The Transformation of Child Labor in Andhra Pradesh, India: Lessons for State-NGO Collaboration

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October 2013

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INTRODUCTION

When the 1991 Census of India was released, the state of Andhra Pradesh in India was reported to have the highest percentage of children in the workforce.[1] Between 1991 and 2010, the percentage of children in Andhra's workforce decreased from 10% to 4.7%, making Andhra Pradesh the state with the sharpest decline in the percentage of working children within a span of two decades.[2] A local NGO called MV Foundation (MVF), founded in 1991 has worked extensively on the issue of child labor in Andhra Pradesh. MVF has been credited by the state agencies, media, and independent evaluators to have brought about a "social movement" in Andhra with reports of "change in mindset" among village communities where education is now seen as an imperative and child labor is deemed as unacceptable (Ekbote 1995; Rajendra Prasad 1994; Ravikiran 1996; Wazir 2002). Andhra is also the only state in India to have witnessed a string of legislative and policy initiatives from the mid-1990s onwards to completely abolish child labor and make education compulsory, initiatives that were still in nascent stages of debate at the national level. In the country with the largest child workforce in the world, where the issue of child labor was either ignored, if not openly condoned, the proactiveness of village communities as well as policymakers on the issue of child labor in Andhra Pradesh presents a puzzle.[3] What makes the Andhra case even more compelling is that states like Gujarat with much higher per capita income than Andhra and similar levels of inequality have witnessed increase in the magnitude in the child workforce.[4] The change in child labor levels in Andhra therefore challenges the unquestioned axiom that poverty causes child labor and therefore, logically long-term economic growth should be the panacea to child labor.

The purpose of this study is to explore the causes of the change in state and societal orientation towards the issue of child labor in Andhra Pradesh. I argue that the major determinant of the change towards child labor in Andhra is the collaborative effort of MVF and the state bureaucracy I have attempted to locate the Andhra experience within prevailing theories, strategies, and practice of state-NGO relationship, and question some of the axioms that dominate this literature, specifically in the Indian context. Moving away from conventional literature that examines the state and NGO as the two variables in the equation of state-NGO relationship, I have placed community participation as a theoretical third piece that ties together the relationship of the state and NGOs. I explore how strategies of community participation adopted by MVF were critical in shaping the nature of state-NGO relationship and in bringing about an ideational and attitudinal shift in the Andhra's agenda on child labor. Further, I locate both NGOs' strategies of mobilization and attitude of state officials in the context of two contextual factors specific to the state of state of Andhra Pradesh: a) the historical background of social movements in Andhra which had created a predisposition among citizens towards community participation, and; b) the more immediate factor of a supportive

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[1]   Census of India 1991

[2]   Census of India 2001; Employment and Unemployment Situation in India-NSSO Report 2009-10.

[3]   Weiner (1991) presents a vivid account of the indifference among middle class Indians and elites towards the issue of child labor and compulsory education in India.

[4]   In 2005, Andhra's per capita GDP is $1430 compared to $3853 for the state of Gujarat – yet in the last two decades, Gujarat has witnessed a rise in rates of child labor from 3.9% in 1991to 4.3% in 2001 and to 7.8% in 2010. (Source: Directorate of Economics and Statistics of respective State Governments).

political leader who accepted community participation as the pivot of participatory governance. Through the lens of the child labor policy, this study attempts to locate state-NGO relations within the broader political economy in which activism and political realities converge.

METHODOLOGY

This study is based on field research in the two districts of Ranga Reddy and Hyderabad in the state of Andhra Pradesh for a period of three months (February-April 2012). Though MVF's activities on the issue of child labor have been extensively documented, what is less understood is how the organization was able to influence the state's agenda on the issue of child labor and universal education. While trying to understand how the broader movement evolved, I focused on the linkage between the social movement initiated by MVF, and the state, especially since many of the field interventions were eventually incorporated into Andhra Pradesh's state policy. For the purpose of this study, I interviewed MVF's staff and volunteers to understand the evolution of the movement, and their process of advocacy with the government. To gauge the response of the community to MVF interventions, I interviewed government officials, elected members of gram *panchayats*, school teachers, parents of child laborers, and former child laborers.[5] To understand why MVF initiatives were incorporated into policy, I interviewed senior bureaucrats and politicians. I interviewed academic experts specializing in Andhra's civil society at the Osmania University and conducted archival research at the social science library of Osmania University in Hyderabad to understand the institutional context of Andhra Pradesh's child labor policy.

THE THEORY OF STATE-NGO RELATIONSHIPS IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT

In the era of neoliberalism and market triumphalism, NGOs have emerged as a distinctive mediating actor to fill the vacuum generated by the withdrawal of the state from development projects and the move towards efficient markets. With around 30,000 NGOs, India is regarded as the 'NGO capital of the world' (Kudva 2005). Given the size and diversity of the Indian subcontinent, some of the advantages attributed to NGOs are particularly relevant in the Indian context: their strong presence in rural areas allows them to deliver cost effective and appropriate services to the poor (Farnworth 1991); they are better positioned to represent the views of the poor (Clark 1991); they can establish grassroots mechanisms through which rural poor can express themselves; and their small scale and flexibility allow rapid response to their needs (Korten 1987).

State-NGO relationships in India have undergone peaks of cooperation and troughs of conflict (Sen 1999). In the post-independence period, this relationship was marked by cooperation between Gandhian welfare-oriented organizations and the newly emerging state. NGOs were limited to providing relief and supportive function to state-led development plans but did not question existing power relations. In the 1970s and 80s, there was an increased antagonism between the two sectors as newly emerging youth-action groups, particularly leftist groups, questioned the urban-based development model of the Indian state. New laws like the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (1976) were enacted to assert greater control over the role and funding of NGOs. Since the 1980s, the Indian state has adopted a new policy of promoting NGOs as service-delivery organizations on behalf of the government while strongly restricting the role of empowerment oriented NGOs.[6]

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[5]   *Panchayats* are the village-level elected governments.

[6]   For a detailed historical account of NGO-state relationships in India, see Sen (1999) and Tandon (2002)

Despite the oscillating nature of the relationship, scholars identify certain propositions as definitive of state-NGO relationship in India. The trajectory of relationship is largely determined by the munificence of the state, with NGOs' role limited to that of a "shadow state" (Wolch 1990): a parastatal apparatus charged with the responsibility for providing services that were previously provided by the public sector (Kudva 2005). The Indian state supports welfare and modernization oriented NGOs, but is not accommodating of empowerment oriented NGOs (Sen 1999). Although broad contextual forces may shape the voluntary sector at the national level and define its aggregate character, local politics and local agents are fundamental to explaining patterns of voluntarism across national territories, such as metropolitan regions (Sen 2002; Weisgrau 1997). This is shaped by the federal nature of the polity which brings NGOs in close contact with the local bureaucracy and democratically elected *panchayat* bodies at the grassroots level. State-NGO relationship at the local level is generally characterized by hostility of local elites towards NGOs (Sen 2002).

The current literature envisages state-NGO relationships in the manner represented in Figure1. It examines the determinants of the conceptually direct relationship between NGOs and the state.

Figure 1: Conceptualization of State-NGO relationship in current literature
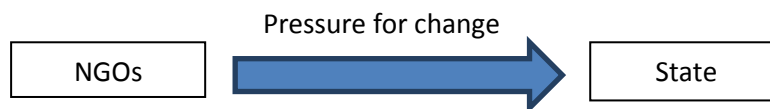
Though the current literature on provides important insights into the status of the state-NGO relationship, it suffers from two important limitations. First, studies either focus at the macro-level of the nation-state or at the micro-level, mainly the locality in which the NGO operates as the unit of analysis. The dimension of regional politics is underplayed (Baviskar 2002). Since the NGO sector acts as a key actor in mediating the channelization of resources from the state to the community, it does not operate in political or institutional vacuum. It is deeply influenced by the political economy of the state in which it operates. The relationship of state-NGOs in the context of regional politics is not clearly specified in the literature. Second, NGOs are organizational entities but there are hardly any systematic studies on the socio-economic membership, their organizational dynamics, and why they choose certain strategies of interaction over others (Fisher 1997).

The case study of MVF's work on child labor in Andhra Pradesh is interesting since it challenges the accepted axioms of state-NGO relationship, and provides insights into the aforementioned limitations in the literature. MVF's philosophy in dealing with child labor is radically different approach compared to the Government of India's (GOI) policy on the issue. MVF recognizes poverty as a relevant factor in child labor but holds that the main causation is rooted in social and cultural factors that condone the existence of employed and non-school going children. In fact, poverty is regarded as a consequence of child labor, since it leads to long term deprivation of educational opportunities and perpetuates the inter-generational transfer of poverty (Wazir & Saith 2010). Therefore, MVF supports access to full-time formal day school for every child; any child who is out of school is considered a potential child labor. On the other hand, the GOI's stand is that since poverty causes child labor, India should aim for a long-term strategy of "progressive elimination" of child labor. Therefore, the Child Labor (Prohibition and Regulation) Act 1986 only bans employment of children below the age of fourteen years in certain predefined 'hazardous occupations' while regulating child labor in other occupations. Even though MVF has adopted an empowerment narrative by adopting a rights-based approach to issue of children's well-being, its relationship with state agencies at both the local and the state level is one of active collaboration, not hostility as predicted in the literature. Further, MVF's work on child labor provides rich insight into how the

growth of an NGO's ideology, its strategies of mobilization, its membership, and its organizational dynamics are intricately tied to the evolution of civil society and to the political economy of the region. Therefore, the MVF case provides compelling new insights into the status of NGO-state relationship.

STATE-NGO RELATIONSHIP—AN ALTERNATIVE DISCOURSE

MVF's case is important because it highlights an important missing link in the theoretical literature on state-NGO relationship – the central role of community participation. I argue that an important missing link in the delineation of state-NGO relationships in India is the intermediate role of the community. There has been a proliferation of studies on the importance of community participation following the trend towards decentralization and participatory governance in India since the 1990s. In the era of decentralization and debureaucratization, both state and non-state agencies like the World Bank are promoting community participation as an ideal for participatory governance (Puri 2004). Putnam (1993), through his comparative study of Italian regions showed that a participatory civic culture was instrumental to good governance, while others like Sen (2000) argued that by enlarging the normative goals of empowerment, equity and human agency, participation builds 'capabilities' and far outweighs efficiency as a goal. Based on these perceived benefits of community participation, the Indian state is increasingly relying on the idea of community participation to fashion development interventions, like joint forest management committees, women's self-help groups, etc. that utilize pre-existing social networks or create new ones (Govinda and Diwan 2002; Saha 2011; Singh 2011; Uphoff *et al* 1998). On the other hand, a large plethora of NGO literature cites how NGOs, by virtue of their closeness to the community, their familiarity with local issues, their flexibility to experiment with new innovations on a small-scale are well-placed to build networks, generate awareness, and mobilize collective efforts to manage local resources (Mencher 1999; Kudva 2005).However, the current state-NGO literature doesn't tie these two strands of literature to analyse how community participation mediates the relationship between the NGO and the state.

Using an inductive method, I draw on field experiences of MVF to shed light on how the role of community participation is critical in shaping state-NGO relationships. I hypothesize: a) NGOs that are able to mobilize community participation on an issue are more likely to draw the attention of the state. Once NGOs make the community aware of their rights, state agencies are more likely to be accountable. NGOs that create an inclusive agenda and facilitate the emergence of local self-sustaining member organizations are more likely to be sustainable. Empowerment of the communities through awareness generation and capacity building is likely to bring greater response from the state as well.; b) NGOs have the freedom to experiment with diverse solutions, which is not necessarily possible within the leviathan nature of government organizations. Instead of acting as a service-provider, NGOs are more likely to influence the public agenda if they encourage the community to devise practical, innovative solutions; c) If NGOs maintain at least a neutral, if not positive relationship with government organizations, their efforts are more likely to be replicated on a wider scale. An open minded and flexible bureaucracy and a supportive political environment are critical for adaptation of NGO innovations into state policy (Hulme & Edwards 1992). The attitude of state officials towards NGOs and the strategies of community participation utilized by NGOs are intricately related to larger socio political and historical factors that have shaped state-society interaction.

I conceptualize the state-NGO relationship to be mediated by the role of the community as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: The Intermediate Role of Community in State-NGO Relationship
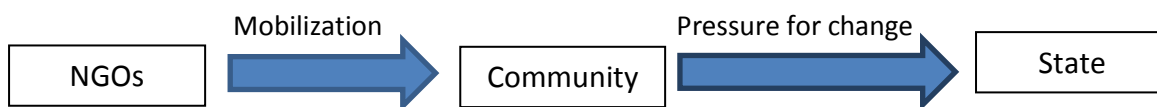
MVF: HARNESSING THE POWER OF COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION

Why Community?

MVF's philosophy of involving the community is drawn from the rights-based approach to children that the organization has adopted—that children are not instruments to ensure the family's survival, but as human beings they have inalienable right to a free and decent childhood. MVF was founded in 1991 by Dr. Shantha Sinha, a Political Science Professor in the University of Hyderabad. In the mid-1980s, when Dr. Sinha was working as director of an adult literacy program for wage laborers, she discovered that forty percent of the bonded laborers they released from landlords were children (Sumanaspati 2003). MVF strategies of emphasizing on the community have evolved over the years from their field experience. The strategy of involving the community became imperative when MVF personnel realized that the issue of child labor is not a simplistic reflection of parental poverty—many children stayed out of the schooling system because of factors that were not a direct reflection of poverty, like bureaucratic obstacles to admission, social norms that mandate child marriage, or parental alcoholism.[7] This led to the realization that withdrawal of children from the workforce must be accompanied by creation of a norm in the community that every child must go to school.

The informed community also became the pivot because of tactical reasons. Venkat Reddy, the national coordinator of MVF explains: "The community has more authority to pressurize the government to demand their entitlements. Once the community as a whole supports the idea that all children should go to school, it becomes easier to convince individual parents and state officials. As an NGO, our authority to make demands from the government or parents is limited."[8] Community meetings are arenas where errant teachers, or employers of child laborers are warned against employing children.[9] The issue of child marriage has been hotly debated in pressure is applied on parents to send their daughters to school. The tool of 'naming and shaming' is a powerful mechanism for accountability in the close-knit village community where peer-approval is valued by individuals. Through felicitation of landlords who release child labor and bureaucrats who cooperate in the campaign, the community meetings create positive reinforcement for supporters of the movement. Shantha Sinha says: "Choosing the path of encouragement and promotion is based on the philosophy that people will do the honourable thing if given the opportunity and motivation."[10] These strategies have enabled communities to analyze their own realities and influence development priorities, and have led to better collective action through peer monitoring and social

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7   Based on interviews with MVF volunteers.

8   Interview with Venkat Reddy, Hyderabad, February 23, 2012.

9   For a more detailed account on MVF's philosophy, mandate and strategies, see Wazir (2002), "Getting Children out of Work and Into School: MV Foundation,"MV Foundation: Secunderabad; Rekha Wazir (2002), "No to Child Labor, Yes to Education: Unfolding a Grassroots Movement in Andhra Pradesh", Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. XXXVII, No. 52; Sucheta Mahajan: Education for Social Change: MVF and Child Labor," Delhi: National Book Trust.

10   Interview with Shantha Sinha, New Delhi, July 3, 2012.

sanctions (Mitra & Gupta 2009). In fact, communities have been found to costlessly and effectively monitor the behaviour of its members and local institutions (Bowles 2005).

Strategy of Inclusiveness

The ideal of community participation has been criticised on the ground that communities are not an undifferentiated cohesive whole, but are a space for "internal differentiation, contestation, and power differentials." (Puri 2004; 2512). This holds true in caste-ridden Andhra society. However, NGOs can play a critical role in mitigating existing disparities by creating a space for inclusive participation. An evaluation of MVF's strategies of mobilization observes:

> "Much of the success of MVF in achieving this is a consequence of its philosophy of inclusion. All social groups, classes, castes, communities and individuals are involved in its programs…this has the advantage of having a wider appeal and of bringing the entire community-parents, teachers, employers of child labor, government officials and above all the children themselves – together around the issue of child rights. What is effectively sought through this inclusive approach is a change in the values and norms that were previously acting as constraints to universal education and the elimination of child labor." (Wazir & Saith 2010, p.15-16).'

As part of its strategy of inclusiveness, MVF ties up with local civil society groups. In Kurnool district, where MVF has recently launched a mass campaign against child labor in the cottonseed industry, alliances with trade unions like the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), local women's self-help groups, handicraft workers' cooperatives, and *dalit* groups have been formed.[11] A member of the AITUC said, "We joined hands with MVF because it is ethically wrong to employ children. Child labor also depresses adult wages."[12] Women's groups and *dalit* groups have been included because most of the children working in the hybrid cottonseed fields are young girls from dalit families. Creating alliances with other groups allows MVF to gain legitimacy in the local community, gives the movement the strength of numbers, creates a critical mass of support, and creates a 'mood' for mass movement.[13]

Strategy for Sustainability

Sustainability of interventions is one of the biggest challenges of NGOs (Farrington *et al* 1993). MVF ensures sustainability by institutionalizing community level mechanisms that monitor the status of each child in every village, and remain operative even after MVF has withdrawn from a village. The most important community-mechanisms initiated by MVF are the Children's Rights Protection Forums (CRPFs). CRPFs consist of village level volunteers who monitor the status of children's nutrition, health, protection and development within the village. CRPF convenor of Tandur *mandal*, Rangareddy district Venkat Rao said, "We conduct checks on the factories and if we find any child being employed, we make complaints to the labor officer. We also check on the regularity of teacher's attendance in the schools and the status of school's infrastructure." [14] CRPF members across Andhra Pradesh are trained by MVF to make petitions to government departments under the Right to Education Act, 2009 extensively to demand that the right of free education guaranteed

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[11] The word *dalit* is used to denote the former untouchable castes.

[12] Interview with Srikrishna, Secunderabad, March 1, 2012.

[13] Interview with Venkat Reddy, Secunderabad, February 20, 2012

[14] Interview with Venkat Rao, Ranga Reddy district, February 23, 2012.

under the act is delivered to children. MVF trains members of CRPF on key laws relating to the rights of children, on how to engage with the community and the state on the issue of child rights. Each of these groups are organized at the mandal, district and state level, thereby allowing them the flexibility of interacting with each level of the bureaucracy. CRPF convenor Venkat Rao said, "We file petitions with local officers. If our petitions are not heard, we send our petitions to the district magistrate or even to the State-level officers with the help of the district and state level CRPFs. At some point they have to respond because we are only asking for what is due to us. It is a slow process but we have to start somewhere." The CRPFs with its network of 20,000 members ensures sustainability on the issue of child rights even when MVF withdraws its operations from a particular area.

Strategy of Collaboration with Bureaucracy

The support of the state is regarded as definitive in making NGO efforts successful—therefore, NGOs have to delicately balance between government demands and the needs of local communities (Mackenzie 2003; Farrington *et al* 1993). When MVF first started its mobilization in Shankarpally mandal in Ranga Reddy district, the main task of volunteers was to withdraw children from the workforce and send them to government schools. Since government schools were the cheapest and most widely available option for poor children, MVF focused its strategy on strengthening government schools. But admitting children into schools brought home the fact that for child labor eradication to be successful, MVF had to actively engage with the bureaucracy. Therefore, MVF volunteers started with supporting government school teachers by following up with absentee students, assisting them with classroom teaching activities since teacher-student ratio was very low, and urging the community to assist in building the infrastructure of schools. Venkat Reddy explains, "Our biggest task was to teach the community to engage with the state, not with cynicism, but with hope."[15]

Since MVF actively interacted with the community through household surveys and community meetings, they conveyed the problems that child laborers and first generation learners encountered in accessing the schooling system to the local education bureaucracy. For instance, the process of one-time admission during the academic year meant that children who missed school admission during the month of August because of agricultural work had to stay out of the school for the entire academic year. Also, a child who had missed a year/few years of schooling found it impossible to rejoin the school, since there was no provision to make up for the lost years of schooling. 15-20% students were dropping out in the process of transitioning from Class V to Class VI because parents were unaware of the process of acquiring transfer certificates. When they conveyed these problems to the local education department officials, they responded proactively. Seshadri, who was the Mandal Education Officer (MEO) at the time when MVF started its movement in Shankarpally said, "As an NGO, they had the flexibility to experiment with new innovations. But as government officers, we have to act within existing guidelines. However, we tried to amend the existing rules to address the community's demands." NGOs who play a facilitative role between the community and the bureaucracy have been found to be more successful than advocacy NGOs (Kudva 2005). MVF played the role of facilitator between the community and the local bureaucracy.

In 1995, the MEO passed a circular that a child should be admitted to school anytime during the academic year to overcome the problem of one-time admission. To deal with problem of children who had 'missed the boat', so to speak – child laborers, or dropouts, - government school teachers and MVF volunteers held special coaching classes so that these children could catch up and join the

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[15]   Interview with Venkat Reddy, Hyderabad, February 23, 2012.

academic session in an age appropriate class. These special coaching classes formed the germ of the Residential Bridge Course (RBC) Camps which have evolved as one of the most successful innovations of MVF. After a transitional period in the RBCs, they are admitted in local government schools at an age-appropriate class. The MEO passed an automatic promotion policy: once syllabus for a particular year was completed, all children from a particular grade would be promoted to the next grade so that teachers and students were not discouraged by repeated failures. The onus of issuing transfer certificates were passed on to the headmaster of the primary school instead of the parent. This intervention alone nullified the number of drop-outs from fifth grade to sixth grade.[16] The local bureaucracy set up mandal-level education committees consisting of members of the community, especially women to fortnightly monitor the status of the schools in the mandal. The innovations at Shankarpally presented a good example of state-NGO collaboration where NGO conveyed local demands to state officials, and the state officials responded by adapting government regulations. These strategies of inclusiveness, sustainability, and collaboration have been utilized by MVF consistently over the past two decades with effective results.

IMPACT OF MVF'S STRATEGY OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Response of the Community

Statistics show that MVF's strategies of community mobilization had an impact. MVF had first started its mobilization in Shankarpally mandal in Ranga Reddy district. In 1992, at the time of the first general survey, only 56.7% of the children in Shankarpally were attending school. By 1994, 86.7% in the *mandal* children were attending school.[17] By 2004-05, the percentage of children in Shankarpally attending government schools rose to 97.5%.[18] M. Seshadri, the former MEO said, "MVF's process of community mobilization worked because the community started feeling a sense of ownership towards their own children and towards the village schools. Shankarpally is perhaps the only mandal in India where hundreds of classrooms were built solely through community funds within the span of a few years. This could not have been accomplished solely through government efforts." He added, "The involvement of the community is absolutely indispensable. They are the ones who are at the receiving end of the policies, so they are aware of the loopholes. But NGOs are needed to follow-up and to bring out loopholes in policy into the forefront."[19]

The response of parents and former child laborers towards MVF initiatives was positive. Some of the testimonies are noted below:

> *A mother whose three children had gone to MVF-run RBCs said, "One son is an electrician in Dubai, another is a data analyst in New Delhi and my daughter is enrolled in a government residential school." She insisted that I speak with her son in New Delhi over the mobile phone because she wanted me to hear her son speaking in English. She was obviously proud as her son explained in fluent English how he had*

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[16]   Seshadri 2001

[17]   Out of 10,661 children in Shankarpalli Mandal, MVF identified 5155 school-going children and 5610 non-school going children. By 1994, 4,190 of the non-school going children began to attend schools.

[18]   See *Enabling Access of Out of School Children Into Schools*: Action Aid Report 2006.

[19]   Interview with M. Seshadri, Shankarpally, February 27, 2012.

graduated from MVF's 'bridge camps' and subsequently pursued his studies at a government school.[20]

K. Anjeya, currently employed as a teacher in the government-run Sakshar Bharat Program. He said, "I had dropped out of Grade 4 and was tending to cattle and goats. When MVF volunteers requested my parents to send me to an RBC, my parents were very reluctant. But eventually, they agreed to send me to MVF's Patlur Bridge Camp for five years." Today Anjeya makes Rs. 3,000 every month ($60) out of which he gives Rs.2000 ($40) to his parents. He said, "It is not just the financial help, but they are very proud that I am a respected man in the village."[21]

Kiran, an orphan was rescued from a circus by MVF volunteers and is currently enrolled in undergraduate college in Hyderabad. She has started her own voluntary group in the college to rescue child laborers. She says, "I stay in a government Social Welfare Hostel now and MVF still supports me in continuing my education. I would like to give back what I have received."[22]
The Sarpanch (headman) of Panchalingam village in Maredpally mandal says, "Earlier we were not even aware that the Panchayat could monitor schools. With MVF's training, we now regularly check the schools and maintain 100% enrolment in our village."[23]

In the past two decades, MVF has withdrawn 6,00,000 child laborers, released 25,000 child bonded laborers, mainstreamed 50,000 children from RBCs to formal schools, and stopped 8,000 child marriages. Through a network of 80,000 youth volunteers, 20,000 CRPF members, alliances of thousands of local groups, MVF has successfully created an extensive social network across 25,000 villages in Andhra who consistently monitor children's rights (Wazir & Saith 2010). The training of CRPF members in the democratic process of mobilizing the community and engaging with public officials has created a group of dynamic grassroot-level leaders, and significantly over 750 members of CRPF have won elections at the village, mandal and district levels. MVF's senior resource have successfully transferred the model to urban cities of Delhi, Patna, and Bhopal, to Naxalite areas in Bihar and Chattisgarh, to remote tribal habitations in the state Madhya Pradesh, and even areas disturbed by ethnic insurgency and separatist movements in the state of Assam (Wazir & Saith 2010).

MVF has been criticized for focusing on enrolment and retention, but not so much on quality of education. Seshadri explained, "MVF and the local bureaucracy's first target was to bring and keep children in school. Quality was a secondary issue."[24] However, within a span of two decades the normative approach towards education has changed. Venkat Reddy explains, "Once we enabled one generation of parents to access the schooling system, the next generation automatically wants to educate their children. Parents, once educated, have the most powerful multiplier effect of spreading normative change."[25] Vijay Kumar, a senior bureaucrat explains, "We have won the battle against poor enrolment. Now parents not only want education, they want quality education."[26] MVF

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[20] Interview with mother of former child laborers, Maheshwaram mandal, March 7, 2012

[21] Interview with K. Anjeya, Dharur mandal, February 23, 2012

[22] Interview with Kiran, Hyderabad, March 3, 2012.

[23] Interview with Sarpanch, Dharur Mandal, February 23, 2012.

[24] Interview with M. Seshadri, Shankarpally, February 27, 2012.

[25] Interview with Venkat Reddy, February 23, 2012.

[26] Interview with T. Vijay Kumar, Hyderabad, March 4, 2012.

has now organically moved on to a second generation of reforms that focus on quality of education. Therefore, MVF's achievements have to be analyzed in light of the fact that the organization was battling against deeply entrenched societal norms and political indifference on the issue of child labor.

Response of the Bureaucracy

The most significant contribution of MVF, which has led to widespread replication of its innovations, has been ideational shift in the state on the issue of child labor and universal education. The shift in the mind-set of the bureaucracy is regarded as the most essential element for sustainable change (Mukherji 2012; Weiner 1991). The state of Andhra Pradesh accepted MVF's contention that child labor was a cause of poverty, rather than poverty being a cause of child labor. T. Vijay Kumar, currently a senior bureaucrat in the rural development department who played an important role in incorporating MVF initiatives into state policy in his previous position as Commissioner of School Education said, "Child labor eradication as now accepted as an integral element of Andhra's strategy for poverty eradication. In fact child labor eradication and universal education are stated objectives of the state's Velugu program- a program for women's Self-Help Groups (SHGs) that has played a big role in financial mobility of the poor. It was MVF that demonstrated this link between child labor and universal education. They showed us a proof of concept of what is workable on the ground. That was their most unique contribution."[27] This change in perspective that saw child labor eradication as a prerequisite for poverty alleviation brought a sense of urgency in mitigating child labor.

The shift in perspective led to a slew of legislative initiatives.With the support of senior bureaucrats, the innovation of RBCs, automatic promotion policy, ongoing admission throughout the year, first experimented with in Shankarpally have all been incorporated as state-level policy. In a 2001 Andhra Pradesh Assembly Resolution, the state government accepted the nomenclature of 'Out of School Children' first used by MVF. Instead of denoting children working in hazardous industries as 'child labor', the Andhra legislature accepted that any child that was out of school is a child labor, thereby taking a radical step away from conventional policy on child labor. In 2003, Andhra passed the Child Labor and Compulsory Education Bill which declared that children's work across all occupations should be banned. Though the Bill was never enacted   into policy, the drafting of such a Bill in Andhra Pradesh demonstrated that the issue of complete abolition of child labor and compulsory education was being discussed in policy circles in Andhra seriously. Andhra became the only state in India where the subject of child labor was transferred from the purview of the Department of Labor to that of the Education Department (Weiner 1991). Vijay Kumar said, "It was a unique process of bottom-up policy making. MVF demonstrated solutions on the ground which was accepted by the state."[28]

The strategy of community mobilization used by MVF also found incorporation into state policy. Andhra was the first state where the idea of community participation, through School Education Committees (SECs), initiated in Shankarpally was incorporated into the Andhra Pradesh School Education (Community Participation) Act, April 1998. Upendra Reddy, who is currently an official of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, the government's main program for universal of elementary education says, "The entire push of child labor eradication came from MVF. The strategies of community mobilization—of releasing child laborers from their employers, of involving local volunteers, of involving parents came from MVF. We fine-tuned some of those strategies while integrating them

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[27]   Interview with T. Vijay Kumar, Hyderabad, March 4, 2012.

[28]   Interview with T. Vijay Kumar, Hyderabad, March 4, 2012.

into policy, but MVF must be given the credit for these strategies of mobilization."[29] Under this Act, every school in Andhra Pradesh was required to have a SEC to monitor the status of the quality of infrastructure and education in the village. SECs have now become an integral part of the SSA and are implemented throughout India. Andhra was also one of the first states in India to create an Integrated Action Plan to Eliminate Child Labor in 2007 which had community mobilization and NGO participation as its central tenets. Therefore, child labor eradication as an instrument for poverty eradication and community participation found permanent place in Andhra's policy.

What made the state so inclined to incorporate MVF interventions? Would MVF innovations find similar acceptance in other states in India? Was there something unique about the socio-political milieu of Andhra that made the state predisposed towards accepting MVF's interventions? If so, why did these changes only happen after 1991 and not earlier? I analyze these questions in the context of two important developments in Andhra Pradesh: i) the history of social movements in Andhra that culminated in the foundation of a dynamic NGO sector and a culture of active community participation; ii) the stewardship of a political leader, N.Chandrababu Naidu in 1991 who was a strong proponent of the ideas of universal education and community participation.

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN ANDHRA

Andhra Pradesh has had a dynamic history of community participation in public affairs—a history which has had significant influence on the emergence of the NGO sector in Andhra and its interaction with the state. Prior to the 1980s, Andhra was home to significant caste and class movements, but in the post 80s phase, the state has witnessed the emergence of a proactive NGO sector and a spate of social movements led by civil society groups. These movements which have spanned across caste, class, gender and ideological moorings and party affiliation have relied largely on grassroots participation and have created a cache of youth who are deeply engaged with ideology of inequality and are tactical experts at strategies of community mobilization. Andhra's civil society is unique in that it is a more open organization, owned by the plebeian classes with a significant amount of grassroots mobilization.[30]

Andhra Pradesh consists of two major regions—the economically developed and urbanized region of coastal Andhra, and the relatively backward region of Telengana. In 1956, during the linguistic reorganization of Indian states, these two economically diverse, but linguistically similar regions were united to create the Telugu-speaking state of Andhra Pradesh.[31] Both the coastal Andhra region and the Telengana region have been home to long running socio-political movements—a *dalit* movement in the former, and a radical communist movement in the latter.

The *dalit* movement in the coastal Andhra region led by the Dalit Maha Sabha emerged in the 1980s. It consists of a social base of educated youth, educated employees, middle class and urban intelligentsia who have deep engagement with rationalist thought and the theories of justice propounded by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. In recent years, the politicization of the movement with its failed foray into parliamentary politics has led to some loss of its mass appeal. However, the movement succeeded in creating a large group of *dalit* youths who displayed consistent track record of struggle and dedication and were trained in the tactics of grassroots activism.

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[29]   Interview with Upendra Reddy, Hyderabad, March 5, 2012.

[30]   Interview with Political Science professor, K. Srinivasulu, Hyderabad, March 19, 2012.

[31]   In 2013, the Parliament of India assented to the creation of a separate state of Telengana, owing to a long-running separatist movement.

On the other hand, the Telengana region which had been a hotbed of communist politics in the pre-independence period saw a resurgence of the communist movement in the 1970s. The inegalitarian social structure led to a schism in the Communist Party of India (CPI) which had been co-opted into parliamentary politics after independence. A new faction called the CPI (ML) (Communist Party of India Marxist-Leninist) emerged which considered the Indian state as allies of the feudal landlord class. Unlike the CPI, they were unwilling to be part of parliamentary politics and sought to bring about radical change through a communist struggle. Owing to the poor economic and educational development in the Telengana region, many of the rural lower class youth of this region entered the institutions of higher education for the first time only in the 1970s. These youth, who had grown up in the oppressive conditions under feudal agricultural system gravitated to radical politics in a significant way. They dropped out of colleges to join the '*Gramalaku Taralandi*' or 'Go to Villages' campaign that spread the message of agrarian revolution to the rural poor. Powered by the dynamism of youth, a wave of social revolution was created in Telengana. Instead of addressing the communist problem as rooted in societal inequality, the state addressed it as a 'law and order' issue and responded with violent attacks on radicals. They were forced to go underground and responded with a guerilla warfare against the state, leading to an unending cycle of violence in the Telengana region which continued till the early 1990s.

The trajectory of localized politics gave rise to a class and caste movements, but both these movements are actually expressions of deep-rooted class contradictions owing to the incomplete agrarian reforms agenda of the ruling Congress party (Srinivasulu 2002). Since both the *dalit* and the communist movement relied on mass participation, they have created mobilization of civil society on social and political issues. Unlike other communist-ruled states like West Bengal, where civil society is regimented and led by a *bhadralok* (gentleman) class, the mass-based movements in Andhra allowed the poorer classes to engage with political ideologies and grassroots activism. Generations of the same families have actively participated in these long-running movements. This background in mass action has created a dynamic culture of community participation in Andhra.[32]

In the post liberalization period of the 1990s, the state's model of liberalization which is perceived as anti-poor has created a new spate of social movements in Andhra. Anti-Special Economic Zone (SEZ) movement, fishermen's movement, handloom weaver's movement, anti-nuclear movement etc. are evidence of an expanded scope of civil society movements that are against the state's current development model. Under these social movements, there is clear articulation of civil society demands. Unlike the movements in the pre-liberalization period which involved political parties, these movements are mostly led by civil society organizations. Political parties, including the Left, have largely stayed away from getting involved in these movements. The conventional role of political parties which is to bring in a localized movement and give it larger focus, as seen for example in the anti-arrack movement in the 1980s has taken a backseat.[33] Growth of an independent pro-people media has played a significant role in giving publicity to these movements.[34]

A significant development in the civil society sector in the 1990s is the unprecedented growth of the NGO sector which was related to the tapering out of the radical left movement in the state. The violence unleashed by the radical left movement alienated popular support, especially of the educated middle class. Meanwhile, in the 1990s, with the TDP coming to power, the grassroots initiatives undertaken by the TDP started making the radical ideology irrelevant to the people. Many activists left the erstwhile radical Left movement and gravitated towards the NGO sector in Andhra.

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[32]   Interview with K. Srinivasulu, Hyderabad, March 19, 2012.

[33]   The anti-arrack movement was a women's movement against the sale of arrack (locally brewed alcohol).

[34]   Interview with K. Srinivasulu, Hyderabad, March 19, 2012.

Those who had dropped out of college to join the radical Left movement in the 1980s found themselves unemployable when they finally left the movement, since they were in their mid-thirties or early forties. The NGO sector provided an attractive opportunity for employment of the erstwhile activists—it allowed them to escape the repressive state machinery, provided them employment, and allowed them to pursue a social goal (Sen 1999). The NGO sector also needs the skills of these activists, particularly those related to mobilizing the masses. The drawing of activists and issues from the Left has given the NGO sector in Andhra a very distinct progressive, pro-people thrust.[35]

A significant boost to the idea of community participation came in the 1990s when a regional party known as the Telegu Desam Party (TDP) unseated the Congress and came to power under the leadership of N. Chandrababu Naidu. Naidu's philosophy of governance was founded on the principle of 'Praja Vaddukku Palan' (administration at the doorsteps of the people), with the twin goals of debureaucratization, and citizen's participation in governance. A key prong of Naidu's reform agenda was the development of participatory grass-roots bodies that would function in parallel to the previously established elected local councils.[36] Andhra saw an explosion of community based groups –by 2003, Andhra had 37,885 youth employment groups, 10, 292 water user associations, 6,616 forest management groups, 99,618 school education committees and 5499 watershed committees, highest for any state in India. 40% of women's SHGs in India are in Andhra alone (Powis 2003). Community participation in Andhra has been strengthened as a result of platforms of participation offered by multiple institutions. The increase in "grassroots associational density" (Putnam 1993) has led to the building up of social capital in Andhra leading to dynamic collective action and institutional accountability.

RELATING MVF STRATEGIES & BUREAUCRATIC RESPONSE TO ANDHRA'S LEGACY OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

The success of MVF on the issue of child labor has to be seen in the context of the historical background of community participation in Andhra. Like many other NGOs in Andhra, MVF successfully modeled its issues, its styles of campaigning, and its grassroots activists drawing from the rich history of social movements in the state. One of the key founding members of MVF was a retired member of the radical Left movement. He explained, "We have worked for years with the poor in rural backward areas. They trust us. As student activists with the radical Left, we were trained to go to poor villages and win over the trust of the people. We shared their meals and understood their problems. We have given the same training to the cadres."[37] This pro-people orientation of MVF and the identification that the poor feel with its activists have worked in favour of MVF. Even MVF's styles of campaigning have been drawn from the traditional styles of campaigning of the Left. A senior MVF member explained, "When we made our first MVF posters, we did not say 'Take children to school', our poster said, "Stop exploitation of children."[38] The image of children being exploited is very powerful for youth." The use of cultural modes of mobilization through songs, dances and public rallies are reminiscent of the earlier styles of campaigning of the Left movement.

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[35]   Interviews with Shantha Sinha, Srinivasulu and Venkat Reddy.

[36]   Naidu argued that there was a need for "participation of stakeholders through groups/committees for reducing leakages in the delivery system while creating a sense of ownership among the beneficiaries". CBN's speech during the 49th National Development Council Meeting at New Delhi in September 2001.

[37]   Interview with senior MVF member, Hyderabad, February 20, 2012

[38]   Interview with senior MVF member, Hyderabad, February 20, 2012.

Many MVF volunteers belong to families who have for generations been politically and socially active. MVF provided a forum, ideology, and systematic training whereby the youth could transform their beliefs into real action. At the same time, the non-hierarchical structure of the organization played a role in motivating the youth. Rameshwar, an MVF resource person, who has worked with MVF for seventeen years says, "The feedback of the volunteers on local issues is taken into consideration seriously while designing its strategies." The principle of internal democracy is pervasive in the organization's culture. Shantha Sinha elaborates on the organizational culture of MVF:

> "There are always a group of people in society who can be charged by imagination and a moral agenda. MVF has been able to fine-tune the strategies by which people's capacities are brought on to full potential by trusting in their ability to bring change. There are still people who are inspired by a vocabulary of *'niyat'*-what is fair and what is just. These values are practiced not only in what the organization practices but also in its organization and management. The principles of decentralized management, inner democracy are integral to MVF. It is part of the MVF agenda to give freedom to the last volunteer, to hear his experience and feedback and to be proud of the achievements of every volunteer. This is also integral to the way regarding how the child rights message is being delivered. How you deliver a message is as important as what is the subject of the message." [39]

The ideology, nature of organization, and the background of the youth themselves might explain why MVF had been able to recruit, train and retain such a large network of volunteers at the grassroots level.

The response of the bureaucracy to MVF initiatives too must be situated in a bureaucracy-in-society approach rather than a bureaucracy-in-administration approach . The response of the bureaucracy was not hostile compared to what would be predicted in the theory of NGO-state relations. Though it would be an overt generalization to say that the entire bureaucracy responded with enthusiasm, MVF was able to convince a critical mass of bureaucrats about the feasibility of its approach. While further research is necessary to conclusively ascertain if bureaucracy in Andhra is more amenable to decentralization than those of other states, initial evidence suggests, that the winds of decentralization that had emanated through social movements and the political process, could not have left the bureaucracy untouched. Shantha Sinha says: "Some states like Andhra, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu have had intense social movements and civil society has managed to carve out a space for itself in the bureaucratic milieu." The history of social movements and the establishment of large numbers of community based organizations in Andhra created a space for interaction of civil society and bureaucracy. Further attitudinal studies are required to make more substantive claims about systematic variation in democratic inclinations of state bureaucracies.

However, certain political and social exigencies predisposed Andhra's bureaucracy towards readily accepting MVF's approach in the early 1990s. In 1991, Andhra's bureaucracy was trying to straddle with the issues of low literacy and explosive numbers of children in the workforce in the context of a caste-ridden, iniquitous, and volatile civil society. Explaining the exigency of the time, senior bureaucrat Vijay Kumar said, "Census 1991 declared Andhra as having the highest percentage of child laborers in the workforce. It is one thing to know that we have large numbers of child laborers and quite another to be declared the number one state. It made the issue of tackling child labor very

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[39]   Interview with Dr. Shantha Sinha, New Delhi, July 3, 2012. This interview was conducted in a separate phase of fieldwork of my PhD dissertation.

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urgent." The National Child Labor Program initiated by the central government in 1986 with an aim of rehabilitating children working in hazardous occupations had failed to make a significant impact. In this scenario, MVF demonstrated a 'proof of concept'—they showed a workable model on the ground that was yielding results and had succeeded in involving all stakeholders in the community, especially parents and employers. MVF opened up a political space in which bureaucrats open to change were able to manoeuvre.

The response of the bureaucracy was also shaped by the Chandrababu Naidu-led TDP government's focus on administrative decentralization and debureaucratization. A bureaucrat in the state's education department says "Naidu started a large number of programs for universal education and encouraged bureaucrats in every government department to be involved. It had a huge impact on the motivation of the bureaucracy." Dr. Shantha Sinha reiterates the role of a supportive political leader. She says, "Though there were a number of enlightened bureaucrats at that time that supported the MVF campaign, the changes couldn't have been made so far-reaching without the leadership of Chandrababu Naidu. A bureaucracy can lead a program but it cannot assume the status of a movement without the backing of one powerful leader."[40] In Andhra Pradesh, there was fortuitous meeting of minds where the civil society, the bureaucracy, and the political leadership came together to form a consensus on the issue.

RELATING THE ANDHRA CASE TO THEORY ON STATE-NGO RELATIONSHIP

MVF's case study points to the necessity of re-examining the uncontested generalizations of state-NGO relationship in India. It highlights the central role of community participation as a mediating factor in state-NGO relationship. The collaboration of state-NGOs turns on the ability of NGOs able to empower communities to generate sustainable community based solutions tailored to the local context, their creation of an inclusive agenda that mitigates inherent socio-economic disparities, and their able to engage with the local bureaucracy in a constructive manner. Simultaneously, the replication of innovative practices of NGOs turns on the openness and flexibility of the bureaucracy to incorporate workable solutions into policy. The study of state-NGO relationship in the Indian context especially needs to focus on the attitudes of *both* NGOs and the bureaucracy, especially for interest-based issues like children's rights, women's rights, or environmental rights which don't find reflection in the agenda of political parties. Further research is required to establish whether the alternative theoretical proposition of the centrality of community participation is applicable in other policy contexts.

The burgeoning growth of NGOs in India have led to pessimistic conclusions that India may be heading the Bangladesh way with rise of the NGO sector leading to questions about the legitimacy of the state. Such arguments that the ascendancy of NGOs will necessarily be met with hostility by the state are based on the pessimistic assumption that the state cannot reform itself to become a people-oriented entity. However, studies show how top-down functioning bureaucracies have reformed in Sri Lanka, Kenya and the Philippines to become participatory and effective institutions, the normal traits associated with the voluntary sector.[41] The MVF case suggests a possibility that given the right conditions, Indian state bureaucracies too might experience a shift towards participatory governance.

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[40] Interview with Shantha Sinha, *New Delhi*, July 3, 2012.

[41] Thomson 1995

This study suggests that the political economy of the state and its historical impact on community participation should be explored in studies on state-NGO relationship. In this case, the history of social movements had an impact on the membership, the mobilization strategies and the attitude of NGOs' members. Further, the background in community participation also orientated the bureaucracy towards accepting community participation. This suggests that a regional mapping of NGO-state relationship in India could unearth important systematic linkages between the political economy of development, the history of civil society mobilization in a state, and the current status of state-NGO relationship. It suggests state as an intermediate unit of analysis, going beyond the local and the national as the only units of analyses. Therefore, the political economy of development in a region plays a role in the development of the NGO sector and the state's inclination towards democratic norms of participation, and could be an important determinant of the convergence of NGO and state initiatives.

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