Choices and challenges of consecrated women leadership in Faith Based Organizations in India

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Abstract: Contesting the popular claim of Faith Based Organizations as a sphere of women emancipation, endeavoring to investigate the extent of participation, representation, versus exclusion of the consecrated women leaders of these organizations, based on case study of Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Calcutta using Qualitative data through in-depth interviews with the women leaders of these organizations and utilizing the theoretical propositions like R.W. Connell's "gender order", P. Bourdieu's "habitus" and J.C Alexander's "neo-functionalist" understanding of the civil sphere,this article argues thateven when the increasing scale and scope of the organizations increase participation of consecrated women in the intervention activities of the organizations in terms of empowering the marginalized as per their defined duties, their participation in the governance of these organizations is limited. While the hegemony of socio cultural fabric of Indian society, constituted by the dominion of patriarchy has led to the gender stereotyping perpetuated through Indian tradition assigning descriptive roles to the women leaders of the organization, reinforced by theology which eventhough define their role as 'empowering' the marginalized, their duties continue to be of service providers.

Keywords: *Faith Based Organization, gender order, religious minorities, consecrated women, women empowerment*

Background

In the Indian context, institutionalization of voluntarism through The Charter Act of 1813 unleashed the proliferation of Christian missionary activities that incorporated gender concerns in Faith Based Organizations (FBOs) [1] not only among Christian community but also in other communities of India. Retrospectively, while nation state was found to be less adequate and equipped to realise women's development, the FBOs with Christian missionary-endeavors initiated gender concerns in civil society agenda that contributed significantly in the transformation of the status of Indian women in the past two centuries (Basu, 2012: 105-112). This enabled FBO's purpose being served on one hand in incorporating the women emancipation agenda even prior to women empowerment initiatives by the State; and women being included in these organizations as part of their activity on the other. Against the pervasive perception that these organizations are pro women empowerment, the paper with inputs from primary data is an exploration of the reality in

terms of the extent to which these organizations, apart from aiming to empower the marginalized, empower the consecrated women leaders of the FBOs. Studies on Christian women in Bengal elucidate their involvement in church related activities as a scope for their entry into public sphere. Such participation however did not empower them to take up decisions within the public space or challenge the hegemonic relations often coining it as a "comfortable" space (Aleaz 2009:079). Nevertheless, the lack of studies on the influence of missionary work on women's empowerment in India limits understanding of some of the ideological premises of the organizations tied to or originating in religious ideologies, nationalism or other social reform movements, accounts on FBOs declare that there has been limited enquiry concerning the relationship between gender and FBOs both on the part of the feminists as well as faith based theorists. In the backdrop of the history of women's empowerment in India often failing to identify the role of missionary work along with the nature of the role of the women leaders within the FBOs, this paper tries to examine the extent of inclusion and empowerment of consecrated women within FBO srun by Christian missionaries.

Investigating the FBOs

Located at the interface of gender and power, the FBOs are characterized by distinct gender order. Connell's (1987) conception of gender order is a combination of 'gender regimes' at societal level which ultimately prescribes roles to the particular genders. These "gender regimes" are the structural accounts constraining the gender interplay within institutions (Maharaj 1995-59). Connell argues for a practice-based theory which identifies power relationship as the centre and brings out the interaction between the role theory of masculinity and femininity and the categorical theory emphasizing the role of social practice which is inherent to any social structure. The analysis of the structure manifests an order which is gendered in nature. Connell further refers to three central elements of gender order - the sexual division of labor, the structure of power and the structure of cathexis and in each of the elements; it is not the individual but the social processes that play role in determining the order of gender. The gender order and gender regimes are only sustained through institutions. The structure determines the freedom of the agency and also its limitations. The constraints within institutions and its practicality are visible in the various power relationships within the institutions of the society. Thus the examination of social structure begins with the study of its institutions (Connell 1987-92). The fact that gender relationships are altered within the FBOs, portray gender order within these organizations. The gendered division of labor plays a vital role which is an upshot of the constraints that the structures offer. This results in the shaping and training of the women with particular skills that serves as an institutional mechanism for the sustenance of gender order (Maharaj 1995:52). In consonance with Connell thus this article conceptualizes FBOs as gender regimes.

This article endeavors to examine how gender order is reproduced and perpetuated in FBOs in India with the case study of Roman Catholic (RC)[2]Archdiocese of Calcutta [3].The city of Kolkata accounts for 0.72 per cent of Christians and 0.88 per cent of the State's Christian population resides in Kolkata according to the Census report of 2011. The R C Archdiocese of Calcutta covers the city of Kolkata, Howrah and adjacent regions. There are around 25 Congregations [4] of RC consecrated sisters operating 116 RCFBOs for the downtrodden in the city of Kolkata according to

The RC Directory of India 2010 and 2014 and The Archdiocese of Calcutta. The first level of selection was made in the selection of Congregations through which 13 out of 25 Congregations were chosen. Within the 13 Congregations based on proportionate random sampling design, 18 RCFBOs were chosen. RC sisters occupying managerial and leadership positions from each of the RCFBOs were interviewed. The organizations varied in terms of their activities and scope primarily working for the marginalized and downtrodden. Data from each selected organizations were gathered from reports and records of the organization. These reports outlined the history and genesis of the organizations in relation to the involvement of women. In-depth interviews with the sisters in leadership positions were conducted; particularly of those who manage the organizations as well as performed as liaison between their organization and the Congregation. This was done to understand the processes and patterns of services.

Women Representatives of Roman Catholic Faith Based Organizations

The historicity of Christian missionary organizations in India corroborates the tracing of the history of gender inclusion in RCFBOs in India. Evidently, these organizations in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries presented a combination of men and women working in such organizations addressing the needs and welfare of both men and women in Indian society.

Jeffery Alexander's neo functionalist approach to civil society depicts it as a space of inclusion, functioning as an agency of solidarity and integration. He chalks out a binary discourse of civil society at the levels of motives, social relations and sustainable institutions each level manifesting a set of democratic and undemocratic codes which acts as foundations on which the functioning of civil society rely. The democratic code manifests the means of solidarity and integration while the undemocratic codes manifest the antipathies. At the level of social motives Alexander proposed activism, autonomy, rationality, reasonableness, calm, self control, realistic and sane as democratic codes of the actors, in terms of the counter democratic code he proposed passivity, dependence, irrationality, hysteria, excitable, passionate, unrealistic and mad. For social relationship he proposes open, trusting, critical, honorable, conscience, truthful, straightforward, deliberative and friendship as democratic codes and secret, suspicious, deferential, self interested, greed, deceitful, calculating, conspirational and enemy as counter-democratic codes. For the sustainability of institutions he puts forward rule, regulated, law, equality, inclusive, impersonal, contractual, social groups and office as democratic code and arbitrary, power, hierarchy, exclusive, personal, ascriptive loyalty, fractions and personality as counter democratic code. The democratic side of each of the three categories is synonymous to the democratic side of the other categories and thus also is antithetical to the undemocratic side of each category. In the light of Alexander's theory the paper attempts to look into social motives, the social relationships and the civil societies in as RCFBOs catering to activism, being inclusive and promoting friendship. Examining the relationship between religion and collective action sociologically, manifests religion as enabling the forging of social network informed by cultural and ideological framework. This framework further initiates activities which benefits the in-group and unleashes an efficacy mechanism facilitating the actors. The ability of the group to enforce social sanctions is crucial to obtaining cooperation from co-ethnics. There thus lies a pro societal behavior in both Catholicism and Islam which enables the suppression of personal behavior and working for the other. Scriptures are a major factor influencing the generosity as in

case of Catholicism; the New Testament strongly states the importance of giving and service (Warner et.al. 2012: 4). The services extended for the society on the part of the organizations run by the consecrated women of RC community which facilitates their own upliftment as well as the upliftment of the women in need at the societal level. Elliott (2006) in writing about civil society includes voluntary groups which for her responds to local needs which itself is a challenge for the State.

One of the Congregations, started in 1887 by a priest initially gathered twelve women of Mangalore to reach out to the sick and needy. The women were from righteous families who were educated and with the effort of whom, the foundation of the Congregation which currently has four provinces under it was built.

Another Congregation was started around twenty years back under the guidance of the priests who had 15 to 20 faith based homes for the marginalized. Among the three RC sisters of the organizations one of them has been pursuing her graduation while the other two RC sisters were senior sisters of the home. Two of the senior sisters completed their Masters in social work. There are total twenty eight children currently staying in the organization under their supervision. The narration of a fifty five year old RC sister who seemed to be happy with her decisions of guiding the girl inmates, stated that there were orphan girls who were once a part of the organization; are well settled in life currently who often came back to tell us how under the guidance of the RC sisters, they could pursue higher studies and could grow up to be professionally successful women.

The RC sisters of another organization described their roles as serving the humankind who believed that every individual irrespective of their religious orientation has the dignity of being human. Even if they are suffering lying on the roadsides or are disowned by their families, they still should live the rest of their life with the dignity, which other human beings enjoy. This becomes the purpose of the services by the sisters. Their role set includes; nursing, medical practitioners, teachers, care givers and also social mobilisers for the beneficiaries.

The sole mission of one of the RCFBOs is to serve the poorest of the poor and this particular institution serve the destitute picked up from streets and railway stations of Kolkata, who are lying with diseases or are dying by the roadside. The task of the institution includes healthcare mainly but it also gets merged with social faith based irrespective of caste, creed, gender, age, religion, ability, class etc. The RC sisters here are directly involved in giving the services from bathing the inmates to cleaning their wounds to taking care of the food and maintaining each inmate's medical record. For the sisters it is not only offering physical faith services but also talking to them, listening to their sorrows and spending time with them are important. There is a Superior who is the Leader of the RC sisters and is associated with the faith based activities directly.

Led by an RC sister, one of the Congregations of Kolkata works in the services of the poor. The leader sister is solely appointed by the process of voting by each of the other sisters. Each RCFBO run by them has a superior who leads the organization. There are four sisters working under the leader and in case of any difficulty; the superiors of each organization approach any of them. The order of decision making among them is not along gender lines at Congregational level. In one of the RCFBOs run by the Congregation, there are six categories of work associated with the organization which are purely based on the training they have received. There is no ranking within.

There are special trainings given, and duties thus are assigned according to the type of training one has obtained. The nature of the training confirms to the requirement of the organization in concern. The activities taken up by women are pictured as by choice of the vocation but in reality is for the fulfillment of the requirement of the organization. The assigned jobs have its grounding in theology. Considering all the RCFBOs, two types of decision making models can be chalked out: the consensus model and the top down model where the latter overrides the former. Each of the organizations even though are led by women, decisions taken by the leader alone is rare. The unique style of leadership is observed whereby major decisions are taken in consultation with committee or the parish priest.

Women Representation and Leadership in Roman Catholic Faith Based Organizations

Bourdieu's concept of habitus is concerned with the 'capacity to act' and everything one conceives which enables to situate oneself in the field. While habitus is defined as the network, or arrangement of relationships among various positions in society, the positions have been considered as determined by the position they occupy in the power structure of the society which often compromise with the advantages of the position putting at stake their relationship with other positions in the society (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 97). The habitus of the RC sisters have been considered as intervened by the cultural impositions which to a large extent have also bore an impact on their relationship with the others occupying various positions from culturally majoritarian groups.

Following Bourdieu's "generative structuralism" whereby the individual is shaped by the social structures with an 'ontological correspondence' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 127) between the habitus and the field one is in, this article conceptualizes the RCFBOs as well as the culture of religious majority communities as fields; while the habitus of the RC sisters has been considered as socialized according to what Bourdieu terms as the 'transubstantiation' of the majority culture which prescribes and assigns gendered norms to the RC community resulting in their imparting of service activities yet excluding them from decision making within the order of the community.

Chang (2003) opines that a strand of neo-institutional framework has considered the cultural elements as key factor in determining organizational structure. This has also led to a sense of 'mimetic isomorphism' of the organizations whereby the state intimidates and determines the organizations according to its ideology (Lindsay & Wuthnow, 2010: 93-94). This often leads to the RC organizations operating after majoritarian cultural framework whereby patriarchal norms govern the institutions, shape the habitus and determine the field of the actors.

A sense of women empowerment operates within the spheres of the RCFBOs considering the fact that the organizations are women led. However the question here arises about the extent to which the positions give them the power to assert themselves as decision making individuals and active agents, giving them the right to independently choose what is best for the organization taking up more important positions vis-a-vis their leadership within these organizations.

"Power" for Bourdieu is a cultural and symbolic construct acted upon by agency and reified by the structures of society which is an upshot of habitus that direct an individual's behavior within a given society determining roles and sustaining power structures. The cultural prescriptions of the majority community serve as a field contributing to the habitus formation of the minority [5] communities. We conclude that religious women's occupation of the leadership position within the spheres of organizations offering extended services even though privileges them with rights, a politics of palliation operates as it only caters to "problem solving" in sharp contrast to representation. Women's full participation is not ensured particularly of decision making at the organizational level. RCFBOs thus even though reaches out to the marginalized through their service duties, to a large extent hinder their participation in power positions and the organizational level decision making. Order is embedded in the functioning and activities of the organizations being entrenched in the patriarchal culture of the society in which they function and exist incorporating the gender norms and gender stereotype among their participants as well as their beneficiaries poses impediments in granting greater access and transfer of equal power to women. The orientation of the beneficiaries of the services are much alike the women in vows themselves who themselves are working within the patriarchal constraints of the Indian society. The women in India are succumbed to the socio -religious order which often acts as a threat to equality and social order (Chakkuvaracka, 2002).

Connell's conception of gender regimes existing in community and society get incorporated into these organizational structures and functioning which extends reproduction of gender order in RCFBOs. The structural positioning of women particularly their ranking and the expected outcomes of such ranking assigning women their position points out that it is the structure that determines the position and behavior in terms of one's gender.

The research classifies the RCFBOs run by the Christian Missionaries in Kolkata into five types according to the scale and scope of the organizations, as well as the complexity of the responsibilities taken up by the management.

The first type consists of the management and operation of smaller organizations like nursery or kindergarten schools which entail limited responsibilities with the few RC sisters associated with it, the decisions within these small organizations are taken by the sisters. The second type of organizations is medium in size and has comparatively more responsibilities than the first category but is not too complex in its management but the decisions at management level are taken by sisters who are answerable to the higher authorities of the parish. The third type of organizations include large scale organizations in which decisions regarding the activities of it are taken by committees which includes higher authorities apart from the women in leadership. The fourth type consists of organizations managed by the RC sisters but is mainly concerned with activities which are aiming at forging ties with the non religious commoners. Even though the other categories too permeate into nonreligious space, organizations in this category have been seen as providing common utility services. The organizations mainly cater to book shop with reading space, medical dispensary, girl's hostel or homes for the aged. The fifth category consists of organizations which operate at international level; these organizations are no longer limited to the management of it by the RC sisters but are now operating under Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs). The order

pervasively perceptible in the organizations surveyed is illustrated through case studies depicting each type of organization are thus furnished below:

The only nursery school under a Congregation is managed by all RC sisters for more than two decades. The organization provides education for children from all communities and gives concession to the children in financial need. The organization is having a leader, two other sisters under her and a woman helper. It is comparatively a smaller organization and this decision making lies with the leader who is in her sixties. The nursery does come under parish but routine decisions are taken by the RC sisters only. Thus, it manages all its responsibilities under the leadership of sisters with only the organizational decisions resting with the Diocese.

A home for the girls studying between classes 6^{th} to 12^{th} are run by three RC sisters who are non natives of Kolkata and has pursued higher education. The children staying in the shelter home are school goers while the smaller ones are taught by the RC sisters only. Though the organization was initiated with the effort of the RC sisters, they sought the support of the priests experienced in managing such organizations to establish it. Decisions regarding financial management, personal management, human resource management within the organization etc. rests with the sisters and organizational development liaison with external agencies are made by the parish priests.

A house for facilitating study of medicine for the RC sisters and offering medical services was started by Bishop in 1958. The house facilitated treatment of the sisters and also served as a training ground in nursing, medicine and teaching. There are 14RC sisters under one superior RC sister in the house. It also manages a hostel for girls which accommodate twenty eight girls. Decisions regarding the appointment, transfer and assignment of any kind are rests with the Provincial however they can work under Bishop on his agreement.

Even when they had the choice to work under any Bishop, the permission of the Bishop played an important role and ultimately the decision of the Pope. The authors would like to argue that in each of the cases, the women's decision making capacity is largely shaped by the community requirements and permissions from the male leaders. There even though lies a sense of freedom on the part of the provincial leader but it is also limited to duties regarding the sisters. At larger level, the responsibilities lie with the male leaders or with the committee consisting of both male and female.

A health centre run by the RC sisters from various Congregations which facilitates treatment offered by doctors from various places, also provided medical facilities like blood test and x-ray at subsidized rates. The doctors were from different communities and the centre also has receptionist and lab technicians who were from other communities. However the centre leader is a priest who is known as the director.

A shelter home providing education, healthcare, protection and nutrition to under privileged girl children lay at the heart of the city of Kolkata. The home comes under a state coordinator followed by a project in charge who is an RC sister. Apart from her the other people are all lay people, be it home coordinator, home manager, social mobiliser or "home mothers." There is a systematic process of choosing and recruiting them as the state coordinator comes under the NGO. The role of the RC sister is limited within the confinement of routine matters while decisions related to funding and other things are taken care by the national level NGO. The appointment of staff is done by proper interviews in consultation with the NGO. It is however a cause of concern that prescribed

formats of funding agencies work in accordance with the prevailing cultural norms of the beneficiary country; the UNFPA (United Nations population fund) works on their funding by identifying the local power structures as well as the local faith practices considering in their development interventions (Karam 2010: 435-436).

Each of the five cases is a reflection of each typology of organization in the classification. There is inverse relationship between the scale and scope of the organization and the devolution of authority to women. However the religious prescriptions of abiding by the authority's decision making and not questioning it in spite of being in leadership positions illustrates the outcomes of certain decisions satisfying requirements of the organization yet not resulting into fair choice. Sen's conception of 'liberal paradox' questions the rights and efficiency of such 'social choice' which is gender insensitive and only reflect the decisions of the men in the committee due to the relationship and personal bonds shared among the members. A closer look into the decision making patterns will manifest the concerns more profoundly (Peter, 2003: 20-24).

Considering the origins of the Congregations, most of the studied Congregations had its origin in the West and had its root there, the founders of all the Congregations are women who had a particular mission and thus mobilized the women for concerned purposes. However the operation of the Congregation within the Indian context manifests male leadership initially and then subsequently women's involvement brings into forefront the patriarchal nature of the Indian society, the cultural milieu of which also resulted in the dearth of leadership in its true sense as well as the documentation of women's works within the Congregations in India. Thus there occurs lack of literature on the voices of the women who were associated with FBOs and information is mostly in terms of history, designed upon the cultural prescriptions of the Indian society justified by theology. Correspondingly, gender division of labour prescribed by theology assigning different roles to men and women evolves into gender order reproduced from the culture of the majority community. Tadroz illustrates Smeal's writing about women's role and agency as "systematically reduced from participatory decision-makers to the recipients of trickled-down aid" within an FBO (Tadroz, 2010: 15).

Conclusion

Located in a socio culture ambience perpetuated by the way of life practiced by the religious majority community, insulation between the religious communities seem to dilute by which an overwhelming numerical preponderance of non Christians and their way of life influences the Christian way of life among the religious minority communities in India. Correspondingly, the RCFBOs managed by the Christian missionaries and the community with which they work have high influence of cultural majoritarian way of life, symbols, attitudes and values. Although Christian Missionaries in India have made a mark in mainstreaming the gender concerns through RCFBOs being caught up in the cultural domination of the religious majority community because of which the agenda of women emancipation are to a greater extent less likely to be translated into an agenda of women empowerment among the categories of women providers of community level FBOs and also the women beneficiary of such services. Women to a large extent is marginalised from State institutions and male dominated organizations and finds it easier to get involved with the RCFBOs and community groupings or women's activist groups which have been largely

considered as a space for emancipation of women. By investigating such connection between gender and FBOs with reference to state, market and household, the public private debate gets strengthened (Howell and Mulligan, 2005: 4-5). The RCFBOs limiting itself to inclusion and access can also be seen in not empowering them or giving them the power to control, which further manifests a sense of amelioration. The inclusion of women even though ensures their access and role taking in organizations, the consensus model within the organization mitigates leadership and governance by the RC sisters. In terms of the beneficiaries, planned activities seem to be alleviation of sufferings of people enabling activities by which the women involve themselves in service for the community dedicating their lives in service for the others. This however does not provide them with inputs for their empowerment. Some of the enabling activities which meets the survival requirements or subsistence of the consecrated women also limits their voices. The efforts are not transferring power to women or developing women leadership for the beneficiaries. Such order impedes the full participation of women and often mitigates their empowerment. They are however not given the choice to make their voices heard and even the beneficiaries, whom they re-socialise, often limit themselves in terms of their demands and voices which again impede the process of women empowerment. Gender practices within any faith inevitably are determined by the community's system of leadership, the socio historical setting of the group and the political ideology of the state. The agendas of the community's RCFBOs will have an influence of the majority religious ideologies and gender practices thus promoting gender order within the RCFBOs. Studies on the role of women within RCFBOs manifest instances of gender stereotyping backed up with ideologies of religion (Tadros, 2010: 21).

The role of civil society has to be considered in the backdrop of the dialectics of state and market. This portrays the platform of civil society organizations as facilitating debate and discussion in research paradigm. Jeffery Alexander's neo functionalist approach to civil society portrays it as a sphere facilitating solidarity and integration, the actors of the RCFBOs adhering to the democratic codes of activism, autonomy, rationality, reasonableness, calm, self control, realistic and sane forging social relationships which are open, trusting, critical, honorable, conscience, truthful, straightforward, deliberative and friendly concluding that social motives, the social relationships and the institutions of the minority run RCFBOs caters to activism and inclusiveness promoting friendship on one hand and concretizing beliefs in the way the RCFBOs functions, reproducing societal expectations in the religious and cultural beliefs or social hierarchy on the other. Thus, religious minority organizations in spite of their pioneering efforts and persistent perseverance for gender inclusion and women emancipation tend to get entrenched into the dominant culture of the religious majority community thus largely structure the RCFBOs acting as gender regimes reproducing the gender order of the wider society and culture.

Recommendation

With a view to implement Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 5), the following recommendations are deemed desirable:

1. Capacity building- RC sisters need to be perceived as human resource. Accordingly providing training to them in managerial skills and leadership would enhance their capabilities to participate and represent in governance of RCFBOs.
2. Gender mainstreaming- RCFBO policies needs to be reoriented and made gender sensitive to accord greater space and span of authority to women leaders within RCFBOs.
3. Women empowerment – The goals and activities of RCFBOs need a paradigm shift from amelioration or emancipation to women empowerment with greater accent on skill development and leadership training for the women inmates and beneficiaries.

Notes

1. FBOs: Faith Based Organizations affiliated to a religious body; a mission statement with explicit reference to religious values; financial support from religious sources; and/or a governance structure where selection of board members or staff is based on religious beliefs or affiliation and/or decision-making processes based on religious values, see Ferris (2005) RCFBOs refer to the Roman Catholic FBOs.
2. Roman Catholic(RC) Sisters: Roman Catholic is a denomination among the Christians who identify themselves in close association with the Pope in Rome and Roman Catholic sisters are women who lead their lives according to more simple vows of poverty, chastity and obedience and work towards reaching out to the people. The nuns on the other hand lead cloistered or semi cloistered lives mainly engaged in prayer within the ministry (A Roman Catholic sister's life Ministry, 2016)
3. Archdiocese: Derived from a Greek word meaning 'administration', Diocese refers to the geographical extent led by Bishops. An Archdiocese is the 'leader' Diocese of the Province which usually is led by the Archbishop.
4. Congregation: 'A group of people assembled for religious worship,' see https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/Congregation it also refers to an organized group bestowed with certain activities by the RC order. The membership to the Congregation is permanent.
5. Minority: The definition of the term minority does not limit itself to the size of the population but also the experience of their inconveniences. Robinson (2005) in her book 'Minority Studies' opines that the groups who are considered as minorities share certain common qualities with respect to gender, class or culture. Sociological perception of the concept of religious minority facilitates its understanding in relation to the subjective experience of the group concerned. Working with and reemphasized by the interacting categories of gender, caste or language and the power play among the categories reproduce the process of marginalization.

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