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**NGO'S AND VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS: DO THEY STRIVE  
FOR PROTECTING RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND THEIR  
EMPOWERMENT?**- Bini. R.A<sup>1</sup>**ABSTRACT**

India being a nation of patriarchal system of governance in the family, it is seep rooted in traditional Indian culture that women are bound to be inside their homes doing daily house hold activities and maintaining the home. But the scenario gradually changed and after the independence of India several laws were enacted to protect the rights of the women. Both the Union Governments and respective State Governments strive hard to achieve this end and thereby implementing various schemes and welfare programmes for the empowerment of women in Indian society.

But the real issue in India is that it is a nation with high amount of population and women comprises almost half of the entire population, so meeting every woman is impractical for the Government. In this regard, several Non-Governmental Organizations and other Voluntary Organizations are assisting the Governments to achieve their obligations. It can be rightly inferred that without the help of NGO and voluntary organizations, Governments would not be able to meet their objectives, vision and mission for protecting the rights of the women which are guaranteed under various legislations pertaining to women and the Indian Constitution at the grass root level.

Keywords - Non-Governmental organization, Voluntary organization, women empowerment, rights of women, grass root level.

**INTRODUCTION**

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India is a nation with varied rich tradition and culture. But when it comes to equality and gender gap between men and women, the stand of India is not up to the mark right from the ancient days. The position of women in Indian society is always worsened. The primary cause for this is the societal thought about women. Often women were considered merely a commodity, having no feelings and their own choices. They were not allowed to get out of their home, always doing household chores and looking after the family. To put an end to all the discrimination and atrocious acts against women, several leaders and social workers fought.

After independence, massive developments took place almost everywhere in the society. The changes do occurred for the women also. India enacted various legislations for the protection of women's rights and their empowerment. The need for separate legislations for women is mainly due to male chauvinism. However, with lots of legislations for women it lead the way for poor implementation of the legislations<sup>2</sup>. Most of the legislations pertaining to women remain only on paperwork. The successful rate of any legislation depends upon the effective implementation of those laws, but as far as legislations for women is concerned the implementation is not done in a proper way. This paved the way for development of Non-Governmental Organizations and other voluntary organizations for women.

The NGOs and voluntary organizations for women address the problems of women even at grass root level<sup>3</sup>. In fact, they conduct programs and campaigns for women and make them aware of their rights. When a particular right of women has been violated, these organizations raise voice for women and ensure that proper justice has been served to them. As a result, people started having hopes on these organizations and they flourished to a great extent.

### **NGO FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT**

NGO stands for Non-Governmental Organization. A NGO is a non-profit organization that works independently of the government for the citizens<sup>4</sup>. Though a NGO is a non-profit one,

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<sup>2</sup>Special Correspondent 'India suffers poor implementation of gender laws: U.N. report' The Hindu (07 July 2011).

<sup>3</sup>763\_34974.pdf <[https://irma.ac.in/uploads/randp/pdf/763\\_34974.pdf](https://irma.ac.in/uploads/randp/pdf/763_34974.pdf)>accessed 03 October 2020.

<sup>4</sup>'What is an NGO (Non-Governmental Organization)?' <<https://www.invesopedia.com/ask/answers/13/what-is-non-government-organization.asp>> accessed 03 October 2020.

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it gets fund from national and international levels. The World Bank defines NGO as “private organizations that pursue activities to relieve suffering, promote the interests of the poor, protect the environment, provide basic social services, or undertake community development<sup>5</sup>.” NGOs work in the wide areas like<sup>6</sup>:

- Education;
- Youth empowerment;
- Women’s rights;
- Human rights;
- Health;
- Rural development and so on.

### DEVELOPMENT OF NGO’S AFTER 1950’S

In the year 1916, Karve started the first women’s university in India called as S.N.D.T. Women’s University. After that Dadabhai Naoroji, Jyotiba Phule and other social workers started to work for the betterment of women. The tremendous improvement in the NGOs happened in 1920s and 1930s when Mahatma Gandhi called the youth to work for the rural, poor and untouchables.

The rapid growth of organized voluntary associations started after the independence of India. Patrick Kilby says that the history of NGO and the relationship of the State in the post-independent period fall into three eras<sup>7</sup>:

- An era of co-operation from independence till late 1950s;
- An era of antagonism from early 1960s till late 1970s; and
- An era of string state control of NGOs from mid 1980s to the present day.

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<sup>5</sup>multi-page.pdf <<http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/814581468739240860/pdf/multi-page.pdf>> accessed 03 October 2020.

<sup>6</sup>‘NGOs 101: Field of Work of NGOs’ <<https://afitabsh.com/2014/09/26/ngos-101-field-of-work-of-ngos/amp/>> accessed 03 October 2020.

<sup>7</sup>10\_chapter4.pdf <[http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/jspui/bitstream/10603/129084/17/10\\_chapter%25204.pdf](http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/jspui/bitstream/10603/129084/17/10_chapter%25204.pdf)> accessed 03 October 2020.

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The big breakthrough for NGOs came after the national emergency of 1975-77. When Janata Party came into power, NGOs developed with the support of the government. And again during the period of Congress in 1980, NGOs grew with less support from the government. During post-liberalisation period, over 70% of the current NGOs emerged.

### **GENDER GAP AND NGO'S**

To address the injustice faced by women and to redress them at the right forum, NGOs play a vital role. One cannot find as many NGOs working for the rights of men in the country. The App 'SIF' which was brought by Save India Family Foundation wherein the details of fifty NGOs in fifty cities in twenty five states was provided<sup>8</sup>. The SIF is an app exclusively for men and that app only provides details of fifty NGOs for men. From this one can understand there are limited NGOs for men. But when taking about the NGOs for women they have no official count on that. So, it is expected that there would be obviously more number of NGOs for women than men in India because being in a male dominant society when men have some amount of NGOs for them, then women would also need NGOs for them and they are the vulnerable group.

The area of protecting rights of women and their empowerment is the area where the scrutiny by the government is less. NGOs can play a prominent role in this area. Based on this two kinds of NGOs emerged<sup>9</sup>:

- Welfare oriented NGOs; and
- Action oriented NGOs.

While the welfare oriented NGOs are basically like an intermediary between donors and vulnerable groups and the action oriented NGOs are involved in the actual empowerment of the women and such other vulnerable side.

### **INTERVENTION BY NGO'S IN GOVT. SCHEMES**

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<sup>8</sup>Press Trust Of India 'Here comes a mobile app to save men from harassment' The Indian Express (11 June 2014).

<sup>9</sup>Supra.

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In a country like India, with vast population, only government cannot achieve the scheme and policies related to women. They cannot meet all the people. In this instance, the role of NGOs comes into picture, they intervene in the implementation of schemes and policies for women for the effective implementation of the same.

### FIVE YEARS PLANS

During the five year plans, many scheme or policies are concentrated for women, which were made successful by the NGOs.

- **First five year plan (1951- 1956)** – establishment of Central Social Welfare Board with the purpose of assisting voluntary agencies in organising welfare programmes for women<sup>10</sup>.
- **Third five year plan (1966-67 to 1968-69)** – assistance in providing educational and health services for women. This work had been partly implemented by the NGOs.
- **Fifth five year plan (1974- 1978)**– Women’s Welfare and Development Bureau was set up under the Ministry of Social Welfare in the year 1976 with an object to co-ordinate policies, programmes and to initiate measures for women’s development<sup>11</sup>. In addition, the National Plan of Action for women also formulated in the same year which served as the guiding document for development of women<sup>12</sup>. Most of the NGOs at that period worked based on that Action Plan.
- **Sixth five year plan (1980-1985)** – chapter 27 of the plan exclusively dealt with ‘Women and Development.’ In 1982, Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA) was formed to provide self-employment opportunities for women belonging to below poverty line<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup>‘Women Empowerment in the Five Year Plans of India’ <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/332780543\\_Women\\_Empowerment\\_in\\_the\\_Five\\_Year\\_Plans\\_of\\_India](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/332780543_Women_Empowerment_in_the_Five_Year_Plans_of_India)> accessed 04 October 2020.

<sup>11</sup>AR2001-02.pdf <<https://wcd.nic.in/sites/default/files/AR2001-02.pdf>> accessed 04 October 2020.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>‘SEWA Self Employed Women’s Association’ <[http://www.sewa.org/movements\\_gujarat.asp](http://www.sewa.org/movements_gujarat.asp)> accessed 04 October 2020.

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- **Seventh five year plan (1985-1990)** – the Department of Women and Child Development was set up. Main achievements are promoting twenty seven beneficiary oriented plans for women in 1986. Also, National Perspective Plan for Women (1988-2000) was formulated which emphasized on reservation of women in several fields.
- **Eighth five year plan (1992-1997)** – National Commission for Women was set up. Some of the schemes were framed by the intervention of NGOs, like<sup>14</sup>
- STEP (Support for Training and Employment);
  - TEPC (Training cum Employment cum Production Centres; and
  - TRYSEM (Training of rural Youth for Self Employment Programmes)
- **Ninth five year plan (1997- 2002)** – the emphasis on NGOs in the ninth five year plan were:
- Adoption of special strategy of women component plan (WCP) to make sure that not less than 30% of funds or benefits flow to women from other development sectors;
  - Organising Self Help Groups (SHGs) for women empowerment process; and
  - Promoting skill development among women in modern upcoming trades.
- **Tenth five year plan (2002-2007)** – certain schemes were adopted:
- Swayamsidha;
  - Swashakti; and
  - Rashtriya Mahila Kosh.
- **Eleventh five year plan (2007-2012)** – strengthening SHG initiatives, policies and schemes will increase women’s awareness, health, literacy and entrepreneurial skills.
- **Twelfth five year plan (2012-2017)** – emphasis on economic empowerment, women’s participation in governance and other related areas.

## **SCHEMES BY INTERVENTION OF NGO**

Several schemes for women were implemented by the Ministry of Human Resource Development. Some of the schemes relating to women are implemented by Ministry through the intervention of the NGOs. They were:

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<sup>14</sup>Supra.

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→ **Scheme of Assistance to Voluntary Agencies under Mahila Samakhya**

This scheme seeks to create an environment for women in which they can seek knowledge and information. Also it aims at providing formal and non-formal schooling, adult education through condensed courses and vocational training<sup>15</sup>.

→ **Mahila Co-operative Banks**

Mahila Co-operative banks are for the women and are managed by women. The main objective for founding these banks are to assist the poor and needy women of the women section of the society in improving their standard of living by generating source of finance to them thereby leading them to become self-reliant<sup>16</sup>.

→ **Support to Training & Employment for Women (STEP)**

This scheme is formulated by the Union government in 1986 and is still in force. The scheme intends to provide skills and competencies to women so that they can become self-employed<sup>17</sup>. The grant under this scheme is granted to organisations like NGOs.

Table No. 1<sup>18</sup>

State/ UT- wise beneficiaries covered under Support to Training-cum-Employment Program (STEP) Scheme during 2016-17 up to 20-03-2017

Sr. No.	State/UT	Beneficiaries covered
1	Andhra Pradesh	1425
2	Assam	1600
3	Bihar	400
4	Haryana	100

<sup>15</sup>09\_chapter\_4.pdf <[http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/jspui/bitstream/10603/208885/9/09\\_chapter\\_4.pdf](http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/jspui/bitstream/10603/208885/9/09_chapter_4.pdf)> accessed 05 October 2020.

<sup>16</sup>‘Mahila Co-operative Bank Ltd’ <<http://mahilacb.com/about-us-2>> accessed 05 October 2020.

<sup>17</sup>‘Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women’ (STEP) <<https://wcd.nic.in/schemes/support-training-and-employment-programme-women-step>> accessed 05 October 2020.

<sup>18</sup>datafile.xls <<https://data.gov.in/resources/state-ut-wise-beneficiaries-covered-under-support-training-cum-employment-program-step>> accessed 05 October 2020.

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5	Jammu & Kashmir	200
6	Jharkhand	200
7	Karnataka	3934
8	Madhya Pradesh	1850
9	Maharashtra	250
10	Manipur	1700
11	Orissa	300
12	Rajasthan	200
13	Uttaranchal	500
14	Uttar Pradesh	2000
15	Delhi	200

→ **Swayamsiddha**

Swayamsiddha is a programme for the empowerment of women through the network of SHGs. The scheme tends to provide education, family progress and economic development for women<sup>19</sup>.

→ **General Grant-In-Aid Scheme for Assistance to voluntary organization in the field of women & child development**

This scheme is to support innovative voluntary action and initiatives to render services for women and children and financial assistance is given up to 90% of the

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<sup>19</sup>'Swayamsiddha Scheme' <<https://govinfo.me-swayamsiddha-scheme>> accessed 05 October 2020.

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approved cost on recurring and non-recurring expenditure and the balance 10% is to be met by the voluntary organization<sup>20</sup>.

→ **Swadhar – A Scheme for Women in Difficult Circumstances**

This scheme is to provide food, shelter and clothing to women living in difficult circumstances who are living without any social and economic support. This scheme arranges for specific clinical, legal and other support for women in need of those interventions by linking and networking with other organizations in both Government and Non-Government sector<sup>21</sup>.

Table No. 2<sup>22</sup>

State/UT wise list of Swadhar Homes

Sr. No.	State/UT	No. of Homes	Capacity of Homes
1	Andhra Pradesh	13	775
2	Assam	16	800
3	Bihar	3	150
4	Chhattisgarh	3	150
5	Gujarat	4	210
6	Haryana	4	100
7	Jammu & Kashmir	3	150
8	Jharkhand	2	100

<sup>20</sup>cswb.pdf <<https://wcd.nic.in/schemes/general-grant-aid-gia-scheme-assistance-voluntary-organisations-field-women-and-child>> accessed 05 October 2020.

<sup>21</sup>'Ministry of Women & Child Development' <<https://vikaspedia.in/social-welfare/ngo-voluntary-sector-1/government-of-india-schemes-for-ngos/ministry-of-women-child-development>> accessed 05 October 2020.

<sup>22</sup>datafile(1).xls <<https://data.gov.in/resources/stateut-wise-list-swadhar-homes-ministry-women-and-child-development>> accessed 05 October 2020.

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9	Karnataka	33	1950
10	Kerala	3	150
11	Madhya Pradesh	14	750
12	Maharashtra	47	2350
13	Manipur	18	800
14	Mizoram	1	100
15	Nagaland	2	350
16	Odisha	45	2350
17	Rajasthan	11	550
18	Tamil Nadu	14	750
19	Telangana	13	775
20	Uttar Pradesh	40	3050
21	Uttarakhand	4	500
22	West Bengal	18	900

### ACHIEVEMENTS BY NGO'S

The accomplishments of NGOs towards the protection of women's rights and their empowerment are enormous. Through a number of NGOs, the policies and schemes related to women are implemented at all levels of the society and meeting the right people to whom those policies and schemes are intended.

### SELF HELP GROUPS (SHG'S)

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Self Help groups are defined as self-governed, peer controlled information group of people with similar socio-economic background and having a desire to collectively perform common purpose<sup>23</sup>. SHGs are largely dependent on NGOs for their existence and development. Self Help Groups provides opportunities to women to acquire the ability for their own lives. They assist women in rural areas who are belonging to below poverty line. Being in a SHG, women can learn lot of things and could acquire more knowledge like<sup>24</sup>:

- Acquiring literacy and numerical skills;
- Awareness on basic human rights;
- Awareness on projects and developmental activities offered by State;
- Political consciousness and electoral process;
- Freedom from exploitation;
- Health consciousness;
- Re-structuring of women's time utilization; and
- Enhanced decision making power in the household.

The functional areas of SHGs are<sup>25</sup>:

- Participation of members actively in every activity conducted by the group;
- All the members provide certain amount as savings regularly, which can be provided in the form of loan to its members when needed; and
- Meetings are conducted to resolve the problems of the members of the group.

Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana, 2015 is a scheme which covers one hundred million families through 8.5 million SHGs. These SHGs have a total deposit of Rs. 161 billion, and 84 million

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<sup>23</sup>Self Help Groups (SHGs)' <<https://www.drishtiiias.com/to-the-points/Paper2/self-help-groups-shgs>> accessed 06 October 2020.

<sup>24</sup>2-5-199-483.pdf <<http://www.advancedjournal.com/download/567/2-5-199-483.pdf>> accessed 06 October 2020.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

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SHGs received collateral free credit among which 88% are rural women<sup>26</sup>. As of 2017, there are 85, 76, 875 SHGs around India with total members of 10, 09, 89, 661<sup>27</sup>.

### MAHILA MANDALS

Mahila Mandals are schemes to help the women in rural areas and to make programs that will help in the education of girls from economically disadvantaged families.<sup>28</sup> Activities undertaken by Mahila Mandals are<sup>29</sup>:

- Jigyasa (Education);
- Sanjeevani (Health);
- Samarpan (Charity); and
- Swabalamban (Social Empowerment)

### VOLUNTARY ORGANISATION

In the common parlance, both Non-governmental organisations and voluntary organisations are understood as one and the same. But both are different. It is not mandate to all NGOs to be voluntary. There are NGOs which are engaged in caste and community activities. There are many NGOs working in the voluntary sector purely for the commercial purposes<sup>30</sup>. It will be accurate to say that 'All voluntary organisations are Non-Governmental Organisations, but all Non-Governmental Organisations are not voluntary organisations.'

### MEANING

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<sup>26</sup>'Self Help Groups (SHGs) in India – Functions, Advantages & Disadvantages' <<https://www.iasepress.net/self-help-groups-shgs/>> accessed 06 October 2020.

<sup>27</sup>datafile(2).xls <<https://data.gov.in/resources/state-wise-details-self-help-groups-shgs-and-number-members-march-2017-ministry-finance>> accessed 06 October 2020.

<sup>28</sup>'Mahila Mandal' <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/mahila-mandal>> accessed 06 October 2020.

<sup>29</sup>'Fuelling Social Progress' <[http://www.mahanadicoal.in/Sustainable\\_Development/sustainability\\_2014-15/mahila-mandal.html](http://www.mahanadicoal.in/Sustainable_Development/sustainability_2014-15/mahila-mandal.html)> accessed 06 October 2020.

<sup>30</sup>09\_chapter\_02.pdf <[https://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/150366/9/09\\_chapter\\_02.pdf](https://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/150366/9/09_chapter_02.pdf)> accessed 06 October 2020.

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Voluntary organizations are defined as organisations which are voluntary in spirit with non-profit making objectives and exist as a legal entity, registered under the Indian Societies Act or Charitable and Endowment Trust Act or corresponding state Acts, covering only a limited areas of action<sup>31</sup>.

In May 2007, Indian Government formulated the National Policy on the voluntary sector, and the voluntary organization was described in the policy as<sup>32</sup>: ‘voluntary organisations mean to include organisations engaged in public service based on ethical, cultural, social, economic, political, religious, spiritual, philanthropic or scientific & technological considerations and includes formal as well as informal groups such as community based organisations; non-governmental developmental organisations; support organisations; networks or federations of such organisations; and professional membership associations.’

## FUNCTIONS

The voluntary organization engages in many activities and some of them are<sup>33</sup>:

- Voluntary Organizations involve citizens in noble affairs and avoid concentration of powers in the hands of government and serving as power breakers;
- They make the individuals in the participation of their organizations thereby making them learn about fundamentals of groups and political action;
- These organizations raise additional resources in rural areas; and
- They perform the functions of educating the members and the public at large about the policies and programmes of the government about their welfare and their rights and obligations.

## DIFFICULTIES FACED BY NGO'S AND VO'S

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>‘National Policy on the Voluntary Sector’ <[https://www.icnl.org/research/library/india\\_npvoluntary/amp/](https://www.icnl.org/research/library/india_npvoluntary/amp/)> accessed 07 October 2020.

<sup>33</sup>‘Voluntary Organisations: Important Objectives and Functions’ <<https://www.yourarticlelibrary.com/organization/voluntary-organisations-important-objectives-and-functions/24318>> accessed 07 October 2020.

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NGOs are intended to provide services to the people. But people lose hope in NGOs because of the nature of some NGOs like lack of trustworthiness and fraudulent natures. Besides these, NGOs and VOs face some difficulties such as<sup>34</sup>:

- **Lack of credibility** – The main motive of VOs and most of the NGOs are non-profit oriented. So they do not open about their source of funding, how it has been spend and likewise.
- **Not meeting the right people** – These organizations at times lacks proper knowledge on the socio-economic conditions of the people, and this creates difficulty when services and benefits don't reach the needy people.
- **Support from general public** – In many instances, general public has no trust on these organizations, therefore the public fails to support them.
- **Lack of funding** – Not every NGO receive funds and grants for the activities carried out by them. These results in dragging of activities and loss of interest to engage new activities<sup>35</sup>.
- **No planning** – Some of these organizations are formed just to receive funds and grants. And due to lack of proper organising head, they are not effective at times in the society.

## CONCLUSION

India is a nation with more number of NGOs. It is estimated that India has a total of 3.2 million NGOs and it is also stated that there are around four NGOs for every one thousand people in urban areas and 2.3 NGOs for every one thousand people in rural areas<sup>36</sup>. With such enormous NGOs and VOs, they tend to address the problems faced by the women, to protect the rights of the women and for their empowerment. They are taking a big step towards the empowerment of women in the right direction.

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<sup>34</sup>'Challenges Faced by NGOs in India' <<https://www.savethechildren.in/articles/challenges-faced-by-ngos-in-india>> accessed 07 October 2020.

<sup>35</sup>'What Challenges Do NGOs Face And What Are The Solutions' <<http://maximpactblog.com/what-challenges-do-ngos-face-and-what-are-the-solutions/>> accessed 07 October 2020.

<sup>36</sup>'Rise of third sector' <<https://www.downtoearth.org.in/coverage/rise-of-third-sector-33712>> accessed 07 October 2020.

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The main issue lies in the NGOs and VOs is they are not controlled by the proper authority. Intervention by the government on these organizations is very minimal. They are not even monitored properly. This often leads to unanimous power exercised in the wrong way. In 2014, an Intelligence Bureau report said that several foreign funded NGOs are used in anti-national activities like promoting terrorism, and due to that the Union Government asked all the States and Union Territories to monitor the NGOs and to take urgent action on the same<sup>37</sup>. The need of the hour is to have an authority separately to have supervision on the activities of the NGOs and the funds or grants received to them.

It is an undisputed fact that NGOs are striving for the betterment of the women particularly in the rural India where lot of restrictions are imposed on women. It is because of these organizations, women in rural areas and grass root level are made aware of their rights, their participation in the political side has increased and most importantly more rural based women became self-reliant. These are very harder to achieve without the utmost help of the NGOs and VOs, because these works will definitely over burden the government. With proper management of the voluntary organizations and non-governmental organizations, a better standard of life for women will be achieved sooner, and making them aware of their rights and protecting the same would be easier one.

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<sup>37</sup>Rahul Tripathi 'Centre to states: Track NGOs for 'anti-national' activities' The Indian Express (2 November 2018).

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