From Crisis to Identity

Mid 1980s

PRIA conducted capacity building programmes for Voluntary Development Organisations (VDOs), where regulation was identified as a challenge.

Why does this equate voluntary development organisations with volunteering? Why does this include only VDOs working in rural areas?

Why weren't development organisations consulted while drafting this legislation?

In 1986, Dr. Rajesh Tandon came across a document proposing a legislation on defining VDOs, and a code of conduct.

The proposed legislation also came at a time when the Kudal Commission was investigating VDOs with Gandhian connections in India.

Over four months, Dr. Rajesh Tandon travelled to 22 locations to discuss the proposed legislation with local VDOs, and eminent Gandhian thought leaders.

Yes, the regulatory framework for VDOs should be created using participatory discussions with those affected by it.

We need to have a collective voice for voluntary organisations, to represent our interests, and strengthen our position in policymaking.

LC Jain, Rajni Kothari, Al Fernandez, Ajay Mehta and Ela Bhatt were among the eminent leaders consulted.

In September 1986, the first National Convention of VDOs was held at Indian Social Institute, New Delhi, with support from nearly 250 participants.
Subsequently, Voluntary Action Network of India (VANI) was functioning informally since 1988, and became a legal entity in 1991, with Dr. Rajesh Tandon as its first Chairperson.

The political context between 1989-1991 was in flux, both at national and international levels. The fall of the Berlin Wall, and the disintegration of the USSR created a unipolar world, with related economic implications. Liberalisation, Privatisation, and Globalisation in India also had implications for rural and urban poor. This prompted fresh academic discussions on civil society—its meaning, roles, and impacts.

Internationally, a new global civil society initiative called CIVICUS (World Alliance for Citizen Participation) was created in 1993, with Dr. Rajesh Tandon as its Founder-Board Member and second chairperson.

The years between 1986-1996 began to formulate the 'identity' of the sector of VDOs in India, later on bringing in the larger canvas of civil society.