult for them to survive on their own or work
and lead an independent life” (Tanika, Interview 9, 04/08/06). Does this mean that the government or other funding agencies are enforcing such traditional notions of gender roles? Such assumptions simplify the situation and undermine the possibilities that adoption and encouragement of such traditional gender roles may be a strategic and conscious move on the part of the organization for two reasons: to appease the government sources and to make these women conscious and aware of empowerment even within such traditional roles. This is in line with the discourses around the strength of motherhood in Bengali culture. The shelter, by becoming the house of the mother (a clearly gendered space), has special significance in the Bengali cultural context, where a girl goes to live with her in-laws after marriage. She usually thinks of her mother’s home as the place of warmth and safety, where she is under less scrutiny from “patriarchal regimes.” Thus according to Tanika, “Even though women are often encouraged to get married, we do have regular gender and sexuality awareness workshops in the shelters so that women are aware of their strengths as women and cannot be taken for a ride in marriage” (Tanika, Interview 9, 04/08/06). Staff members like Anima and Nima claimed that foreign funders and agencies generally fund these awareness workshops as HIV awareness programs that are then used by the organizations to bring home the message of marital rights to their beneficiaries (Interviews 5 and 6, 05/12/06). This interesting strategy reveals that, although the government clearly encourages the creation of gendered spaces and organizational mechanisms within organizations, the NGOs often use such regulations to develop a culturally sensitive and appealing notion of empowerment for women beneficiaries.
Government plays a key role in both fostering and curbing networking and collaboration between different organizations, not only between different NGOs in this case but also government agencies such as the police and the judicial system. Recognizing the role of this networking is important for understanding the ways in which perceptions about rescued women from the sex trade operate in all these organizations. The research revealed the prevalence of a victim narrative about trafficked women, as they are referred to as “rescued victims” of trafficking and the sex trade.

In my quest for finding the reasons behind the use of this victim narrative, I found three very different explanations arising; which one was used depended on the role of the NGO worker, his or her ideological position, and his or her awareness about feminist theories and practices. The interviewed government officials, ranging from a very famous women’s rights advocate to police officers and judges in local courts, provided different viewpoints on this issue as well.

My interactions with the police department revealed a deep-rooted patronizing attitude towards these women, as people within that department strongly claimed that the women are victims of the sex industry and their own misfortune. In recent times, there have been efforts to make the police more gender sensitive. With funding from the state

36 I observed this repeatedly in gender sensitizing workshops organized for the police and court cases on trafficking.
37 I attended several workshops organized by Daywalka foundation on trafficking issues and the role of the police in it. I also observed court cases on trafficking in Kolkata High Court. The Daywalka Foundation was a US-based 501c(3) INGO human rights organization that addresses human trafficking, safe migration, and gender-based violence through culturally grounded, rights-based solutions. Daywalka had a resource center in Kathmandu, Nepal, and offices in Kolkata, India, and Dhaka, Bangladesh, in 2006. The Daywalka Foundation builds capacity among all stakeholders to ensure safe and sustainable livelihoods for all people, especially women and children who are unwillingly or illegally coerced or tricked into any form forced labor or slavery. http://gen.pdx.edu/local.php
Women’s Commission and other international organizations like UNODC and UNIFEM, different NGOs are appointed to organize workshops on gender sensitizing for the police. One staff member from Sanlaap who has been part of such efforts argues that the attitude of the police has surely changed for the better because of such training. Shomik argued:

Gender awareness workshops for the police not only benefit the police and the women they rescue but also improve police attitude and behavior towards NGO staff. Earlier women staffs of the NGOs were scared of going with the police for a raid and felt insecure interacting with them on any issue. Things are different now and we can see a slow but clear change in the attitude of the police. (Shomik, Interview 3, 04/06/06)

The chairman of the Women’s Commission, who is a pioneer in women’s rights issues and a prolific proponent of women’s studies in colleges and universities, argues that the government has been slowly warming up to the importance of gender sensitization of government officials (Interview 29, 05/14/06). The NGOs are needed to act as the primary trainers in such efforts.

The interviews with staff of all three NGOs who work with government officials revealed that the reality of the police department’s adoption of gender sensitization is more mixed. Although some of the NGO staff (not the majority) were aware of what gender is and its role in fostering empowerment of the women, a majority of the staff have no ideas about gender sensitization and believe that these women are victims in need of rescue. It is interesting that it is mostly those staff members who have a higher-level education, such as a master’s degree, or who were trained at some point in a foreign
school, who were aware of the implications of the rescue narrative. They used it as a strategic tool to make their interactions with the police and the justice system more effective.

The justice system, or the courts, is one of the most archaic institutions of this state. Interviews with lawyers working on trafficking issues and directly with NGOs revealed the dominance of the victim narrative in trafficking cases. The victim narrative is used to appeal to the sympathy of the court for these women as the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act (PITA), the anti-trafficking law, views both the trafficker and the trafficked as criminals, which complicates the situation for the women who are rescued. Because of such criminalization, the lawyers for the rescued women appeal to the emotions of the judge, trying to portray their female clients as helpless victims of the greed of their guardians, the economic situation, and deceit as the primary reasons for the women to be in the sex trade. There is no room for acknowledging a woman’s agency, and the way in which these women are viewed is very different from women facing other judicial issues such as domestic violence or dowry. My observation notes on cases in the Kolkata High Court reinforce the claims of these lawyers that, unless the language of the laws on trafficking is changed, the system will continue to rely on a rescue narrative to get something done for these women. It is in this scenario that the NGOs of this study operate and work on gender empowerment.

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38 The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, or PITA, is a 1986 amendment of legislation passed in 1956.
Foreign Funders and NGOs

The interview questions on the role of the foreign funding agencies revealed similar responses from the staff of the different organizations. According to Pradip, the program director of Sanlaap, the foreign funders allow more freedom in program design and application. This is an interesting claim, as many scholars like Kamat (2001) have pointed to the clear ideological motivations of the foreign funders in their funding of the NGOs. Further research on this subject and interviews with funders from Terres des Hommes\(^3^9\) revealed an interesting scenario. One of the biggest funders of Sanlaap during the time of this study was GTIP (Global Trafficking in Persons), a program of the State Department of the United States. They received this funding in the year 2000 immediately after George Bush became the president of the United States. According to Sumit, “It is not a coincidence that Sanlaap is funded by the state department of US and not Durbar Mahila Samity\(^4^0\) This is because of their anti-sex work ideological stand” (Sumit, Interview 30, 07/22/06).

Sumit’s words were echoed by a member of Daywalka Foundation, another funder of Sanlaap. Daywalka Foundation itself is funded by the State Department and funded different organizations working on anti-trafficking in Kolkata. According to a former staff member, “We had clear instruction from higher authorities in United States to evaluate an organization’s ideological position on sex work before allocating funds”

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\(^3^9\) The Terres des Hommes International Federation is a network of eleven national organizations working for the rights of children and to promote equitable development without racial, religious, political, cultural, or gender-based discrimination. They were one of the leading foreign funders operating in Kolkata during the time of my research in 2006. [http://www.terredeshommes.org/](http://www.terredeshommes.org/)

\(^4^0\) Durbar Mahila Samity is a pro-sex work union for sex workers operating in the Sonagachi area of Kolkata.
This suggests that organizations need to align themselves ideologically with their funding agencies when it comes to empowerment projects relating to sex workers. However, it is also necessary to mention that several influential staff members from the three organizations claimed that the organizations manipulate the requirements of the funding agencies (both state and private) according to the needs of their beneficiaries.

Thus, we can conclude that in this case the flow of ideas about gender empowerment is primarily a top-down process, as it is perceived by the different funding agencies. However, there are often disruptions in this process. My interviews with the staff members of Sanlaap, Jabala, and New Light revealed that in their day-to-day work, they are pro-sex worker, and the staff members (men and women) are committed to the wellbeing of each woman arriving at their premises for their support. This is a clear departure from their ideological positions as anti-sex work organizations.

In my research I found that while there is encouraging evidence that none of the organizations studied have simply caved in to the new agendas and surrendered, foreign donor funding has had an undeniable impact. In the three organizations studied there is a growing homogeneity in agendas and strategies for empowerment. Ways of working and strategies of particular relevance to the national context are sidelined—or if they still happen, such as street activism, they are not reported. The search for financial sustainability when donors are unable and unwilling to give institutional grants for the development of the organization has driven these organizations to taking on more and more short-term projects while at the same time having to neglect the pursuit of more
strategic longer-term goals. The organizations also struggle to cope with ever-changing policy priorities and reporting requirements that, I observed, foreign donors change as frequently as they change their clothes.

The funding of gender equality from foreign funders has had profound effects not only on the organizations themselves but also on the meaning of gender equality and how this is to be achieved through empowerment programs. First, there is a discernible shift to supporting gender mainstreaming, as mentioned in Chapter 3, which in foreign funders’ speak means not supporting programs targeting specific women’s interests. This shift denies the history of discrimination and leads to the inclusion of men, as I witnessed happening in the organizations studied. Second, according to staff of foreign funding agencies interviewed for this project, the role that funders played in supporting homespun methods of “doing” gender equality work has been over for some time. This has been replaced by and large by program funding on themes that are internationally being promoted and frameworks that come from these quarters. The immediate fallout is the homogenization of discourse on how empowerment, and specifically gender and empowerment, should be done, a homogenization that further disempowers the NGOs.

**Empowerment Programs and Departures**

According to the NGO leaders and funders interviewed for this study, economic empowerment is the first step towards social reintegration.\(^\text{41}\) It is evident in the words of

\(^\text{41}\) Refer to interviews with leading staff members of Sanlaap, Jabala, and New Light.
staff members of these NGOs, government officials, and funders that there is an expectation that once these women take up a legally recognized, “respectable” trade, society will ultimately accept them as part of the mainstream. Most of the empowerment agendas and skill-building efforts in these organizations are rooted in the perspective of how these marginalized women can be rehabilitated.

The discussion of the importance of gender kept coming up in my conversations with different staff members on the question of economic empowerment through skill training. The kind of skill training in question is that which aims at making women who are defined as beneficiaries economically viable once they leave the premises of the NGOs. In order to reintegrate these women into society, a discussion about the nature of and implications for the kind of skill-building taught to these women is necessary, in light of my discussions in Chapter 3 of NGOs as “engendering mechanisms.” All three NGOs in this study emphasize skill-building primarily through three methods: block printing (taught at the shelter in Sanlaap), sewing (taught in all three NGOs), and computer skills (taught in all the three NGOs). Teaching basic computer skills is a comparatively recent phenomenon and can be interpreted as a departure from traditional gender skills. Before addressing the efficacy of each of these skills as a means to create an empowered individual, it is necessary to discuss the role of marriage as a viable path toward empowerment for these women. I delineate the empowerment programs that are within the ambit of this current study in Appendix 2.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the word “marriage” came up repeatedly both in interviews with the staff members and with the beneficiaries during fieldwork.
Staff members like the counselor Anima were cautious in addressing this issue as a viable but not overtly encouraged option given to these women. Other staff members, like Tanika, were more open in emphasizing the importance of marriage in the process of reintegration. According to her, “In the history of this organization, and I have been around from its inception, I can vouch for the rehabilitation of only two women, and both of them are happily married” (Interview 9, 04/08/06).\textsuperscript{42} Throughout my research I found that both the staff members and the beneficiaries express faith in the institution of marriage as a path towards social acceptance. These claims need to be read within the context of the beneficiaries’ experiences and relationships with different men at different points in their lives. There are two distinct groups of women in this study who discussed marriage in their conversations with me, and their arguments differ considerably from each other.

For married sex workers of New Light, marriage as an institution is addressed by sex workers as their primary arena of activity, while sex work is merely a job. In their conversations, they referred to their daily chores as wives and as mothers as their major activity and taking care of their husbands, mothers-in-law, and children as their greatest satisfaction. Sex work is merely a job they perform for the economic wellbeing of their families, which makes the marriage successful. Their participation in both the institutions of marriage and sex work is evident in examples such as the story of Malati. She is 32 years old and lives with her husband, two children, and mother-in-law in Kalighat. She is

\textsuperscript{42} Feminists have been suspect of the role of NGOs as promoters of marriage as a viable option for empowerment, arguing that marriage is a reiteration of patriarchal economic arrangements for women. Further, a majority of married women participating in the labor force (both formal and informal) continue to face the dual burdens of household chores and work responsibilities (Nussbaum 1999).
a sex worker. She recalls her mother being a sex worker, and she entered the trade early and voluntarily: “I do this work for the good money that it brings so that I can send my son to a good school and ultimately get my children out of this cycle of poverty” (Interview 28, 03/06/06). Her husband does odd jobs and sometimes drives a taxi. Malati identifies herself as a dedicated wife, mother, and daughter-in-law. She uses the NGO New Light's services primarily for the wellbeing of her children. She sends them there for tutoring and childcare so that they can do well in school and so that they are taken care of when she is out walking the streets. Malati’s story is an example of the underlying sense of security that women feel from being part of these NGOs, but it also exposes the ways in which they are disrupting traditional notions of womanhood (in the form of mother, wives, and daughters-in-law) within the institution. Sex work in this case is the work that generates the economic resources needed by these women to ensure the feeling of security they feel within the institution of marriage.

Many trafficked women were sold by their husbands or partners. The sense of betrayal these women feel is deeply rooted and is manifested often through behavioral issues. According to the counselors, when most of these women arrive at the shelters they are traumatized and very often suffering from different forms of depression. The effects of these past betrayals appear in some women’s problems with acting out, remaining isolated, and sometimes engaging in violent behaviors. The counselors also pointed out that some of the women arrive pregnant or HIV-positive, thus embodying their experience of trauma. One of the counselors emphasized, “Such cases are more complex and have to be handled with special attention. We let them be on their own without
pressurizing them to do anything. Very often after a few days, some of them decide to talk and get counseling. One of the ways we try to address their traumatic experience is by making an effort to provide alternative examples of masculinity (as staff and volunteers) which might help to reverse their lack of faith on any man” (Interview 6, 05/12/06). A similar sentiment resonated in the interview with Pradip, a male staff member. According to Pradip:

We male staff members consciously interact with these women (with caution) in a way that they can see that all men are not traffickers or rapists. Marriage and a happy, healthy relationship also act as an example for these women to address their trust issues and feeling of betrayals. The way we do it is by slowly telling them about the success stories of women married from the shelters and also ultimately allowing them to have supervised interaction with boys from other organizations. (Interview 10, 06/10/06)

The reiteration of compulsory heterosexuality, along with notions of womanhood and traditional gender roles, emerge from these conversations. A true gendered empowerment according to interviewed staff members, therefore, is one where the women are reintroduced to notions of a gender binary and gendered roles within the institutions of marriage and society, along with economic skills.

The gendered nature of conceptualizing women who are engaged in the sex trade and/or rescued from trafficking is evident from the way the field staff of the three NGOs interchangeably deploy notions of marriage and skill-building as ways for “mainstreaming” their beneficiaries. While the official literature and missions of these
organizations do not mention marriage, it is evident from my research that a majority of
the field staff aspire for the women beneficiaries to be married along with being engaged
in the labor force. Similarly, in my casual and formal conversations with the
beneficiaries, they stated that their true empowerment was in being able to participate in
marriage as an institution both as caregivers and economic contributors.

The specific economic skills being imparted to the beneficiaries are those that
have been traditionally considered women’s occupations in India, such as sewing, design,
and block printing, a recent departure being computer literacy. A discussion of these
economic skills needs to be understood in the context of a liberalized Indian economy,
the imposition of a free market, and notions about neoliberal citizens as responsible, risk-
taking, and entrepreneurial in such an economy as discussed in Chapter 3. Analysis of my
interviews with the staff members and the organizational literature revealed that all three
organizations operate to re-engage their beneficiaries with such a neoliberal economy.
The emphasis is on the individual skill-building of their beneficiaries. The primary
motivations behind all the economic skills taught in these organizations are once again
reintegration and rehabilitation.

The computer lessons are taught both at the NGOs and at other external sites. A
major computer program at Sanlaap is run by an “American lady” (as she is referred to by
the women in her program), Allis, and the teacher is an ex-shelter girl, Guria. These
classes provide basic computer literacy training to the women and prepare them for better
paying jobs when they leave the shelter. About seventy-three hours of lessons are given
to each woman, but Guria feels this is inadequate. According to Guria, many women
need time to adjust to the new environment (shelter) and overcome their traumatic experiences of being “rescued,” and many of them have never attended any formal school. For such women, computer literacy does not mean anything without formal education. Moreover, she, along with Allis, emphasized that some of the women who learn the skills after considerable effort end up getting married and not utilizing their skills. They claim that the results are different with boys in similar situations, suggesting a gendered outcome of this skill.

Block printing has been taught to women in the shelter run by Sanlaap from the 1990s. Although Karabi is in charge of the process, the trained ex-residents of the shelters primarily teach the newcomers, with Rita as their current leader. Rita’s case is interesting. At 22, Rita is married and works full time as the lead trainer of block printing in Sanlaap. She is an ex-resident of the shelter and a trafficking survivor. She learned the trade during her years in the shelter (1996-2005). Rita is from Murshidabad, a border district of Bengal, and has never attended formal schools. She developed an interest watching staff members mixing colors for printing and learned how to do it in six months. In her words, “I was fascinated to see how the aunties worked through the day here and then went back home to their families. I wanted that life. I knew if I had a skill, I could work and earn some money. I also longed to have a family life. When I arrived here, I was very timid, could not say a word, and did not know how to present myself. I am much more confident now” (Interview 15, 04/12/06). Rita got married recently, and her husband works in a bakery. Her sense of receiving approval in the outside world is rooted in her statement, “My mother-in-law loves me. She is the one who wanted me to marry her son.
My family is very happy that I am economically independent and working in Sanlaap.” Rita is an example of a kind of reintegration that is based on having social recognition as someone’s wife more than as an economically independent woman.

A similar narrative emerges in the interview of Reshma, who manages the sewing lessons. Reshma is 23 and lived in the Sanlaap shelter from 1999 to 2004. She was trafficked while very young and was rescued during a police raid. She was enrolled in the informal school in the shelter but did not like her studies and developed an interest in the vocational trainings. An avid sewer, she envisions herself to be a leading fashion designer in the future. Reshma’s story is a glimpse of the optimism that some of the shelter women have, in spite of their experiences in the outside world. Reshma is an expert sewer, and after leaving the shelter joined a boutique in Kolkata for work. However, the social stigma of being from the shelter made her life miserable there. She could not deal with the negative attention from the owner and ultimately came back to Sanlaap as a full time sewing teacher. She claims, “I am happy here. I feel wanted and cared for and satisfactions in helping other women learn the skills.” She argues, “The women feel comfortable learning from me when they realize I am one of them, and they open up to me and share their deepest thoughts and concerns about life in the shelter” (Reshma, Interview 14, 03/2/2006, 04/12/2006). Although she is economically independent, it will be a stretch to argue that she has truly reintegrated into society.

Another form of rehabilitation is evident in the case of Molly, from the organization Jabala; she exemplifies everything that the NGOs want their beneficiaries to become. Molly was 19 years old at the time of this study. She was dropped off at Jabala
when she was 14, from Harakata Gali,\textsuperscript{43} in Kolkata. She is the poster child of Jabala’s success and a spokesperson for the organization’s objectives. She reiterated how indebted she is to the organization for rescuing her from the sex trade and teaching her skills to survive on her own. Her sense of empowerment seems to emerge from this very position as poster child for the organization. She claimed, “I feel great being here and working for this organization now. It is because of Jabala that I have traveled to different places around the world, attended workshops, and talked about the problems that women face in the red light areas.” Molly almost voices a sense of disrespect and disgust for the women who continue in the sex trade, including her own mother. “Many of them are doing it because they want to earn more money with less labor” (Molly, Interview 23, 02/10/2006). The stories of Reshma, Rita, and Molly call for a reevaluation of the use of words such as “reintegration.” They confirm that processes of reintegration and rehabilitation, which NGOs claim as paths to empowerment for these women, need to be contextualized within the reality of the deep-rooted prejudice that exists about women of the sex trade. I do not discount the importance of these skills for the beneficiaries of the organizations, as they claimed that acquiring a skill made them more confident and eager to become economically independent. However, from the words of interviewees like Tapati, Reshma, and Rita it was clear that these girls had a tough time getting a job and retaining them outside of the NGOs. Thus claims to be “empowering women” through engaging them in the market conflate power with money and imbue the acquisition of money with almost magical powers—as if once women had their own money, they could

\textsuperscript{43} A red light area in Kolkata.
wave a wand and wish away overnight the social norms, institutions, and relationships that are part of their lives.

The primary objective of teaching these economic skills is to help the beneficiaries find work once they leave the shelter (they have to leave once their case has been resolved or when they are deemed adults). However, during fieldwork it became clear that many of the women (as evidenced in the stories of Rita and Reshma) return to these organizations seeking further assistance and collective support. The economic skills imparted to them, therefore, do not allow for either a continuous income or a sense of empowerment to navigate the “world outside the NGOs” (a vastly technocratic consumer culture-driven Indian market, within which the stigma associated with sex work remains unaltered). Reshma's story demonstrates the limitations of merely learning a skill without addressing other broader social concerns. Reshma explained she could not find an appropriate job that would pay her enough in the outside world. She also complained that since she is not well educated and the NGO has not taught her about other necessary entrepreneurial skills, such as capital generation and marketing (according to Reshma), she cannot start an independent business. This suggests that beneficiaries themselves might be attracted to a neoliberal skill-set, but in reality they often revert back to a collective identity (NGO women) and a space where they feel accepted and appreciated. This also resonates with Naila Kabeer’s arguments on empowerment discussed in Chapter 2, that Reshma is experiencing the process of empowerment not only by acquiring an economic skill but by having the power to make strategic life choices, and in this case choosing to return to the NGO as a staff member.
Where the NGOs conceive of these women as individual subjects whose relationship with the mainstream can be altered by imparting economic skills to them, the women often negotiate between collective support and individual ways to find their empowerment within and outside the NGOs. Collective identity, a sense of resisting certain aspects of patriarchy, and rebuilding one’s wounded self esteem are fostered in cultural projects that are not explicitly about economic skill development. These can be the spaces where some women renegotiate their relationships with oppressive social and economic relations and develop bonds that bring them back to the NGOs even after their “empowerment cycles” have been completed.

The site of offering avenues for empowerment by the NGOs and the women beneficiaries is often blurred. At times, projects such as advocating for government ration cards, voter cards, and identity documents locate the state as the provider of certain political rights, and yet implicit in the market-based models of economic skills development is the notion of individuals negotiating access to economic opportunities within a free market. The theme of empowerment therefore at times is disjointed and at best is conceived as holistic.

**Bodies in Motion: Dance Therapy as Mode of Healing and Empowerment.**

“Dance is the song of the body. Either joy or pain.”

-Sanved, publication

“M is a 29 year old girl from Nepal, who is depressed, and has been rescued, living in a shelter in Nepal. She is undergoing treatment for depression, and
taking medications. She had been non-communicative, since dance classes she has been more communicative.”

-Sanved, publication

While conducting fieldwork I learned about “Sanved,” the dance therapy and skill-building project conducted by the NGO Sanlaap. This specific project breaks away from conceptualizing empowerment as economic skill-building within the market structure and creates a space for healing and collective movement-building. A volunteer at a shelter run by Sanlaap in 1996 started the dance project. In 1998 Sanlaap provided her with the institutional framework to apply for a grant from the Human Resource Department of the Government of India to launch a research project entitled “Rangeen Sapney” (Colorful Dreams), with 120 “victimized/abused” women. The project aimed to document the psychosocial changes that dance and movement therapy could induce in the women. The project lasted from 1999 to 2000. This was the precursor to Sanved.

According to its founder Sohini, Kolkata Sanved uses dance movement as an alternative approach to recovery and healing and for the psychosocial rehabilitation of victims of violence and trafficking. Working with young women who are victims of violence, Sanved is trying to establish itself as a center for excellence in the field of dance therapy in South Asia. The dance therapy project therefore squarely locates itself as a supplement to economic skill-building and psychological counseling, in developing a holistic sense of self among the women beneficiaries of the project. I found the program’s use of the terms “target group,” “trafficked victim,” “survivors of violence and sexual abuse,” and “children of women in prostitution” particularly interesting, as they identify a
clear sense of separation between the founder and the women identified as the beneficiaries of the project and their children.

The project’s literature identifies the following principles for their work:

- Creativity is more important than technique
- Developmental: exploring what the body can do, rather than what it cannot do
- Be Empathetic: Empathy is more necessary than sympathy
- Keep Patience
- Non-judgmental
- Maintain Confidentiality
- Respecting Process
- Participation
- Gain Confidence
- Create a safe environment: socially, emotionally and physically.

As mentioned earlier, the use of terms such as “women rescued from trafficking” or “victims” already creates a value-laden conceptualization of the women and their children. The narrative provided by Sohini, the founder and leader of Sanved, is rooted in her position as a middle-class, English-educated woman trained in dancing. Her introduction to the situation of trafficking victims was via a poster of a child sold into trafficking at a book fair in Kolkata. She emphasized in her interview the need to share her dance skills with trafficked women, enabling the creation of a healing space and helping them develop skills as dancers and peer educators as part of their rehabilitation.
However, as her narrative progressed, she elucidated the development of her own consciousness and recognized the inseparability of her own liberation from patriarchy with the women she works with.

Sohini described three key phases in the emergence and development of Sanved. The first phase, named “Search” (1996-1997), included sessions revolving around story-based movements and physical exercises as a way for women in shelters to communicate their life circumstances; this phase is considered a period of mutual learning and exploration. The second phase of Sanved’s inception was “Enlightenment” (1997-1998), in which Sohini, as a paid Sanlaap staff member, studied the “Red Light Areas” and developed a deeper understanding of “prostitution.” The study led to her interest in approaching rehabilitation through creative projects. The third phase was “Experiment and Achievement” (1998-2001), in which the emphasis was on the professional development of the dancer herself as a dancer, through workshops with certified trainers and professional memberships with organizations such as the American Dance Therapy Association.

Sohini characterized the next phase as “Result 2001 Onwards.” During this phase, Sanved was launched as a “professional curriculum” in the year 2002 at a prominent cultural venue of Kolkata. Sohini won an Ashoka Fellowship\textsuperscript{44} in 2003, which increased the popularity of the program. It is during this time that the founder identified the results

\textsuperscript{44} Ashoka Fellows are leading social entrepreneurs who are recognized for their innovative solutions to social problems and the potential to change patterns across society. \url{http://www.ashoka.org/fellows}
of the dance therapy project as the progression of young, afraid, withdrawn women to confident, bold, expressive artists.

“The ingenuity of the certain masterpiece is the human being”

-From Sanved Report.

While analyzing Sohini’s interview and description of Sanved in written materials, certain keywords and components emerged, which help understand the framework deployed to create empowerment through dance: space, relaxation, expression, love, care, support, self expression, and communication. The combination of these keywords is achieved through dance forms that emphasize the following: body awareness, improvisation skills, group facilitation and therapy, creation and thinking, participation and integration.

Body awareness, as explained by Sohini, consists of the period when the women participants are instructed to perform basic movement exercises, after which they discuss how each of the exercises felt and how their body responded to the exercise. This is usually followed by role-playing and movement exercises that help the participants narrate their life stories. The facilitator then works with individual participants, sometimes also in small groups, to debrief the emotions associated with each of the role-plays. This debriefing is followed by the collective creation of a dance piece. Body-mind coordination allowing for non-judgmental sharing of mutual experiences emerging from the stories and the creation of a collective narrative through movement exercises are not new to feminist practices. Concepts such as body-mind coordination and movement therapy have emerged from the “somatic” movement and the dance therapy movement.
(Eddy 2002). In somatic-based dance therapy, the emphasis is upon using movement as a way to coordinate body and mind. This methodology helps in healing the disruption that occurs from traumatic experiences between bodily feeling and reactions through mental processes. The creation of a safe space, where the mutual sharing of life stories can occur, happens only when hierarchies between trainer and beneficiaries are broken.

Therefore, we see in the journey of Sohini a gradual movement away from the NGO rhetoric of professionals helping rescued victims (women) to a more egalitarian notion of collective movement-building and healing. Sanved further creates a space for the retelling of their oppressive stories by the women at the shelters. This process of individual retelling and the resulting creation of a collective narrative enable the women to develop deeper understandings of systems of oppression such as patriarchy and sexism and their interconnections with their lives.

“The complex interconnections between poverty, religion, women’s reproductive capacity and their disempowerment give rise to a very negative feeling about their bodies and mind.”

-From Sanved Reports 2005 (unpublished data).

The conceptualizing of empowerment as the process wherein notions of self are created in tandem with healing from violent disruptions caused by trafficking and multiple forms of abuse, however, is not entirely divorced from a commitment to developing the economic skills of the participants. Sohini said that she has worked with five women who began as beneficiaries but have become trainers in their own right and, in the process, have access to a livelihood. Thus, this project has economic viability also.
Further, Sohini indicated the adoption of the curriculum in other academic art-related institutions. Sanved’s impact can be gauged by the sheer number of trainers, volunteers, and audiences that the curriculum has reached and by their innovative mode of communication, which breaks away from ordinary speech-making to deliver complex messages about patriarchy, trafficking, and women’s sufferings and empowerment.

Sanved has been working with 255 youths in Kolkata, including women from Sanlaap and other NGOs, on a regular basis. Indirectly through seminars, workshops, performances, and campaigns, Sanved reaches more than 3000 people in India and abroad. The project has trained fifteen leaders in India, Bangladesh, and Nepal who are working as peer educators, youth motivators, and dance therapists with vulnerable populations.

**Between the Prosaic and the Poetic: Using Creative Writing and Poetry as a Form of Empowerment**

“Take that old, material utensil, language, found all about you, blank with family-arity, smeared with daily use, and make it into something that means more than it says. What poetry is made of is so old, so familiar, that it's easy to forget that It's not just the words, but polyrhythmic sounds, speech in its first endeavors (Every poem breaks a silence that had to be overcome), prismatic meanings lit by each other's light, stained by each other's shadows.”

- Adrienne Rich, 1995

Kalam is an empowerment project attended by women and men from Sanlaap, New Light, and Jabala that emphasizes empowerment through poetry.
“We encourage them not to look at themselves being forced to be part of the mainstream by characterizing them as either victims of trafficking or exploited in sex trade but go beyond the binaries constructed by the NGOs and funding agencies and discover themselves as individuals. We feel we have been able to encourage the women to emerge as complicated individuals with complicated interactions with the outside world but with the power to locate herself and express her desires in the midst of the chaos that she is living in.” - Quote from Kalam Founder/Director Bishan Samaddar

Creative writing, including poetry writing exercises, has been used as a form of storytelling about the self with therapeutic value among patients in hospitals (Bolton 1992). Although the majority of the research on the therapeutic value of poetry among hospital patients and marginalized populations has been conducted in the US and the UK, much of India’s struggle for independence also has seen a flourishing of nationalist and women’s poetry. Inspired by writing programs for adolescents in the US, Sahar S. Rumani and Bishan Samaddar, with funding from the Daywalka Foundation, introduced “Kalam: Margins Write” to the women of Sanlaap. Bishan, the instructor and founder of the program, argues that Kalam’s basic goal was to motivate people to use poetry and reading as forms of empowerment for the creation of one’s own identity. Bishan also claims that by emphasizing poetry writing as a primary form of expression, Kalam challenges stereotypes as to who gets to write poetry and for whom. Kalam’s organizers specifically chose Sanlaap as the site for their work, first, because of the Daywalka Foundation’s emphasis on anti-trafficking and, secondly, because the instructors felt the
women from Sanlaap already had exposure to basic literacy. However, not all women from Sanlaap participate in Kalam, and those who participate are typically recommended to the project by the organization’s staff. A majority of the women participating in Kalam are trafficking survivors, but quite a few are children of sex workers at risk of entering the trade. There were four men and seven women active in Kalam at the time I conducted research.

Kalam initially started with a creative writing workshop spread over twenty weeks for two hours each day. The primary objective of this workshop was to provide the women with the basic tools to become writers. Bishan emphasized that this process was directed not only towards preparing the participants for poetry writing but also towards making them conscious of their own identity and the way they want to be perceived by society. The ultimate goal was to help the participants overcome the trauma of surviving trafficking or being at risk of trafficking, through discovery of inner selves that are full of confidence, positive self-esteem, and consciousness about their rights as women. In addition, Kalam also trains the participants in publishing skills. Bishan pointed out a book of poetry entitled *Poetic Spaces*, published by the Daywalka Foundation, as the product of the twenty-week writing workshop. An example of the methodologies used by Kalam is a role-playing workshop about religious-based gender identities and a collective deconstruction by participants of how individuals are reduced to signified roles. Participants were encouraged to question these signifiers and express their thoughts through poetry. Most participants found this difficult initially.
The Kalam participants expressed a range of opinions about their poetry writing experiences. A large portion of the Kalam women interviewed by me said that they felt safe to explore complex emotions over a period of time and found the collective creative writing space a welcome break from the otherwise structured spaces of the shelter and the vocational training sites. According to Rina, a twenty-one-year-old who has been living at Sanlaap since 1993:

I joined Kalam in 2004. I did not know anything about Kalam. I did not have any habit of writing and did not have much interest. I thought at that time, if I liked the first class of Kalam I should come and join. I really enjoyed the class/workshop. Sanlaap did not tell us anything about Kalam. At first Bishan and Sahar came to our place and made the offer. Since then regular classes were arranged and are going on. (Rina, Interview 13 07/02/2006)

The founders of Kalam were primarily interested in creating a space that provided the women and children who were referred to them with creative tools. Kalam’s methodology is rooted in role-playing, free-flowing exercises, word association games, and collective debriefing. Saraswati, another participant, noted:

The classes of Kalam were really interesting, and we enjoyed the classes and the techniques of learning how to write. Kalam classes were arranged thrice a week: Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday. We come here by bus. Our attendance is at 10 AM. At first the Kalam workshop was arranged at Bagha Jatin Home. Its approach was different as well as interesting. In our first class of Kalam, Bishan

45 The working women’s shelter run by Sanlaap.
taught us to make new sentences containing some thoughts with new words, and it was a specific game. They gave us new words to describe our partners or friends. We all together came up with new stories; we did enact something to describe our thoughts. There are no strict and rigid guidelines in Kalam classes. It is really a place for us to think, to write, to express independently. (Saraswati, Interview 13, 07/02/06)

When asked about her ability to express herself at Kalam classes, she replied:

Kalam has given us inner strength; it has enhanced our will power. We now have a strong base from where we can easily and confidently express our thoughts. During our first classes in Kalam, Bishan and Sahar told us to use different images in expressing our thoughts. They helped us in constructing the idea of writing. After joining Kalam our confidence has increased. We became bolder in expressing ourselves. We came to know how to mix with others. Now we are able to take responsibilities. At Kalam we really learn many new things. Kalam has helped in building our own identity. There is an environment of healthy competition. (Saraswati, Interview 13, 07/02/06)

Kalam, as an exercise in creative writing and poetry composition, provides the women from Sanlaap’s shelters and other places with a space that breaks from the structured spaces of the NGO and from their specific rhetoric on empowerment. The women and girl children participants are able to recast themselves and form a notion of self that is based upon a critical, collective, and reflective process. This process is crucial in the formation of a holistic sense of self. A sense of “self empowerment” is created that
challenges the binaries of being a rescued woman and a victim among these women. The environment of mixed gender presence in Kalam, although initially difficult, helped to create positive images about men. Further, the intense personal reflections that the women engage in along with men in the group enable them to renegotiate their sense of connections with other males. This adds to my discussion of the role of male staff members in changing perceptions about male interactions for the women of the three organizations. Kalam, therefore, along with Sanved, becomes a critical space for the creation of a sense of collective empowerment of women as poets and dancers. This is a departure from the accepted role of NGOs as creators of neoliberal citizens. Empowerment initiatives like Sanved and Kalam are thus creating spaces that subvert the strategies needed to create a neoliberal citizen.

The economic empowerment schemes adopted by the three organizations address issues of sense of self for the women through skill-building programs that aim to enable them to take up economic opportunities that were previously unavailable to them. Yet a close examination of the post-training processes that the women undergo reveals multiple levels of difficulty that the women face when they leave the premises of the organization, which raises the question of whether acquiring an economic skill is enough for these women to have a sense of self and esteem to reintegrate and rehabilitate.

It is evident, from the failures of a majority of the women (according to Tanika, interview 9, 04/08/06) in gaining meaningful and continuous employment in the different skills they are being trained in, that a mere imparting of skills does not constitute economic or other empowerment. Further, as mentioned earlier, the conceptualization of
the beneficiaries as individual entrepreneurs vs. workers in a free market system leaves very little scope for collective economic organizing.

The spaces based on collective identity-building and other collective processes are cultural projects. In these cultural projects, the NGO beneficiaries develop their notions of self and learn skills to draw strength from their newly acquired senses of self within a patriarchal society that still holds immense prejudice against women who have been trafficked or are engaged in the sex trade. This is significant for understanding how staff of organizations like Sanlaap, New Light, and Jabala, who clearly espoused a goal to create neoliberal citizens, were unaware that they were creating spaces that subvert the strategies needed to create one.

My research revealed that intersections among neoliberal economic ideologies, transnationally framed NGO cultures, and their diplomatic engagements with state institutions inform the incomplete project of transforming the “marginal,” “criminal” subject (women involved in sex trade) into a neoliberal economic citizen of the globalized Indian state. The empowerment projects seek to “reintegrate” the women into “proper gendered life trajectories” by imparting gender-specific neoliberal economic skills. This process, as evidenced in the contested meaning creations within the NGOs, associational ties formed through cultural projects, and shelter living arrangements, is a ruptured/broken process. The ruptures are also evidenced in the strategic ways in which NGO elites deploy notions of “victimhood” in sites such as the judiciary and other state agencies.
Conclusions

Overview

This dissertation was initially conceptualized as a project for understanding the processes and cultures of three NGOs dedicated to women’s empowerment. The works of feminist scholars like Sonia Alvarez, Joan Scott, and others influenced the theoretical underpinnings of the questions raised about the workings of women’s rights NGOs and the role of gender in their work. However, fieldwork at the three NGOs changed the project, and empowerment, rather than organizational culture, became the central theme of analysis. This change came about primarily because of my findings in the field concerning the women beneficiaries’ important role in influencing the work of the NGOs. My close communications with and observations of these women and the staff members of the three NGOs revealed a complex scenario of NGO interactions with the state, funding agencies, and their beneficiaries, and as a feminist scholar I felt it imperative to shift my focus to this aspect. Such complexity in the web of interactions among actors exposes the limits of research that labels NGO-led empowerment processes as neoliberal. For example, Aradhana Sharma argues that in the era of neoliberal governmentality, NGOs signify a new mechanism of rule and governance formerly assigned to the state (2008). Although I agree in principle with Sharma’s claims, my research revealed that NGOs often are themselves manipulated by the women using their services, which makes them fertile spaces for continuous contestation between the neoliberal agenda of creating self-regulating individuals and the agency of “beneficiaries” who find strength in reverting to their collective identities as sex workers or NGO women.
My dissertation analyzed three NGOs—Sanlaap, Jabala, and New Light—as sites of contesting and reconciling neoliberal notions of empowerment for women involved in sex work and trafficking. I found that the deployment of a neoliberal agenda for empowerment remains incomplete, thus challenging a homogenous conceptualization of women’s rights NGOs as primarily agencies for creating self-regulating economic subjects of the globalized Indian nation. What emerges is that while the three NGOs continue with their neoliberal empowerment agenda, they also create certain spaces and opportunities for the women to challenge such an enterprise. I also found the creation of gendered spaces, through the increasing number of male staff members at the three NGOs, to be part of the neoliberal empowerment agenda.

The dissertation research has revealed that organizational structure and daily activities are vital domains for theorizing the work of the three NGOs around women’s empowerment. Rather than studying processes of empowerment solely by analyzing the beneficiaries of projects, I also studied the dynamics of staff-to-staff and staff-to-beneficiary interactions and perceptions. The discussion of the different kinds of staff members and the role of the men in the NGOs revealed organizational shifts taking place within NGOs in Bengal. This shift is a consequence of increasing demands from foreign funders, and it results in a growing homogeneity in agendas and empowerment strategies among the NGOs. However, a careful interrogation of field staff and observations of their interactions with beneficiaries revealed a variegated picture of empowerment. This picture challenges a linear conceptualization of senior and field staff-directed processes of empowerment. By observing the daily interactions among the different actors, I was
able to witness the beneficiaries’ capacity for negotiation, which they perhaps experienced as a way of asserting their agency.

I used the literature on gendered organizations to analyze the organizational hierarchy and culture of the three NGOs. For example, using Joan Scott’s definition of genderedness and Acker’s five categories of processes, I identified the three NGOs as hierarchical, professionalized, and gendered entities. This contradicts the initial claims the NGO directors made that their organizations have a semi-formal structure. Also, the differences across organizations in terms of divergent histories, goals, rhetoric, and targeted beneficiaries were less relevant than how similar these organizations were in terms of their organizational cultures, hierarchies, and operations. All three organizations, though led by women, have a large number of men working in different key positions. Men mostly command important roles as finance officers, field officers, and marketing heads, a pattern that reinforces a continued gendered division of labor in the three organizations. However, the gendered spaces created with the increasing number of men in the organizations are not devoid of feminist interventions and commitment to women’s empowerment, as these men are subjected to challenging notions about patriarchy through the gender mainstreaming workshops and through their daily interactions with the beneficiaries. I also discovered that gendered labor in the three NGOs intersected with education, class privilege, knowledge of the sex work profession, and familial networks, all of which determined different actors’ roles in the operationalization of empowerment projects. I found that although the hierarchical organizational structures of the NGOs frame the empowerment initiatives, staff members have more flexibility in the
implementation of such projects. Sanlaap’s hierarchical organizational structure helps them to appeal to the funding agencies (foreign and state) as an established space for advocating a certain kind of women’s empowerment, which encourages smaller, less hierarchical organizations like Jabala and New Light to move in that direction. Thus it is necessary to study the organizational structures of NGOs in the light of the funders’ perception of NGOs and their role in advocating women’s empowerment.

The three NGOs’ interactions with state and other funding agencies revealed the importance of transnational notions of “gender mainstreaming” to the goal of achieving “gender equality” for the victims of sex work and trafficking. The organizations’ mission statements, as well as some responses during interviews, allude to gender equality as the NGOs’ empowerment goal, but in practice their initiatives are aimed towards the beneficiaries’ social reintegration, in the sense of reintegration through presenting specific forms of gendered behavior and opportunities for enhancing their livelihood. Nonetheless, I identified potential areas for transformation and change even in such a gendered context; for instance, the shift in some male staff members’ attitudes (e.g., about sex work) shows that staff members are aware of the disconnect between organizational rhetoric and the realities of the lives of their beneficiaries.

In Chapter 3, I discussed historical details necessary for understanding the present role of NGOs in women’s empowerment in West Bengal, India. For example, although the NGO sector addressing women’s issues in Bengal has evolved with the historical trends of the time, like neoliberalism, it retains its unique character because of its history of left-dominated politics since the 1970s. By 2006, the time when fieldwork for this
study was conducted, I found that NGOs with neoliberal empowerment agendas were proliferating in Bengal, a development that coincided with a shift in the economic policies of not only the central Indian government but also the local left government. Recognizing the role of neoliberalism in the rise of NGOs is important for analyzing the current role of NGOs, their relationships with the state, and their future directions.

Another finding pertains to the role of women’s rights NGOs as multi-layered sites of transnational meanings constructed around concept, practice, and goals for women’s empowerment. Multiple factors, such as international funding agencies and neoliberal state policies, play key roles in how empowerment projects are conceived and defined. I found that NGOs strategically use such interactions with funders to change meanings of empowerment and that the “beneficiaries” manipulate these meanings to suit their day-to-day livelihood needs. Thus, even the outwardly anti-sex work NGOs, who are ideologically dedicated to eradication of the trade and often blame it for the trafficking of women and girls, end up providing certain necessary support to the sex workers to continue their survival through the sex trade. An outsider, looking at the work of these NGOs, would not comprehend the contradictory workings of the organizations. This works well for funders with similar ideological dispositions, who see what they want and what the NGO staff want them to see. My close involvement and analysis of the day-to-day lives of the staff and beneficiaries of these organizations revealed many instances when these women’s agency turned the situation to their advantage. Their enactment of agency exposes the limits and dangers of viewing NGOs as mere representatives of
certain transnational ideological frameworks, like the creation of neoliberal citizens, when it comes to empowering their beneficiaries.

On another level, the three NGOs studied are internally mostly conformists when it comes to conceptualizing traditional gender roles for women as authentic paths for empowerment. As discussed in Chapter 3, ideals of gender role conformity are increasingly fraught with conflicts between tradition and modernity. The NGOs create certain spaces for their beneficiaries like Sanved and Kalam, discussed in Chapter 4, which are then used as associational spaces by the women themselves. For example, I explained how beneficiaries try to use economic empowerment initiatives—like sewing and block printing, rooted in certain traditional reifications of feminine roles—to their advantage and often fail. I also showed how many women of the three NGOs draw a sense of empowerment from their collective identities as sex workers, trafficking survivors, and NGO women. This is most clear in the cases of women who return to the NGOs for employment and other services like childcare and who then integrate non-economic empowerment into their work with other sex workers.

I found that the ideological divide on trafficking, as mentioned by Doezema (2010) and Dewey and Kelly (2011), influences the rhetoric and objectives of these organizations, which would classify themselves as anti-sex work NGOs. However, analysis of the daily interactions between the staff and the sex workers reveals a relationship that is transformative not only for the sex workers (as expected by NGOs like New Light) but even more for some staff members, like the men discussed in Chapter 3 who work with the sex workers. I argue that staff members, through daily interactions
with their subjects, are transformed through their growing appreciation of their beneficiaries’ life decisions, even when they ideologically disagree with them.

In Chapters 3 and 4, I discussed the gendered nature of discourses emerging from interviews with the staff and beneficiaries and in the organizational literature and how it reveals a reiteration of the gender binary in the traditional roles of women as mothers and wives in the empowerment projects of the three NGOs. These roles are then rebranded, along with the identity of a “working woman,” as possible routes of “rehabilitation” for the beneficiaries. The women beneficiaries, therefore, are caught between two distinct gender binaries—traditional versus neoliberal, victim versus emancipated (from sex work)—and engage in continuous contestations with these rebranded binaries. What then emerges is constant multi-dimensional negotiations among NGO managers, field staff, and the women themselves in the construction of the self-regulating, empowered neoliberal subject. The contradictions become obvious when all three organizations discourage sex work and yet provide childcare for the women who choose to remain in the sex trade. Yet there are organizational poster cases, such as that of Molly, who was rescued from sex work by the organization Jabala and received training in public speaking and block printing. Molly expresses disgust for the sex trade and spends time working for Jabala in discouraging women from returning to sex work. She finds strength and power in the collective identity as a “Jabala woman” and not as an empowered individual, which highlights her journey from one collective identity (sex worker) to another (NGO woman) in search of viable economic means. Thus NGO women like Reshma, who are conceived as beneficiaries, make use of collective spaces such as the
dance and writing projects and shelter space while partaking in the economic skill-building projects (which are singular in focus), in hopes of supplementing their incomes.

**Contributions of This Dissertation**

This study challenges previous scholarship about NGOs as creators of neoliberal citizens that have focused on macro-level analysis of NGO empowerment projects as successfully creating, in collusion with the state and other funding agencies, self-regulating individuals with the potential for economic empowerment. This dissertation also challenges feminist research that fails to hear the dissenting voices of women who are at the receiving end of such empowerment initiatives. My research suggests a need to reevaluate research on NGOs that has tended to focus only on the beneficiaries and the projects and not on the role of the organizational culture and hierarchy in the adoption and operationalization of ideas about empowerment. Although some feminists like Aditi Mitra (2011a, 2011b) have studied women staff members in NGOs, my research included not only the women staff members of the NGOs and their perceptions about empowerment but also the men in the organizations who have steadily increased in numbers. My dissertation also contributes to the theorizing of NGOs as neoliberal entities. Although I do not dispute this interpretation, I revealed that there are ways in which a neoliberal project can create spaces and opportunities for contestation of such ideas. I believe my training in feminist theory helped to identify those spaces by leading me to apply meta-theories of neoliberalism and the construction of neoliberal subjects to my broader analysis of the micro-level situation in West Bengal, India. This notion merits the attention of theorists from all disciplines working on neoliberalism, who would
benefit from considering the experiences, concerns, and reflections of women beneficiaries and staff members who are at the receiving end of any neoliberal enterprise before characterizing them as neoliberal subjects and citizens or vehicles of such. The spaces where women from different NGOs come together and express themselves through poetry and dance are most important for not only what they are but what they can become in the near future. These spaces challenge the binaries of NGO ideology (pro- vs anti-sex work) and allow new kinds of networks to be forged, thus creating the potential for new forms of activism. I contend that empowerment is risky and sometimes political. Scholars like Raju (2006) have argued that neoliberal governmentalization may produce depoliticization, but it also makes new forms of political activism possible through network building and identity formation in spaces created by neoliberal entities. My field experience was a testament to this phenomenon. For now, identities such as NGO women (Sanlaap, Jabala, and New Light) may seem benign and spaces like Sanved and Kalaam apolitical, but I believe they have in them the seeds of collective agency with potential for future collective activism.

My study of the organizational structure of the three NGOs in light of the literature on gendering of organizations revealed the limitations of using western frameworks to understand the role of gender in organizational structures of the NGOs. The analysis in Chapter 3 of the increasing importance of men in the three organizations showed that although it seems that the increase in men in key NGO positions reintroduces binaries based on gendered division of labor, in reality this process is also a ruptured one as men’s roles in the NGOs are mediated by their professional training, family
connections, and most importantly their interaction with the beneficiaries. Thus the
gendered nature of their role does not always result in the reinforcement of gendered
hierarchy and a patriarchal culture within the organizations. The men continue to enter
and work under the direction of women in power positions, and men interviewed for this
project claimed that their exposure to the field and the gender training workshops helped
them to challenge their own patriarchal attitude towards women. Thus these three NGOs
are gendered organizations but also foster spaces where both men and women working
within them learn to challenge notions of patriarchy.

This study also prescribes a pragmatic and nuanced relationship between the
NGOs and the state. As shown in Chapter 4, the relationship between the state and the
NGOs of this study is simultaneously helpful and detrimental to women’s empowerment.
What is important is how individual actors (staff, beneficiaries) navigate this relationship
in their daily activities. While the NGOs of this study continue to remain highly regulated
because they depend on the state for accessing funding for their beneficiaries, while these
conditions of regulation are often mediated by law enforcement agencies and the legal
system, my research indicated that there is room for interpretation within this relationship
when it comes to implementation. Thus although the state provides oversight, the NGOs
are still able to use its resources to shape their own meanings.

My dissertation also suggests that researchers and practitioners should reevaluate
the process of “rehabilitation of sex workers and trafficking survivors” as I did in Bengal,
India. It was evident from interviews with the three organizations’ staff and beneficiaries
that the current methods of rehabilitation used by the NGOs, prescribed by the state and
other funding agencies, are not working, as most of these women either went back to sex work or were re-trafficked. The time has also come for reevaluating the ability of funders to determine NGO agendas in the global south and for raising questions about NGOs’ accountability not only to their funders but also to the women they serve. This is because of what I characterize as the funders’ (both government and private) privileging of ideology over social and cultural context in shaping organizational funding.

I also propose that a particular thesis widely regarded by feminists affiliated with CATW, which presents an unsubstantiated, straightforward, causal link between rehabilitation efforts of anti-prostitution NGOs and the production of neoliberal feminine subjects, needs to be evaluated with data from reality. The idea that this thesis is suited for a state aggressively moving toward a free market economy needs to be interrogated in light of context-specific, empirically grounded ethnographies. My own research is an attempt to move in this direction. As the myriad examples I have discussed evince, the neoliberal project has failed, or at least remains incomplete, at instantiating an individuated female subject “freed up” for the market and abstracted from normative demands of socio-familial structures.

The NGOs working on women’s empowerment in Bengal face some contextually unique challenges, as shown in this dissertation. However, I have found Bengal remains a fertile ground for competing ideologies when it comes to notions about women’s empowerment, especially the empowerment of trafficking survivors and sex workers who

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46 A grounded ethnography is best because the researcher can be alert to levels of mediation (between NGOs and “the subject to be rehabilitated”) that go into determining the outcome of the rehabilitation programs. This can show the ways in which the neoliberal project is thwarted, even if partially, or remains incomplete, as I found.
leave the trade. There is ample room to further investigate the differences in NGO approaches to sex work and sex workers in light of an increasing rift between organizations on the question of the legalization of sex work. Some organizations that claim to be pro- or anti-sex work coexist in the same areas, vying for funding from similar funding sources, both local and international. In Chapter 4, I discussed some transnational influences in Sanlaap’s adoption of an anti-sex work ideological position. I showed that the organizational position is also a result of its personnel’s ideological positions and feedback from the beneficiaries, and that it is often challenged in its daily operations. The NGOs, notwithstanding their expressed agendas and the hidden and explicit intentions of their donors, often draw some of their workforce locally, from the very social sphere upon which they supposedly act. Thus, the work culture of a specific NGO operating in a specific context is not solely determined by its stated agenda or that of its donors but is often deeply inflected with the prejudices, social expectations, and cultural assumptions that this workforce brings to the organization. Research on NGOs also needs to be done by looking at the broader historical and political context in which they operate.

In my future work I propose to emphasize and explore this aspect of NGOs’ social embeddedness. I will focus on the backgrounds of NGO workers—both women and men—and beneficiaries, their modes of functioning at work, the practices they generate, their idle lunch time chatter, and so on. I hope to investigate more deeply how the location of the NGO in specific instances generates discourses beyond its expressed agenda and the manner in which such discourses act as vectors in determining the
outcomes of NGO-run programs. It will be interesting to compare the empowerment frameworks of a pro-sex work organization like Durbar Mahila Samity with that of an anti-sex work organization like Sanlaap as they operate in the same localities.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, Sanlaap is the largest and the most influential in framing debates for other NGOs in Kolkata. While New Light and Jabala are smaller, and internally the staff revealed a more grounded approach to sex work, it is evident from the interviews that the senior management at both these organizations covet Sanlaap’s size, finances, and political connections. Sanlaap’s notions around “victimhood” and “saving women,” then, became nodal points for the diffusion of gendered ideas about empowerment to other smaller organizations, both locally and transnationally. Field observations revealed that, although the two smaller NGOs were critical about some of Sanlaap’s practices, in reality they strive to emulate the larger organization. It will be an interesting project to study in what ways the work of the smaller NGOs is influenced by the work of the bigger ones.

I am also interested in focusing my research on social actors who act as go-betweens and mediate between an NGO and the “beneficiaries to be rehabilitated.” Examples from my current research already indicate possible subjects for future research: actors from neighborhood clubs or other civil society organizations who often have multiple ties and sociopolitical obligations to juggle. For instance, the local clubs in Bengal in every neighborhood (para in Bengali) provide a continuous supply of temporary and permanent NGO workers. These actors and their “voluntarist” social actions are often mediated by their relationships to local political bosses and affiliations.
with parties operating within the constraints of an electoral democracy. These affiliations may potentially undercut the agenda of the NGO operating in the locality and transform the nature of voluntarist civil society actions when such individuals join the NGOs. Such actors may need to negotiate multiple ties of loyalty and protection on behalf of the NGOs. This is a particularly ripe area for research, as it opens up the possibility for studying NGOs in a much broader context than has previous research. This would provide an opportunity to understand how NGO programs emerge within the context of a variety of organizational actor-other NGOs, civil society in general, and local, national, and international politics. These kinds of research will continue to shed light on meanings of everyday practices, which in turn will reveal the shifts in the NGOs’ organizational structures and their relationships with their beneficiaries and the society at large. This is important for me as a feminist scholar as I continue to interrogate the new challenges and possibilities for women’s empowerment in this sector.
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178


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- A Documentation
- An Effort Against Women and Child Abuse (Manifesto)
• The End of a Beginning (Booklet)
• Gender, Sex & Sexuality, HIV/AIDS, Migration & Trafficking (Training Manual)
• Is This Your Child’s Future? (Poster)
• Jayga Badal Surakshita Hok (Poster)
• Jonaki (September 1996) (Newsletter)
• Looking Back and Ahead
• Looking Back Planning Ahead: 2003-2004
• Make Migration Safe (Poster)
• Press Coverage of Sanlaap (1993-2002)
• Quality Care Standards for services provided to Child Victims of Commercial Sexual Exploitation & The Child Protection Policy of Sanlaap (Booklet)
• Sayakbarta (Newsletter):
  o November 2005
  o January-February 2006
  o March 2006
  o July 2006
• Trafficking? Why? What? (Manifesto)
• UNCEDAW: Empowering Women (Booklet)
• Women and Child Trafficking (Leaflet)

From Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee:

• Din Badaler Palla Shuru
• Report of the First National Conference of Sex Workers (1997)
• Sex Workers’ Right to Self Determination: Theme Paper for the West Bengal State Conference (1997)
• Shanti Utsav (2002)

From West Bengal Commission for Women:

• Dharshhan O Ain: Sexual Violence and Law (March 2002)
• Implementing Vishaka (August 2004; Status Report)
• Meyeder Chokhe Ain O Ainer Chokhe Meyera: Edited by Jashodhara Bagchi and Anindita Bhaduri (September 2001)
• Narikantha (Newsletter of West Bengal Commission for Women):
  o March 2002 (Bengali)
  o March 2002 (English)
  o June 2002 (Bengali)
  o September 2002 (Bengali)
  o December 2002 (Bengali)
  o March 2003 (Bengali & English)
  o June, September 2003 (Bengali)
  o March 2004 (Bengali & English)
- June, September, December 2004 (Bengali)
- March 2005 (Bengali)
- March 2005 (English)
- June 2005 (Bengali)
- September & December 2005 (Bengali)
- March 2006 (English)

- Paschim Banga Mahila Commission: Uddeshya O Karanio
- Political Empowerment of Women: A Sanlaap Experience, by Indrani Sinha
- Sishukanya: Ai Samaye Ai Muhurte—Samasya O Sahay, by Gairika Ghosh
- West Bengal Commission for Women and Ababhash:

**Other:**

- Case Report No.: Re.N.T.S P.S Case No 27 of 2006
- Draft Commission Paper on Trafficking in Women, by Malini Bhattacharya
- Naripachar (Sananda)
- Nari Unnayaner janya Sarkari Prakalpa Talika O Tathya Sachetana
- Pachar: Ekti Samajik Samasya/Trafficking: A Social Problem (Leaflet)
- Seminar on Trafficking In Women & Children in India with Emphasis on West Bengal
- The Status of Women: A Reality check (Manifesto; Swayam)
- The Study of Rehabilitation of Sex Workers Economic & Social Implications (Dissertation Draft)
- Trafficking of Children, by Dr.Jyotsna Chatterjee
- Two Day Seminar on Trafficking in Women & Children in the Eastern Region - West Bengal Commission for Women
- What Do We Mean by Violence Against Women? (Manifesto; Swayam)
- Women and Security: Eastern Regional Conference Indian Association for Women’s Security
- Women’s Human Rights: Preliminary Guide for NGOs, Women’s Groups and Individuals (Book)
- The Youth Partnership Project (Manifesto; Christian Aid)

Research project: by U.N.D.P- UNIFEM
Item no. 2-10

Annex 5

Trafficking in South Asia

Human Rights Standards for the Treatment of Trafficked Persons

Trafficking in Women & Children

Anti Trafficking Programs in South Asia

How to Organise Women’s Groups?
Appendix A Interviews

Appendix A.1 Formal Interviews

Formal Interviews: This is a list of the formal interviews conducted during the fieldwork in the three organizations and other sites like office of funding agencies, government, etc. The real names of the participants are not disclosed, except for the directors of each NGO.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview No.</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Designation</th>
<th>Date of interview</th>
<th>Sex/Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sinha</td>
<td>Sanlaap</td>
<td>Director/staff.</td>
<td>03/10/06, 08/10/06</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mita</td>
<td>Sanlaap</td>
<td>The main point person of the organization, Mita does most of the coordination of the organization and rose up the hierarchy through showing loyalty towards the organization. She has a higher degree (MA).</td>
<td>01/06/06</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Shomik</td>
<td>Sanlaap</td>
<td>Has been in the organization for quite a few years. Works for the programming department and is one of the main faces of the</td>
<td>04/06/06, 04/07/06</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
organization as he communicates with the funders as lot. Has extensive activism experience and has worked in the field.

4. Pulak Sanlaap Has been with Sanlaap since its beginning, arrived from leftist student movement, currently a bit disillusioned with the leftist government. He is in charge of the newsletter and publicity department.
   02/06/06 03/12/06 Male

5. Anima Sanlaap Counselor 1, professionally educated from a university in United Kingdom; exercises a lot of influence in the activities of the shelter.
   04/24/06 05/12/06 Female

   05/12/06 Female

7. Swapna Sanlaap Counselor 3, professionally educated.
   05/12/06 Female

8. Radha Sanlaap Counselor 4, professionally educated.
   05/12/06 Female

9. Tanika Sanlaap Staff (legal/senior). One of the most
   04/08/06 Female
influential persons in the organization. She is the main point person with the state and legal agencies and exercises a lot of influence on the “beneficiaries” in the organization. Has come up the organizational hierarchy through experience and effectiveness as a legal activist. However, she does not have a law degree and is primarily self-taught on the legal rights of trafficked women.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pradip Sanlaap Staff (marketing/senior)</th>
<th>06/08/06</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td></td>
<td>06/10/06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One of the young guns of the organization, he is related to the director, has a western degree, and is extremely influential in the management practices of the organization. He was also trained in the leftist student movement and advocates for
making Sanlaap a movement rather than an NGO.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Sebanti</td>
<td>Sanlaap</td>
<td>Administrative staff in the shelter, professionally trained.</td>
<td>05/13/06</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Rikhiadi</td>
<td>Sanlaap</td>
<td>One of the senior staff members of the organization; has been with Sanlaap since its beginning, runs the drop-in center at Kalighat. One of the most experienced activists in the organization and not professionally trained.</td>
<td>07/20/06</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Rinadi</td>
<td>Sanlaap</td>
<td>Another senior staff member of the organization; has been with Sanlaap since its beginning, runs the drop-in center at Kalighat. One of the most experienced activists in the organization and is not professionally trained. Was part of the leftist movement in the seventies.</td>
<td>07/20/06</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Reshma</td>
<td>Sanlaap</td>
<td>Erstwhile beneficiary, she is now back in the</td>
<td>03/02/06 04/12/06</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
organization working as the sewing teacher. She has very good relations with the women in the shelter. She emphasized the need for reevaluating the rehabilitation process for the women, as just skill training is not adequate in a society that has so much prejudice against sex work.

<p>| | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Rita</td>
<td>Sanlaap</td>
<td>Same as Reshma, she is the leader of block printing. Happily married. She was initially “rescued” by the police and brought to Sanlaap.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>04/12/06 04/13/06 05/07/06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Guria</td>
<td>Sanlaap</td>
<td>Computer teacher, hails from a marginalized background. Was trained by Uddami to become a computer teacher for Sanlaap. She claims to identify with the women in the shelter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>07/07/06 07/10/06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Mrinmoyee</td>
<td>Sanlaap</td>
<td>Professionally trained</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>07/15/06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>Role and Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Sabita</td>
<td>Sanlaap</td>
<td>Professionally trained, in charge of the youth programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>Karabi</td>
<td>Sanlaap</td>
<td>In charge of the income generation programs, she has an art degree.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>Baitali</td>
<td>Jabala</td>
<td>Director and professionally educated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>Swati</td>
<td>Jabala</td>
<td>Professionally educated; does multitasking for the organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>Sushmi</td>
<td>Jabala</td>
<td>Works as an activist in the border communities, which are deemed vulnerable for trafficking, not professionally educated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>Molly</td>
<td>Jabala</td>
<td>Was a “beneficiary,” now the poster child for organizational rehabilitation, she works as administrative staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td>Urmi Basu</td>
<td>New Light</td>
<td>Director.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>Hansha</td>
<td>New Light</td>
<td>Professionally trained, does multitasking, no clearly defined role; however, extremely influential in the organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26.</td>
<td>Raju</td>
<td>New Light</td>
<td>Activist, member of local club, now works for New Light, not educated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.</td>
<td>Gopal</td>
<td>New Light</td>
<td>Like Raju, works closely with the sex workers and their children, not educated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.</td>
<td>Malati</td>
<td>New Light</td>
<td>Sex worker and a staff member for this organization; she works as the connection between the community and the organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.</td>
<td>Jashodhara Bagchi</td>
<td>West Bengal Women’s Commission</td>
<td>Chairperson.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.</td>
<td>Sumit</td>
<td>Terres des Hommes</td>
<td>Funder and the representative of Terres Des Hommes, a Swiss funding agency which funds projects on literacy programs for children of sex workers, among other things.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.</td>
<td>Jenn</td>
<td>Daywalka</td>
<td>Funder and program director of Daywalka.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32.</td>
<td>Bishan</td>
<td>Daywalka</td>
<td>Staff/funder.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33.</td>
<td>Rina</td>
<td>Kalam/Daywalka</td>
<td>Beneficiary from Sanlaap.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34.</td>
<td>Sushit</td>
<td>Daywalka</td>
<td>Legal expert and in charge of the</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix A.2

The following are the list of beneficiaries I interviewed both formally and informally, but mostly informally. The names of their organizations are not mentioned for their benefit.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Background info</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Ajmira Trafficking survivor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Anima Trafficking survivor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Anita Trafficking survivor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Ashtami</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>Asmuda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>Tina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>Mina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>Sanatani</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>BiBi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>Banani</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>Dolly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>Fatema</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>Rina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>Saraswati</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B: Empowerment Programs

Below I delineate the empowerment programs that are within the ambit of this current study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Empowerment projects</th>
<th>Block Printing</th>
<th>Sewing</th>
<th>Computer Literacy</th>
<th>Sanved (Dance)</th>
<th>Kalam (Poetry Writing)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sites</td>
<td>Shelter of Sanlaap</td>
<td>Shelter of Sanlaap, Office of Jabala, Office of New Light, Drop-in Centers of Sanlaap, Jabala and New Light at Kalighat and Bowbazar.</td>
<td>Shelter of Sanlaap, Daywalka Foundation, Office of Jabala.</td>
<td>Shelter of Sanlaap, Office of Daywalka Foundation</td>
<td>Shelter of Sanlaap, Office of Daywalka Foundation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Beneficiaries involved | Girl Children and women rescued from trafficking by Organization Sanlaap under the Swadhar Program (Government of India) | Girl Children and women rescued from trafficking of Organization Sanlaap under the Swadhar Program (Government of India), Children of sex workers in Kalighat and Bowbazar. | Girl Children and women rescued from trafficking of Organization Sanlaap under the Swadhar Program (Government of India), Children of sex workers in Kalighat and Bowbazar. | Girl Children and women rescued from trafficking of Organization Sanlaap under the Swadhar Program (Government of India), Children of sex workers in Kalighat and Bowbazar. |

| Stated Goals | Economic self-reliance | Economic self-reliance | Economic self-reliance | Dance movement therapy | Empowerment through creative writing |

Appendix C: Funders

Below are the names of the foreign funders, who were funding different programs in Sanlaap, Jabala and New Light in 2006

AD+, Madrid, Spain
Alba Cons Varela
Amistad International
Bangladesh National Women’s Lawyer Association (BNWLA)
BONO - Direkthilfe, Cologne
Campaign Against Child Trafficking (CACT)
Chance Suisse
Christian Aid
Daywalka Foundation
Delphine Prunault
Dhaka Ahsania Mission (DAM)
End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes (ECPAT)
European Commission
Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst (EED)
Federacion Mundo Cooperante, Madrid, Spain
Federation of American Women Overseas, Provence Chapter
Ford Foundation
Fundacion Meridional, Madrid
FX Street.com, Barcelona, Spain
HAQ Foundation

INDITEX, Spain

Infancia Solidaria, Madrid, Spain

International Justice Mission (IJM)

International Organisation for Migration (IOM)

Katholisches Pfarramt St. Vitalis

Kingsland Baptist Church, U.S.A.

Les enfants de personne Sion, Switzerland

Save the Children Sweden and Denmark

Department of State, United States

Singapore International Foundation

Solidaridad Cristiana, Jaen, Spain

South West Care Centre, Santa Fe, New Mexico & Dr. Trevor Hawkins

St. John Ambulance Association

Stop Trafficking, Oppression and Prostitution (STOP)

The Panama Street Fund, Elkins Park, Pennsylvania

The Pranik Healers Association of Kolkata

The Rotary Club Of North Rocks, Sydney, Australia

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

United Nations Fund for Women (UNIFEM)

United Nations International Children’s Education Fund (UNICEF)

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)
Appendix D: West Bengal

Map of West Bengal
### Appendix E: Acronyms

**Acronyms used in this dissertation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ATSEC</td>
<td>Action Against Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation of Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BINGO</td>
<td>Business –oriented International NGO or Big International NGO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAPART</td>
<td>People’s Action and Rural Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CATW</td>
<td>Coalition Against Trafficking of women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPI</td>
<td>Communist Party of India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPI (M)</td>
<td>Communist Party of India (Marxist)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSO</td>
<td>Civil Society Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DONGO</td>
<td>Donor Organized NGO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECPAT</td>
<td>End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENGO</td>
<td>Environmental NGO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FCRA</td>
<td>Foreign Contributions Regulation Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INGO</td>
<td>International NGO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISO</td>
<td>International Organization for Standardization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KVIC</td>
<td>Khadi and Village Industries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maitree</td>
<td>West Bengal Based Feminist Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAMO</td>
<td>National Alliance of Women’s Organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO Non-governmental Organizations</td>
<td>Non-governmental Organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NORAD</td>
<td>Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OXFAM</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PITA</td>
<td>Immoral traffic (Prevention) Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRIA</td>
<td>Society for Participatory Research in Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QUANGO</td>
<td>Quasi-Autonomous NGO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SGRY</td>
<td>Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TMC</td>
<td>Trinamool Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations Children’s Emergency Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNIFEM</td>
<td>United Nations Development Fund for Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNODC</td>
<td>United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>United States of America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WB</td>
<td>West Bengal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WB</td>
<td>World Bank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WBWC</td>
<td>West Bengal Women’s Commission</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>