Doing Gender, Doing Development:

Interrogating Indian State's attempts at 'Doing Development' through Gender

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I felt deeply honoured for having been asked to deliver the very important lecture instituted in honour of Naik Saheb - to borrow Vinadi's term. Naik Saheb is how she refers to him throughout in her book, **Memories of a Rolling Stone** (2010).

From the same book, one not only gets a fairly detailed idea of the active role played by Naik Saheb in the setting up of CWDS but also vignettes of the persona of J P Naik, the scholar, visionary, able administrator with a mind of his own, willing to use the authority conferred on him by his position to facilitate and get things done.

I thank CWDS for this opportunity to pay my homage to this extraordinary human being, whom I have not had the occasion to meet in person but have grown to admire.

I. The Context

In 1987, ***Gender and Society*** journal carried several papers that began with a seminal piece on 'Doing Gender' by West and Zimmerman. Among other things, the article offered a critical assessment of then existing perspectives on sex and gender, even as it introduced important distinctions among the terms sex, sex category and gender (1: 125-51). In 1995, in the same journal, West and Fenstermaker published 'Doing Difference' to make up for an earlier neglect of race and class, and, "to extend our analysis to consider explicitly the relationships among gender, race and class, and to reconceptualize 'difference' as an ongoing interactional accomplishment" (1:9)

In 2009, ***Gender and Society*** revisited the theme in the form of a symposium that, in a sense, took stock of how 'Doing Gender' had been conceptualized and operationalized over the intervening period. Among the several contributions to this discussion, we highlight Barbara Risman's observations for the sharp manner in which it captures the sanitized manner in which 'Doing Gender' has been operationalized. To quote Risman: "First, the concept has been so integrated into the sociological lexicon that the implicit feminist critique embedded within it sometimes disappears entirely. Second, the feminist use of doing gender has become so diffuse that we have created a tautology: whatever groups of boys and girls, or men and women, do is a kind of gender" (1:81).

Several other scholars, Deutsch (2007), for example, pointed out how, despite the revolutionary potential (of West and Zimmerman's 1987 article) for illuminating how to dismantle the gender system, 'doing gender' had, on the contrary, become a theory of gender persistence and the inevitability of inequality. Deutsch also points out (and this is important for the argument of this paper) that, while the persistence of inequality cannot be ignored,

one of the major contributions of the approach is to examine the limits of structural change. What I believe researchers often ignore is how focus on the interactional level can also illuminate the possibility of change. The study of the interactional level could expand beyond simply documenting the persistence of inequality to examine (1) ***when and how social interactions become less gendered, not just differently gendered; (2) the conditions under which gender is irrelevant in social interactions; (3) whether all gendered interactions reinforce inequality; (4) how the structural (institutional) and interactional levels might work together to produce change…*** *My plea is that we shift our inquiry about ongoing social interactions to focus on change. Although I do not have the answers, I believe we should change the questions* [emphasis mine] [ibid: 114].

Needless to add, much of the discussion on 'doing/undoing/redoing' gender and as documented in the pages of **Gender and Society** referred to above is in the context of Western societies. It is our contention that, while the framework within which the 'doing of gender' is discussed remains relevant across time and space, what is conspicuous by its absence in the above discussion (whether in 1987 or 2009) is the context and level of 'development' of a country – political, economic and social – a phenomena that cannot be ignored and which still foregrounds much of the discussion on gender, and, about gender, in societies such as India. The present paper is set against the above backdrop of the theme of 'doing gender'; however, the paper does not simply stop at illustrating how 'gender has been done' in the Indian context; rather, following Deutsch's (2007) plea to change the questions being asked, and, also by superimposing the 'doing gender' framework onto the Indian state's agenda of 'doing development', the paper seeks to go beyond and demonstrate how the Indian state's agenda of addressing gender-based inequalities and thereby empower the marginalized through its programme of development actively contributes to the entrenchment rather than redressal of gender-based inequalities.

This paper is part of a larger project and consists of two parts. Part I is aimed at providing a broad-brush sketch of the multiple ways in which scholars researching on India have attempted 'to do gender'. These include: (i) interrogations of mainstream academic disciplines that have produced generations of gender (in)sensitive social scientists and policy makers; (ii) participation in, and, studies of movements that have had several fallouts including the establishments of Departments/Centres of Women's/Gender Studies across many institutions of higher learning in the country; (iii) activisms that have exposed gender-based violence in public and private spaces and institutions; (iv) membership of Government Committees and Commissions aimed at making governments come out with gender sensitive programmes and policies even while remaining alert to impositions of gender-blind policies and legislations that have very often added to, rather than mitigated gender inequality, to name a few.

Part II of the project is specifically aimed at capturing how the particular manner in which the Indian state has sought to achieve ***economic*** development since Independence has had deleterious consequences for its agenda of achieving gender justice. Further, the changing development discourse, particularly in the post-liberalization period, with its emphasis, among other things, on 'smart economics', has become a euphemism for using women and girls to 'fix the world' (to quote the title of Chant and Sweetman, 2012) albeit in the name of gender equality and empowerment of women. In the process, 'development' as practiced by the Indian state has not only been singularly unable to address and therefore reduce gender-based inequality but has in-built biases and deficits that render it incapable of 'mainstreaming gender' in the feminist sense of transformation of society that 'doing gender' was originally envisaged to achieve.

This paper dwells on Part II of the above project; it explicates the phenomenon of 'doing development through gender' by focusing on three different aspects of economic development, each of which illustrates significant consequences when viewed through a gender lens. These include:

1. The theme of land administration in India: this provides a macro context to the hitherto and continuing (un)successful struggle by activists and women's groups in particular to end poverty and impart some dignity to their lives through attempts at acquisition of land titles.
2. Using 'paid employment' as trope, we demonstrate how the Indian state attempts to kill several birds with one stone: (i) state-sponsored or state-executed women's empowerment programmes have become euphemisms to thrust responsibilities on women but which nomenclature enables governments to deny women the status of 'workers' even if, in some cases, women are gainfully employed; (ii) increasingly, the expanding social sector welfare programmes of the state, both at the Centre and at the local level, are being implemented through local women; the latter however are designated as volunteers and paid an honorarium – a 'smart economics' move that makes women work for development rather than development empowering women through creation of formal employment. As illustrations of these attempts, we critically engage with the Heath, Education and Social Welfare sectors, where (a) the state continues to appoint large numbers of ASHAs but who technically do not belong to the Health Ministry of either local or Central government; (b) the institution of ***Para***-teachers has become the norm rather than the exception; and, where (c) the conditions as well as the ***position*** of Anganwadi, and mid-day meal workers continues to remain precarious even in states where the ostensibly 'well-administered' functioning of these schemes have earned kudos for the states concerned.
3. Creating a learning society, which includes access to formal education for all sections of society, is an avowed goal of all societies, India being no exception. An important international initiative is the institution of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that, among other things, expects member countries that are signatory to the achievement of these goals, to end gender disparity in education by 2015. The Indian state has made tremendous efforts to fulfill this goal; this paper is not concerned so much with the continuing and/or regional variations in levels of disparity in education that yet remains to be addressed. On the contrary, we bring together ethnographic material that provide disturbing evidence of how girls' education is being interpreted and subverted on the ground.

II. The Long History and Continuing Saga of Land [Mal] Administration.

The rationale for a discussion on land administration, and its relevance to the theme of 'doing gender through development', can be summed up as follows: Women's studies scholars and activists have a long history of engaging with the issue of women's access to and title over land, more particularly in the rural areas. The anxiety to empower women to secure clear titles to land stems from several related aspects: one, disproportionately larger numbers of women continue to be engaged in land-based activities. Consequently, not having independent access or clear title to land puts them in an economically vulnerable position in the event of widowhood, desertion or separation. Additionally, this lack also denies them access to formal credit where collateral in the form of land becomes the basis for availing of such facilities provided by the government. Two, despite progressive legislation conferring equal inheritance rights on both the genders, the reality on the ground depicts a complex picture which simply cannot be read as one of lack of implementation of a progressive legislation and therefore of denial of rights. On the contrary, official admission of lack of basic land records, years of neglect of creating such records, and therefore the entrenchment of vested interests that thrive on fraudulently created records and practices – reveal a scenario where the continuation of existing situation at the macro level can in no way reverse the situation on the ground but will in turn continue to thwart attempts to secure gender justice as far as access and title to land is concerned.

We dwell at length on official documents, namely Reports of the Planning Commission that provide candid details of the state of land administration in the country. We supplement this official speak with a couple of ground based studies that, when read along with the official documents, begin to provide us with a sense of why the resolution to women's access and title to land will continue to remain a distant dream for a long time to come.

Official Speak on Land Administration, Land Reform and Distributive Justice:

A. Way back in 1978, during the brief period of the rule of the Janata Party, Prof. D T Lakdawala, Professor of Economics and Head of the Department of Economics at the Bombay University, became Dy. Chairman of the Planning Commission. The Planning Commission under Professor Lakdawala produced the Draft Five Year Plan 197883(henceforth PC78-83), which till today, in our opinion, remains the only and most important official critique of the state of the economy till that period. Among the several important themes covered in this document is an elaborate section on Land Reform under the heading, Distributive Justice. We quote at length from the above section to provide a context as well as the dimension of the problem of land administration that has eluded resolution despite official knowledge and documentation of the steps needed to be taken for redressal. Elaborating on the theme of **Distributive Justice,** PC78-83 states: *In a developing economy the instrument of taxation alone is ineffective in reducing disparities in income and property. Therefore a variety of other redistributive measures are necessary. These should influence, first of all, the existing distribution of assets, particularly agricultural land, urban real estate and corporate property…*

(p11)

The indicator of distributive ***injustice*** in the case of land that PC78-83 deploys is concentration ratio of assets based on data put out by the RBI:

> *According to Reserve Bank data the concentration ratio of assets [mainly agricultural land] owned by rural households was 0.65 in 1961-62 and increased to 0.66 in 1971-72. The poorest 10% of rural HHs owned only 0.1% and richest 10% owned more than half of total assets in 1971-72 as well as in 1961-62.* ***These data show that up to the 60s the land reform measures had no visible impact on the distribution of rural property*** (emphasis added) (p11-12)

On the issue of **Land ceilings**, the PC78-83 noted as follows:

> *As on 31st July 1977, the* ***estimated*** *surplus area was only 5.32 million acres, the* ***declared*** *surplus was 4.04 million acres, the area* ***taken over*** *by govt was 2.10 million acres and the area* ***actually distributed*** *was only 1.29 million. Thus the distributed area remains less than one-fourth of the estimated surplus… p11-12*

In a footnote [on page 12] the 1978 Report refers to the findings of NSS 26th Round, 1971-72, whose estimates of surplus land in the country exceed 20 million acres. Continuing on the theme of Distributive Justice, PC 78-83 notes:

It is established policy that preference be given to landless households in the allotment of surplus land. Even with small holdings of a hectare or less, the landless

families can cross the poverty line if the holdings are irrigated and income from crop production is supplemented by income from animal husbandry, fishery, forestry and cottage industry activities. Even the possession of small holdings will improve the social status of the landless, particularly scheduled castes and tribes, and enable them to have better access to other means of production… Tenancy reform has often been conceived as independent of the legislation on ceilings. But it should be implemented as a part of the same redistributive process… The assurance of security of tenure, limited rent liability, and eventual ownership to real self-cultivating tenants and share-croppers will bring about an effective redistribution of leased-out land… (p12)

In the light of the above observations, the Report therefore emphasized the need to create **land records**, observing as follows:

The updating of land records is crucial to the development of a healthy agriculture. Large areas in the country do not have up-to-date land records. This is anachronistic in a system of administration which presupposes the existence of direct relationship between the State and the owner-farmer. What is more, the records once prepared have to be continuously updated as otherwise they would cease to be useful after a few years. The investment on preparation of records and their continuous updating has to be accepted as investment on agriculture and should not be judged as expenditure on schemes which yield no return (p132).

B. That from 1978 to 2011, no visible progress has been made on the issue of land administration is borne out by the fairly detailed observations contained in the Planning Commission's **Mid-Term Appraisal: Eleventh Five Year Plan, 2007-2012**, document (henceforth PC2007-12).

On the state of **Land Records in the country,** the Mid-term Appraisal document observes:

Accurate and updated land records are a veritable lifeline for millions of small and marginal farmers in India. They provide them security against a range of vulnerabilities and allow them to access credit and agricultural inputs, as also the benefits of various ant-poverty programmes. ***In most states a multitude of departments are involved in land record management. People need to approach several agencies to complete land records – the Revenue Dept for textual records and mutations; Survey & Settlement [or Consolidation] Dept for maps; registration Dept for verification of encumbrances and registration of transfer, mortgage, and so on; and panchayats for mutation. The harassment they potentially suffer can be imagined. Also because these depts. work in isolation from each other, updation by any one of them makes the records of the others outdated. Absence of integration of textual and spatial records makes it hard to get maps-to-scale with the record of rights [RoRs]***. (p86)

What is extremely significant in the Mid-Term Appraisal document for our larger theme of rural & gender justice is the acknowledgement of complete, and I would add criminal, neglect of investment in protocols for appropriate functioning of land administration machinery. PC 200712 is however candid in admitting that land record administration underwent great neglect once state income in the form of land revenue began to decline, especially since the 1970s. On the method of administering land records PC2007-12 makes some telling observations extremely crucial to place feminist struggles relating to women's access to land in context.

The most important activity for updating land records – original survey for cadastral mapping – has been neglected by many states. In many areas, especially the tribal hinterlands, land records have not been updated for decades. Mutation of names in the records does not happen [as it should] upon transfer of possession & ownership of land. Millions of cases of mutation & measurement remain pending across the country (emphasis added, p86)***.*** *The current system of land registration in India is based on the Registration Act, 1908,* ***which provides for registration of deeds and documents, and not titles****. Only the transaction is recorded.* ***The transfer of ownership title remains merely presumptive****. The massive time-lag between registration and mutation provides space for fraudulent transactions, such as in land and litigation. An alternative system used in many other countries… is that of 'conclusive titles' [Torrens System], which confers a legal indefeasible title to the holder of the land.*

The system of conclusive titles is based on four fundamental principles: [a] a single agency to handle records to ensure consistency and reduce conflicts between sources; [b] the 'mirror' principle, whereby the cadastral records mirror the reality on ground; [c] the 'curtain principle' which indicates that the record of the title is a true depiction of ownership status, so that mutation is automatic following registration, referring to past transactions is not necessary and the title is a conclusive, rather than a mere presumptive, proof of ownership; and [d] title insurance, which guarantees the title for its correctness and indemnifies the title holder against loss arising on account of any inaccuracy in this regard. ***At present, land records in India do not reflect any of these principles*** (emphasis added p86)**.**

PC 2007-12 notes that, in order to move decisively in the direction of a Torrens System of land records in India, the National Lands Records Modernization Programme was launched in 2008, but is quick to point out the formidable challenges that the system and government of the day need to tackle towards resolution of these challenges.

One of these challenges has to do with the scale of area to be surveyed for record purposes: *As much as 2.16 million sq.km of cultivable area has to be surveyed. The survey and settlements have to be done for 140 million landowners with 430 million records. There are 92 million ownership holdings each with 4-6 parcels of land. Around 42 million field measurement blocks and around 1 million village maps have to be digitized… of the 4018 registration offices in the country, 1896 are yet to be computerized. Nearly all of them have to be linked with state revenue departments. As many as 1.5 lakh patwaris, the staff of 5000 tehsils, 4000 registration offices and 50,000 staff need to be trained* (p87)

In a different way the Mid-Term Appraisal Report endorses the distributive ***injustice*** characterizing the country's land reform and administration policy as pointed out way back in PC1978-83 mentioned earlier on.

Ever since independence land reforms have been a major instrument of state policy to promote both equity and agricultural investment. Unfortunately, progress on land reforms has been slow, ***reflecting the resilience of the structures of power that give rise to the problem in the first place****… While the average landholding size over the last 30years has halved from 2 ha to 1ha, inequality in landholdings has grown with the Gini coefficient rising from 0.583 in 196061 to 0.624 in 2003. Over 80% of the farmers are small and marginal but they own only around 40% of the land, whereas the largest 3% farmers own 38% of the land… the balance of power in rural India is so heavily weighed against the landless and the poor that implementing land ceiling laws has become a virtual non-starter.* ***It is clear that without massive mobilization of the rural poor and a deepening of democratic governance in rural India, very little can be achieved in this direction*** (emphasis added, p88)**.**

C. Land-Based Struggles: Feminists Fighting for Entitlements to Land

Thus far, we have noted that, at the National level:

- It is officially admitted that land administration (which includes land reforms, documentation leading to conferring of conclusive titles, operationalization of ceiling laws and the like) is not and has not been a priority agenda item for the GOI since the 1970s when contribution to exchequer from revenue from land began declining;
- Two, officially again it is admitted that, progress on land reforms has been slow, reflecting the resilience of the structures of power that give rise to the problem in the first place;
- Three the GOI's fall back option is the hope that massive mobilization of the poor and deepening of democratic practices on the ground will effect a turnaround.

The almost complete abdication of responsibility by the Centre in making available secure land to the tillers among the poor, means that in the meantime, poor households and women in particular will have to keep shouldering the ever increasing burden of provisioning for their households with or without security of land tenure. More significant is the context in which this provisioning has to be accomplished, namely, one where each state government is free to practice its own brand of patron-client relationship. The latter becomes very evident in studies documenting land-based struggles on the ground.

Two different kinds of field-based studies illustrate how the poor (and poor women in particular) on the ground are forced to come to terms with the above situation. We begin with Meera Velayudhan's (2012) documentation of women's struggles to obtain rights and entitlements to land in Gujarat.

Discussing the social, legal and administrative constraints to women's ownership of land, based on studies conducted in two Adivasi and two caste villages in Narmada and Surendranagar districts, the author highlights a significant finding, namely, that ***the land inherited were not recorded formally***; informal ownership was more prominent in tribal set-ups while in the caste villages only young widows had informal ownership of land; the feeling of insecurity among widows from the caste villages was very high; even where they had formal ownership, it involved a struggle to gain ownership (ibid:511).

Some telling observations from the paper are worth quoting for the reason that, these directly corroborate the macro observations made earlier on the overall state of land administration in the country.

> *In many areas **varsai** [inheritance] **entries have not been conducted for up to two or three generations** and cases of corruption by revenue officials are evident, depriving widows and other single women in particular of their due share in land* (emphasis added, p515).

> *The decision on women's entitlements to assets (land and other forms of property) were mainly left to the community's traditional decision-making bodies – the panch [mainly male] and to local practices…* (p515)

While noting that the implementation of land reforms in Gujarat in terms of land distribution to the landless has been considerably weakened because of persistent opposition from upper caste landed sections, the author also points out how struggles by the landless to take possession of land ***already*** distributed over two decades ago are still ongoing. More important, Velayudhan points out that despite a Government Regulation of 1989, distribution of land was not in the joint names of the spouses; rather 'family' was seen as the unit of resource allocation with titles being given to individual men (p519).

An equally important but disturbing finding made in the paper that goes beyond the earlier observations that we have recorded above on the theme of Distributive Justice is the following: under the Gujarat Agricultural Land Ceiling Act, 1960, surplus land was allotted to cooperative societies of SC, STs, OBCs and landless peasants rather than to landless individuals. However, as per information received through RTI filed by a prominent Dalit lawyer, many of the so-called Dalit cooperatives have been illegally selling agricultural land on a large scale. In many cases, such land has been sold without registering documents and these illegal documents have also been transferred to govt records. Many of the members of cooperatives are illiterate and do not even know that their land has been sold (p519-20).

In short, while Velayudhan is more focused on unearthing biases that deprive women of entitlements to land, we place her paper in the larger context of land (mal)administration sketched earlier to reinforce a point made earlier: when the State at large has abdicated its responsibility of securing Distributive Justice (in this case provision of secure land to the poor and landless tillers) attempting to 'do gender' at the ground level cannot take us very far towards our agenda of achieving either distributive or gender justice. In other words, feminist struggles on the ground need to be also informed by, as well as placed in the larger context of land (mal)administration in the country.

The second study that we engage with is by Jayashree Mangubhai (2014) who seeks to answer the following question: *how do Dalit women in rural South India secure livelihood entitlements, thereby overcoming social exclusion and transforming power relations?...* [p14-15]. This field-based study conducted by Mangubhai consists of three case studies located in the south Indian state of Tamil Nadu; while collective action processes is the unifying theme for all three, each case study exemplifies how entitlement outcomes could be different and specific, emphasizing the complexity and contextuality of each circumstance. Within the same state and despite the 'universal' nature of human rights, Mangubhai demonstrates what makes a particular struggle successful; another continues to struggle while the third waged an unsuccessful attempt to protect existing entitlements. Through a critical reading of the state's discourse on Empowerment and Livelihoods, Mangubhai demonstrates how the practices of 'the assorted state institutions and actors that collectively compose the *state'* significantly contribute to and reinforce the durability of structural inequalities.

We choose to highlight one particular case, namely, the Vetriyur village case, where the author investigates an ongoing struggle by Dalit women to acquire legal title to agricultural land. Here the author emphasizes the dynamics that come into play when two parallel systems of governance [formal and informal] produce competing notions of rights, entitlements and obligations. The study demonstrates how informal institutional actors reinforce unequal entitlement norms and influence state actors to maintain these norms. These in turn shape the distinct pathways and the types of organizational and entitlement strategies available to Dalit women to secure their livelihood entitlements. Dalit women in Vetriyur village, for instance, argued the legitimacy of their land entitlement based on three counts: first, a quasi-legal right flowing from the government officials' assurances to change classification so as to grant them title; second their right to equal treatment where nearby villages have been granted title for government lands; and, third, a right to land title based on their years of cultivating the land to make a living [p223].

Through a meticulous analysis of field data, Mangubhai notes how and why gender interests assume lesser importance in the women's collective action on entitlements given a situation where castes overwhelmingly determine how resources are distributed to give individuals dignity and respect. In all three struggles, women gained the support of Dalit men by reproducing gender norms surrounding labour, sexuality and inheritance. In other words, their actions generate power to induce structural discontinuities as well as continuities [p225]. Many Dalit women villagers recognized their often larger contributions to household maintenance and children's welfare as a consequence of the gender inequality built into household economic relations. In addition they expressed a sense of entitlement to life without domestic violence or male alcoholism. Just because they know their interests, however, does not mean that they choose to act on

them, especially where sacrificing certain interest ensures their future security.

Hence it becomes imperative to understand the material contexts in which women may appear to consent to gender inequalities [p234] [a point made by Bina Agarwal way back in 1994].

In her concluding observations, Mangubhai, among other things elaborates on why dalit women's collective action "appears to have altered caste-class relations, while leaving gender relations relatively untouched"(p231), and, given the indivisibility of rights, why it is essential to factor issues of culture, status and identity into entitlement struggles. In challenging the received notions relating to human rights law and practice, Mangubhai stresses the need to realize that while human rights are primarily the rights of individuals, these individuals are located within relational and situational contexts that make it imperative to understand the ways in which these relationships and conditions shape people's sense of, as well as their actual choices, rights and entitlements.

The two studies that I have taken up for discussion are, on their own terms, significant additions to our understanding of women's struggles to protect and gain legitimacy over their livelihood resource, namely land. While Velayudhan's exploration of land struggles in Gujarat reveals how Gujarat is a microcosm of a larger malaise afflicting the economy, Mangubhai's case studies demonstrate how the virtual abandonment of effective distributive justice through land reforms & land ceilings policy by GOI has meant that each state government is free to practice its own brand of patron-client relationship; further, Mangubhai has concretely demonstrated how the intertwining of formal [state] and informal [nadu] systems of governance preserves the socio-political power of the informal institutions, to the detriment of landless dalit women, making them take positions that could very often be construed as unfeminist. In a sense, therefore, we have a situation where a particular manner of 'doing development' by the state (namely, not seriously attending to its responsibility of land administration) was actually resulting in a phenomenon that could be termed 'undoing gender'.

II. Empowering Women OR Making Women Work for Development?

Sylvia Chant and Caroline Sweetman's (2012) trenchant critique, among other things, of the mission statements and change goals of development organizations, wherein investing in girls and women is seen as not only being fair but also a 'smart economic move' (p520) to break intergenerational poverty and create a better world, forms the backdrop against which we assess GOI's social welfare programmes that have an even longer history of being premised on the deployment of women as 'volunteers' and 'honorary' staff to fulfill the development agenda of the Indian State.

Chant and Sweetman's discussion enables us to situate the Indian State's use of women and girls to 'fix the economy' in the global context; in a sense it also makes us realize that, at one level, the continuing devaluation of women's time, effort and labour by the Indian State (a point to be elaborated below), and at another level, the entry of corporates into the social sector through the mandatory Corporate Social Responsibility programmes, to a large extent, echoes the global agenda. The latter, as Chant and Sweetman record, works as follows: "Development organizations and governments have been joined in the focus on the 'business case' for gender equality and the empowerment of women, by businesses and enterprises which are interested in contributing to social good" (p520). However, Chant and Sweetman demonstrate how this smart economics move 'oversimplifies complexity and shifts responsibility' (p524); more significant, they aver, "smart economics is concerned with building women's capacities ***in the interest of development rather than promoting women's rights for their own sake***" (emphasis added) (p527).

The functioning of the Health and Education sectors of the economy provide rich evidence of the manner in which women of this country (poor, rural women in particular) contribute to development much more than what they benefit from development. For example, the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) launched by the GOI in 2005 is a major flagship programme aimed at achieving several ambitious goals in the health sector, much of which goals is to be implemented, monitored and fulfilled by the Accredited Social Health Activists' (ASHAs), the cornerstone of the above mission. Using the ASHA programme as case, this paper is aimed at demonstrating the stark disjuncture in the manner in which GOI approaches the theme of recruitment, roles, responsibilities and monetary compensation to ASHAs when juxtaposed against studies conducted on the ground, that, among other things also capture the voices and perceptions of ASHAs themselves about the Mission programme.

GOI's Take on ASHA programme:

The Report of the Mid-Term Appraisal of Eleventh Plan (PC 2007-12, mentioned earlier) is a good starting point to get an official appraisal of the status of Health and Health infrastructure in the country. We concentrate on the section on human resources rather than physical infrastructure.

The Report, while acknowledging that shortage of human resources in health is as pronounced as lack of physical infrastructure, interestingly also notes that the overall shortfall of female health workers and of ANMS was relatively low at 12.43% in 2008 when compared to shortfalls of 54.3% in the case of male health workers, 53.3% in radiographers, 50.9% in lab technicians and 64.5% in specialists. What therefore is eminently discernible is a concerted effort to recruit female health workers.

Several disturbing observations in terms of nature and status of appointments of health personnel contained in the Report, include the following:

It has been reported that due to contractual recruitments with NRHM funds, states have added 42,633 ANMs, 12,485 MBBS doctors, and 2,474 specialists. In the last three years under NRHM, 26,253 staff nurses, 7,399 AYUSH doctors, and 3,110 AYUSH paramedics were appointed… As contractual appointments are facilitated, the states tend to decrease their sanctioned posts. It must therefore be ensured by the states that they will, in the long run, bear the expenditure for such contractual appointments (p149, 151)

Specifically on ASHAs, the Report observes the following:

> *The appointment of locally recruited women as ASHAs who would link potential beneficiaries with the health service system is an important element of NRHM. The good part is that 7.49 lakh ASHAs have been appointed; but several issues still need to be resolved. Not only is there a lack of transparency in the selection, ASHAs are often inadequately trained. Besides, their focus seems to be on facilitating institutional deliveries. The ASHA who accompanies the expectant mother faces considerable hardships because she has nowhere to stay for duration of confinement as institutional accommodation facilities are non-existent. They also often experience long delays in payment of incentives… the payments (under the Janani Suraksha Yojana) are delayed by three to four months [at times even a year in some states] and are often made only after repeated visits by claimants. There are complaints of unauthorized deductions by the disbursing functionaries. While cheque payments reduce leakages, they delay the process further. Due to lack of identity cards or proof of address, many women are unable to open bank accounts and therefore cannot avail of the benefits* (p154).

What is the scene on the ground as far as the institution of ASHAs is concerned?

We fall back on a couple of fairly recent studies [one an ethnographic sketch of a particular ASHA, and the other, a survey based research] that provide graphic details of the contexts, circumstances and conditions under which ASHAs struggle to fulfill the State's expectations of them to become change agents apart from delivering on health goals.

We begin with Dagrun Kyte Gjostein's (2014) ethnographic study of an ASHA based in rural Rajasthan. This study is aimed at interrogating the Rajasthan state's depiction of the ASHAs in the following terms: "She [the ASHA] is the link between the community and the health care provider[s]. [The] Department of Medical and Health at State and at Center is looking at ASHA *as a change agent who will bring the reforms* in improving the health status of [the] oppressed community of India" (emphasis as in original) (139).

> In the course of her exploration into the life and working experience of the ASHA, the author realizes and notes how complex is the terrain in which the ASHA is expected to fulfill the 'change agent' role: *The ASHA… needs to deal with competing loyalties and conflicts of interest. The ASHAs must in practice manage and manoeuvre their many professional and personal roles: as a community member, as a government worker or 'lackey' under controlling superiors, and as a potential 'social activist'. Their position provides an interesting access point to examine the dynamics of changing gender roles and women's agency in contemporary rural India* (p140).

An important detail captured in the study is the range of work that the ASHAs are expected to perform, as the author puts it, *to promote the various pieces of 'health advice' the Indian authorities have notoriously promoted to the population* (p141). These include: compliance to the small-family norm, vaccinate of children, seeking out health check-ups during pregnancy, giving birth in a hospital, exclusively breastfeed children for the first six months, use contraceptives and opt for sterilization after two children, construct toilets and so on (p141).

The ethnographic and participant observation methodologies deployed by the author enabled her to gain firsthand knowledge of the day-to-day functioning of the ASHA.

When I asked ASHAs about their position and work, none of them described themselves as 'activists' or 'change agents'. Rather, they explained their role by listing their various tasks… The ASHA's various responsibilities and tasks are… quite comprehensive, only for some of which they are compensated… In Rajasthan, the ASHAs have an additional role as a sahyogini (associate), an outreach person employed at the anganwadi centres. This means that in Rajasthan ASHAs work for, are compensated by and report to superiors in two departments: the Department of Medical, Health and Family Welfare and the Department of Women and Child Development… ***ASHAs are not defined as permanent government employees***. ***Rather, they are compensated as 'honorary volunteers'*** *(GoR, 2013)… superiors often expected certain results from the ASHAs under them and held them accountable for achieving set monthly and yearly targets of, for example, hospital delivery, vaccination and sterilization. They enforced these expectations with different methods of pressure* (emphasis added) (p149).

While at one level, as recorded above, superiors exerted pressure on ASHAs to produce results/achieve targets, the operation of some of the tasks expected of them brought them into direct confrontation with other functionaries, government as well as non-government. For example, the author speaks of being witness to frequent quarrels at the maternity wards between the nurses and ASHAs. The context for the quarrels arises from the manner in which the ASHA programme pits the ASHA against nurses in hospitals; underlying this antagonism is the monetary compensation that the ASHA is expected to receive for encouraging women to go for institutional delivery rather than deliver at home; the latter is aimed to achieve the state's agenda of reducing infant mortality which is premised on the notion that non-institutional deliveries are the major cause of infant mortality in the country.

The author provides details of the specific manner in which the compensation scheme works and why the particular manner in which the compensation is to be availed by the ASHA brings her into confrontation with hospital staff: *since 2005 women had been paid Rs. 1,400 under the NRHM's Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY) – the safe motherhood scheme – to give birth at a hospital instead of at home. Additionally, the JSY schemes pay Rs.400 for transportation. If an ASHA accompanies a woman to the hospital, the transportation money is paid to her in addition to Rs.200 for herself. The latter amount is to compensate the ASHA not only for accompanying the woman to deliver at the hospital, but also for counselling and bringing her to three check-ups during the pregnancy. Some of the nurses would encourage families to come without an ASHA, by reasoning that they did not really need her there, and that they (the families) would be paid Rs.400 more if they came alone. Nurses would frequently not authorize the ASHA's involvement in a delivery case unless she was present in the labour room at the time of the delivery. And without this authorization the ASHAs would not receive their compensation of Rs.200* (ibid: p151).

The reason for reproducing the above in some detail is to underscore the following: the nature and number of tasks expected of the ASHA is one part of the story; that ASHAs are not considered government employees but 'honorary volunteers' so that it becomes convenient to compensate them for some tasks while leaving uncompensated several others is the second part of the story; that ASHAs, are expected to deliver the hitherto unachievable and not-so-easy development agendas of the GOI (such as increase institutional deliveries, reduce infant mortality, etc.), but under circumstances that exposes them to confrontation and abuse is not the scenario that has been captured and recorded by any official document on the subject. Hence, while there are 'official' reasons for delay in payment to ASHAs, the actual reasons such as those that involve the non-registration of the ASHA's name in cases brought to hospital for delivery finds no mention anywhere and therefore merits no resolution. Gendered development in this case does not simply exploit women; doing development through gender is bad enough; but making it a humiliating experience is unpardonable.

Kavita Bhatia's (2014) survey of the ASHA scheme in Maharasthra is the second study that we have found extremely useful to highlight our theme of how the Indian State does development through gender. Bhatia's study conducted in Shahapur Taluka in Maharashtra, was aimed at capturing stakeholder' perspectives on the system of remuneration characterizing the ASHA scheme. The findings of Bhatia's study, in our opinion, complement the observations reproduced above from Gjostein's piece on Rajasthan.

Among the important points recorded by Bhatia is the role that families of ASHAs play and particularly in a context where ASHA's receive their remuneration long after completion of tasks and submission of relevant documents. Under such circumstances, it is the families that had to provide an advance to the ASHAs to even begin their tasks. This along with the fact that ASHAs were required to be away from their homes (even if within the vicinity of the village) had tremendous social repercussions that required supportive families – support being both social and economic, and which support was neither freely available nor could be taken for granted. *An important finding from the indepth interviews was that the family of the ASHA was a key stakeholder in the ASHAs' understanding of their work. The ASHAs shared that the foremost challenge after joining was to step out of their homes for a purpose that was not related to their domestic requirements. They had to negotiate with their families to join and to continue and the family's perceptions of their remuneration were crucial in these negotiations. A perception of the task-incentive balance being a one-on-one equation made the post less worthwhile for their families because most of the incentives were seen as being low* (148).

The ASHAs in the area said they were escorting pregnant women who were not from BPL families and seriously ill persons without incentives. They were told to make daily rounds of their villages and anganwadis. Such gratis tasks were considered as "free tasks". The ASHAs said they were facing pressures from their families to discontinue because of the difficulties with the remuneration (p148).

In this study, both the ASHAs and the ASHA Facilitators did a free listing of the responsibilities of the ASHA.

The 244 ASHAs (covered by the survey) collectively listed 20 responsibilities. Just five tasks were paid incentives as per the task-incentive entitlements, the rest were gratis. *The 29 ASHA facilitators had collectively mentioned 24 responsibilities with the same five paid tasks. Several unpaid sub-tasks were mentioned in these free listings* (p149).

The following observation by the author on the reluctance of the system to affiliate and acknowledge ASHAs as health workers of the Health Ministry reinforces our point of how this flagship programme of the GOI does development through gender and in the process exploits the very women whom the programme was meant to empower..

> *A point of consideration with regard to the ASHA scheme is that every aspect of the ASHAs' functioning from selection to payment is through the health services, leading to an identification of the ASHAs with the health services and a sense of entitlement. All the mandated tasks of the ASHA are towards accomplishing the goals of the national health programmes. This is in common with all the health functionaries within the health services. Yet, none of the others involved in the national health programmes receive their payment according to their performance that month (unlike the ASHAs). The reluctance of the health services to take full ownership of the ASHAs while extending her functions revealed a gender hierarchical bias. Ironically, the ASHA scheme has selected these women due to the advantages of their gender and location within the community* (p150).

The Institution of para – teachers

The Education sector, like Health, employs large numbers of women in particular in the elementary education sector as teachers. Various factors over the years have led to unprecedented levels of attention and growth in this sector necessitating the appointment of teachers. While it is well known that the demand for additional physical and human educational infrastructure is not uniform across different states of the country, what is however common right across the country is the increasing recruitment of teachers on contract basis – also referred to as para-teachers. Across the country, to meet the surge in demand for teachers consequent to explosion in enrolment, and at a time when states were and still are facing fiscal deficits, the contractual appointment of teachers was facilitated by the Centre to minimize the permanent recurring liability of teacher salaries in state budgets. Studies (such as those referred to below) mention that several states have discontinued hiring regular teachers altogether in government schools; new hires are only para-teachers.

To illustrate how the institution of para-teachers, like the ASHA programme, uses women (and also men) to fulfill the State's need to meet its educational target (whether national or international), we refer to two studies that have explored this institution in some depth. Both studies cover similar ground; hence we discuss them together. One is an exhaustive review of the institution of para teachers by Govinda and Josephine published by UNESCO in 2004; the second one is a literature review of available studies covering the theme of para teachers in India by Geeta Gandhi Kingdom and Vandana Sipahimalani-Rao published in 2010 in the Economic and Political Weekly.

We begin with an important observation made by Govinda and Josephine (2004) that, among other things, firmly establishes that the institution of para teachers is not a passing phenomenon but one that is not only going to remain but also expand:

> *Engagement of teachers on contract basis as opposed to employment on permanent tenures particularly in government schools is a recent phenomenon. The term 'parateachers' is a generic term applied to characterize all teachers appointed on contract basis often under varying service conditions in terms of emoluments and qualification requirements. Some documents also refer to them as 'contract teachers'. In fact, official documents of state governments refer to them in vernacular terms as* ***shiksha karmi, shiksha mitra, guruji*** *and so on, depending on the schemes under which teachers are being employed. In one sense there is no clarity on who is a para teacher or under what kind of contract do teachers get engaged if not on permanent tenures… This is probably due to the perception that it is only a passing phase in the development of the system and would soon disappear. This, however, is not likely to happen in the near future unless a drastic revision of thinking at the national level emerges among education policy makers. At present… it is an expanding phenomenon and the policy pronouncements clearly favour its continuance* (p8).

A point to be noted right at the outset is that large number of males also function as para-teachers and in that sense they are also working for 'development' rather than 'development' working for them. The studies explode several myths associated with the above institution: that para-teachers are less qualified, that they bring down quality of teaching because of lack of professional training in teaching, etc. What is significant for the purpose of our discussion is the following observation:

> *all states pay para-teachers a fraction of their regular counterparts; in West Bengal, para teachers were paid just 14% of the wages of regular teachers in 2007* (Kingdom and Sipahimalani-Rao, 2010: 61).

How do champions (read economists, largely) of para teacher schemes push through this programme? By arguing as follows: there is greater accountability of the para-teacher because she/he is drawn from the community; there is better linkages with the community since the community is involved in the recruitment process and local bodies most often pay their salaries; that para teachers are about twice or thrice as cost-effective as regular teachers given their

effectiveness in imparting learning at a cost to the taxpayer of only one-third to one-half of the regular teachers (Ibid: 66)**.**

Given the fact that the institution of para teachers has come to stay, the issue needs to move out from being seen only as one of exploitation or of pitting the institution of para teachers against the Body of regular teachers; instead the discussion needs to be placed in the larger context of how it all began, namely, as a (development) solution, wherein states embarking on ambitious programmes of enrolling students needed also to recruit teachers but given their poor fiscal status had little or no resources to pay and maintain ***regular*** teachers.

The perennial anxiety to find 'cost-effective' solutions when it comes to hiring teachers as well as health workers needs to be placed in the larger context of the debate among fiscal economists on, among other things, two issues: one, the practice of classifying expenditures in government budgets under 'plan and non-plan'; and, two, inadequate fiscal space for states for fulfilling the objectives of plans even as major responsibilities for plan implementation are devolved on them. The point that needs to be emphasized here is that 'Plan' expenditure has come to symbolize 'development' expenditure and therefore there has been a tendency on the part of governments to go in for larger and larger 'Plans', neglecting to undertake expenditure required on maintenance and running of existing assets. The recurrent expenditure on salaries of teachers (once appointed) comes under non-plan. Requirements for meeting non-plan revenue expenditures are to be met out of transfers recommended by the Finance Commission, which does not go far enough to bring about parity in plan/non-plan expenditure requirements.

The discussion of the theme of plan/non-plan fiscal expenditure and its implications on development performance of states of the country measured by say, health, education, employment indicators is outside the scope of this paper; the issue however needed to be flagged for the reason that it lies at the root of the problem of why states of the country not only show differential economic performance but are increasingly resorting to the phenomenon of doing development through gender.

Personnel in Other Social Sectors: 'Employees' or 'Volunteers'?

The Mid-Term Appraisal of the 11th Five year Plan (PC2007-12, mentioned above) records approvingly the role of the Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) in having brought about a positive impact on enrolment and attendance of children (particularly from the weaker sections), elimination of 'classroom hunger', retention of girls in schools, and better learning achievements, and the aspect of a shared common meal contributing to gender and social equity. It also quotes the CAG's 2009 note emphasizing public support for the continuation of MDMS with a majority of parents and teachers reporting a positive perception of the impact (ibid: 124). The expenditure incurred on cook-cum-helpers is, however, considered as ***honorarium***. In a similar manner, Palriwala and Neetha (2010) in their study of Anganwadi and paid Domestic Workers point out that, though these workers are part of the organized, government sector, Anganwadi Workers and Helpers are not classified as employees, but as social workers/volunteers receiving a ***stipend***. They are not entitled to the leave and social security benefits enjoyed by permanent, fulltime, government employees - an illustration of the State's ability to violate its own labour regulatory framework, particularly in an arena such as care, where women are predominant.

What are the numbers of volunteers/social workers that we are talking of here: as per PC2007-12 data, the MDMS engages 15.7 lakh cooks, of which 85% are women; Aganwadi workers number 961,975, while helpers number 953,483. What is interesting in the Planning Commission's list of areas of concern (pertaining to the functioning of the MDMS) is the complete silence relating to the demand of MDMS workers to regularize their appointment.

A lot has been written about how the Tamil Nadu Mid-day meal programme is a model to be emulated by most states. And yet hardly any mention is made of the workers, the back bone of this programme, and their fight to get themselves regularized. In a study (Swaminathan, Jeyaranjan, Sreenivasan and Jayashree, 2004) conducted by us, we noted the following on the specific issue of mid-day meal workers based on conversation with unionised workers: *An aspect on which the organisers, union members in particular, dwelt at length was their employment 'status'; the noon-meal personnel are not treated on par with other government employees, they are not entitled to monetary and miscellaneous benefits to which the government employees are eligible. The eligibility norms based on which noon-meal functionaries are appointed are not made apparent, thereby making it difficult to decipher the basis on which appointments and remunerations are arrived at. The noon-meal personnel form a parallel bureaucracy, as it were, with no regular scale and with very little security. There has been very little engagement thus far by the government regarding how it intends to deal with these personnel. The financial implications of absorbing them as regular government employees could be huge; at the same time without their deployment the scheme cannot be run on a day-to-day basis* (ibid, 2004: 4820).

III. Promoting Investment in Girls: Ground level realities

However limited, ill-designed or poorly implemented may be the programmes of the State to address issues of the poor and the marginalized, women and girls in particular, it cannot be denied that over the years since Independence, considerable investment has gone into several aspects that impinge on the lives and livelihoods of the poor and the marginalized in the country. While the discussion thus far has been to examine how development has used gender, it is equally important to explore what implications the particular manner in which development has been operationalized in the country has had for gender. There is no attempt her to conduct an exhaustive exploration; rather, we refer to a couple of ethnographic studies that have explored the phenomenon of how education of girls is being interpreted and acted upon on the ground. While findings of these studies cannot as yet be generalized for the country as a whole, they cannot be ignored either, in our opinion. Papers such as these have made us aware of the express need to conduct more and varied studies that capture the fallouts of macro level development programmes, rather than simply assuming that development indicates progress, or that, the outputs of development programmes cannot but be positive.

Education and Status Production:

Clarinda Still (2011) in her paper, "Spoiled Brides and the Fear of Education: Honour and Social Mobility Among Dalits in Soth India", examines female education, marriage and honour among upwardly mobile Dalits. Using data collected during fifteen months of ethnographic fieldwork (2004–2005) in a Dalit community in rural Andhra Pradesh, the author describes how families who constitute the upper strata of Dalits are educating their daughters in order to marry them 'upwards' within their caste to a groom with prospects of employment. Education allows these Dalit girls to become **housewives** – the latter to be interpreted as indicating escape from a life of demeaning agricultural labour that involves 'hard work in the hot sun'(ibid: 1119).

As educated wives married into salaried households the anxiety is to acquire middle-class virtues that set them apart from their labouring counterparts: *their language, dress, movement and manners must convey shame and modesty*. *As their responsibility for maintaining family honour increases, they are progressively more scrutinised and controlled* (p1119, 1126). The author explores this heightened emphasis on honour among, what she refers to as, traditionally egalitarian Dalits and suggests reasons for the increasing concern about female sexuality. **Education for girls is seen as a particularly risky business**: on the one hand, the author notes, education provides opportunities for sexual encounters, but on the other hand it holds the promise of hypergamy. Given their already precarious circumstance, many Dalits choose to cut short the education of their daughters, rather than take the risk. While received literature views education of girls as a positive phenomenon, Still's ethnographic research shows how education can be a 'contradictory resource' (emphasis added).

The pulling out of hard work in the sun consequent to being educated and married into an economically upwardly mobile household, according to the author, marks a new trend among Dalits who were either previously constrained by economics to enforce this typically upper-caste sexual morality, or, they had no interest in doing so. And this raises the question of whether or not the changes occurring among a few Dalit families (girls' education, 'prestige marriage' and withdrawal from work) are a 'good thing' for Dalit women themselves, and whether Dalit social progress translates into women's social progress.

One explanation proffered by the author for the heightened concern about honour is that it is the most accessible way of elevating one's social status…In the light of their lack of resources and political power, the control of women is one way they can more easily achieve a status that fits with their emergent self-image of respectability and dignity (p1144). From a feminist point of view, upwardly mobile Dalit women are turned from valuable workers into sedentary status producers. But quoting Patricia Jeffery's ethnographic study of *pirzada* women who live in strict *purdah* near a Sufi shrine in Delhi, Still emphasizes the need to examine how women themselves logically assess their situation within a particular economic and social framework. And therefore she concludes: *this reminds us to look at the values that underpin Dalit women's active participation in the pursuit of honour and strategies of upward mobility, even when they seem detrimental overall. And while Dalits may not be using education in the way that liberals, feminists and policymakers expect, they are eager to educate their daughters nonetheless* (p1146).

In a similar vein, Manuela Ciotti (2010), in her paper *The Bourgeois Woman and the Half-Naked One: Or the Indian Nation's Contradictions Personified* explores the interplay between development, identity politics and middle-class aspirations amongst low-caste Chamar women in rural north India. The paper brings these discourses together and in the process demonstrates *how the Chamar appropriation of the 'modernising' agenda has initiated a dual process. On the one hand, a minority of women has embarked on an embourgeoisement trajectory predicated on education, 'modern motherhood' and aspirations to white collar employment, and on the other hand, underprivileged women (with their 'unfit' personas) have become increasingly vulnerable to stigmatisation as a result of being in 'menial labour'*(p786). Germane to our discussion is Ciotti's discussion of what education, a relatively new phenomenon, means to the small section of the upwardly mobile Chamar community. Quoting one of her respondents, Ciotti notes:

> *According to a young woman from a household supported by government employment, 'marriage is parents' main concern when they provide their daughters with education as well as for the latter, when they pursue their degrees'. Education however is not perceived by women as something purely ornamental, even if it does not mean a college degree, and even if the overwhelming majority of educated women will never find employment outside their household* (p808-9).

On the contrary most respondents listed a series of benefits to self and family because of being educated – much of which listing had to do with the civilizing properties of education.

These narratives and the author's fieldwork with women informants also pointed to a transformation of motherhood roles. *Many Chamar mothers evoke the category coined by Nita Kumar of 'non-mothers' insofar as 'their poverty and insecurity makes their mothering invisible, by implication deficient and unsuccessful' compared with the mothers of the Indian ntelligentsia, examined in the same context, the product of colonial modernity. The 'inadequacy' of the Chamar labourer mother is substituted in public and private spaces by the educated mother, suitable for a 'proper' up-bringing of children—for instance, she is able to help them with their homework. Together with the new working woman model, modern motherhood as a result of women's education is an entirely novel gender role in this Chamar community: it does not have a precedent in local history precisely because of the earlier lack of education among women*

(p810).

What do we make of the two ethnographic studies discussed above? The two studies though confined to a small section of upwardly mobile Dalits, nevertheless starkly reveal the inadequacy of our development agenda as also the naïve and simplistic belief of our developmental state [read development economists] that mere provision of and access to education can so empower our women and confer so much agency on our girls that they would not only be able to change altogether the context of their present existence but that it would also be in the direction prescribed in conventional development discourse.

Additionally, while none can fault the communities studied by the above scholars for aiming to use education to make their daughters transit from a life of 'dishonourable labour' to one perceived as more honourable and status giving, even if the latter is at the cost of giving up paid employment, what present development efforts as well as feminist discourse needs to grapple with is, how to read and make sense of what seems like women colluding in their own subordination through their notions of honour, motherhood and modernization.

Education and Early Marriage:

Biswajit Ghosh's (2011) paper interests us for its attempt to explain "the enormous and escalating magnitude of child marriage in West Bengal in recent years". Ghosh's study combines field exploration with macro data from Census. According to him, as per 2001 Census, 37.16 per cent of the girls in the state of West Bengal have got married before eighteen; while the corresponding figure for the country, as a whole, is 32.10 per cent only. Further, among the nineteen districts of West Bengal, Malda (the study area of the paper) had the second highest percentage of child marriage in the state after Murshidabad in 2001.

In Ghosh's view, the perceptions of daughters about the reasons for child marriages differ strikingly for those of parents and other elders: … *both fathers and elders have identified 'poverty' as the major reason for fixing marriage of girls early. But a close scrutiny of their behavior in real life reveals that patriarchal values and institutions influence this pattern greatly. This is because parents with sound economic condition in Malda also fixed their daughter's marriage before they were eighteen… In peasant families across Malda, notions of a girl's virginity and chastity are strongly linked to honour and status of a family or clan. Hence, there is tremendous pressure to minimise the risk of any untoward incidence or improper sexual activity through early marriage. The conservative peasant society of Malda does not normally report harassment cases of girls to the police, because such harassment may mean that she has lost her chastity. The community and religious leaders, who very often enjoy moral sanction to control life beyond religion, typically support such value structure and norms* (p50).

In the FGDs conducted and reported by Ghosh, school going girls are keen to pursue their education and avoid getting married early: *they have, therefore, urged on the need for reforming the parents first to initiate change. Subordination as well as undervaluation of the role of the girl child within and outside family, therefore appears to be the major reason for the continuance of the practice of child marriage even today* (p54).

Reading between the lines of the paper, we realize that the problem in Malda is far more complex and definitely not one that can be resolved simply by *enforcing right to education for all children, especially girls, and prolonging academic career of adolescent girls* (p58), as suggested by Ghosh towards the end of his paper. In fact Malda to us represents a microcosm of the enormous challenges that require to be understood and tackled ***simultaneously*** rather than assuming that uni-dimensional programmes such as increasing girls' time spent in educational institutions alone will suffice. Several of these complex factors have been flagged by Ghosh in the text of his paper (such as the quote we have reproduced earlier) but there seems to be an almost naïve notion that education can overcome some or all of these complex issues.

As in the case of Clarinda Still and Manuela Ciotti's papers discussed earlier, Ghosh's study also emphasizes the aspect of family status and honour that parents and community members strongly feel could be jeopardized because of girls having to step out for educational purposes. Two, while expenses connected with conduct of marriage are deemed inevitable, whatever may be the economic status of households, expending money on girls' higher education in particular is deemed unnecessary, avoidable since it is not only seen as not benefiting the natal family but also a huge risk (social and economic) that families, given their position and dependence on the community in their immediate vicinity are not prepared to shoulder. Three, the earlier the marriage of a girl is settled, the lesser the dowry that parents perceive they need to pay for the same – a point flagged by all three authors: families lower down the economic ladder argue that imparting higher education to their daughters would require them to look for even more highly educated grooms; the latter would translate into higher dowry demands that such parents can ill-afford. What however is interesting is the observation that Ghosh records about economically well off parents: *It is noticeably revealed through FGDs that due to the gendered nature of role classification in rural families, parents prefer to send their sons to schools and prepare their daughters for marriage. It has been pointed out in some FDGs of mothers that*

economically well off parents do spend money to buy a mango orchard or invest in a business; but when it comes to educational expenses of their offspring and particularly daughters, they vacillate… It was due to such differences in perspectives that parents gave least preference to the issue of 'lack of educational infrastructure and communication' faced by their daughters
(p53). From a development perspective, the negative correlation between increasing literacy and age at marriage puts paid to years of governmental efforts to promote girls education mainly to increase age at marriage and thereby reduce fertility**.**

By way of Conclusion

The paper has attempted to underscore the point that the Indian state's attempt at 'doing gender through development' in a large measure has been an exercise of 'doing development through gender', meaning thereby the point that, the manner in which the state has attempted to do development has had, and continues to have, adverse consequences for the larger and professed agenda of gender justice. Our exercise has revealed the manner in which gender inequality is being created and perpetuated in the process of economic development.

Case studies on social sector have demonstrated how the state has thrust on women the responsibility of meeting the state's various objectives in the fields of health, education, child nutrition, etc. But in almost all these areas the programmes are so designed and implemented that the women deployed to achieve these objectives are denied the status of workers (by being referred to as honorary volunteers) which would have, theoretically at least, entitled them to some legislative protection under various labour laws of the land. Further, the state gets away by designating some of the welfare programmes as having been instituted to empower women; in the absence of such programmes the argument goes, women currently employed would not have had access to the remuneration that they now receive. Most studies evaluating such programmes are generally caught up in measuring in what manner the implementation of these programmes have/have not 'empowered' women. That such programmes are another facet of the ways in which Indian women subsidize the Indian economy is one part of the story. More significant for labour economic studies is the question of how does one confront the Indian state that is, at once the arbiter on issues concerning violation of labour laws but is also the defaulter when it comes to hiring personnel for its own programmes?

For the women's movement in the country, continued material deprivation of large numbers of households combined with sub-optimal solutions (as represented by our ASHAs, para-teachers, mid-day meal workers) can by no stretch of imagination take us any closer to the lofty ideals espoused in the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action that was to ensure that "the concerns for women and gender issues should not remain marginal to the ideas and practices of development organizations, but should be central to them, and hence located in their 'mainstream'.

It is our contention that the hope that through the interaction of 'development and gender' change could be produced has not been belied; except that this is not necessarily the kind of change that we have been struggling for. Moreover, the continuing challenge for feminist scholars and activists on the ground is the perennial need to track the consequences of actions taken as well as those not taken. I do not believe that we have not periodically changed the questions that we have or should be asking. However, all our attempts thus far has failed to make development [read state] accountable to the agenda of gender justice, without which the project of doing gender, which includes the phenomenon of making development work for women and children of this country will remain unfinished and therefore ongoing.

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