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The formal creation of informality, and therefore, gender injustice: illustrations from India's social sector

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Abstract   This paper interrogates the Indian State's agenda of 'Doing Development' with a specific emphasis on how the particular manner in which 'development has been/is being done' is having an impact on women's work and on women as workers. The paper is also aimed at illustrating how the State attempts to kill several birds with one stone; one, in the guise of alleviating poverty, and, two, on the increasingly questionable assumption of poverty being feminised, the State has instituted several welfare programmes that have led to feminisation of responsibilities; again, in the guise of 'empowering' women, the State gainfully employs local women but does not designate them as workers. The paper applies existing feminist literature that has critiqued the 'smart economics' (Chant and Sweetman 2012) approach that makes women work for development, rather than development enabling women to procure 'decent' employment. As illustrations of these attempts, we critically engage with: (a) the Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) programmes by juxtaposing official-speak on the subject with studies that examine its functioning on the ground; (b) a critical reading of the institution of para-teachers; and (c) studies that have assessed not just conditions but also the position of anganwadi, paid domestic, and mid-day meal workers as part of the larger developmental efforts of the State. This exercise enables us to discuss the gendered consequences of the above nature of 'doing development through gender'. It provides concrete illustrations of how, at least in the social sectors, and particularly when it relates to female employment, the traditional hypothesis that the informal

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sector is a transient phenomenon and would disappear by getting absorbed in the formal sector over the years does not hold true. The informal nature of employment in the social sector has been formalised in several ways, such that while services are being delivered under the formal health/education sector, some of the personnel (mainly women) employed to deliver these services are informally employed within the same sector.

The context

While Western feminists have been continually engaging and interrogating the theme of 'doing/undoing/redoing' gender (to be discussed below), for countries such as India, this framework needs to be supplemented and contextualised to accommodate and account for the nature and level of development; the latter still foregrounds much of the discussion on gender, and, about gender in our societies.

By superimposing the 'doing gender' framework onto the Indian State's agenda of 'doing development', we hope to demonstrate how the changing development discourse, which today talks of, among other things, 'smart economics', has become a euphemism for using women and girls to 'fix the world'; of investing in women and girls so that they work *for* development as informal workers even if the name of the game is to achieve gender equality and empowerment of women.

Specific concerns of the paper

After a brief discussion of the theoretical framework informing the argument of the paper, we proceed to an examination of official reports and data; this part of the paper would attempt to demonstrate what development has meant to women and girl children, emphasising in particular the point that the attempt to kill two birds (poverty reduction and gender inequality) with one stone (poverty alleviation/ empowerment schemes) has ended up overshadowing commitments to change gender relations even as it has resulted in the 'feminisation of responsibility and obligation' (Chant 2008).

The second part of the paper, based on ethnographic studies, highlights how development programmes and welfare entitlements are understood and operationalised, and get reworked on the ground with specific consequences for women and girl children.

The aim of the paper is to bring home the message that juxtaposing the macro concerns of policies to address 'gender' with ground realities provides rich insights into how and why rather than working towards 'dismantling the gender system', the Government of India's (GOI's) manner of 'doing development' is actually contributing to the entrenchment of gender inequality. Informalisation of work with women occupying a more central place in this informalisation is achieved through the formal mechanisms of the State; the latter, by 'doing development

through gender' has moved further and further away from the feminist agenda of 'mainstreaming gender' understood in the sense of achieving a transformation of society that is premised on gender equality.

'Doing development', 'alleviating poverty', 'empowering women': framework for analysis

In 1987, the journal *Gender and Society* carried several papers that began with a seminal piece on "Doing Gender" by West and Zimmerman. Among other things, the latter article offered a critical assessment of the then existing perspectives on sex and gender, even as it introduced important distinctions among the terms 'sex', 'sex category' and 'gender' (Vol. 1, pp. 125–51). In 1995, in the same journal, West and Fenstermaker published the article "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" (Vol. 1, p. 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 conceptualised and operationalised 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 sanitised manner in which "Doing Gender" has been operationalised. 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" (Vol. 1, p. 81).

Several other scholars, including 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 the 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, p. 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 phenomenon that cannot be ignored and which still foregrounds much of the discussion on gender, and, about gender, in societies such as India.

In 1989, the journal, *World Development*, in a special issue focusing on poverty, examined ways to improve the livelihoods of poor women through support for activities that could enhance their earnings. In this issue, based on field studies covering the sectors of dairying and silk production in India, Marty Chen (1989) spoke of the strategic significance of promoting women's work and earnings through a sectoral approach. Chen's rationale for advocating a sectoral approach stemmed from her following argument:

> In many developing countries, a distinction is made between mainstream development programs (directed at generating growth) and anti-poverty programs (directed at protecting the poor). The mainstream development programs are typically developed along sectoral lines. That is, critical activities of the economy are assigned, with significant budget appropriations, to specialized ministries or departments for support and development. Antipoverty programs on the other hand, are designed to deliver welfare services, productive assets, or employment to the poor, and are typically assigned to welfare ministries or departments. Women's programs – whether economic or social – are usually categorized and developed as antipoverty or welfare programs (ibid., p. 1007).

It was Chen's hope that applying a sectoral frame to the analysis of women's work could provide a way to close the gap between "the now well-documented economic roles of women and the as yet male-biased macroeconomic planning done by governments…. because government programs are typically developed along sectoral lines, women can be linked to existing support systems and infrastructure. Finally, and perhaps most fundamentally, women's work and needs can be translated into broader policy issues relating to sectoral development" (ibid., p. 1008).

Further, Chen attributed a number of positives to the adoption of the sectoral approach:

> By working with women in the critical sectors of the economy, the approach serves not only to link women to sector-specific government programs but also, by so doing, to make their work in these sectors 'visible' to national policy makers. By conceptualizing women as an economic category (workers) rather than as social categories (mothers, wives, widows) the approach presents the case for women as economic agents and legitimate clients for the mainstream programs and policies of government. By tailoring interventions to meet the needs of specific sectoral groups, those interventions cover not just a given number of clients but potentially a whole sector of women workers. And, perhaps most importantly, by organizing women around common

structural problems, the approach promotes empowerment as well as narrow economic goals (ibid., p. 1015).

We have reproduced Chen's arguments in some detail to demonstrate how, almost 25 years on since Chen wrote the above, while women have indeed been inducted into several important development sectors of the economy (such as healthcare and education), while they and their work are not just 'visible' but constitute the backbone of some of these sectors, nevertheless, while this visibility may have improved their *condition* (material state), it has not necessarily contributed to improving their *position* (in society in terms of access to power and decision making).

Concretely, using 'paid employment' as a trope, we demonstrate how the Indian State attempts to kill several birds with one stone: (1) 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; (2) increasingly, the expanding social sector welfare programmes of the State, at both the Central and local levels, are being implemented through local women; the latter are, however, designated as volunteers and paid an honorarium—a 'smart economics' move that makes women work for development rather than development empowering women through the creation of formal employment. As illustrations of these attempts, we critically engage with the healthcare, education and social welfare sectors, wherein:

(a) the State continues to appoint large numbers of ASHAs but who technically do not belong to the Health Ministry of either the local or the Central government;

(b) the institution of *para*-teachers (contract teachers) has become the norm rather than the exception; and

(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 has earned kudos for the states concerned.

Empowering women *or* making women work for development?

Chant and Sweetman's (2012) trenchant critique, among other things, of the mission statements and goals for bringing about change laid down by development organisations, wherein investing in girls and women is seen as not only being fair but also a 'smart economic move' (p. 520) 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 fulfil the development agenda of the Indian State.

The discussion by Chant and Sweetman 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 realise 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 (CSR) 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*" (p. 520). However, Chant and Sweetman demonstrate how this smart economics move "oversimplifies complexity and shifts responsibility" (p. 524); 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) (p. 527).

The functioning of the healthcare and education sectors of the economy provides rich evidence of the manner in which the 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, many of which are slated to be implemented, monitored and fulfilled by the' (ASHAs), the cornerstone of the above mission. Using the ASHA programme as a case study, this paper aims to demonstrate the stark disjuncture in the manner in which the 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 the ASHA Programme

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

PC 2007–12, while acknowledging that the 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 Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (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 laboratory technicians, and 64.5 % in specialists. What is, therefore, eminently discernible is a concerted effort to recruit female health workers.

Several disturbing observations in terms of the nature and status of appointments of health personnel contained in PC 2007–12, 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 3 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 (PC 2007–12, pp. 149, 151).

Specifically on ASHAs, PC 2007–12 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 (ibid., p. 154).

The scene on the ground with regard to the institution of ASHAs

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 study) that provide graphic details of the contexts, circumstances and conditions under which ASHAs struggle to fulfil the State's expectations of them to become change agents apart from delivering on health goals.

We begin with 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) (p. 139).

In the course of her exploration into the life and working experience of the ASHA, the author realises and notes how complex is the terrain in which the ASHA is expected to fulfil 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" (p. 140).

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" (p. 141). These include: compliance with the small-family norm; vaccination of children; seeking out health check-ups during pregnancy; giving birth in a hospital; exclusively breastfeeding children for the first 6 months; using contraceptives and opting for sterilisation after the birth of two children; construction of toilets; and so on (p. 141).

The ethnographic and participant observation methodologies deployed by the author enabled her to gain first-hand knowledge of the day-to-day functioning of the ASHA. She recounts her experience as follows:

*"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) (p. 149).

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, including 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 ASHAs 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 at achieving the State's agenda of reducing infant mortality, which is premised on the notion that non-institutional deliveries constitute 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 of 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., p. 151).

The reason for reproducing the above in some detail is to underscore the following:

- the nature and number of tasks expected of the ASHA, which 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 several others uncompensated, which 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 bringing about an increase in institutional deliveries, and reduction in infant mortality, among other things), but under circumstances that expose them to confrontation and abuse, a scenario that has not been captured and recorded by any official document on the subject.

Hence, while there are 'official' reasons for delay in payment to ASHAs as recorded and reproduced from PC 2007–12 above, 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. The concept of 'development', here understood in terms of health indicators and to be achieved through ASHAs, does not simply exploit women. Doing development through gender is bad enough; but making it a humiliating experience is unpardonable.

Bhatia's (2014) survey of the ASHA scheme in Maharashtra is the second study that we have found extremely useful for highlighting the theme of how the Indian State does development through gender. Bhatia's study, conducted in the Shahapur *taluka* in Maharashtra, was aimed at capturing the stakeholders' perspectives on the system of remuneration characterising 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 the families of ASHAs play, particularly in a context wherein ASHAs receive their remuneration long after completion of tasks and submission of relevant documents. Under such circumstances, it is the families that have to provide an advance to the ASHAs to enable them 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—with the support

being both social and economic, and which support was neither freely available nor could be taken for granted.

> An important finding from the in-depth 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 (ibid., p. 148).
> The ASHAs in the area said that they were escorting pregnant women who were not from Below the Poverty Line (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 (ibid., p. 148).

In this study, as part of the survey, 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 (ibid., p. 149).

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 (ibid., p. 150).

The institution of para–teachers

The education sector, like that of healthcare, employs large numbers of women, particularly 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 a contractual basis and these teachers are also referred to as 'para-teachers'. Across the country, in order to meet the surge in demand for teachers consequent to the 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 minimise the permanent recurring liability of teacher salaries in state budgets. Studies (such as those referred to below) mention that several states have discontinued the hiring of regular teachers altogether in government schools; the new recruits are only para-teachers.

In order to illustrate how the institution of para-teachers, like the ASHA programme, uses women (and also men) to fulfil 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 Kingdon 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), which, among other things, firmly establishes that the institution of para-teachers is not a passing phenomenon, rather 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 'para-teachers' 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 (p. 8).

A point to be noted right at the outset is that a 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, and that they bring down the quality of teaching because of the lack of professional training in teaching, among others. 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 (Kingdon and Sipahimalani-Rao 2010, p. 61).

How do champions (read economists, largely) of para-teacher schemes push through this programme? By putting forth the following arguments:

- There is greater accountability of the para-teacher because she/he is drawn from the community.
- There are better linkages with the community since the community is involved in the recruitment process and local bodies most often pay their salaries.
- The 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., p. 66).

Given the fact that the institution of para-teachers has come to stay, it is imperative to move away from seeing the issue only as one of exploitation or of pitting the institution of para-teachers against the body of regular teachers. The discussion instead 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 also needed 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 emphasised here is that 'Plan' expenditure has come to symbolise '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 for the maintenance and running of existing assets. The recurrent expenditure on the salaries of teachers (once appointed) falls under the non-Plan category. Requirements for meeting non-Plan revenue expenditures have to be met out of transfers recommended by the Finance Commission, which does not go far enough to bring about parity in the Plan/non-Plan expenditure requirements.

The discussion of the theme of Plan/non-Plan fiscal expenditure and its implications on the development performance of states of the country measured by,

say, healthcare, education, and 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 as to why the 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 Eleventh Five year Plan (PC 2007–12, mentioned above) approvingly records the role of the Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) in having brought about a positive impact on the enrolment and attendance of children (particularly from the weaker sections), elimination of 'classroom hunger', retention of girls in schools, 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 emphasising public support for the continuation of MDMS with a majority of the parents and teachers reporting a positive perception of the impact (ibid., p. 124). The expenditure incurred on cook-cum-helpers is, however, considered as an honorarium.

Palriwala and Neetha (2010), in their study of anganwadi and paid domestic workers, point out that though these workers are part of the organised sector, namely the 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, full-time, 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 such *volunteers/social workers* that we are talking of here? As per PC 2007–12 data, the MDMS engages 15.7 lakh cooks, of which 85 % are women; anganwadi workers number 9,61,975, while helpers number 9,53,483. What is interesting in the Planning Commission's otherwise fairly long list of areas of concern (pertaining to the functioning of the MDMS) is the complete silence relating to the demand of MDMS workers to regularise 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 regularised. In a study (Swaminathan et al. 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 (p. 4820).

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 marginalised, 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 marginalised in the country. While the discussion thus far has been to examine how development has used gender, it is equally important to explore the implications that the particular manner in which development has been operationalised in the country has had for gender. There is no attempt here 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 the findings of these studies cannot as yet be generalised 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

Still (2011) in her paper, "Spoiled Brides and the Fear of Education: Honour and Social Mobility among Dalits in South India", examines the issues of female education, marriage and honour among upwardly mobile Dalits. Using data collected during 15 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*, with the latter term to be interpreted as indicating an escape from a life of demeaning agricultural labour that involves 'hard work in the hot sun' (ibid., p. 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" (pp. 1119, 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 the education of girls as a positive phenomenon, particularly due to its potential for employment, 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 advent of changes occurring among a few Dalit families (in terms of girls' education, 'prestige marriage', and withdrawal from work) is 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 in which they can more easily achieve a status that fits in with their emergent self-image of respectability and dignity (p. 1144).

From a feminist point of view, upwardly mobile Dalit women are converted from valuable workers into sedentary status producers. However, quoting Patricia Jeffery's ethnographic study of *pirzada* women who live in strict *purdah* near a Sufi shrine in Delhi, Still emphasises 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" (p. 1146).

In a similar vein, 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'" (p. 786).

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" (pp. 808–809). 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 civilising 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 intelligentsia, 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" (p. 810).

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 the 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, no one 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. However, 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 modernisation.

Education and early marriage

Ghosh's (2011) paper evokes interest 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 the Census. According to him, as per the 2001 Census, 37.16 % of the girls in the state of West Bengal got

married before the age of 18 years, while the corresponding figure for the country, as a whole, is only 32.10 %. Further, among the 19 districts of West Bengal, Malda (the study area of the paper) accounted for 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" (p. 50).

In the Focus Group Discussions (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" (p. 54).

Reading between the lines of the paper, we realise 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" (p. 58), 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 the time spent by girls in educational institutions alone would suffice. Several of these complex factors have been flagged by Ghosh in the text of his paper (such as the quote 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 emphasises the aspect of family status and honour which parents and community members strongly feel could be jeopardised because of girls having to step out for educational purposes. Secondly, while the expenses connected with the conduct of marriage are deemed as inevitable, regardless of the economic status of households, expending money on girls' higher education, in particular, is deemed as unnecessary and avoidable since it is not only seen as not benefiting the natal family but also as a huge social and economic risk that families, given their position and dependence on the community in their immediate vicinity, are not prepared to shoulder. Thirdly, 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 the 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 is, however, 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 by 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" (p. 53). 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 the age at marriage and thereby reduce fertility.

By way of conclusion

This 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 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.

Using the social sectors as a case study, we have demonstrated how the State has thrust on women the responsibility of meeting the State's various objectives in the fields of healthcare, education, and child nutrition, among others. However, 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 (but are instead referred to as honorary volunteers), which would have, theoretically at least, entitled them to some legislative protection under the 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 that the 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 the manner in which the implementation of these programmes has/has not 'empowered' women. The fact that such programmes signify another facet of the ways in which Indian women subsidise the Indian economy is one part of the story. More significant for labour economic studies is the question as to how one should confront the Indian State, which is, at once the arbiter on issues concerning violation of labour laws as 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 the ASHAs, para-teachers, and mid-day meal workers) can by no stretch of the imagination take us any closer to the lofty ideals espoused in the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, which 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 both the 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 have failed to make development [read the 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, would remain unfinished and therefore ongoing.

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