

How '*transformative*' is gender transformation?

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Abstract

The current paper is a part of an ongoing research (located in parts of Madhya Pradesh), asking the question –of 'empowerment', of women, in its current frameworks, set in the 'third' world context. It seeks to interrogate the nature of what gets termed as the 'empowering' experience and which then is sought as being 'transformative' in its purview. The object of enquiry thus holds to understand this 'experience' and its nature of 'transformation'. The category of the 'third world woman' which gets *foregrounded* in the global projects of 'empowering' them, which calls for building on them as 'unified', homogenous, subjects of 'transformation'. The question then holds in understanding what gets *foreclosed* in this process of 'transformation', what remains 'hidden', what gets 'prescribed' and 'described' but not necessarily seen or heard. The current work is then trying to sit patiently with the women who have been 'prescribed' as the 'empowered' women, and listen to their narratives which might not always be the linear, structured narratives of 'empowerment'. What lies in this experience of 'empowerment' thus, that the empowered woman seeks to articulate in her 'agentic' voice? (What is termed as empowerment is usually agency and voice, but what are these constructs?) We then need to hear this voice, deeply, to what she is saying, when she talks loudly, aggressively, when she sounds meek, when she slowly disapproves of her life as a 'woman', as a 'struggling' woman. When she 'walks' long distances to 'empower' other women and thinks of life as 'labor' but also that of possibility. A possibility within gaps and disruptions but of a life that walks radically with this woman taking her 'somewhere' through the fields, maybe something 'transformative', but what 'of' transformation and what 'in' transformation? Just as Achuthan puts it, the possibility of 'politics' lies in the "unsedimented solidarities" among women's experience which is "aporetic, inarticulate, indifferent". One is then trying to re-locate methodologies of research-ing in this process through *living* of lives with women. The argument of the paper then asks us to *re-visit* the notions of empowerment as a structural category which is fulfilled through the mainstream development rhetoric and what it actually means to '*live*' empowerment. Do we then begin to look for the 'empowered' *be-ing* in her walking? This thus takes us to the question of 'self-transformation' and what lies as the 'ethical' and the 'political' *of* and *in* transformation. How do we then, think about *trans-form-ing* the logic of empowerment and empower-*ing* transformation itself?

Keywords: empowerment, transformation, third world, experience.

Introduction

Let us sit in a circle, let us tell our names, the name of the SHG's that we belong to, let's clap for each other, let's 'listen' to her, listen to who, who is she, perhaps the woman, the rural woman, whose apparent 'need' is her 'empowerment', for her 'productive' life?

The above lines are a reflection of the conversations that I have been mostly a part of, amongst Self help group (SHG) women members and their meetings, and the 'ways' in which they have learnt to conduct these meetings. I often wonder about such ways and the insistence to 'perform' these ways and then, have we in the name of developmental work created "systematic standardizations"?

This paper marks out a journey of an ongoing work (in Madhya Pradesh, Block Kesla, District Hoshangabad) in understanding the question of 'empowerment' of women. It tries to set up a critical enquiry between the constructed, and as such homogenized spaces which push for the agenda/idea of 'empowerment' of women in comparison to what happens to the imagination of 'empowerment' when we try to locate it in the realm of experience in the everyday lives of women, experience kept with-in its problematic purview. In locating the rural woman subject's situatedness who is pushed towards becoming an 'empowered leader', addressing to experience can be productive.

In that sense the paper tries to denote the tension between the (mis)understanding of the rural woman's life and how it has got structured by the models of the 'developed' world, to reach to reading the 'language' of her experiences, her experiences of struggles, possibility, hope, desire. It tries to then, reach to the understanding of 'empowerment' as we 'walk'¹ with women in their trajectories of struggles, hopelessness and yet the 'desire' of/for hope. Walking with-in their moments of labor and struggle, to attempt to make sense of their 'lived' lives, perhaps to understand this language, that maybe reflects their journeys of possibility and desires of/for 'freedom'.

The paper tries to map the discourses in which 'empowerment' is common place and about closely observing the practices which 'forms' the 'identities' of empowered woman, to generate a productive critique of such practices. Critique because of the failure to address the experiences of women, not to say that experience has been completely forgotten but has been considered limited, incapable, as the woman is perhaps just put out as a victim of her 'poverty'.

¹ I use the metaphor of 'walking' here and later, because in my stay and experiences with 'empowered' women, walking is something that denotes their everyday struggles, walking for long stretches to reach a 'highway', to reach the city, the mainstream, walking for hours to reach out to other women to form more SHG groups, walking for/in the household labor. Walking thus, for the researcher I felt, is a way of 'researching' and 'living' or at least attempting to 'live' with these women, to build 'real' relationships. Can it be the 'ways' in which we learn from the 'didi' her ways in/of walking, living rather than inscribing 'our' ways. Can we then begin to see traces of hope in their walking long distances, and thereby also understand stories of transformation as they walk?

Living in close quarters with women, who are engaged in the work of development of a better life for themselves, the question has remained to understand this figure of the empowered woman at a deeper level, of who this 'woman' is and what be-comes of her in this event of 'empowerment'. What language does she insist on talking, when she talks as the 'empowered' figure? What does she tell me, the outsider, and what does she hide from me, what can she then finally tell me in the nights we spend, about her secrets, desires, to come out to learn or her hopes for the future? What I have encountered usually, as I stayed along with the lives of women, forming 'relationships', are their experience of struggles, labor, fear even within the narratives of empowered fearlessness, with an attempt to articulate a freedom that they wish to strive for. Ambivalence will perhaps be also always there and one cannot perhaps be fully empowered, neither the rural adivasi/dalit woman nor perhaps the urban woman like me, but is there space for these ambivalences in the built empowered narrative of the rural woman, because we are told only happy stories and happy faces, as if therein only lies the proof of empowerment.

The paper thus aims to, while providing a critique of the ongoing processes of 'empowering' women, aims at re-thinking empowerment, re-thinking the political, re-imagining the feminist political². In this rethinking, as if, it aims to push for the *trans*-formation of 'empowerment' itself? Maybe to consider the transformation of the language that defines 'empowerment', to trans-form 'empowerment' from its hegemonizing relationship with women and pursue in the building of newer goals and aims of empowerment which has a space for women's struggles and (im)possibilities of/in life. The work is thus a journey from beginning to understand the experience of empowerment in the life of a rural woman as a *process* to finally reach the process/possibility of transformation in her life. The paper in no way attempts to deny the negotiating capacities within which these women place themselves in relation to institutions, in the moment they step out of their households to voice out their concerns at the Panchayat office/institutions/gram sabha, however what lies in this 'process', whether they beat the men or push for a transformation of the culture of discrimination. What will be this possibility of transformation remains the import of this research, to discover a feminist politics of engaging with development.

The paper thus unfolds into two parts, one which will critically look at the problems with the current framing of the models of developing empowerment as a 'paradigm'. It will try to enter into the language that is used to put these models in shape and will thus in that sense help us identify for the thin-ness it lives with and that it propagates. What violence does it incur, and what it takes away or 'gives' to establish the 'inscriptions' of the 'sameness', to create the 'same' woman (empowered) throughout different contexts, different life worlds. At the same time to also see, what effect it creates in women's lives, in the meetings they conduct, in the conversations they have with me in forming a relationship, in the violence that they share of their lives.

In a similar manner, I will also attempt to look at 'gender' critically, what it has meant as a theoretical category, to be able to critique the tenuous ways in which gender gets conceptualized in 'gender trainings' given to the empowered didi. In that way, the attempt is to get a sense of what is understood as 'gender', which, often always gets translated as women, but is it even work 'with'

² The feminist political is as if has been misplaced/displaced in the question of 'development'.

women, or rather work 'on' women? The setting up of apparent solidarities and sisterhood between 'identities' of 'women' through gender work is problematic without looking into women as subjects.

The second part of the paper will attempt to read the un-recognised, unwished aspect, 'desire'. The desire of the woman to become the mother, daughter, sister to form that relationship which wishes to sleep with you in the closest proximity, (perhaps that which is also non- relational but always naturally disguised as 'relationship' but not without the desire of being perhaps, the mother in the relationship), remains un-touched in the work of development, What is in this 'desire' that she asks 'of' the development practitioner, the researcher, the development world. What is it that she lets out in the dead of the night, what is it that she seeks, what is it that she wants to tell the woman who has come to understand her life? This desire has been historically forgotten, mis-placed and mis-represented by the discourse of development. It has been missed, when the women are made to sit together in circles in groups and clap for each other's 'sharing' of their names and SHG groups, because what holds in this activity of 'sharing' is a (mis)reading or rather (un)reading of her life. This desire which is not necessarily erotic but something which invokes as if a fear of the unknown, the (un)known of/in the lives of women, which sitting in a saving-credit group will never allow to be touched, because of the very premise of hierarchical, non-relationship among them.

In no way, does the paper tries to push for an understanding of desire as an absolute unknown, but what the paper tries to do, is to push for an understanding of the empowered subject of the 'unconscious' through the invocation of 'desire', and if/can development attempt to even understand this side of the 'woman'. She's not always necessarily the liberal, conscious subject, to be modernized, to be developed, who must have 'empowerment'. But one needs to see for whom and what/why this 'inclusion' is 'for' in the name of her empowerment? In that sense the paper tries to lodge the victimized, poor, third world woman as not so hopelessly trodden, but as someone who immerses some hope in me and asks me to think about her 'desire' through which I wish to think about her 'self', as also the political and transformation. It is in this raw-ness of her struggles and desires that I begin to stumble upon the articulations of women's 'empowerment', perhaps. And hence in the critique, can we begin to re-configure the possibilities of transformation, the feminist political, and empowerment as such?

The language of the 'lacking other'

A UN Women leaflet (2014) for the Beijing Platform for Action³ turning 20 (Beijing+20) has a slogan which says, 'Empower Women, Empower Humanity: Picture it'. One wonders what does the empowerment of women has to do with empowering the humanity. Does it underline the notion that women are peacemakers and the larger humankind should enable their empowerment so that

³ Beijing Platform for Action (1995) was the first international platform where the international community had 'pledged' to work towards 'empowerment' of women and raised concerns that needed to focus on women and to 'include' them in the larger set up. "The Platform for Action is an agenda for women's empowerment. ... Empowerment of women and equality between women and men are prerequisites for achieving political, social, economic, cultural and environmental security among all peoples." (Mission Statement, Beijing Platform for Action 1995, Report)

their 'progress' and upliftment brings a 'productive' and less destructive humanity. Does it also underline that women as mothers, carers, nurturers are the most suitable for this empowering of the humanity and thus the need to empower them. It further goes on to say that, "The 20th anniversary of Beijing opens new opportunities to reconnect, regenerate commitment, charge up political will and mobilize the public. Everyone has a role to play—for our *common good*" (Italics mine). Does this mean that working for the 'common good' is now going to be the prerogative of and for women to be accomplished and as also their additional activity apart from all the household labor that they have to fulfill and the labor that perpetually falls on to them no matter how the 'common good' is achieved. Further the UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka says, "We all have a responsibility to keep pushing ahead for full implementation [of the Beijing Platform for Action], because every time a woman or girl is held back by discrimination or violence, *humanity loses*" (Italics mine). The encounter again is with the 'humanity's' loss. This relationship built with humanity and the lives of women interestingly puts the responsibility on the 'oppressed' to free themselves and now also cater to the larger humanity. She should now 'emerge', step 'forward', help other women to 'come out' of their oppressive households, even if the husband still abuses her, even if she doesn't have to ask him to 'come out' now⁴.

It is the model which envisages her 'inclusion' that gets imitated, but what 'of' inclusion and how, is scarcely considered. Chakrabarti and Dhar (2012) call this 'inclusion' a careful strategy of 'exclusion' of the poor, pre-modern, pre-capitalist third world 'other' (or and also the non-modern Other), made 'included' by presence-ing her poverty, her victimhood and her 'third-world-ism'. In this 'presence-ing' there is a palpable devaluing of the 'language-logic-ethos' of the third world, of what they call is the 'traditional', by the 'modern', capitalist, first world. Development is, they say, the secret politics of 'modernisation', and it works on operating through two 'privileged' centres of capitalism and modernity; "the logic of transition is driven by these centres, such that the *other* is attempted to be worked upon and transformed in their images" (pp-1090).

The image of the 'holistic' development of women which asks "the rural woman to *unleash* women's leadership potential, *enhance* awareness and ability to *access* their rights, *increase* political participation and *develop* women's role as economic actors and decision makers within their households and in the community"(emphasis mine) (UN Women Note on Fund for Gender Equality). To unleash, enhance, access, increase, develop, is the expression that defines the goals of gender equality, which always and everywhere translates into learn, acquire/access and empower. What is this knowledge, who decides, who imparts, what hegemonizes in this making, in this appropriation of women's lives into apparently 'productive' labor intensive work of/in acquiring this 'empowering' knowledge. Does this empowered woman become the burden of her own struggle to acquire the homogenized universal character? In other words what gets additionally appended to contribute to the 'productiveness' of her making, is always already misconstrued.

⁴ Not to be able to take the husband's permission to 'come out' apparently is considered one of the indicators of empowerment, however what is forgotten that just emphasizing this point says something about the patriarchal structures within which women live and to not ask the husband is in a way also asking the husband.

The most recent National Family and Health Survey (2015-16)⁵ now tells us that there has been a “dramatic decline in under-age marriages of girls”, for instance, Bihar has had a decline from 60.3% to 39.1%, Madhya Pradesh from 53% to 30% and so on. This finding has been most expectantly clubbed with the growth in the female literacy rate which shows an increase, Bihar from 37% to 49.6%, Madhya Pradesh from 44.4% to 59.4% etc. And this section is titled in a newspaper daily as ‘empowering’ women. So does this take care of her ‘inclusion’, to stand against her early marriage and to get her some education? It says everything about the universalizing trope of measuring women’s lives and the thinness within which they are encapsulated.

A World Bank Sourcebook (2002) on empowerment and poverty reduction, prescribes empowerment as “the expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control, and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives.” It identifies four key elements that pushes forward the way to empowerment which are, access to information, inclusion/participation, accountability and local organizational capacity. Further the sourcebook states the ‘application’ of empowerment as an ‘approach’ including, provision of basic services, improved local governance, improved national governance, pro-poor market development and access by poor people to justice. So now we also run into empowerment as an approach that needs ‘application’. What underlines clearly is that the poor woman needs the upliftment of World Bank as their agentic vanguards to help empower them and come out of their poverty. They themselves have neither the skills nor the buying power which can help them get out of their ‘deplorable’ condition. It is important to note that such documents and measures that get undertaken, show us that what is viewed of ‘poverty’ is that it is a condition, an abysmal condition that one can never want to be in, and will only want to get out of it. When the measure is such as these, the urge is to assimilate the poor within the ‘mainstream’, as they have been left behind because of ‘lack’ of resources. However this ‘assimilation’ is always already to keep them ‘outside’ of the assimilated, but always through generating a ‘consent’ of them. That is how the hegemonic will function (secretly), provide for skills and assets, initiate assimilation, engender consent that their development is good for them and that they should always be ‘dependent’ on them.

In another report, (World Bank Development Report, 2012) titled Gender Equality and Development, it calls for gender equality as ‘smart economics’ as it “enhances economic efficiency and improve other development outcomes. Greater gender equality can enhance productivity, improve development outcomes for the next generation, and make institutions more representative. For an economy to be functioning at its potential, women’s skills and talents should be engaged in activities that make the best use of those abilities.” It further goes on to say that globalization will help in promoting gender equality by opening up of trade channels, using communication and technology as fundamental to reduce disparities, ‘reshaping’ attitudes of women and men and opening their access to markets.

Can we then begin to ask whether the language that gets deployed in understanding the rural woman, is itself lacking? It is lacking because it fails to address the nuances of the woman’s life and her experience, it is lacking because it fails to hear her or acknowledge her presence. The

⁵ The Times of India, dated 21st Jan 2016.

fundamental premise in which it addresses woman is based on a lack that she apparently inhabits, perhaps?

So how is the 'woman' conceptualized in the framing of this kind of development work, where her experiences are naturally, usually disavowed because primarily what is important is that she should be given education so that she has skills which can connect her to the 'market', "global circuits of capital". We always see her pictures on the brochures, documents, posters of various organizations as the 'empowered' woman, leader, also a happy, smiling figure, being read about her life as a 'case study'. She then either only becomes the victim whose 'body' is used as the site of 'cleansing' her life's violence and discrimination in order to promote for her equality, knowledge and at the same time negating the sense of her body through the more dangerous, consensual violence in making her the 'hero' of the movement of empowerment. So her journey as if, lies only between being either the victim or the hero, with an agenda which is largely universal, homogenous. In fact in the appropriation of her life, different identities of women may be included but nevertheless, trained to represent themselves in the 'same' voice of empowerment. This woman continues to be-come the model of the standard, the One, the 'masculine' and yet disavowed other.

We know what needs to be done to achieve equality and a 50:50 Planet by 2030. Together with the findings of the Beijing +20 review, let this report be a call to urgent and sustained action, frontloaded for the next five years, to start real, visible change, especially in the lives of the most marginalized. My hope is that everyone will be inspired to be part of a re-energized and growing movement for gender equality. With determined people from all walks of life, and with more determined leaders, gender equality can be a defining achievement of the first quarter of the 21st century. (UN Women Executive Director, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, UN Women Progress Report 2015-16)

The expertise apparently as if only, lies with the hegemonic, to transform women's lives into more equal and sustainable lives. They also have a target year to achieve this equality by 2030. When human lives are measured through target years and lives of women reduced to being that half of the world's population which needs to be wholly amended for their productivity and the cause of humanity, there is a serious problem which should trouble us. And does this mean transformation? Would transformation continue to get conceptualized as a target goal to be achieved with women as their targets, and we will continue to celebrate this change in growing compact 'appearances'?

From identity to subject

Perhaps then the movement is to be made from the identity of the woman to the experience of the subject that she is, that she becomes, "in Gayatri Spivak's terms, "make visible the assignment of subject-positions," not in the sense of capturing the reality of the objects seen, but of trying to understand the operations of the complex and changing discursive processes by which identities are ascribed, resisted, or embraced and which processes themselves are unremarked, indeed achieve their effect because they aren't noticed" (Scott, 1992: 33).

Butler (1990) talks of identity as 'foundationalist' and homogenizing, "because the articulation of an identity within available cultural terms instates a definition that for-closes in advance the

emergence of new identity concepts... does “unity” set up an exclusionary *norm* of solidarity at the level of identity ...?” (pp21). Further Scott (1992) goes on to add, “Being a subject means being “subject to definite conditions of existence, conditions of endowment of agents and conditions of exercise.”... Since discourse is by definition shared, experience is collective as well as individual. Experience is a subject's history. Language is the site of history's enactment (pp34)”. In that sense the figure of the empowered woman (didi) requires an understanding, not as a given, coherent, homogeneous identity but a multiple, complex, contradictory subject position. How does she become the woman, the empowered woman, and modules of gender-work in the scope of development can prove to be in a very limiting nature. Butler (1990) helps in understanding ‘gender’ as a complex process of be-coming, “gender is a complexity whose totality is permanently deferred, never fully what it is at any given juncture in time... gender is a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being”(pp22,45).

Recounting an experience from the field, in a SHG federation meeting, where a discussion is happening around the sustained absence and inactivity of members towards the federation. Suneeta bai, who is also the head of the management committee (of the federation, called the Narmada Mahila Sangh) in that instance states out her difficulty of not being able to give time because she is cooking in the village school and has to do all the other household work too as she has no support at home. She further added, “I can’t share my personal problems in the sangh, but I am sharing this one time because I feel bad for being less involved, and it is not as if I haven’t given time to the Sangh, despite hearing taunts and accusations from my husband and villagers”. In countering her, another older member of the federation, said that, we all have work and responsibilities, house work will never end but we have to also think of how to take the sangh ahead, keeping its *rules* in place. “You have to fight more promptly to be able to stand against these problems, because finally what lies of importance is that you are the member of management committee and you will have to take on this responsibility”. It used to sometimes feel that these are not women standing ‘with’ each other, but as if, opposed to each other. What was bigger, larger, were the rules of the federation (who set these rules and why). What lies amongst, within them, is precisely only the Self help group that brings them together, and the rules with which these groups ought to be run. What will begin and close this meeting, however, is often a ceremonious clap, and of sitting in a formation of a circle, as if in telling the solidarity of the group, another rule of the group. How does development and gender training address this apparent conflict in the ‘subject’ positions of these women?

Further, when Suneeta bai, articulates her struggles that she goes through, even though considering the Sangh (the SHG federation) as one of the parallel spheres of her life giving her hope for a better life. But the days of struggle continue, as she recounts them, “*Where should I start with, I never got anything in childhood, or through marriage, and even today, life is just a struggle. I never got anything from my husband, like I was scared of my parents as a child, I was scared of my husband after marriage, what if he beat me up to death. Where would I go? Even if I run away, there’s no place (space). I always remain scared. I have suffered a lot*”.

In another instance, when a woman from the Middle East recounts her need to work, (in a World Bank document) says, "I believe that a woman must be educated and must work in order to prove herself in society and to be a better mother." What gets lost and absented, displaced, and what do we hear in these different narratives of women? Where lies the difference? What are we *really* hearing?

The movement to her desire

Irigaray (1985) in her essay 'When our lips speak together' talks about the relationship between the self and the body and the desire close to body. She beautifully builds this dialogue, in meting out the nature of the two/multiple as compared to the standard/One. Her work becomes important for us when talking about the discourse of development, as she moves from the theory of the masculine standard to the one of multiple orgasmic desires and finding the truth of a woman's life and body in this two-ness, in this multiple. Does this dismantle the straight, linear, target driven agenda of/for the humanity? Does it loosen up the so tightly packed agendas of 'empowerment', making it completely unsettling?

We haven't been taught, nor allowed, to express multiplicity. To do that is to speak improperly. Of course, we might-we were supposed to?-exhibit one "truth" while sensing, withholding, muffling another. Truth's other side-its complement? its remainder?-stayed hidden. Secret. Inside and outside, we were not supposed to be the same. That doesn't suit their desires. Veiling and unveiling: isn't that what interests them? What keeps them busy? Always repeating the same operation, every time. On every woman. (Irigaray, 1985: Pp 210)

Irigaray talks of the secret of truth, the remainder, what subscribes to this, is never asked because as Irigaray says, it is 'improper' to talk/speak of desire, the woman's desire, because she is the one with a body inflicted with violence, exploitation, discrimination, inequality and needs to be freed off from this cycle of violence. Any desire on her part will be exactly that of her 'freedom', but freedom of what kind, of what form, of what nature, the freedom that lets her 'loose'? Her 'violated' wounded self has to be restored, but out of what, of fitting her into the models of 'sameness'? This desire is as if deep, dense, that the body remains touched and yet untouched. The desire that remains always unfulfilled, unarticulated, and remains in the negative, the absent, the lack, as if in a loss of language. Would we then, continue to form assumptions about the nurturing, innate qualities of women to sustain, grow, empower or would we begin to look at her intimacy with her body, her intimate desire, her touch, her body, her nakedness? "They have wrapped us for so long in their desires, we have adorned ourselves so often to please them, that we have come to forget the feel of our own skin. Removed from our skin, we remain distant. You and I, apart." (Irigaray, 1985:217-218)

What is it to be touched? Touched in the 'nakedness' of the bodies, asking something that development can never imagined to be asked for, as it is too occupied with the appearances, representations, identities. Can this touch be understood, addressed? In the dead of the night as I get 'touched', I often wonder about this touch, coming from the woman sleeping in tight proximity. What does she ask of me? What does she question of me? What does her body desire? What does

she want to touch and yet leave untouched? What does she confide in me, what does she want to scare me with? Does she ask me, if I can *read* her desire? Her incomprehensible, inassimilable, desire. Does she then, also ask, 'Am I desirable'?

Lacan maintains that the exclusivity of the surface or of appearance must be interpreted to mean that appearance always routs or supplants being, that appearance and being never coincide. It is this syncopated relation that is the condition of desire. ...Thus, when Lacan insists that we must take desire literally, we can understand him to be instructing us about how to avoid the pitfall of historicist thinking. To say that desire must be taken literally is to say simultaneously that desire must be articulated, that we must refrain from imagining something that would not be registered on the single surface of speech, and that desire is inarticulable. For if it is desire rather than words that we are to take literally, this must mean that desire may register itself negatively in speech, that the relation between speech and desire, or social surface and desire, may be a negative one. ...Disregarding desire, one constructs a reality that is real tight, that is no longer self external. One paves the way for the conception of a self enclosed society built on the repression of a named desire. (Copjec, 1994: Pp 14)

So if desire is inarticulate, what holds in the work of 'empowerment' of women and how does the work on desire become important, maybe because it leads one to the unknown, *foreclosed* secret of her body, of her touch. And in the liberal, rational rumblings of the development paradigms, such attention to the inarticulate language of desire seems much of an (im)possibility but what then lies in the (im)possibility of working with lives of women. Whether desire will lead us to the secret, naked, bodied selves of women, and in their intimacies one will unlearn as one learns, what holds in the hope of desire. To touch desire means to be able to come closer to the negative in language, but development will instead fill in the language that the woman should be speaking or else she is too uncertainly filled with 'doubt' if she doesn't 'speak', talk, engage, however no one discusses the missed, forgotten desire.

To begin to think of desire is also to begin to look at the nature of 'demand' that the discourse of 'development' is making to the SHG woman, however seeing her as the lacking other and to attempt to 'mainstream' her. This demand that is in fact seen as *her* desire (conscious) to move out of her poverty, her *lack*, perhaps is actually the demand that development makes on her to progress, to come out of her poverty, to rescue herself from violence, without attempting to understand the nature of her life (world), her struggles, fears, desire (which is perhaps cannot be known so easily).

But when one draws attention to the absent present (incomprehensible) nature of desire, one wonders, what is the nature of the demand that is being made at the conscious, rational level, within a liberal rights bearing, entitlements framework. Who is making the demand to whom, and what gets turned in making of this demand? In the paper, the turn to desire is precisely to point to this nature of demand that is actually being made by development to the woman who is attempted to be-come developed, empowered, mainstreamed. The turn to desire, however makes us reach to the woman, who actually is asking the question, 'what do you want' (*che voi*)? And at another level, perhaps, is also asking, can you 'read' my desire? In Deleuze and Guattari's words does development then 'territorialize' her desire through its invariable demand of neuroticized patterns

of development, put in her life? Will it always fail to notice, what Deleuze and Guattari call the 'flows of desire', the flows through which action and thought can be proliferated, expanded, transformed. How do we then begin to re-imagine transformation? Do we begin to see the 'cure' that development apparently provides in its recurrent revamping of the poor into the modern, developed, democratic, included subject? Do we then call for the persistent critique of this 'curative' of development, to be able to reach to transformation?

When a woman asks me, "*We can blame God for our poverty, you must have been born in a rich household where you have everything, who do you blame? We rubbed our chappals, fell hungry, with no water, still we didn't get anything and blamed God that why did he throw us in these conditions. But some people get everything just sitting and working on a chair.*" What does this woman ask of me, what does she want to know? Is it simply the desire of/for my life, or raises a bigger question to the desire of that desire in me, which wants to know her, understand her, correct her, change her, transform her?

Transformation cannot but be political in itself, as that will be the *desire* of the political and vice versa. It requires thus the recurrent movement of redefining and *trans*-forming the logic of 'empowerment'. To displace the hierarchical hegemonies of the World Bank, one has to begin to value the flows of desire in the woman.

Believe that what is productive is not sedentary but nomadic. ...Do not demand of politics that it restore the "rights" of the individual, as philosophy has defined them. The individual is the product of power. What is needed is to "de-individualize" by means of multiplication and displacement, diverse combinations. The group must not be the organic bond uniting hierarchized individuals, but a constant generator of de-individualization. (Foucault, 1977: Pp XIII)

Conclusion

The usual critiques of development has been that of failure of delivery, the last mile problem, exclusion, the problem of not being able to reach out. But as against that, this paper has argued for seeing development as a framework, as a paradigm having its own idioms of groups and collectives and has critically revisited development's obsession with the group. Group without desire, without bodies. The critique of development has been problematic at many levels, however the current paper focuses on the exclusion of desire in its processes and framework in an attempt to locate the 'empowered' woman.

The paper began with the critique of the current systems of providing 'development' to the poor, marginal, woman, however it ends with the image/story of the walking, laboring woman, as if depicting the action of/in the political. Can labor be counted as struggle and does this struggle carry the power to (un)wind the story of development? I am not sure, one cannot be certain but I can only intend to propose with an anticipation of a question, what will be 'action' in transformation and what will be 'transformative' in action? Quoting Tagore from one of his books, *Sadhna*-The Realisation of life, "Working for love is freedom in action. Our true freedom is not freedom 'from' action but freedom 'in' action, which can only be attained in the work of love". Perhaps, can we

begin to look for freedom 'in' the everyday actions of women, in 'walking', in labor, in love, in desire?

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