

Editorial

<https://academic.oup.com/cdj/article-abstract/44/3/276/294593>

Critical explorations of community organization in India

Janki Andharia

Introduction

Community organization (CO) has come to acquire a distinct meaning in India. This special issue reflects upon the nature of intervention of community workers and forces of transformation both in the lives of ordinary people, especially the poor and the marginalized, and within the sphere of knowledge related to community studies, across diverse institutions and socio-political contexts. The selection of articles in the issue captures the theoretical refinement of CO and also represents challenges that CO practice confronts at the practical level in the contemporary Indian scenario.

The history of India as a nation is replete with organizing, asserting, demanding and fighting for rights. It is the collective assertion and courage of citizens that are often celebrated on 15 August – the date in 1947 when India got her independence. A relatively young nation, India covering an area of 3,300,000 km² and housing a large diversity of ethnic groups¹ is respected as one of the largest democracies in the world.

CO was introduced as a method of social work in the 1950s in several western countries, and it was also during this period that the Department of Urban and Rural Community Development (URCD) was established in the first school of Social Work in India, generating several scholars and practitioners espousing diverse perspectives and ideologies. By 1980s the term 'Community Development' was generally regarded with disdain due to the

¹ India as a nation comprises 3000 human communities (races tribes, castes and other), 325 functioning languages and 25 scripts in the 32 states and Union Territories (GOI, 2003).

failure of the official Community Development Programme, launched by the Government in the 1950s. In India the term 'Community Organization' on the other hand was regarded as far more progressive and received an impetus through the mid-1970s up until early 1990s. In 1975–1977 the country experienced political upheaval when a state of Emergency was declared suspending official democracy. This simultaneously gave rise to a large number of protests with a democratic fervour and specifically in the form of mass-based movements and voluntary organizations. It also saw a critique of social work positioned largely as an apolitical enterprise.

The failure of community development programmes to impact the poverty levels or people excluded from health, education, housing, sanitation and infrastructure services forced social workers and community organizers to re-examine its excessive emphasis on local development issues. They began to recast their work to include structural factors that shape local realities. The expanding critique of social work influenced CO teachers who redefined and reshaped CO to align with, contribute to and borrow from literature on diverse forms of organizing – social movements, trade unionism and mass-based people's organization and self-help groups (SHGs).

Organizing communities against atrocities and against forms of dominance is evident in almost all parts of India and is not restricted to a particular discipline. In fact, sensitive social workers draw on the history of organizing within a region or of specific communities, metaphorically invoking historical events to reach out to the masses. A generation of teachers and activists from 1980s onwards who began to associate themselves with mass-based struggles, discovered different strategies and new allies and questioned conventional moorings of western forms of institutionalized social work and its relevance to India. Grass-roots empowerment took precedence over community development and saw greater involvement of community organizers and scholars in issues of exclusion, violation and assertion of rights, discrimination against dalits, tribals and other marginalized groups. (See Figure 1 for an overview of the trajectory of CO and CD in India.) A sharper ideological orientation gave CO a political edge much to the discomfort of certain social work professionals.

The changing perspective of CO in particular compelled the social work fraternity to review its curriculum, the choice of field work agencies and the intervention processes with which scholars aligned themselves. Modes of intervention were questioned and revised, tools of analysis underwent a shift and political frameworks were consciously used, in more fundamental ways to shape both the practice and education in CO. Despite the strong imperative to move away from a traditional social work orientation based on a naïve belief of 'bridging gaps' through simple welfare means, the

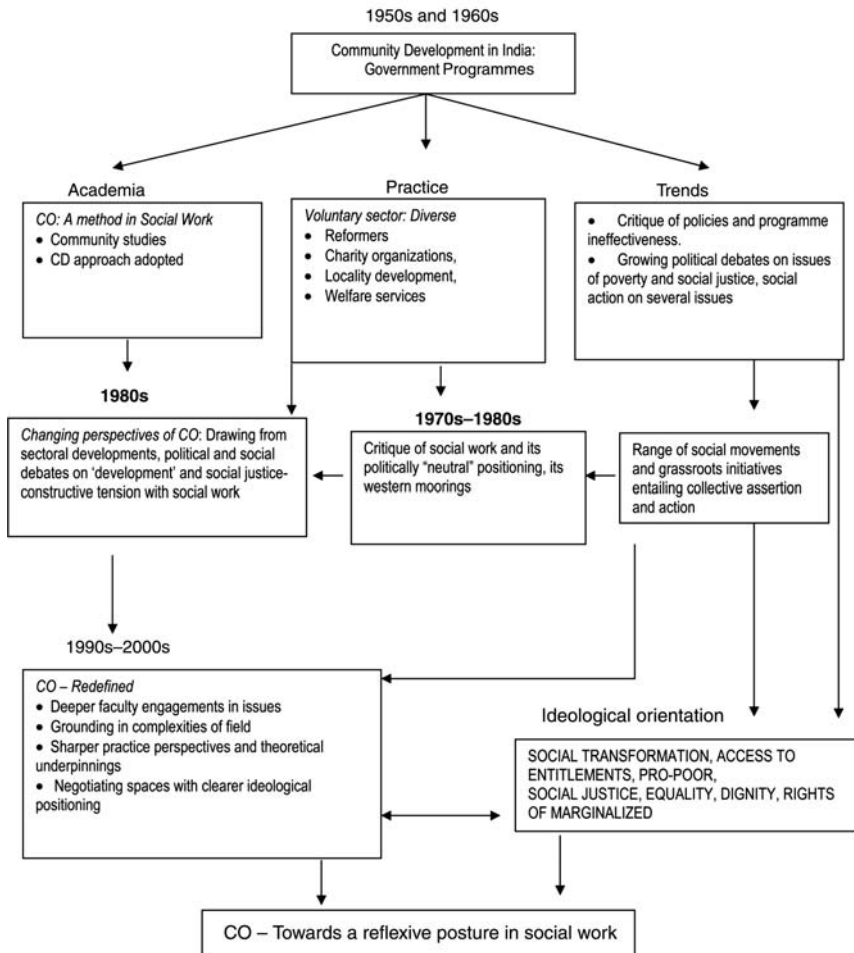


Figure 1 Historical trajectory of CO and CD in India. Source: Andharia (2007, 103).

transition within the academia was painstakingly slow. At the end of nearly three decades of debates, most of these changes remain undocumented even as CO confronts fresh challenges in contemporary times. For example, the fact that the economic reform agenda is pursued assiduously by the government, when poverty and inequality levels remain high, exploitation is legitimized by the state and the globalizing forces are moving ahead unabashedly, is all a matter of serious concern to community organizers. Withdrawal of the state from health, education and social security sectors has caused further exclusion and deprivation of the marginalized section.

The special issue on CO in India is devoted specifically to locating the challenges of the context and possibilities which community workers in

India need to familiarize themselves with and it is hoped that it renews interest in collective action for social transformation in a rapidly globalizing world.

The context shaping the agenda for CO

A community in some ways is a microcosm of a nation. One would assume that in a democratic nation, all institutions function democratically upholding values of equity with reference to citizens and their collectives. However, in practice, this does not happen and rights have to be asserted and structures are to be negotiated. As a result the understanding of democracy, citizenship and collective action are never static. A community gets mobilized when citizens organize to take a stand and work towards specific demands. Such assertions are fundamental to the empowerment of citizens and such shifts in power balance between people and institutions are fundamental to CO.

The broader context for CO practice in India can be discerned from the country's performance on human development indices and the agenda for community practice may be drawn from a critical appreciation of processes that marginalize and alienate large sections of society.

India is often called a country of contradictions. For example India prides itself as a nation on the move, a nation that has witnessed, during the last century – a transformation from a colonial, agrarian economy into a modern, industrial, knowledge-based economy. As a parliamentary democratic system, the country is an acknowledged home to people of diverse cultural, faith, ethnic and social identities. The constitution provides for democratic participation of citizens giving them a voice in politics. Popular movements and struggles are credited with ensuring that parliamentary democracy has retained its vitality over the last 60 years of independence.

On the other hand, despite the political democracy, the country is faced with economic inequalities, concentration of wealth and regional imbalances that work in favour of exploitative social, political and economic structures. About 70 percent of India's population is rural and agriculture is the backbone of livelihood security system for nearly two-thirds of the population. Farmer's suicides, ethnic tensions created by right-wing Hindutva forces, poverty, malnutrition, disease and deprivation, falling per-capita intake of food grains are often said to reflect the erosion of democratic principles and secular fabric of the nation. The media and the judiciary have played a significant role in highlighting the backwardness and social injustice and inequalities based on caste, class, gender and ethnicity. Besides popular struggles, new social movements led by trade unions, women's

organizations, voluntary organizations and committed individuals have responded to the overwhelming poverty, illiteracy displacement, dispossession of land and rising food insecurity. Criticisms about the ability of the development agenda to ensure social inclusion and equality of opportunity for all have sparked vigorous debates about addressing the 'democratic deficit'. In India, the Constitution through its amendments has devolved more powers to local bodies, but they are yet to be empowered in full. Their capacity needs to be built and financial powers to be strengthened before we can expect them to adopt best practices in governance. The dalits constitute 16 percent of India's population and the tribals constitute 8 percent. According to government estimates, some 125 districts spread over 12 states, covering more than a quarter of the landmass mostly in the central part of India, is affected by extremist Naxalite activities. A combination of economic and socially oppressive factors is identified as the major cause of rise of Naxalism in India.

The next section highlights the democratic deficits' that will enable an appreciation of the Indian social, economic and political fabric which constitutes the context in which community organizer sets an agenda and chooses specific strategies for action. The focus is on food security, education, access to potable water, health care facilities and housing – all of which constitute fundamental rights of every citizen – basic requirements for a life with dignity.

Poverty, food insecurity and inequality

During 2007 escalating food prices and vanishing global food reserves added about 75 million to the hunger trap of which nearly 30 million are from India according to a Food and Agriculture Organization Report [2007]. Data from the National Family Health Surveys paint a grim picture.

More than one-third of the Indian population lives in sub-human poverty and a recent World Bank estimate put nearly 42 percent as absolutely poor by international standards. More than three-fourths of the population has a daily purchasing power of less than 20 rupees per day (about half a US dollar) and nearly half the children are undernourished. The 2008 Human Development Index ranked India 128 out of a total of 177 nations and in the latest ranking (2009) India has fallen to 132 out of 179 nations.²

2 HDI looks beyond the GDP to a broader definition of well-being. It seeks to capture three dimension of human development: a long and healthy life (measured by life expectancy at birth), being educated (measured by adult literacy and tertiary education) and GDP per capita measured in US dollars at purchasing power parity (PPP).

Food security remains a pressing issue in India.³ According to United Nation's Human Development Report (2008), India dominates the world hunger league. Of the world's 850 million chronically hungry people, nearly 25% are in India. This makes it the country housing the world's largest food insecure (200 million) population. It scored 66th place in the 2008 Global Hunger list of 88 countries. Despite years of robust economic growth, India scored worse than nearly 25 sub-Saharan African countries and all of South Asia, except Bangladesh.⁴ Half of India's rural population or over 350 million people are below the average food energy intake of sub-Saharan African countries. Though the country's economy is growing fast (at 7–9 percent GDP growth) with a population of about 1.1 billion people, 4 in every 10 children are malnourished. It is well known that hunger and malnutrition are rooted in poverty.

On the other hand, India celebrates its entry into the 12 member 'trillion dollar economy' league. The wealth of the billionaires was equivalent to about 22 percent of India's GDP in 2008, compared with less than 0.2 percent in 1996. According to the Croesus Count, also known as the Forbes list, in India 53 individuals held wealth equal to almost a third of the nation's GDP in 2007. Four Indians were among the world's top ten richest in 2008. The Food and Agriculture organization also states that 27 percent of the world's poor live in India, as do the richest 4 percent. This demonstrates the gross unequal distribution of wealth and market-led economics are clearly widening social inequalities in the country.

According to Sen (1999), national economic prosperity cannot be genuine development when it does not translate visibly into improvement of the living standards of the poorest of the poor in terms of reducing infant mortality and malnutrition as well as providing better prospects for health, housing, education and political participation. Associated with economic growth are industrialized technological advancement, market expansion and rise in personal incomes. These, according to Sen (1999), should be treated only as useful means to enhance people's economic, social and political freedoms.

India's children do not receive badly needed basic medication such as immunization, drugs to treat childhood diarrhoea and nutritional supplements. Gender inequalities are rife, with boys having access to food and medicine before girls. Being born a girl carries high risks – it raises the chances of premature death between the ages of 1 and 4 by about one

3 The India State Hunger Index measures hunger on three leading indicators: (a) prevalence of child malnutrition, (b) rates of child mortality and (c) the proportion of people who are calorie deficient.

4 The International Policy Research Institute (IPRI) in collaboration with Welthungerhilfe and Concern Worldwide, CA, prepared this report.

third. Strong economic growth does not necessarily translate into lower hunger levels. More equitable growth, improving distribution of wealth, provisioning and strengthening public health services and action to tackle disparities based on gender, wealth, religion and caste are needed and progressive CO practice addresses these issues.

Overcoming malnutrition requires concurrent attention to food (macro and micro-nutrients, clean drinking water) and non-food factors (such as sanitation, environmental hygiene, primary health care, literacy, work and income security). This can only be achieved through a fusion of political will and action, professional skill and people's awareness and participation.

CO must continue to find the inspiration and the energy to work with the poorest of the poor. The interplay of individual, household, local, national and global factors becomes significant in the analysis of a given context and situation. The emphasis is clearly on structural aspects of society and policy. The success of organizations working with National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) in Andhra Pradesh, MKSS in Rajasthan or that of ANANDI in Gujarat, and MASUM in Maharashtra all amply demonstrate the scope of work and the widening ambit of CO. Some of these interventions are discussed in the articles in this issue. If academic teachers of CO learnt to engage with these processes, revise and re-interpret their curricula, students of CO might move towards a more pro-active involvement in ensuring social and political rights, a life with dignity for the poor.

The lopsided priorities driven by strong global forces have had a deep impact on the urban and rural poor, the informal sector workers, whose very existence is threatened because of an inability to secure food for survival, job opportunities and their entitlements for a decent wage. Fluctuations in international prices of commodities hit the farmers hard, especially those who are unable to repay their debts. For example, across five districts in western Maharashtra, nearly 5000 cotton farmers have committed suicide over the last decade because of an unbreakable cycle of poor monsoons, crop failure and debt. On an average two farmer's per day were driven to take their own lives in the last 5 years. These districts saw two financial packages, several schemes and a nationwide loan waiver for farmers who fall within the eligibility criteria. The impact has not been substantial.

Education and health

A population that cannot read and write and critically participate in their social and political affairs remains impoverished and vulnerable to exploitation. The barriers to widespread education in India are unmotivated teachers, low-quality education in government schools and colleges,

unaffordability of books, uniforms and off-school complementary tuition, crowded classrooms and the lack of accountability of the school administration to parents or local community. Each of these constitutes significant areas of intervention by community organizers working towards public action and empowerment, compelling governments to act in decisive ways.

Although 65 percent of India's population is literate, only 7 percent of India's children can afford the luxury of higher education. Nearly 75 percent of women in India suffer from anaemia, and the infant mortality rate is 73 per 1000 live births. Only 42 percent of the children received all the immunization. Gender, caste and religion structure access to education and health care in India. Combined with a rise in drug prices and expensive medical care, the health scenario has worsened for the poor. Many interrogate the growth rate in terms of who is benefiting from it and what needs to be done via health and education to ensure that economic development is coupled with distributive justice and human dignity.⁵

Water

Access to clean water is of fundamental importance for survival. Water and sanitation have a direct linkage with health, a human right recognized under international covenant. The norms adopted by India to access protected water supply coverage – 40 l per capita daily (lpcd) within a 1.6 km radius – fall short of the World Health Organization's recommendation of 50 lpcd at the consumer end to be counted as intermediate level access. According to government sources, about 58 percent of the country's groundwater resources have been over-exploited. This is serious as about 80–90 percent of the drinking water comes from groundwater. Water sources are drying up or are polluted, have weak technical systems and are poorly maintained. Biological and chemical contamination poses major quality on problems.

Wetlands and rivers are being polluted by industrial chemicals and domestic sewage. The traditional base of surface water services has been rendered weak, encouraging indiscriminate groundwater extraction. Water bodies (ponds and lakes) outside many cities are tragically being turned into sewage ponds because sewerage infrastructure does not match the pace of urbanization. To advance sustainability goals, the government is now realizing the need to involve communities in legally protecting water bodies from encroachment and degradation, develop new sources such as lakes and reservoirs and take immediate measures to check industrial and fertilizer pollution. This realization has come about through a

5 On an average health and education received 1.4 and 2.9 percent of the GDP during this decade.

plethora of exemplary work by genuine rural development workers, activists, community-based initiatives, advocacy by the press and NGOs.

Urban poverty and housing shortages

Urbanization may be inevitable but whether it will turn to a positive force or an environmental and social disaster depends on how quickly the country can put plans and governance in place. The year 2007 is a milestone in the history of human society where, for the first time, the urban and rural population of the world is equal. It is argued that urbanization has brought new economic opportunities and advantages to people who migrate to cities. However, it has also created the phenomenal growth of slums all over the world. According to the UN Habitat's State of the World's Cities 2006–2007, one in three city-dwellers live in slums. These are areas where people do not have access to basic necessities for life with dignity such as clean water, sanitation, sufficient living space, durable housing or secure tenure that ensures freedom from eviction.

Urban India accounts for 30 percent of the total population and its share is likely to rise to about 40 percent by 2030. In spite of a national slum policy and housing policies being in place, the housing deficit in Indian cities is on the rise. In 2007 the housing shortage was about 24 million units, and it is expected to touch 26 million by 2012. About 99 percent of this deficit pertains to lower income groups. The fast growing economy facilitated by government policies especially on land, agriculture and forced evictions creates serious tensions.

Amita Bhide's article traces the history of organizing slum and pavement dwellers in Mumbai – the commercial capital of India where half the city's population lives in slums. Community organizing around housing rights through the 1980s has been successful to some extent but faces unique challenges. She argues that political parties, populist schemes and capitalist slum re-developers create a complex terrain for community practice. Her paper raises the crucial question of whether CO can be all encompassing and whether education and training equips organizers to engage with complexities experienced by the slum dwellers.

The plurality and refinement of CO

Over the last three decades Indian innovative experiments in participatory democracy, collective mobilization by trade-unions, social movements, co-operatives and civil society organizations offer a fascinating landscape to observe and reflect on CO. There are a wide variety of ways of working in the community, albeit with differing approaches, perspectives,

philosophies and orientation. The depth and rigour of analysis often determines the forms of involvement and the choice of strategies used.

In the contemporary era of globalization, community studies and CO are rapidly emerging as substantive areas of academic and practice focus. They draw liberally from sociology, political science, economics, critical geography, public administration, anthropology, feminist studies and applied science and technology-oriented disciplines such as environmental studies, architecture and so on. This trans-disciplinary nature of CO in India has received very little attention in scholarly journals, although the country has had a very rich tradition and experience base in CO since 1940s and 1950s. The country's political history is replete with powerful mass movements of people of diverse regional, cultural, social and religious identities. These movements and struggles nurtured a strong sense of nationalism creating a robust democracy. CO has been enriched through experiences of social action of tribal movements, peasant movements, and what is categorized as new social movements (the ecology movement, women's movement, dalit movement to name a few). These constitute some of the most successful post-industrialist and post-modernist expressions of new social movements in human history.

For example, special economic zones (SEZs) have been set up across India with little concern for the natural and common property resources that they are taking over for this purpose. The 2005 SEZ Bill enables the development of specific areas as 'demarcated' industrial and commercial private enclaves – entire townships with full-fledged infrastructure that would have a high productive capacity and provide great opportunities for employment. Regarded as a new face of globalization, aimed at enhancing direct foreign and large domestic investment, they are conceptualized to be autonomous in their governance structures, offering privileged concessions and outside any local tax, duty and tariff regimes.

The SEZ policy and its implementations have serious implications for those farmer groups and communities driven off their lands and their livelihoods. SEZs are largely seen as a trade capacity development tool with a goal to accelerate economic growth. A number of community organizers are leading struggles against SEZs across India. The issues under protest relate to the use and misuse of Land Acquisition Act 1894 (amended in 1984), the lack of environmental concerns, the tax benefits to the 'developers', potential restrictions on workers' rights to organize and strike and the unprecedented freedom in governance which has not been seen in independent India. The political implication of creation of private enclaves for real estate development is the most critical aspect of the debate.

With the largest number of SEZ approvals, Maharashtra has witnessed strong resistance from villages in Pen, Panvel and urban tehsils who have

organized themselves into SEZ Virodhi Sangharsh Samiti (Anti-SEZ struggle groups) and Gaon Bachao Samiti (Save the villages committee) which have all formed a Jagatikkaran Virodhi Kruti Samiti (Anti-globalization Action Group). Similar struggles have been waged in Gujarat, Goa, West Bengal, Haryana, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka who were opposed to large-scale land acquisition by governments and corporate giants in the name of development.

In India, many popular movements argue that unless the course of development is changed from corporate-led capitalism to decentralized employment led growth, resistance will increase. Confronting the imbalances in distribution of economic resources and power relations at local and regional levels makes effective intervention a political activity.

What is evident is that over the last three decades, conceptually, CO in India has experienced increasing specialization through issue-based work on health, education, housing, food security or consciousness raising activities with women, dalits and tribals. There has been a considerable refinement at the practice level where the process of collective action and mobilization includes a strong analytical and ideological orientation. The symbolic significance of assertions through collectivization either in the form of trade union or in the form of community-based organizations (CBOs) or membership-based organization is immense. This is because it brings the powerful message that the problems one faces are not individual problems but collective ones – enabling a shift towards understanding social issues in systemic or structural terms, with a critical understanding of the power of major development institutions.

There is a growing recognition of the interrelationship of CO with other professions or disciplines (such as urban planning, community medicine, political science, disaster management, peace and conflict studies, community media and culture etc.). Some of these are explored in this special issue with far-reaching consequences. The articles contain conceptual reflections, reformulating and re-inventing the idea of CO and explore the shift and refinement of CO going beyond the 'methods-approach' in social work education prevalent in India today.

Javeed Alam's article on *Democracy in India and the quest for equality* provides an excellent backdrop to understand many of the contradictions that we encounter in India as a democratic nation. He dwells on democratic politics which is supposedly subversive of ordained hierarchies. The struggle for equality takes a collective form in CO. However, he argues that the identities of vulnerable communities impact the process of mobilization in multiple ways.

His article emphasizes how communities are constituted based on the context and have variable boundaries. While mobilization of communities

along lines of caste, class and gender needs to be, on the one hand, located within the democratic sentiment, Alam argues against homogenizing tendencies of modernity. He problematizes the congealing of identities and the tendency within each community to preserve its own internal relations of power, enforcing compliance resulting in the exclusion of some. For example, in a democracy, caste identity has an altered significance and is discontinuous. Similarly, moral codes imposed on women who confine them and define their actions militate against equality and gender dignity.

Manoj Jha's article looks at communities split on caste and religious lines. He draws attention to the rise of right-wing forces and of mobilization of hate against Muslims in the Gujarat carnage in 2002 over a 4-month period. This marks the 'death of a community' which ought to be built on principles of justice and peace in a democratic nation. Adversarial relations are constructed between two communities which shape both identities and collective memories, which in turn often translate into stereotypes and prejudices. Community organizers must learn to address these, despite the shrinking of public spaces and increasing distance and divisive tendencies. Jha argues for the need to celebrate diversity and difference as fundamental to sound CO practice. The strategies to build positive and sustainable community relations require the organizers to have a deep understanding of issues, factors and processes causing splits and ruptures in the community. It requires skills, insights and wisdom to withstand pressures. Jha argues that overcoming ruptures and breakdowns in community relations requires addressing causes and symptoms at structural, individual and intermediate levels. Building credibility integrity and trust among communities are necessary when CO is committed to human rights and social justice.

In this volume, emphasizing the role of social action Manish Jha's paper describes the causes and consequences of food insecurity especially on tribals, women and vulnerable sections of society. He underlines the exclusion faced by marginalized sections although India is a food surplus nation and argues that assertion of rights and entitlements through community mobilization is the way forward. The work of Deccan Development Society (DDS) is conceptualized by Ashok Kumbamu. DDS has advanced a sustainable model with 5000 women farmers from 75 villages in Medak district of Andhra Pradesh. In partnership with other NGOs they worked on education, watershed management and afforestation projects. Women's sanghams (SHGs) forested 1000 acres and organized seed banks at village level enabling food sovereignty. It has also increased employment in the village considerably.

Kumbamu's article specifically focusing on dalit mobilization and CO that works towards maintaining autonomy and sovereignty over local

resources and socio-political institutions through constructive resistance and militant struggles. He uses Karl Polanyi's 'double movement' to understand the self-regulating markets and rise of self-protecting communities in the politics of globalization and its resistance.

The article by Mouleshri Vyas demonstrates the conscious linkages drawn between unionization and CO over a decade – a process which has re-defined and re-shaped teaching of CO in India. It describes, in the face of privatization, the struggles of conservancy workers in Mumbai city and makes a strong case for community practice to look at issues of work and livelihoods and for social workers developing a sharper understanding of efficacy of strategies and skills in grassroots organizing, especially in the post-liberalization era of the Indian economy.

Siddharth and Siddhant Sihag's article traces the origin of the movement for the right to information (RTI) in villages of Rajasthan challenging the culture of secrecy within the government which indirectly promotes corruption. A 10-year long movement initiated by the rural poor and activists used democratic spaces and culminated in the passage of one of the most progressive RTI laws in the world in 2005. It is hailed as a landmark piece of legislation that could change the relationship of the citizen with the state. Pro-active and voluntary disclosure of availability of schemes, funds and facilities by public authorities is fostering greater transparency and is very essential for citizens to realize the full potential of RTI law. Many progressive community organizers are concertededly working in this area and have been associated with the movement. India now has 25,00,000 Public Information Officers to provide information under RTI. In 3 years, 15,00,000 people filed 75,00,000 RTI applications. Resistance on part of government to declare information continues. In Andhra Pradesh, embezzlement of funds (under NREG Scheme of government) worth Rs 2,00,00,000 has been recovered from governmental officers after disclosure under RTI exposed the scam.

India has had a strong women's movement with a wide variety of approaches to feminist organizing from which community practice has drawn and contributed in diverse ways. Reflecting on the phenomenon of a rising number of SHGs, researchers and activists have pointed out that in many areas SHGs have helped reduce dependence on exploitative money lenders, created opportunities and spaces for women to participate in the public realm and promoted a wider strategy of women's empowerment. Anurekha Chari-Wagh's article discusses how women's citizenship rights are asserted through interventions by MASUM which critiques the neo-liberal agenda of micro-finance institutions. The economic instrumentalist view of women in SHGs leaves out their concerns around survival and women's collectives based on self help, education and empowerment are being replaced by SHGs that have a narrow financial agenda with little

focus on rights and social justice. Within the women's movement, several concerns about SHGs remain. By handing over service delivery to SHGs where the terms and conditions of work and compensation are generally inadequate, there has been systematic privatization of government schemes such as Public Distribution System, the Integrated Child Development Schemes and the Midday Meal Scheme. Besides, the state is projecting SHGs as the only strategy for poverty alleviation and micro-finance institutions are charging high rates of interests and deploying coercive methods of recovery.

The strategies of M.K. Gandhi have inspired generations of activists across the world. In India, for many community practitioners, Gandhi inspires an alternative vision of politics and resistance at a time when oppression is not only getting more overt and physical but also more insidious. They firmly believe ethics and values are to be practiced in daily lives by individuals and Gandhi's adherence to truth, non-violence and passive resistance opens up possibilities and can be applied to global affairs as well.

Although a large number of writings on the Mahatma – his teachings, his biographies, his letters – have been published, Paromita Goswami, a social worker by training and a young activist, revisits the work done by Gandhi in South Africa and draws lessons for community organizers in a refreshingly original and grounded manner, drawing from a strong experiential base in her work with tribals in Thane and Chandrapur districts of Maharashtra.

Four carefully selected books are reviewed in this issue. The first compare agricultural reforms in rural India and China, both regarded as emerging economic giants. The second focuses on human development in rural India and using indicators such as employment and its determinants, education, status of children, fertility, maternal mortality, children's status, education, health care and differentials in development across social groups. The third book is a collection of essays on Islam that are more human than the contemporary political or academic discourse and have a broader universal appeal. The last book offers a Marxist view on politics and policies in India.

Conclusion

CO has political interest quite distinct from most 'social work' which largely operates within 'the need' of the individual, groups or communities or a 'problem' focus, both of which have a temporal, instrumental dimension. It fails to interrogate how the need or the problem is constructed, in what terms and how 'solutions' are offered, through what forms of assumptions and analysis. CO in India is rooted in pro-poor organizing, draws on development discourse, critical studies and is based on an analysis of society, state power and politics of resistance. It is a process which encompasses

all efforts that seek to re-define power relations that contribute to the experience of discrimination and marginalization. Therefore, CO entails efforts not just at the level of communities but with social structures and with democratic institutions of governance.

Needless to say, activists face innumerable hurdles and pay a price. They are killed or directly attacked, threatened and intimidated in different parts of the country. Harassment comes through various means. Homes are raided and the legal system is misused to intimidate the people's organization and their members. Criminal proceedings initiated against organizers on unsubstantiated evidence, or judicial proceedings which remain unresolved for extended periods, also seriously curtail their ability to carry out legitimate work. Training and education in CO needs to prepare students to deal with these on-ground challenges.

With this broad understanding, it is important to recognize that although many community workers have often received their disciplinary orientation in social work, they have expanded their repertoire of knowledge from a variety of disciplines. In their practice, community workers are seen responding to specific issues and engaging in politics of change and resistance with a focus on social justice, equality and access to entitlements. This has brought a sharper political perspective, and CO has grown in multiple directions. Effective practice has drawn from the context of exclusion, exploitation, oppression, violation of rights, denial of services and addresses a wide range of issues, many of which are reflected in the selection of articles in this special issue.

Professor Andharia has over 26 years of experience in the field of community organization and social development. Her areas of work focus on gender issues, environmental concerns, social planning and participatory development, addressing diverse forms of marginalization and vulnerability. She has been involved in policy work and has had a long association with grassroots organizations. She has been teaching at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) for over two decades and was Head, Department of Urban and Rural Community Development before moving on as Chairperson of the newly created Centre for Disaster Management.

Address for correspondence: Janki Andharia, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, V.N. Purav Marg, Deonar, Mumbai – 400 088, India. email: andharia@tiss.edu

References

- Andharia, J. (2007) Re-conceptualizing community organization in India: a trans-disciplinary perspective, in A. K. Johnson Butterfield and Y. Korazim-Korosy, eds, *Interdisciplinary Community Development: International Perspectives*, Haworth Press, New York.
- Government of India (2003) *The Genome Project*, Anthropological Survey of India, New Delhi.
- Sen, A. (1999) *Development as Freedom*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi.