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TUL 670A Project 2

**Agency Assessment and Selection**

Choosing an organization to write my thesis with is an important decision, one that should not be taken lightly. It should be a partnership that both benefits the organization and allows me as a researcher to work freely in the field and retain ownership of my findings. For each of my internships, I have had the privilege to work under Delhi House Society (DHS), an NGO who works with the poorest of the poor of Delhi. Although I was fairly certain I would like to do my research under the supervision of Delhi House Society, I took this assignment as an opportunity to critically evaluate this choice.

# **The Search: Potential Options**

When I first began looking at potential NGOs and ministry networks to work under, I had still not completely defined my research topic. I wanted to examine how elements of Indian religion and culture can either promote or prevent progress, but I was not entirely sure what specifically I wanted to focus on within this broader topic. Therefore, when considering who to meet with, I looked at NGOs, networks, and institutions that might provide opportunities to explore this topic further.

Each of the organizations and ministry networks I met with work in a variety of different development sectors, including health care, education, income generation, advocacy, church/faith movement growth, and movement leadership, to highlight a few. The diversity of their activities would have certainly allowed me to take my research in whatever direction I needed to go once my topic became more defined. However, now that I know I want to focus my research on small, community-based groups as agents of transformation, I am able to go through what I have learned from each organization and make a more informed decision about who I would like to work with.

**Figure 1: Criteria for Organization Assessment**

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| Criteria | Description |
| Legitimate | Does the organization and its leadership enjoy a reputation in the host community for being honest and sincere, without evidences of misconduct related to fund use, management, and governance? |
| Problem-Focused | Does the organization address specific community dilemmas and risks (e.g. evangelism, ill health, failing schools, economic shocks, human rights abuses, land tenure)? |
| Exemplary | Is the organization acknowledged as a “model” of best practices and effectiveness in that specific sector of development? |
| Public | Does the organization include, in both its staff and beneficiaries, a cross-section of community residents, crossing tribal, religious, caste differences? |
| Participatory | Does the organization involve local residents in defining and carrying out an agenda for community improvement? |
| Supervised | Does the organization have bilingual national staff who are able and willing to provide outside researchers expert supervision and feedback? |

In my search, I also looked at people and organizations with whom I already had connections, as a certain level of trust and understanding of MATUL had already been developed there. I have met with two NGOs and one ministry network with which I am connected:

* Delhi House Society
* Justice Ventures International
* Raman Singh and Delhi’s Insider Movement network

I evaluated each of these organizations and networks against the criteria above (Figure 1). All of them met the majority of these criteria, but each had their own strengths and weaknesses, which I will talk about in more detail below.

## **Delhi House Society**

Delhi House Society (DHS) is an NGO that works with the destitute poor of Delhi. It was started after a Dutch man named Ton Snellaert visited Old Delhi in the mid-1990s and felt compelled to respond to the overwhelming poverty he saw. Inspired by Isaiah 58, he came back to Delhi the following year and began taking these men into his own home. This later developed into Sewa Ashram in 2000, a rehabilitation center for these homeless men who were suffering from drug and alcohol addiction, tuberculosis, and a number of other health issues. They also work with homeless families in Old Delhi, working in the very communities from which these homeless men were picked up. At their current project site in Meena Bazaar, a Muslim squatter community in Old Delhi, where they now run a learning center, shelter, and primary health care clinic.

Although DHS started out as a foreign-run organization, it is now Indian-run. Delhi House Society’s core staff are all believers and all of their programs are based on biblical principles, but they also employ people from a variety of different faith backgrounds. They currently have Hindu, Muslim, and Christian staff working on each of their community projects. As much as possible, they also invite the beneficiaries of their services to be a part of the development planning process, primarily through interviews and focus groups. With the help of a translator, I myself have helped carry out these meetings with the residents in order to identify specific needs or interests to be addressed in upcoming programs.

Delhi House Society is involved in a variety of holistic, participatory development projects, but they are also seeking to become more involved in the spiritual element of transformation. They recognize that programs and services can improve a person’s quality of life, but only true inward transformation will lead to lasting change. At Sewa Ashram, they have small support groups for the men called Life Groups, which are designed to allow the men space to talk about their issues and make goals that will allow them to make positive change in their lives. The NGO has recently started community health classes with the ladies in Meena Bazaar, which also include a time for spiritual teaching, discussion, and goal setting. I am hoping that any research I do could be used to assist Delhi House Society in what they are already doing and design better models for these groups in order to create a space that enables transformational conversations to occur.

Delhi House Society regularly partner with other organizations in their projects, recognizing that they could not possibly accomplish everything they would like to do on their own. This includes their partnership with their interns. My supervisor, Faniel Singh, says that DHS’s interns are a vital part of the project planning process and is very open to these new ideas being put into practice in DHS’s field work. He is also a bit more progressively-minded than other believers I have met. He is a devout Christian and attends church every Sunday, but he also believes that people come to faith in different ways and that their faith looks different depending on the background from which they have come. He would agree that not all discipleship needs to happen in a church, and loves the idea of meeting both practical and spiritual needs in groups that are not strictly “Christian.”

## **Justice Ventures International**

Justice Ventures International (JVI), although not an Indian organization, works primarily with national partners to address the issues of poverty, discrimination, and corruption that lead to the injustice of human trafficking. Their office in Delhi is currently involved in two major initiatives – interventions (including restorative after-care) and advocacy (awareness and prevention). Recently, JVI has been re-evaluating their approach and trying to refine their programs in a way that addresses the deeper root issues behind injustice in India. This will include a great deal of research on the role that religion and worldview play in how Indians view trafficking. The staff would like to see if there are any cultural or religious narratives that could be used to appeal to legislative officials and potentially even traffickers, implementing contextual storytelling in a way that engages people in transformational conversations.

Although being involved in this research process might be a great internship opportunity for our advocacy class, it seems that it might not be the most ideal set-up for my research topic. JVI tends to be more focused on working at the legislative level rather than at the grassroots in the majority of their initiatives. I would also have trouble accessing communities if I were to work strictly with JVI. As I talked with a few of the staff members more, I learned that JVI has a strict policy of only allowing nationals to do field work. I completely agree with this approach, as having only national faces on site avoids unnecessary attention and suspicion that a Westerner might draw. However, this unfortunately also means that my mobility in field research with them would be limited.

## **Raman Singh and Delhi’s Insider Movement Network**

Insider Movements have become both a popular and controversial idea in missiological circles here in India. Raman Singh, who helped us facilitate our leadership conference last semester, began his faith journey and ministry on more of an “Insider” trajectory. However, as he grew in wisdom and maturity of faith, he says that he began to see that there were a few parts of the Insider Movement phenomenon that were not exactly biblical. He still associates with his Insider brothers in the faith, but now advocates for a more biblical form of contextualization, one that is closer to what we see in the early church.

While Raman might be a good resource for connecting with small group leaders in Delhi, it does not seem that asking him to be my supervisor would be the most practical decision. I am interested in learning more about Insider Movements here in India, but I (like Raman) would not consider myself someone who believes strictly in this practice or theology. Although Raman is a brilliant man that has both knowledge of and experience with faith networks in India, his Insider ministry connections are not closely linked enough to be what I would consider a unified network. I would definitely like to consult with him further throughout my research process and see if I could connect with any of these local leaders, but it would make more sense to partner with an organization or network that is more established and structured.

**Conclusion**

While meeting with different networks and organizations, I kept coming back to Delhi House Society as my most viable option. I have already established a professional relationship with their staff and invested in the communities with whom they work. The benefit of working with Delhi House Society is not necessarily that they will provide me with access to a multitude of potential discipleship groups, although there are a few, but that they will hopefully be able to apply my research to their own small group models in the future. In addition, I would like to continue to partner with Delhi House Society in order to open up opportunities to work in the Meena Bazaar community long-term when I return to the field. They have already established a presence and built relationships with the community, which would make it easy for me to return.

The reality is that I will not be able to research this topic through only one organization. Opportunities will need to come through a variety of different of network connections. Thankfully, each of the organizations and networks I have spoken with seem open to assisting me in this process in one way or another. I would love for my research to eventually benefit other faith workers in India outside of Delhi House Society as well. If the opportunity presents itself, I might even want to publish a more concise article about my findings if I stumble upon anything significant. However, for now, it seems right and good to focus my research efforts on Delhi House Society, an organization that has already invested so much in my academic experience here.