

Articulating Citizenship:
Muslim Women in the Old City of Hyderabad

Final Technical Report

Period: January to December 2006

Diia Rajan
Intern, Women's Rights and Citizenship
IDRC, Ottawa

1. Synthesis

Socio-political theory and, more recently, development practice have used the concept of citizenship both as a theoretical and an analytic tool. However, the question of what citizenship *means*, especially to those who are socio-economically marginalised and disempowered, in lived (substantive rather than formalist) terms has not been comprehensively addressed (Gaventa 2002). This project aims to address this gap by undertaking qualitative research to explore how citizenship is experienced and articulated by disempowered women. In particular, this project worked with Muslim women from the socio-economically deprived and isolated areas of the Old City in Hyderabad.

For the purpose of this research, the concept of citizenship is addressed as a) an expression of individual and group agency in women's everyday negotiations with family, community and state, and b) the relations of accountability that women have access to, establish, and are held accountable by, in their efforts to access rights/ entitlements vis à vis the family, community, and state.

The project's basic objective is to map the core issues, problems, and concepts that inform, enable, and disable Muslim women's citizenship. Women's perceptions of and relations with the state, community and family are also addressed to aid a more engaged understanding of how women perceive their 'place' in an increasingly hostile local and national environment.

A comprehensive literature survey on gender and citizenship, with a particular focus on the south-Asian context, and Muslim women in India, undertaken during the first half of the internship aided the formulation of the research question and context. Four months of fieldwork in Hyderabad's Old City during the summer of 2006 – conducting detailed semi-structured interviews with Muslim women as well as resource people – form the core of the research.

Drawing primarily on the interviews, as well as the literature/ context survey, a preliminary analysis of women's everyday experience – the meaning and signification – of citizenship is attempted in this report. The analysis is as yet preliminary for two main reasons. Firstly, given the paucity of time and resources transcriptions of the interviews could not be done. Secondly, the learnings need to be grounded with a more thorough understanding of national and local political discourse, in order to avoid easy essentialisms and potentially political quandaries.

The preliminary learnings from the research have been organised around agency and accountability in relation to family/ community, and state. Central to women's articulations of agency is the concept of self-dignity, *haisiat*. Self-dignity enables agency, *bolne ki taqat* (the strength to speak), which along with education and secure livelihoods are key to *qabiliyat*, capability/ empowerment. Discrimination and poverty are perceived to be the primary inhibitors of agency and access to accountability. While the state has an everyday presence in the lives of women through welfare, civic and law and order bodies, Muslim women have very little access to these institutions, configured as they are as 'objects' of accountability.

A constant sense of insecurity – fed by decades of communal violence, constant state surveillance, and the daily impact of national political events – has resulted in an alienation of Old City Muslim communities, especially younger generations, from the larger local and national landscape. The focus-group discussion with adolescent girls provides a graphic illustration of the increasing alienation of Hyderabad's Muslim communities. This discussion points to the changing concepts of community and identity between generations, with a growing sense of *qaum* (pan-Islamic community) among the younger generation.

In its initial stages, the scope of this project was limited to a quick 'mapping' exercise. However, growing familiarity with debates on minority issues in India, as well as the realisation on completing the interviews that the material can be

politically potent – especially given the present Indian scenario – has brought home the need for further research and reflection on these preliminary learnings. The ‘Minority Women Negotiating Research’ project, for which I am currently working on the Hyderabad component, provides me with the opportunity to pursue the research begun during my internship.

2. The Research Problem

Theoretical Context:

Contemporary discursive engagements with citizenship have pushed the boundaries of formalist frameworks, towards conceptualizing citizenship not only as status *and* practice, but also as an expression of agency and a relation of accountability (configured in the term ‘voice’) (Yuval-Davis 1997, Lister 1998). The question of identity – and consequently of group rights/recognition, inclusion/exclusion, and cultural and subaltern subjectivities – has been central to theoretical engagements with citizenship, with many contemporary theorists arguing that access to and experience of citizenship is framed by the particular location(s) of differentiated subjectivities (Mamdani 1996, Mouffe 1992). Recent theories are repositioning citizenship as a concept that includes negotiating patriarchal power-relations in spheres ‘other’ to the state (Menon 2004).

These theoretical conceptions are reflected in the efforts of development practice to address gender and citizenship through questions as varied as state decentralisation processes and governance, access to justice, access to land and other resources, political participation and representation, livelihood deprivation, and sexual/ reproductive rights.

It is important in this context, where both theory and development practice are grappling with new articulations of *gendered* citizenship, to address how women themselves articulate, access, and negotiate citizenship in their everyday

engagements with the institutions of family, community, and state. Such a qualitative analysis of women's lived experience of citizenship will possibly challenge and/ or empirically substantiate theoretical engagements, as well as development learnings, on gendered citizenship. Exploring citizenship through the lived experiences of women might also open up new avenues to mapping the relations/ dynamics that create and foster disempowerment, especially in contexts defined by the complex intersections of socio-economic, political and cultural disempowerment.

While most development programmes centred on gender and citizenship in India have addressed women of socio-economically marginalised communities (poorest-of-the-poor, Dalit, backward and schedule castes), it is of some concern that the particular contexts and concerns of women from minority religious communities (especially Muslims, being the most disadvantaged among such communities) have not been sufficiently addressed (Kazi 1999, Hasan 2004).

Research Context – Muslim women in India:

India's Muslim communities¹, located at the intersection of socio-economic and political/ cultural marginalization, are among the most disempowered communities in the country (Haq 2001). I use the term 'disempowered' in reference to India's Muslim communities since it effectively connotes the breadth and depth of these communities' socio-political, economic and cultural marginalisation. These communities – excluding a minority Muslim elite and economically prosperous – are not only on the margins of political and social/civic structures, they are also as yet to realise the social and political agency to create and sustain conditions for their development.

While the Muslims of India have been the subject of numerous studies and debates on questions of identity and nationalism, law and legal reform, political

¹ I use the plural here since India's Muslim population is not a homogenous entity, being deeply divided – like India's other populations – along linguistic, regional, sectarian and caste lines.

participation and representation – and more recently education and violence – engagements with Muslim women’s issues have mostly been in relation to the community as a whole, and therefore restricted to questions of law and legal reform, and cultural rights and identity. The Shah Bano case saw the debate on legal reform become the focal point of Indian civil society’s approach to and engagement with Muslim women’s issues. More recently, the increasing numbers of conflict situations, the perceived threat of Islamic social institutions to ‘secular India’², as well as the international focus on Islamic communities and culture have fore-grounded the questions of Muslim identity and citizenship in the Indian public domain. However, most of these engagements tend to be responses to international tensions and dominant discourses, and have for the large part failed to address those concerns of the disempowered Muslim communities of India which do not directly relate to politicised debates.

Several studies of the past few decades have highlighted the poor human development status of Indian Muslims. Quantitative data and statistics over the past several decades have shown that the average standard of living of Indian Muslims compares poorly even to the most disadvantaged among majority communities (Kazi 1999). Indian Muslims are worse off than their counterparts in the majority community on all major socio-economic indicators. Literacy rates are significantly lower, unemployment rates are higher, and the incidence of poverty is substantially higher among Muslims (Aiyar and Malik 2004).

While much of this data is not gender disaggregated, one recent study, of about 10,000 Muslim and Hindu women from different parts of India, shows that Muslim women are a particularly disadvantaged demographic (Menon and Hasan 2002). Interestingly, the study shows that although similar levels of gender-inequality in areas of marriage, mobility and autonomy cut across both Hindu and Muslim communities, Muslim women are more disadvantaged in socio-economic,

² The secular nature of India and the meaning of this phrase (both semiotic and political) have become contentious debates in recent political discourse. Right-wing parties have also laid claim to being the bearers of ‘true’ secularism as against the ‘pseudo’ secularism of the Congress.

education and work-participation levels. To quote some particularly telling figures; while, 57 % Muslim and 41 % Hindu women are illiterate, 26 % of *educated* Muslim women have illiterate husbands. Similarly, 11.4 % urban Muslim and 16 % urban Hindu women participate in paid work; however, 60 % of urban Muslim women are self-employed.

The figures for voting among Muslim women are high even by global standards – 85 percent of the women had voted in elections, however, only 4 percent had contested elections and 78 per cent stated no interest doing so. Questions on decision-making are also telling, with 86 percent of *all* women claiming that any activity involving money transactions needed the permission of the male head of the family.

Appointed by the Prime Minister to evaluate the social, educational and economic status of Muslims in India, the 13 November, 2006 Sachar Commission report is the first government sponsored document which voices issues crucial to understanding the socio-economic status of Muslims in India. The report highlights identity, security and equity as the main concerns amongst minority socio-religious communities.

Other than important quantitative data, the report also discusses Muslim's struggles with being labeled anti-national and the cause of their own backwardness. Lack of education is a key concern of the communities', whose access to education is often limited to neighbourhood *madrassas* – and yet only 4% of children go to *madrassas*. The report finds that discrimination is most widely felt in employment, housing and schooling. There is a lack of opportunities and access to job markets, low bargaining power and access to credit facilities – Muslim majority areas are often designated as 'red zones' by creditors. The report also points at the flaws in the current nation-wide delimitation of electoral-constituencies process, showing that Muslim majority constituencies are being reserved for Scheduled Caste candidates, thereby effectively preventing Muslim

candidates from contesting. On gender issues the reports highlight the fact that gender justice has been engaged with solely vis à vis the issue of personal law, thereby ignoring the gendered dimensions of other socio-economic issues. The report points to the exclusion of gender concerns in education and employment as needing immediate attention. Insecurity among and around women, especially in communally affected areas, is extremely high, adversely affecting the mobility of women.

The Research Question:

It becomes fairly obvious from the brief sketch above that socio-economic issues are at the core of the continued disempowerment of India's Muslim communities. The socio-economic and political rights of Muslim communities and Muslim women in particular, have been neither sufficiently addressed nor studied (Aiyar and Malik 2004). Social research has continuously highlighted the fact that socio-economic disempowerment is often exacerbated at certain intersections of gender, caste, class and religion.

However, addressing the issue of the rights – political, social and economic – of Muslim women only in relation to their access to rights and resources as circumscribed by their religious context, completely negates their location as 'citizens' both within and outside the community. Addressing the experiences of minority women must take into account socio-economic and political experiences in the larger framework of citizenship, which enables a focus on questions of agency and voice vis à vis the institutions of family, community and state. It is important then to address the question of Muslim women's citizenship in a framework that is not solely premised on their 'cultural'/ legal location, in order to take into account the multiple relations configuring their disempowerment and resistance.

Popular imaginations frame Muslim women in India as victims of their religious/ cultural location, as an oppressed minority in an antagonistic nation-state.

Political and social reform agendas in India have, historically, taken up the project of 'modernizing' the Muslim communities of India, and necessarily these agendas target Muslim women as the vehicles of modernization, i.e. as the 'other' who need benevolent big-brother to emancipate them. My brief previous association with the Confederation of Voluntary Associations (COVA) – a CBO which works with Muslim communities in different parts of India – suggested to me that these women have subtle agential ways of negotiating power structures to lay claim to some, perhaps limited, aspects of citizenship.

It has been argued that secure livelihoods – i.e. socio-economic rights, and voice/ agency – i.e. political and cultural rights, are necessary for women of subordinate/ marginalized groups to realize citizenship (Mukhopadhyay and Meer 2004, Yuval-Davis and Werbner 2005). Recent contributions to citizenship discourse engage with the concept of 'inclusive citizenship' (Kabeer 2005). This concept addresses the *substantive* and nuanced aspects of the lived citizenship of excluded peoples. Naila Kabeer (2005) foregrounds justice, recognition, self-determination and solidarity as the key 'meanings and values' of citizenship arising out of the narratives of those excluded from formal citizenship.

These approaches have enabled an analytic framework, which pushes beyond compensatory and contributory histories (K. Lalita and others 1988), to facilitate exploring the nuanced expressions of Muslim women's citizenship in India.

This project attempts to explore how citizenship is experienced and articulated in the everyday lives of Muslim women from the economically deprived areas of the Old City in Hyderabad.

For the purpose of this research, the concept of citizenship will be addressed as a) an expression of individual and group agency in women's everyday negotiations with family, community and state, and b) the relations of accountability that women have access to, establish, and are held accountable

by, in their efforts to access rights/ entitlements vis à vis the family, community, and state.

Objectives:

The basic objective of this research is to draw a preliminary map of a) the core issues, problems, and concepts that both inform and emerge from Muslim women's articulations of agency and accountability; b) Muslim women's perceptions of and relations with the state, community and family.

Such a map can aid a more engaged understanding of how Muslim women perceive their 'place' in an increasingly hostile local and national environment, as well as identify the core issues/ concerns being highlighted as the most disabling/ enabling of their voice, agency and to relations of accountability.

3. Preliminary Research Findings

Note: The findings discussed here are as yet preliminary since most of the detailed interviews conducted with women in Old City have not been transcribed and analyzed in full. Of the three detailed interviews with resource persons only one (the shortest and only one conducted completely in English) has been transcribed. The interviews conducted in the Old City were in Dakhani, a local dialect of Urdu. These interviews will be transcribed by end-June 2007, by the person working on the "Minority Women Negotiating Citizenship" project transcriptions.

To facilitate analysis of the detailed interviews with eight Muslim women and three resource persons, the learnings have been arranged under two main themes. First, expressions of agency and relations of accountability in the spheres of family and community; and second, expressions of agency and relations of accountability vis à vis the State.

Agency and Accountability in Family/ Community

The first significant learning – which questions popular constructions of Muslim society in India of women confined to their homes – is the absolute overlap between family and community (understood here as the community of the *basti*

or *mohalla*) boundaries. I found when women speak of not coming out of the house; they extend the boundary of their home to that of their *basti*. This may be particular to the interior areas of the Old City where the interviews were conducted, where *bastis* are bound together by strong familial and community ties. Many residents of these *bastis* migrated to the city from nearby villages decades ago. In Riasat Nagar, for example, an entire street houses families from the same village in the Latur district of Maharashtra.

All the eight women, as well as the girls in the Aman Nagar training centre, foreground their socio-economic context – the inherent challenges of poverty and discrimination – and not their religious/ cultural context, as the primary inhibitor of agency. Agency was defined as the ability to act, to ‘voice’. The phrase *bolne ki taqat*, the strength to speak, was used widely and with ease by all interviewees. This phrase was introduced to their lexicon via COVA’s awareness and capacity building training programmes, however, it is become an organic part of their speech. Zainab Begum, the only interviewee who was not a member of COVA and is therefore ‘outside’ the development framework, does not use this phrase; agential acts are narrated as experiences and not labeled.

Expressions of agency are recognized as such by the women usually only in flashback, as they recount the story they recognize it to be an instance of *bolne ki taqat*. For example, as Choti begum and Putli Begum from Riasat Nagar narrate how they ran through back streets to participate in the ‘human chain’ outside Mecca Masjid (see notes of discussions in Annexure 1) despite warnings from the local leader not to, they realize that moment of defiance was perhaps a greater sign of agency than actually participating in the ‘human chain’.

The primary enabler of agency, of the ability to act and speak, is the realization of self-dignity, *haisiat*. *Haisiat* emerges as a concept intrinsic to the lives of most women – young girls, women not associated with CSOs, as well as women members of COVA refer to this concept in their narratives. As opposed to *bolne ki taqat* the concept of *haisiat* does not seem to be a production of development

discourse. Self-dignity is linked, in the narratives, to conditions of autonomy and mobility. Interestingly, self-dignity is not necessarily ensured by economic productivity alone, though it is obvious that economic productivity and independence play a primary role in ensuring *haisiat* within the home. However, for their dignity to be realised within/ by the community as well, women say they need to have some degree of autonomy and mobility to be able to speak and to act; i.e. *haisiat* is a precondition for *bolne ki taqat*. Most of the women interviewed here spoke of needing to be accompanied by male relatives to travel outside community boundaries. Often, middle-aged and elderly women are 'allowed' to move around their community without burqah or hijab (see discussions with Anees Begum and GM Chawni group in Annexure 1).

When compared to their expression of agency vis à vis state institutions and actors, it is evident that agency within family/ community is nuanced and carefully expressed. Ateequnnisa and Sajida Begum, both educated women who have tremendous achievements to their credit, speak of how delicately they negotiate power relations within the home. Both are proud of their achievements, but more so of how they convinced their families to let them work, to educate their daughters and prevent early or unsuitable marriages, without ever *directly* confronting their husbands or in-laws. Many women speak of how even after they started earning they would always give their entire salaries to their husbands, and then ask for money on a needs basis. After building trust on this issue they would begin to hold on to a small amount, to spend on what they chose to or save, and give the rest to their husbands.

While some women (Aaliya and Bilqees Begum in Jagdish Hut and Choti and Putli Begum in Riasat Nagar) play key roles in their communities as arbitrators of domestic and community disputes, most women rely on family/ community interventions in settling domestic disputes without playing agential roles in the negotiations. Most domestic disputes are settled at the community level, with the involvement of community elders, leaders and religious heads. A resource

person, practicing lawyer Vasudha Nagaraj, draws attention to the fact that very few cases involving Muslim families are brought to family courts; on the whole Qazi courts are more frequently accessed for cases which have not been resolved at the community level.

As mentioned above many COVA women-members act as mediators/ arbitrators in their *bastis* – some are even members of the Police initiated ‘peace committees’. It is interesting that in times of conflict, resulting in imposition of curfews, women are given the privilege of mobility and access to stataal institutions.

In taking an active part in community arbitration processes these women are trying to challenge the community’s prerogative as ‘agent’ of accountability, by creating spaces for women’s voices to be heard and encouraging women to speak for themselves. Aliya Begum, for example, is emphatic in saying women must take back the right of the community to represent their interests.

Interestingly, it is political and not religious leaders who have a greater influence on the everyday life of the *basti*. Zainab Begum’s interview shows how women can, and most often do, have agential access to local political leaders, whom they approach with demands for civic amenities and services, dispute resolution, employment, loans, and so on. The COVA women in the Old City are also approached by their local political leaders with requests to participate in arbitration processes, social campaigns, and inaugural of community services or spaces.

Agency and Accountability vis à vis the State

From the narratives of women who have been associated with COVA for over a decade now, it is evident that government and civil-society development programs help build agency – often providing a limited window which women are able to access and transform into a sea of opportunity. Almost every narrative stands witness to this – including Zainab Begum, who continued to access the

civil-society network she came in contact with after her husband's murder during the 1990 riots, to negotiate legal and community quagmires in fighting for custody of her house, getting her daughter married, seeking compensation for the death of her son, and fighting to be made a permanent employee even after fifteen years of service. In the case of those women who first started work as link volunteers on the IPP-8 project (see transcript of Dr. Ranga Rao's interview, Annexure 2), even after the project ended they used the confidence gained through the experience to continue working for their communities (see discussions with the Jagdish Hut group, Annexure 1).

The 'state', although a far off and distant concept for most of the women, has a quotidian presence in their lives through civic, welfare provision and law & order bodies; such as municipal bodies (electricity, water and drainage providers), public distribution systems (fair price 'ration' shops, urban health posts and government schools), and the police. These individual institutions are not always equated with the state, which is perceived to be a near-mythical entity comprising of far-off politicians in Hyderabad's and New Delhi's legislative bodies. Civic and welfare provision institutions are held accountable through local leaders and politicians.

The inherent corruption of all government systems is well-acknowledged, resulting in the belief among those who are not active members of PUCAAR or Roshan Vikas, that 'ordinary people' can hold no hopes by them. Women who have received training on governance structures, or those who have learnt the hard way (like those in Jagdish Hut) believe that the only barrier to claiming civic rights is ignorance of how systems work and a fear of superseding local politicians to approach concerned officers/ departments directly. Being aware of who can be held accountable for what, can make all the difference in enabling poor women to access and demand their rights.

By and large however, the state – whether manifest as local institutions or the larger non-accessible entity – is experienced as non-responsive and repressive.

Needless to say, the primary face of this aspect of the state is the police. Insecurity is surprisingly normalized in the community, so much so that it has become an accepted and unquestioned state-of-being. As noted by Sachar report, quoted earlier, insecurity is one of the primary inhibitors of mobility amongst Muslim women. Hyderabad's Old City having seen decades of communal riots and unimaginable horror is constantly in fear of renewed violence. The constant displacement, loss of home, life and livelihood over five decades, has resulted in the communities of interior Old City becoming increasingly alienated from the rest of city. This alienation has in turn resulted in incubating insecurity in these communities. The constant police presence at every street corner, especially on Fridays and religious holidays when the Rapid Action Force and ambulances are also deployed, only accentuates this feeling of insecurity. State surveillance, and the impact of a volatile national political climate in the form of threat and violence, are in and of themselves impervious barriers to marginalized groups accessing rights or claiming citizenship.

An interesting learning regarding the role of police in women's lives is that women will often access police to play a 'big brother' role in settling of domestic disputes where community arbitration has failed. Women will go to police-stations and request the police to threaten their husbands, for example. Very rarely will they actually file a complaint. They have no faith in the legal process. Many women say filing a complaint can actually work against them since their husbands or opponents are more likely to be able to bribe their way out, implicating them in false cases instead. Here again, Zainab Begum's case illustrates how power and money outweigh justice. Most of the women interviewed were categorical they would never approach courts.

Women, even those who have worked with COVA and are recognized as community leaders by the police and other government institutions, are not configured in a relation of accountability with the state. The interviews suggest that it is the Muslim community as a whole which is somewhat configured in a

relation of accountability with the state. However, the community is always framed the 'object' of accountability by the state, and is therefore rarely able to *claim* accountability *from* the state.

In this context, COVA women-members demanding accountability from local government systems and officials, establishing a relationship and negotiating their rights with local police and politicians, is an incredible expression of agency. However, expressions of agency vis à vis the state are as yet limited to claiming service and accountability from local state infrastructure. For women to be able to hold the state accountable for the denial of justice and human rights will require a more enabling social and political environment.

All the women who participated in the research were very aware of local politics. Although, their knowledge of national politics was not as robust, many were also aware of what had happened in Gujarat and were willing to share a quick analysis of communal violence. Some of the older women (like those in Riasat Nagar and Jagdish Hut) who have experienced several decades of communal violence, are quick to make the connection between electoral politics, land politics and communal riots. All the women were supportive of the concept of democracy, and assertive of their right *to belong* as a Muslim population in India. All these women have voted in every single election, supporting the high figures for participation quoted by Hasan and Menon's study. An interesting learning qualifying these figures on political participation is that it is mostly a community mobilized activity, underpinning the importance of community representation and citizenship.

The adolescent girls in Aman Nagar on the other hand are fairly a-political and very unaware of local or national events and politics. Unlike the older women who use community to mean either their immediate neighbourhood or the general Muslim population of India these girls use the word community, *qaum*, to signify a pan-Islamic community. For them there is a clear, though not contradictory, distinction between being *qaumi* (of the community) and being

mulki (of the land). They identify themselves primarily as Muslim, as opposed to the linguistic, regional, caste and sectarian identities of the older women. As Muslim, their lives are first governed by the rules and edicts of their *qaum*. Having been born into an already alienated community, they are unaware of any concept of 'rights'. The only 'right' they think the government is accountable for is the right to live. Participation in politics, either to vote or to contest, is viewed as an activity for those seeking power and money. One girl who says she would like to contest elections sometime is shot down by the others who say 'yes, she will make a good politician because her *niyyat* (character) suits it'. They distinguish between education in a school – which is about *duniya*, world; and education in a *madrassa* – which is about *deen*, religion. These are also distinctions alien to the narratives of the older women.

The state, as such, is nonexistent to these younger women, betraying the extent of their alienation. The fact that none of these girls have ever been to a cinema theatre, in a country which is cinema-crazy, is another indicator of their physically and culturally confined world.

It is interesting, although an analytic minefield, that the term community has completely changed meaning and signification just over two short generations. The relevance of this, especially in a context where citizenship is a community-negotiated relation, cannot be overlooked.

4. The Research Process

Research Site

Hyderabad was chosen as the research site for one main reason; given the paucity of time it was important to choose a site where access to the community would not be difficult to gain and language would not be a barrier – having lived in Hyderabad and worked with COVA previously this issue could be overcome. Having been a member of some civil society organizations in Hyderabad a

network of key informants/ resource people was also easily accessible, as was an understanding of the local socio-political context.

Partner Organisation

In organising and conducting the research I drew on the learnings, networks, as well as the human and knowledge resources of the Confederation of Voluntary Associations (COVA) in Hyderabad. COVA is a network of over 800 CBOs working in the Old City of Hyderabad, and several districts of Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Gujarat, and Jammu & Kashmir – all dedicated to working towards communal harmony through participatory development interventions.

In Hyderabad, COVA has established several smaller organisations with a particular focus on helping poor Muslim, and other community, women; Mahila Sanatkar Mutually Aided Co-operative Society, works with women entrepreneurs and artisans; Roshan Vikas (RV) Mutually Aided Thrift Co-operative Society, provides micro-finance assistance to poor Muslim and Hindu women; and PUCAAR (People's Union for Civic Action and Rights) works towards enabling local citizen's voice in municipal and civic matters, as well as supporting their political, economic, and social demands at the state and national levels.

COVA, through their longstanding commitment and involvement with local Hyderabad Muslim communities, development issues, as well as questions of gender and citizenship (COVA was one of the research partners on the pioneering KIT Gender and Citizenship project, 2003) provided valuable insights and inputs to the research process.

Research Activities

There were three main phases in the research process. First, a literature survey of gender and citizenship, with a focus on south-Asia, as well as issues of Muslim women in India, was conducted. While the literature review drew on work done

during my Masters program, I spent the first few months of my Internship on collecting and reviewing literature. Most India and Hyderabad specific material was collected after coming to Hyderabad, through visits to libraries, archives and organisations.

Drawing on the literature, brief discussions and three detailed interviews were held with key informants and resource people in the government, NGOs and activist organisations, and community-level workers/ representatives to map how Muslim women's citizenship is articulated and engaged with at these institutional levels. These interviews/ discussions were held with

- i. Dr A.P. Ranga Rao, retired Deputy-Director A.P. Medical and Health Service (see Annexure 2)
- ii. Ms. Vasudha Nagaraj, Advocate, Legal researcher at Anveshi – Research centre for Women's Studies
- iii. Ms. Noorjehan Siddiqui, Coordinator – COVA
- iv. Mr. Basheeruddin Babukhan, ex-MLA for the Congress and Telugu Desam parties, business baron, and philanthropist
- v. Dr. Rehana Sultana, Maulana Azad National Urdu University

Preliminary group discussions and individual interviews with women members of COVA (RV, PUCAAR and Mahila Sanatkar) were held in the Old City of Hyderabad. Initially, I had intended to speak with members and clients of COVA as well as those who are not associated with any civil society organisation, in order to determine to what extent such associations impact women's exercise of voice and agency and access to relations of accountability. However, I realised that despite belonging to Hyderabad and speaking the local dialect, the feeling of insecurity is so high in the Old City that I was not able to gain speaking access to women not associated with COVA, within the time I had. However, I was able to have informal discussions with women outside the Old City, and conducted a detailed interview with Zainab Begum from Nacharam.

I visited seven interior slum areas in the old city, in May 2006, and had preliminary discussions with around 17 women (many women would drop in contribute to the discussions for a few minutes and disappear – they are not named in the list). These areas are; GM Chawni, Riasat Nagar, Kanchan Bagh, Aman Nagar, Chandulal Biradari, Jagdish Hut and Habib Nagar.

From these preliminary discussions seven women were chosen to conduct detailed interviews with, whose narratives and experiences span a variety of contexts, circumstances and concerns. Most of these women were poor and either unemployed or self-employed. Their spouses are also either self-employed or skilled and semi-skilled labour. Most of the women were semi-literate or illiterate, and completely confined to their homes before becoming involved with COVA activities about a decade ago. Three have husbands who work in the Middle-east, and two are high school graduates. These seven women are: Yousufunnisa – GM Chawni, Ateequnnisa – Doodhbowli, Aliya Begum – Jagdish Hut, Choti Begum – Riasat Nagar, Putli Begum – Riasat Nagar, Sajida Ansari – Aman Nagar, and Anees Begum – Kanchan Bagh.

Six of these women had started their association with COVA as ‘link volunteers’ on the World Bank funded India Population Project – 8 (IPP8) around 1992/ 93 (resource person Dr. A.P. Ranga Rao was the regional director of this project). While this project lasted only a few years and there was no follow up of any kind, the link volunteers used the skills and self-confidence gained through this project to engage in other community work, as well as continue their association with COVA and its various organizations. These link volunteers have gone on to become community organizers and leaders, involved in activities ranging from leading SHGs, providing counseling in family/ community disputes, organizing the community around civic issues, etc.

At Aman Nagar and Chandulal Biradari I also had preliminary group discussions with young women in the training centres. After gaining permission from them

and their parents I went back to have a detailed focus-group discussion with around fifteen adolescent girls in the Aman Nagar training centre. These girls, between the ages of thirteen and sixteen, had all been pulled out of school by their parents and were under-going tailoring/ embroidery training at the Mahila Sanatkar-run training centre. Some of them were being tutored at the centre for writing school-leaving certificate exams.

Challenges

There were some logistical challenges since the research was conducted at the height of summer – the heat and power cuts significantly slowed down work. Fixing interviews with women in the Old City was also delayed because they were traveling out of Hyderabad to attend weddings and visit family. The chikungunya outbreak further delayed fieldwork since every household in the Old City was affected and people were too ill or too busy looking after the ill, to be able to sit down and talk at leisure.

The challenge of being a non-Muslim interviewer was, surprisingly, felt strongly indicating yet again the general sense of insecurity in the communities of the Old City. The constant police presence – including the Rapid Action Force on Fridays, religious holidays or at any excuse – was also inhibiting for both interviewees and interviewer.

Ethics Issues

Many women did not want to be recorded on tape, and many were also worried about how the material would be used and who it would be given to/ shared with. There was a lot of reluctance to be photographed. I also experienced difficulty in asking sensitive questions about the Muslim experience in contemporary India. The girls in Aman Nagar requested to speak with me alone in a room out of earshot of their teachers; one teacher sat in for ten minutes and then left. While my 'Hindu' identity did become a subject of considerable discussion twice, it was never antagonistic. However, my identity did seem to prevent some women from

'speaking their mind'. On the whole, the research experience brought home the importance of ethics in research and paying critical importance to seemingly 'small' issues.

Annex 1: Notes from Preliminary Interviews with Women in the Old City

1. Group discussions in GM Chawni, on 15 May 2006, with members of Roshan Vikas group (members, Lateef-Unnisa – an RV Group leader, Tayyaba Sultana – prior to joining RV she also worked on a ODA health project, Utsiya Sultana – also a PUCAAR member and Director of the local RV constituency, Yousuf-Unnisa – an RV Group leader, Rehana Begum – RV officer)

Each of these women spoke about how they came out of strict *purdah* to become active in their communities through COVA. Utsiya Sultana, Rehana Begum and Tayyaba Sultana are high school graduates and the others are literate. All of them talk about how their husbands registered their names when the first Mahila Mandals were started in their localities, and how it is with their encouragement and help that they ‘came out’. Except for Utsiya Sultana and Rehana Begum, the rest have worked as link volunteers on the IPP8 World Bank project. They say that experience, and the awareness training they received from COVA/ PUCAAR has given them ‘*bolne ki taqat*’ (the strength to speak). Their membership in Roshan Vikas for the past decade and more has given them financial stability and independence, which in turn has also enabled voice within the home since as they say ‘*paise se ahmiyat badh gayi*’ (money has increased our importance). These five women are from financially stable families (their husbands are skilled workers/ medium business owners), and have fairly comfortable living-standards.

One of the most interesting narratives is of Yousufunnisa (around 40 years old), who talked about how she never stepped out of her house until about two decades ago. In her natal home her father and grandfather would do everything for the house including buying groceries and clothes. In her matrimonial her house husband did everything, and when he went away to work in Qatar her father came to live with her. She didn’t even know her

neighbours until her husband came back from Qatar and encouraged her to join a Mahila Mandal. Through the Mahila Mandal she became a link volunteer on the IPP8 project. Her confidence grew (*'himmat paida hui'*) thanks to the community work she did on this project, after which she heard about Roshan Vikas and started the first self help group in GM Chawni. Since, she has been an active community worker and member of COVA. Very recently, her family has had to move out of GM Chawni after neighbours (distant relatives) filed a false complaint with the police that her daughter Imroz was trafficking young women from the locality. Imroz in fact has been an active member of the international NGO Play for Peace since childhood and had recently moved to Pune to take up a position with Play for Peace there. Yousfunnisa says Imroz's activist work, her move to Pune without male supervision, and the fact that she is as yet unmarried (being in her mid-twenties) are the main reasons for the community going against them. The police case was dropped only after Play for Peace officials lobbied senior government officials to intervene. While this experience has embittered Yousfunnisa against her community, her rage against the police/ legal system is palpable. She says the community cannot be totally at fault because they were probably under severe pressure from religious/ political forces. However, the fact that the police would hear no reason and nothing short of senior government officers' intervention helped, makes her feel more strongly than before that the entire system is anti-poor and anti-Muslim.

2. 16 May 2006, Group discussion with women members of RV/ PUCAAR in Riasat Nagar (Choti Begum – IPP8 link volunteer/ RV member, Putli Begum – an RV group leader, Salma Begum – RV member, Ahmadi Begum – RV member, Sultana Begum – younger member of RV).

On Friday the 15th of March, 2002, a small group of burqah-clad women – all COVA volunteers – formed a human chain between riot police and agitating Muslim youth, outside the Mecca Masjid in Hyderabad's Old City. These

women successfully prevented the two groups from attacking each other, and managed to coax the youth to disperse. This event was covered widely by the national media and showcased as the ideal community/ civil society intervention in preventing violent conflict in the days and months to come. Most of Hyderabad's residents still remember those anonymous women who displayed such tremendous will by literally putting life and limb at risk in order to prevent what they knew could easily flare into the endless days of horrific violence which they had experienced innumerable times before.

Most of the women who formed this human chain were residents of Riasat Nagar, and had been organized by Putli Begum, a Roshan Vikas group leader. Three of the five women I met here had participated in the human-chain. They recount how as they were leaving their locality they were stopped by the local ward-councilor who warned them against leaving their homes. They replied that that they would go back home immediately and turned back. As soon as the counselor was out of sight they took a back route out of the locality and walked the few kilometers to Mecca Masjid. When asked what made them do it, they say simply they felt they *had to do something*. A few years later they participated in a hunger-strike in protest of Gujarat.

Putli Begum and Choti Begum are community leaders. Like many of the other 'COVA women' I met, they were first involved as link volunteers in the IPP8 project. Putli Bi is the first volunteer from the area. She and Choti Bi have worked on inter-family and domestic violence, sexuality and reproductive issues, and mobilizing on civic issues. They have formed and run SHGs in their area for the past decade, worked on family and community dispute resolution, and have actively participated in campaigns promoting education and nutrition security. Both are illiterate, live in rented homes, and their husbands/ sons are skilled labour (mechanics/ drivers) and own petty businesses. After saving a small amount of money, Choti Bi revived her husband's ailing mechanic-repair business, set up a corner shop from her

home, and helped her son-in-law set up a small construction contract business. She says that prior to her involvement in the SHG she did not know how to handle numbers and never thought she would be able to learn. Handling monies in the SHG she realized that you do not have to be educated to deal with numbers (*'yeh koi badi baat nahin'*- it's not a big deal), and has been able to turn around the fortunes of her family. Her younger daughter insisted on being sent to school (her elder sisters were pulled out after primary school for lack of funds and because the nearest affordable school was outside the boundaries of their *basti*³) and now studies in grade eight. She walks all the way to her school and back, a good two kilometers away, and refuses to wear a burqah. Most other girls start wearing the burqah at 12 or 13. Choti Bi's daughter has resisted the pressure of her father, brothers and community people, with Choti Bi's support. She also helps her mother with the corner store, where she sells vegetables and keeps accounts – all sans burqah. Choti Bi talks about her corner shop a little, and says she stocks a lot of green leafy vegetables and often convinces her customers to buy them, even sharing recipes with them. Nutrition is an issue people are paying less and less attention to, she says. As a link volunteer she spent a lot of time talking to women about the importance of a nutritive diet, and how to achieve the best nutritional security within their financial means. People have not used the opportunity, but SHGs are a good way to both talk about and facilitate nutrition security says Choti Bi.

Choti Begum and Putli Begum are also involved in solving '*basti ke masle*' (community issues) almost on a daily basis. Often, families, local leaders, religious heads, will request them to attend arbitration sessions to help solve/ deal with domestic disputes as well as community civic/ law and order issues. That they are proud of the work they have done, continue to do, and the name they have earned in the community, is evident from their body language

³ literally translated as habitation; a colony, often in a slum or slum-like area; *basti* also connotes a sense of belonging, a residential colony bound together by strong familial/ community ties.

and the ease with which they greet the many men and women who pass by their door with a '*Salaam-aleikum Apa*' (Salaam-aleikum Elder-sister).

3. 18 May 2006, I went to Kanchan Bagh and met with Anees Begum who has been a PUCAAR member for the past year. She is a younger woman, married into Kanchan Bagh a few years ago, and already the leader of a RV group of four members. She had passed grade seven exams after she learnt tailoring and embroidery. However, she did not work until a few years ago when her husband fell ill and was unable to continue to support the family. She then began to do piece work from her home. Her neighbour, an RV member of many years, convinced her to join, and very soon Anees was able to buy a sewing machine and get more work. Through RV she came to know of PUCAAR and joined because she felt very strongly that the government school in their locality should be revived (she could not afford to send her children to a private school). She was also afraid of the influence the local unemployed youth – who hang around her street corner drinking, smoking and teasing women – would have on both her sons and daughters. She also wanted to do something for them. However, their PUCAAR group's first efforts were to have a huge open garbage dump at the entrance to their lane cleared, get open manholes covered, and to get legal electricity connections for their homes.

Anees talk about this first fight, during which she and the three other women in their group had to take up with the local councilors, politicians and ruffians. All the male leaders were affronted, she says, that four Muslim women without any political clout would dare to demand *anything*. PUCAAR officials helped them understand how systems work, that municipal amenities are basic rights which cannot be withheld by local goons. The women took a long time to overcome their fear of officials and police. But after approaching them a few times their confidence grew. "Earlier people would dismiss us saying we just don't understand, but no one can say that now", she says. After the police

and the local MLA visited their area and acted on the PUCAAR group's demands, the local men who had opposed them fell silent and now keep a safe distance. Their '*haisiat*' (status) in the community as gone up because of what they have done for the community, without looking for personal benefits or demanding any payment. She is now able to move around the community freely, many times without a burqah.

She is now spear-heading a campaign to revive the government school in their area. Anees is full of energy and life, and says she wishes she had 'come out' earlier. She has many plans for her community. She wants to do something for the youth whom she feels have not been given a chance at life by the world they live in. The lack of education and employment are the biggest hurdles they face, according to her.

4. In the afternoon of 18 May 2006 I met with Sayeda Fatima in the Habib Nagar primary day-school she runs. The school consists of one large room in which around fifty children between the ages of three and eight are being served their lunch⁴. Sayeda used to attend a night school as a teenager where she was deeply influenced by her Hindi teacher, Jahan Ara (name changed). Jahan Ara had moved to Hyderabad from Maharashtra after she was married into a Maulvi's family. Coming from a fairly liberal environment in her natal home, this woman had a hard time adjusting to the strict purdah of her matrimonial home, and fought very hard to be allowed to teach community women in the local night-school. Jahan Ara inspired all her students to come out of their homes and pursue their educational and vocational interests. She also spoke to them about rights, social justice and discussed national and international issues with them. Drawing on support and advice from Jahan Ara, Sayeda finished a B.Ed. and got involved in education, health and civic amenities advocacy work. She successfully conducted a campaign to improve infrastructure in government schools in the Old City, for which she was able to

⁴ This part of the central government Mid-day Meal scheme, under the Nutritional Support to Primary Education programme. The children are given rice, daal, and either an egg or a banana.

get 10,000 signatories for her petition, and also started a government aided Bala Jyoti centre in Habib Nagar which had no facility for pre-school and primary children. At present she is also working on the issue of corruption in fair-price ration shops, and to make BPL ration cards available to those who really deserve them. She says the biggest hurdle she faces in mobilizing communities to demand their right from the government is that people do not think that their problems are the government's problems. "We have to make the public realize what the government is really here for..."

5. 20 May 2006 I met with Ateequnnisa at the National Women's Centre in Chandulal Biradari. Ateequnnisa runs this centre, with the help of Mahila Sanatkar, where she trains young women in tailoring and embroidery. The building is owned by her natal family, and the locality is fairly middle-class. Ateequnnisa herself lives in Doodhbowli, which is a working class area. Soon after she was married Ateeq moved to Saudi Arabia with her husband, who was working there as a mechanic. She used to make pickles in her home and sell them to the Indian community there. She says they were comfortably off and she did not have any complaints, except that she could never go out alone and had to keep a constant vigil on her daughters since the (Arab) men there were very predatory. They moved back to Hyderabad after a few years because of her husband's ill health. In Hyderabad however, their economic situation degraded since her husband couldn't find work and would not let her work. They lived on 2-rupee rice and red-chilies powder for nearly a year. Eventually, her husband let her join sewing classes. By then communal tensions in Old City were mounting (around 1990) and in severe rioting in 1991 their house, which belonged to Ateeq's maternal grandfather, was looted and burnt. Ateeq and her husband fled from the back alley with their three young daughters leaving all their belongings behind. As she ran Ateeq saw a young woman being attacked by the rioters. It was a miracle, she says, that she and her family got out of there unharmed. After losing all their belongings, her family moved into a room in Ateeq's brother's house. She

began to work as domestic help in her relatives' houses, and also continued her sewing classes. Through the encouragement of her sewing teacher (who also helped her pay the fees) Ateeq wrote grade 10 exams and passed, all without telling her family. She then went on to write the Board of Technology exams in fashion technology and passed these as well. With these qualifications she was able to get well-paying work at a tailoring training centre. Only then did she stop working as domestic. By this time she had also had her fourth child, a son. Most of her earnings she saved to have her daughters educated – two of them have completed their M.A., and third one will graduate soon. Her son is in school.

Around 1994 her husband went back to the Middle East and told her to stop working. Instead, Ateeq convinced her husband and joined COVA as a volunteer (after hearing about the work they had done in the aftermath of the riots) in 1995.

Her *himmat* (courage) had begun to grow as soon as she started earning she says. Quietly, she also mentions that she is a Black Belt in karate. When she started this training centre there was karate school right opposite, and she would go every evening without telling her husband. At first she found it difficult to allow a strange man to touch her in order to show her what to do, but soon realised that the instructor would not take advantage of her. She learnt rapidly and became a Black Belt in no time. She participated in local competitions and also began to teach her daughters and the girls who came to her centre. After an accident in which she broke her hand she stopped teaching karate, but still practices everyday.

Speaking about her daughters and their friends, she says young Muslim women today, especially those who grow up in the constantly insecure environment of the Old City, struggle to gain the trust of their families. Families make the mistake of holding their daughters responsible for all that is wrong with the 'outside world'. "We need to teach our daughters how to deal with the world not how to hide from it."

6. In the afternoon of 20 May 2006 I went to Jagdish Hut and met with Aliya Begum, Bilqees Begum and Akhtari Begum. These three women are the life-blood of Jagdish Hut, says Pawan the COVA auto-driver as we stop in front of Bilqees Begum's house⁵. Aliya Begum was also a link volunteer on the IPP8 project. Akhtar Begum and Bilqees Begum have been PUCAAR members for the past year. However, they came to the notice of PUCAAR when they formed a group in Jagdish Hut to campaign against corrupt local leaders to be given white ration-cards. They had all been issued pink cards and were unable to do anything about it for nearly a year. At election time when the local MLA came to campaign, they surrounded him and said they would prevent all the women in their *basti* from voting until all BPL houses were issued white ration-cards. When the leaders finally succumbed to their pressure, the women also managed to have the corrupt councilor removed, and have roads and drainage connections laid. Hearing of their work and success PUCAAR approached them to form a group in their locality and provided them with training on governance structures and systems, health, food security etc. Since, they have improved schooling facilities in their locality, provide health and para-legal counseling to *basti* residents, have opened a rice shop, and helped almost all the women gain some form of employment (many do piece-work from their homes fro Mahila Sanatkar). Bilqees Begum says very proudly "now men are doing women's work and women are doing men's work in our *basti*." However, they are quick to point out that is only as far as they are confined to their homes or the *basti*. They are still accompanied by male relatives when they need to leave the *basti*, even if only for an hour in broad daylight. Without being asked the question, Aliya Begum says if the people of the *basti* support her she is even willing to contest local elections. She wants to work to educate youth on politics and governance. She says most communal conflict and disharmony is produced

⁵ Pawan developed a high fever the night we went to visit Jagdish Hut. His family rushed him to hospital were they admitted him to Intensive Care and began treating him for Chikungunya. When he did not respond to the treatment the hospital ran tests and diagnosed cerebral malaria. By then Pawan had slipped into a coma and passed away a few hours later.

by political parties, and people need to be educated so that they are not so easily swayed by the politics of hatred, by which they stand the most to lose.

7. 24 May 2006 I visited the Aman Nagar Ansari Mahila Welfare Society, which is run with the aid of Mahila Sanatkar. The centre offers training in tailoring and embroidery, and also provides afternoon classes for girls who are interested in writing grade 10 exams. Most of the girls here are between the ages of thirteen and sixteen and are primary school 'pull-outs'.
I first spoke with Sajida Ansari who established, and now runs the centre. The centre was first started with ODA assistance, and the process was fairly smooth since there was a demand in the area for a vocational training centre for young women. Aman Nagar is particularly isolated and depressed part of the Old City says Sajida, and when she first moved here after marriage it took her a while to get adjusted to the constant feeling of insecurity in the area. Sajida grew up in a suburb, in a fairly well-off educated family. Her in-laws were unwilling to let her work, but her husband was supportive and helped her start the centre. Now, because of the good name her centre has earned, her in-laws are proud of her. When ODA aid stopped she approached COVA and has been associated with them 1996. Now, however, she says there are problems here as well since COVA's funding and attention to Mahila Sanatkar and diminished substantially. She finds this upsetting since this is one avenue young women have of getting out of their houses, learning something, spending time with friends – "it is the one space they have where they can dream... if this [centre] closes down where will they go?" COVA has been pushing for the women of this area to be involved in other activities, such as those of Roshan Vikas and PUCAR. But the families here are extremely conservative and unwilling to let them out. Even for me to talk to the girls in the centre Sajida will have to speak to the parents, inform them of what I am doing and why and take their consent. Sajida's husband works in Saudi Arabia, but keeps an 'eye on her movements' even from there. She is 'allowed' to travel in the city but not outside. Families in Aman Nagar want

their daughters to learn a skill and do piece-work from homes to help support the family. Most girls are even escorted from their homes to the centre and back, since there many young men on streets who harass young women. Her relatives have often tried to convince her to move out of Aman Nagar to a better locality, but she feels she would be betraying the girls here if she did that.

I also spoke with Ayesha Siddiqui, an 18-year old, who is a volunteer coordinator in the centre. Ayesha was pulled out of school, against her will, at 6 because her parents were unable to afford her school fees. Her elder brother had dropped-out at the same time and refused to go back to school (he was in grade 7). When she pointed out to her parents, who were trying hard to convince the son to go back to school, that she could continue school since they would be saving her brother's fees, she was beaten up for her impudence. A few years ago she started learning to tailor at the centre. With a quiet smile she says "thankfully, my parents could not afford to get me married either." At the centre she earns five or six hundred rupees a month and her parents are very happy with her income and don't want her to leave the centre. Her younger brother has passed his grade 10 exams and works with their father in the local cloth shop (owned by their uncle). When I ask her what she would like to do, "I don't know" she says, "*mere haath mazboot hain par bandhe hain*" (my hands are strong, but tied).

As I was about to leave, Ayesha asked why it was that people always came to speak to them (the girls) and never to their brothers. "You should also talk to them... only then will you really understand."

Annexure 2: Transcript of Interview with Dr. A.P. Ranga Rao

6 June 2006, Panjagutta

[DR: Good morning Sir... I spoke with you earlier about my research... Could we begin with the IPP8 project... what was it?]

RR: IPP 8 is the India Population project 8, it's a World Bank assisted project, and it was in 4 cities that it was implemented, Hyderabad, Bangalore, Calcutta and Delhi. The objective was to improve the health of slum dwellers basically. At that time we had some 645 notified slums in Hyderabad. Earlier, there was an ODA project under which some 300 slums were taken to improve infrastructure, water electricity etc. When these slums developed, people sold properties and moved out. In the OC literacy rates among women were high before independence and have fallen consistently since. Now there are two issues, when I say literacy I mean Urdu that they could read and write. Subsequently, at the level of... one is a slum and one is a blighted area. Now slums are defined as those which have no permission, people came and just occupied, there are no infrastructure facilities because the govt. has not recognized, so it is very unorganized because there is no permission for construction of houses and so on... that's how slum is defined.

Whereas there were areas which had permission, like in the Old City there are the walled areas, now they are called gated communities... so some rich man is there he has a big house and servant quarters etc... over a period of time either he migrated to Pakistan or something and people came and occupied that house. Suddenly, instead of 5 or 10 people in that house there are 100 people in that house. Lots of people moved here from Nizamabad and Karimnagar after the police action. So a well built house that had infrastructure facilities, sanitation, water, elec... suddenly found that demand had gone up by plentifol. So, that house does not come under slum and at the same time is worse than a slum because of density and other issues. Also, levels of and access to education has gone down and so many things happened. Now between 80s and 90s a very interesting thing has happened which is SETWIN, government created a corporation by name SETWIN which initiated a process of training people in various occupations. Luckily at that time lots of people with that certificate could get a job in the Middle East and there was a tremendous outflow. Now that outflow brought a little bit of wealth to the Old City and those people with newly acquired riches migrated out of that area and moved to new colonies near Golconda, Mehdiapatnam... instead of living in the Old City, because of the threat to security and various things... at that time we had communal riots in the Old City every year.

All this was changing by '95, this was the scenario. The main concept we took at that time was... before '95 we had to go and say take polio drops or immunization people looked at with suspicion, esp the minority community... they

said they are trying to sterilize me or something, they were very reluctant... the birth and infant mortality rates were very high. Then we thought what can this project do? We came with the concept that every 20 houses we will have one volunteer. Earlier in the ODA project for the entire slum they would have one person who was paid some 50 rupees or something. So we said we will dispense with that because for community action one person is not enough... so in a slum area 20 houses is a very small area. She would know what's happening there, it's a contiguous area... we said we would be middle aged etc, and we will train her. So for a few slums we identified one NGO and that NGO's responsibility is to train these people and have two meetings every month where the medical staff and these people sit and discuss... what has happened in your area what has happened over the past 15 days, who is pregnant, whether they have taken antenatal care, whether any immunization was done, whether any child fell ill...exchange of information... and we thought this information would be useful for the UHPs ... the Urban Health Posts... for their planning and monitoring. So with that concept we... for every 20 slums we had one NGO identified, about 10-15 were active, so each one could take 100-200 slums. For the Old City it was COVA that was more active. Now COVA started the programme in the old city and a few thousands were trained. So every week for three months I think once a week they would come for a session and each week one topic would be taken up and discussed. So the perception that we had was that it really helped two activities. One was the immunization programme, which has really gone up. The other was family planning. For the first time women in the Old City had information... Earlier to that probably they were probably getting from their husbands or TV ads or something but not an interpersonal communication. At that time we also had new technology brought in, that double puncture laparoscopy. So there was... we also said ok let us also try to neutralize political opposition. We had population day celebrations so we requested Owaisi's son Akbaruddin Owaisi to come and address... he said first I'd like to discuss, we said ok, and he raised pertinent issues

[What were these issues?]

Very pertinent, like infant mortality needs to be addressed before family planning because otherwise these people have no security... so we said this is our programme plan so he agreed to come and address... I think this was the first time a Muslim leader from the Old City talked about family planning. Then we had meeting of mullahs and all... we said Indonesia being a Muslim country and all this is what they have done, this is how they have interpreted it... so with that the opposition to the programme has come down. That is they are not vocal, they might not have accepted it but they were not vocal in their opposition.

Then when we had this new technology... the IUD, loop... for the first time we said you don't need to insist on the permission or acceptance of the spouse, even if you don't have it its ok you come... even though its not really correct in one sense I said its ok doesn't matter. When you have so much of oppression

and against that you want to bring in something you have to compromise, so I said compromise just ignore it. So more number of people would come saying I am going to hospital and come, get a loop put in and go back. No one will know. Similarly, women were coming forward for this double puncture laparoscopy because there was no hospitalization. They just come and have it, two minutes job, no suture removal...

[Even that... they didn't necessarily need the consent?]

Yes, even that we said no need, if you have three or four children we said forget about husband's consent.

Now, at that time a lot of local feminists and social activists went against us and demonstrated. So I said ok lets discuss, you see you have to weigh the things of having more children and her health getting ruined than by this operation, you have to weigh in that context. And its ok for you and me and all to talk about consent and great issues, ok. But, in a situation where people are totally oppressed I think my action can be justified. They said ok if you are doing with good intentions then its ok, but they also said this has to be done that has to be done and I said certainly, those are all the deficiencies, we will take of them.

These two programmes really got a benefit out of this work, but the project finished and there is no sustainability and NGOs...

[What was the content of the training that the link volunteers received?]

There must be some modules somewhere...

[Would you have some vague idea?]

All these issues, health issues... Basically maternal and child care, hygiene, sanitation and oral rehydration, same issues... Family planning was the least touched, just basic information... it was reproductive health that was the thing.

[Do you remember what their initial responses to this training was, or the trainers did they report on perceptions, problems, how effective the sessions were?]

One complaint was... they were happy with training and discussing issues but they felt that when we go to the hospitals we are not treated well. So in areas where NGOs are good where they would take interest go talk to doctors, convince doctors etc. there they were good, they succeeded. We created some status for the link volunteers, that if she bring a case you have to spend some time talking to her, let her jump the queue or some damn thing. We said we are not paying them so at least give them some recognition, so when she comes offer her a chair. Those things helped. In the areas where the medical staff has not done that they were not that successful. In the old city it worked because

COVA at that time was in the formative stage so they were adhering to all this, now they may not... so that was one and...

This particular link volunteers... Suppose world population day world immunization day and we had so many of these... they could mobilize thousands of women from the old city. This had never happened in Hyderabad before. Thousands of people participated in these programmes... they would all come to Lal Bahadur stadium to participate... of course they were all campaign kind of modes...

I personally think this had an impact on performance, of these two programmes. Lots of other issues where there, education and enablement... how much they succeeded I don't know.

[Was the initial effort of this project was focused on immunization and family planning, was that a stated focus? Did it just so happen that as the project developed you zeroed in on these two...]

That was a stated objective.

[So in a sense both objectives were met? I met many women who continue to administer polio drops and other immunizations for children in slums...]

So, that time we had the first polio campaign, pulse polio. In Hyderabad we had a very big problem, in a village you can say go to a certain place, everybody there knows every place and there is only a hundred or so population. In Hyderabad, you cannot go to hospitals because there are very few government hospitals. So you cannot cover a 40 lakh population, so you need a new strategy. So we said ok everybody knows polling booths in their area so lets open up all polling booths for pulse polio on a certain day. There was no other way we could give uniform information for everybody... or you have to give a list of all the hospitals and who will come all the way. So we used polling booths, and we had to get special permission from the government etc. that word we could easily spread through the link volunteers, your 20 houses you bring them there. There was a big apprehension that in an urban area like Hyderabad it won't happen. But I was confident that it would. So, we had to have some 4000 people to administer the drops, and they said where will you find them... they have to be trained. So we went to medical colleges and sent them to the polling booths. It was a one day campaign, morning to evening all day, and by evening we had a 110% response. All the officials were concentrated in Hyderabad to see if it will really work and they said yes, its works. So, in that again these people were very useful. They now are trained enough to administer polio drops. My brother a pediatrician trained them for mumps immunization which was also a big success and was taken up by UNICEF as a model project in other states. After that, if you go to fever hospital and ask doctors, you used to get diphtheria cases polio cases, you will find that none of those are happening now. So the impact also we know. How

much these women contributed... to that my answer would be, we used them for two three different things... communication with the community, I communicate to this person and she to 20 houses, second it helped in mobilization... whether they had knowledge about health or not I cannot say but they had 100 times better knowledge about health than their men folk.

[So it's important to train men also?]

Yes... But who has done it and if women are aware it is usually sufficient...

[Don't IUD loops have to be removed after a certain period?]

Yes, usually they can keep for a period of two to three years

[But the follow-up on that, where they told about the risks?]

Yes, we told them... see all this again is the individuals' perception, individuals need... maybe 20-30% it worked

[Were there complications or problems that you were aware of or was that outside the project timeframe?]

I don't know... there would be some problem but I don't think it has been documented, how much of it was really there how much of it was attended to is difficult to say...

[Were the link volunteers informed of these procedures and risks?]

Yes, they were told, but you see what happens over a period of 3 years its difficult to really monitor it. Polio drops you are either there and you take it or you don't. In this sort of thing, over 3 years... the things that could contribute to the whole process, it need to be the IUD it could be other ill health, but whether you attribute that to this or some other thing is very difficult to say. I mean, follow up, even for family planning or IUD or any of these things is not very good.... My estimate is about 5 percent. But, much depends on the individual. Ok, no one is coming no one is complaining, then well no news is good news. That sort of thing...

[But they would be informed...]

They would be informed, but how much they absorb is a different issue.

[The family planning operations, where there any problems or complications... any stray cases?]

Two things in that, it's no higher than other methods. Second, international standards, against that you put it's the same. One in a lakh cases would die... that sort of thing.

[Yes, but given that in this context, where it is a sensitive issue for the minority community even one case might have resulted in any backlash from the community, was there any incident like that for example?]

How do you establish that? I don't think any thing like that has happened in Hyderabad. Maybe in the villages but here in the city. You see the link volunteer scheme was implemented only in this city. Bangalore and Delhi followed the ODA project model, one paid worker per slum and Calcutta had its own model.

[Growth rates, especially in relation to minority communities have always been hotly debated issues...]

You see earlier to 1977, vasectomies were the norm in A.P, but after Sanjay Gandhi there was a lull. When tubectomies were introduced it was taken on by the government as the main point in the family planning programmes. In the past 20 years that A.P. has topped the national list for numbers of tubectomies

[How come?]

Women have accepted here... however, it has not given any result in reducing growth rate. In '97 we reviewed the entire thing and Chandrababu Naidu took on as a tremendous commitment to reduce the growth rate. He said its not just a number game we are on top of the list here and there but it has to have an impact on the growth rate. By 2000 we were next to Kerala despite the fact that we had lowest literacy rates for women... and this was achieved only through sterilization. Those 3 years were critical years, we relied on the same sterilization, but with a new technology. There was a population council and a new policy framed. By then people knew it was a good thing, they accepted also, because they were the 3rd generation to adopt these. Their mothers and mothers-in-law and grandmothers had adopted this. So there is no resistance in the house... in 97 also they were talking the same thing, resistance! I said no, there is no such thing. Where we are failing is to see that they adopt it... we have to create facilities and when they want it we have to provide. They would have a child and after two months say ok we will have an operation now and these people will say after 3 months there is a camp and in the meanwhile they will go have another child. So we said can we break this, can we provide this facility when they need it? So, where they were doing 5 lakh cases every year now they did 7

[Is this a particular socio-economic group?]

Yes, BOP. Its not education, literacy, nothing mattered. We had lowest literacy in AP. Most of the time it was the facility to adopt that was missing.

[Would you have a sense of the figures for the minority community, in A.P?]

Directly no, but indirectly... I found that Muslim population was going up in some 14 cities in India but it was an inconclusive study. For example there is a misconception that Muslims have more wives, it's not true ... Jains have more wives. Because if you have 48:52 ratio and some Muslim men had more wives then many Muslim men won't have a wife? So it's just not true. Whereas in Jains, 20% of them don't get married, so numbers of wives in Jains are more, so there are many false impressions. Having affairs is possible but having four wives is not possible.

[And within the AP what would these figures look like?]

If you look at minority populations from 1901 onwards you find some swells. The biggest was after 47-48. There was a lot of influx from the districts. This was then diluted when AP was formed and the Andhras came in, so the minority population got diluted. How much is really because of increased fertility I am not sure. There must be figures...how much the available datas are reliable is also a question. So we can only go by perception. Migration and birth rate both are important and most of the time its migration that affects numbers. There is also migration within the city, within the state and country and to the Middle East. Someone should really do a study.

[Also are there some fixed perceptions or approaches that differentiate the government's health programming for the minority community... any myths that continue to hold sway?]

Well, there used to be ... but now there is no Hindu and Muslim this or that, it is all American...

[So one big American myth for all]

Yes, yes, it's all only American now.