Crossbreeding Institutions, Breeding Struggle: Women's Empowerment, Neoliberal Governmentality, and State (Re)Formation in India

Aradhana Sharma
Wesleyan University

On a sunny Friday morning in November 1998, I accompanied an all-woman team of staff members from Mahila Samakhya (MS), a women's "empowerment" program initiated by the Government of India, to the block office in Nizabad, a paddy-growing region of the north Indian state of Uttar Pradesh.[1] Meena Rani, a field-level MS employee, led the group in its mission to introduce local officials to the MS program.[2] It was the scheduled day for weekly meetings between the block office staff and local residents about development-related matters, and the office was abuzz with activity. A clerk helped us navigate through clusters of people to a meeting room where we were joined by the Block Development Officer (BDO) Sukhdev Singh and his male assistants.

The MS team began its presentation with a song describing women's participation in local elected bodies.[3] The theme of this song had been chosen with care because singing about gender inequality would have alienated the men present. The BDO nodded approvingly, and Meena Rani asked him to describe what his office was doing to address the needs of the poor women in his area. Sukhdev Singh replied that poor women needed training in literacy and skills for generating income. He had previously implemented state-run training programs for women in midwifery and pickling, but the women who had participated had failed to transform their newly acquired skills into income-generating work. "It is [the women's] responsibility to do the work," the BDO complained, "and not the government's responsibility. But they are not doing [anything]." He asked the MS team to raise women's awareness so that "they can move ahead on their own."

This was the perfect opening for Meena Rani's introduction: "MS is a [program] of the Human Resource Development Ministry of the Government of

India . . . that attempts to empower women, raise their awareness, and make them self-reliant," she stated. One of the BDO's assistants interjected, "What do you mean by *sashaktikaran* [empowerment]? It sounds suspicious."[4] Meena Rani clarified that empowerment meant "giving women information, helping them to move forward, and raising their awareness."

Meetings between development program functionaries and local-level government officials are a commonplace occurrence in rural north India. This particular exchange caught my attention for several reasons. First, the BDO's insistence that women be responsible for their own development raises interesting questions in relation to neoliberal notions of competitive entrepreneurialism and self-developing social actors. Second, his assistant's distrust of women's empowerment raises the question of why the term *empowerment* is more threatening for some state representatives than more technical (and apolitical) discourses of development (Ferguson 1994). What intrigued me most, however, was Meena Rani's identification of MS as a government program in front of block officials. A few days prior, she had introduced MS as a nongovernmental organization (NGO) to a group of village women who were potential program clients. When the women asked Meena Rani what they would receive in return for their participation, she answered that they should not expect any material benefits other than information, knowledge, and support. MS was a *sanstha* (NGO) and not a *sarkari* (government) program that distributed goods.

Meena Rani was not alone in these vacillations. I had observed other field staff resorting to the same shifting identification of MS, which posed an interesting conundrum. Were they simply unclear about MS's identity? I asked Sunita Pathak, a senior government administrator of the program, who explained: "[MS] is partly governmental, and it is also nongovernmental . . . . The national level [program in New Delhi] is strictly governmental . . . . [But] from the state level onwards, [MS] is an autonomous organization."[5] In the world of development agencies, MS would be considered a government-organized NGO (GONGO)—an entity, as I argue below, that is perhaps only apparently contradictory.

Although Pathak's elucidation cleared up some of my perplexity regarding the program's hybrid identity, it did not explain why MS's field staff chose to identify it as an NGO in some contexts and as a government program in others. In this article, I pursue this question by examining the program's organization and its work practices. An analysis of how MS's GONGO structure and empowerment goals articulate with neoliberal ideologies of self-rule and self-care and how transnational neoliberalism and the MS program's everyday practices construct and engender the neoliberalizing Indian state will help us to explore both the potentialities and challenges of feminist-conceived, partially state-initiated programs for subaltern women's empowerment.[6]

The era of neoliberal governmentality is witnessing the emergence of new mechanisms of rule and a proliferation of innovative institutional forms that take on governance functions formerly assigned to the state. Following the theoretical work

of Michel Foucault, I use the concept of "governmentality" to signal the diffusion of self-regulatory modes of governance such as empowerment beyond the bounds of the state and the imbrication of all kinds of social actors such as GONGOs in the project of rule.[7] The emphasis of empowerment programs on capacitating individuals and communities to take care of themselves, when combined with the GONGO form, offers an especially interesting vantage point from which to explore how deeply development discourse is enmeshed in governance and how states and governance in the postcolonial world are being reconfigured through the ideologies and practices of neoliberal development.[8]

The MS program provides an example of how these processes are playing out in India. GONGOs and the concept of empowerment are neither new to India nor are they neoliberal inventions as such. What intrigues me, however, is their conjuncture with contemporary neoliberalism, in which the state's attempt to rethink and downsize its welfare functions occurs alongside its implementation of a GONGO that empowers subaltern women for self-development. I argue that the project of empowerment and the emergence of GONGOs intersect within the project of neoliberal governmentality to reshape the logic of government.

In addition, I wish to delineate popular imaginations of the state in India in light of ongoing anthropological and feminist conversations about the cultural and gendered nature of states. Rather than taking the boundaries of the state as self-evident or viewing it as a preconstituted and coherent actor, anthropological analyses of the state grapple with how it is produced through bureaucratic practices, people's interactions with officials, and public cultural representations.[9] Anthropological attempts to "enculture" states have been paralleled by equally important feminist efforts to "engender" state power (Alexander 1997; Brown 1995; Sunder Rajan 2003).[10] I bring these feminist analyses to bear on the cultural construction of the state as a means of examining the complicated shifts in the gendering of the state under neoliberalism.

In the discussion below, I describe the contemporary transnational regime of neoliberal governmentality in which the concept of empowerment and the formation of civil society bodies, such as NGOs and GONGOs, have become key modalities of governance. The participation of the Indian state in empowerment programs helps reconstruct "the state" as an effect of translocal development discourses that crosscut different spatial registers.[11] I then describe MS's hybrid form to show how "the state" is produced discursively as a distinct (Mitchell 1999) and "vertically encompassing" (Ferguson and Gupta 2002), if ambiguously gendered, entity. Next, I examine the conundrums that state presence in MS's GONGO form raises for its staff. Specifically, I analyze the organization's work practices and employment arrangements to illustrate how these define the boundary between state and nonstate arenas and how, at times, they reinforce some of the very social inequalities that MS seeks to undo.

My analysis of the uneven effects of MS's GONGO form and the paradoxes of state-initiated women's empowerment raises broader questions about the

implications of feminist collaborations with state agencies in the context of neo-liberalism. MS started as a feminist experiment that provided activists with a testing ground for using state spaces to promote large-scale struggles for gender equality (Jandhyala 2001). I conclude this article by discussing the risks and possibilities that such collaborative models of feminist political action might entail in the neoliberal era.

Empowerment, GONGOs, and the Neoliberal Indian State

Government involvement as a key player in grassroots empowerment in India began in the 1980s. In 1984, for example, the government of the state of Rajasthan implemented the Women's Development Programme (WDP), which had empowerment as its explicit goal. The Indian state's adoption of this goal was an overdetermined result of local, regional, national, and transnational factors. These include: (1) the rise of peasant, Dalit, Gandhian, leftist, and women's movements around issues of equal rights, citizenship, ecology, land redistribution, and political participation in postcolonial India; (2) the increase in NGOs during the late-1970s, including those doing empowerment work; (3) the failure of state-initiated modernization strategies to address growing inequalities; (4) the personal initiative of powerful individuals within the government to do something different; (5) the relative success of nonformal education (referred to as NFE within development circles) and adult literacy campaigns in mobilizing women to lead struggles such as the anti-alcohol movement in the state of Andhra Pradesh; and (6) national-level feminist interactions with state agencies, such as those resulting in the passage of the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments that reserve one-third of the seats in local-level legislative bodies for women.

Supranational processes have also shaped the Indian state's shift toward women's empowerment. Paolo Freire's work on radical pedagogy (1970), for instance, influenced the Indian government's agenda for women's education in the mid-1980s with its emphasis on empowerment and conscientization as key ways to change subaltern women's lives; the MS program was conceived to translate this revised agenda into action (Batliwala 1997; Government of India 1997). In addition, the formulation of the Gender and Development (GAD) framework by southern feminist groups such as Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN) and its transnational circulation through UN meetings had an important impact on the state's emergent focus on empowerment.[12] In the late-1980s, GAD proponents contended that social inequalities constitute the biggest hurdle in the path of development and pushed grassroots empowerment as the ideal way to undo these hierarchies and enable equitable social change and development (Kabeer 1994; Molyneux 1985; Sen and Grown 1988; Young 1993).[13] In fact, GAD advocates played a significant role in making empowerment a favored strategy for poverty alleviation and development globally. Ever since the 1995 Cairo conference, empowerment has become a buzzword in mainstream

transnational development discourse. Numerous actors, including NGOs, governments, and powerful international institutions, are now promoting empowerment-based development projects.[14]

The worlding of empowerment has gone hand-in-hand with the global diffusion of neoliberal regulatory mechanisms such as Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs); the latter, I contend, have contributed significantly to the involvement of Third World governments in grassroots empowerment projects. Even as the IMF pushes austerity measures, the World Bank promotes small government and funds empowerment programs. This neoliberal package of SAPs, small government, and grassroots empowerment may seem contradictory; feminists have amply documented the disempowering and poverty-inducing results of SAPs (Sparr 1994). In fact, however, this set of strategies is not as oxymoronic as it seems to the extent that empowerment programs facilitate neoliberal goals of small and good government in their allowing Third World developmentalist states to downsize by farming out their welfare responsibilities to other entities and by capacitating individuals and communities to be responsible for their own development.[15]

NGOs and GONGOs are examples of institutional actors that help to privatize the state. The contemporary neoliberal period has seen a global explosion of such quasi- and nonstate entities, which operate at all spatial levels and perform governmental welfare tasks (see Ferguson and Gupta 2002). International encouragement for nonstate entities to take on state regulatory functions and the increased funding opportunities made available for civil society initiatives by foreign governments and donors during the 1980s have played an important role in the growth of the nonstate sector in India.[16] Whereas 12,000 Indian NGOs were registered with the Home Ministry in 1988 (a subset of the total number of NGOs), they now number around two million (Kamat 2002).[17]

The increased presence of quasi- and nonstate actors in India and their conjoining with state-sponsored grassroots empowerment initiatives reflect, in certain respects, global neoliberal trends that seek to "autonomize" entities of government from state institutions (Barry et al. 1996) by spreading techniques of self-government throughout social space so that the burden of poverty relief, inequality reduction, and grassroots development may be shifted from the state to newly empowered groups and individuals. This "responsibilization" (Burchell 1996) of quasi- and nonstate entities is meant to produce a governmentalization of society alongside a partial "degovernmentalization" of the state (Barry et al. 1996).

These concurrent processes do not, however, signal a complete autonomization of governance and privatization of the state in India. The postcolonial Indian state cannot fully relinquish its development and welfare functions because its very identity and legitimacy rest on precisely these tasks.[18] Moreover, postcolonial states such as India rarely have the resources or the panoptic regulatory reach of metropolitan biopower regimes (Ferguson 1994; Gupta 2001). The retreat of

postcolonial states from their governmental responsibility of enhancing the welfare of their national populations, therefore, needs to be qualified. Finally, the "N" in NGOs has always been questionable because the Indian government has monitored NGOs through registration laws and through funding stipulations.[19] NGOs in India have never really operated outside the disciplinary regimes of the government. Therefore, although the shift to grassroots empowerment and the growth in numbers of Indian NGOs doing development work might point to a possible shrinking of the welfare state in India, it also entails the simultaneous expansion of entities of government whose autonomy from state institutions remains contested and partial.

MS as a GONGO and the Effect of the State

Initiated by the Indian state in 1989 with Dutch government funds, MS was the first national-level program for rural women's empowerment in India.[20] Organized by a group of feminists under the sponsorship of Anil Bordia, a high-ranking civil servant, and patterned after WDP in Rajasthan, MS uses empowerment as a key strategy for achieving gender equality, development, and social change. It views social hierarchies and women's lack of awareness about their rights and the availability of government programs as the main obstacles to development and seeks to mobilize rural women through strategies of empowerment or "conscientization" (Freire 1970). MS envisions empowerment as a collective process whereby women reflect on their situations, take collective action to address their problems, and reposition themselves as agents of development and change (Government of India 1997). The program works primarily with low-caste, poor rural women because they are considered to be the most oppressed, but it does not distribute material resources to its clients.

MS is considered an innovative program by state and NGO representatives alike not only because of its nonmaterial empowerment focus but also because of its hybrid GONGO form. The program's crossbred structure, as one bureaucrat put it, "is a nice combination of government and nongovernment plus-points." Although many feminist and development activists from the nongovernmental sector have felt uneasy about their relationship with state agencies because of their previous involvement in leftist or student activism, they nonetheless have agreed to be a part of MS's hybrid structure. Some well-known women's activists explained their participation in terms of the changes occurring in the Indian political scene of the 1970s and 1980s and the concomitant shifts in feminist engagements with state agencies.[21] My informants characterized the 1970s Indian state as repressive. Indira Gandhi's declaration of a state of emergency in 1975 and the resultant suspension of civil rights and lack of governmental transparency led to a deep suspicion of the state. Versha Rai, a core member of the MS team, explained that the 1970s was a "period of NGOs [and] autonomous groups working totally independently of the state."[22]

By the mid-1980s, just as the UN Decade for Women was ending, the Indian political context was changing, as were some feminists' perceptions of the state. Rajiv Gandhi's entry into politics, his attempts at cleaning up and innovating government, and his promise to give greater priority to women (Agnihotri and Mazumdar 1995:1875) played an important role in repositioning the state as a possible arena for creative feminist work. In the development field, for instance, members of women's organizations participated in reenvisioning government policies on education, population, the informal sector, and empowerment.[23] Feminist involvement in state development projects, albeit tempered with a good dose of wariness and self-reflection, was shaped by a realization that NGO efforts were limited in their reach. As Versha Rai commented:

> The women's movement's [was] ... totally anti-state [in the] 1970s. But then ... [came] a recognition that what is your reach, what are you impacting? If I am working in 100 villages ... what difference does it make if I am not doing anything anywhere else. [Our thinking was that] we need to ... make more impact on mainstream structures. We cannot [work] in isolation. So the question of partnerships, linkages, networks [arose]—this was the ... language in the 1980s.

When the opportunity of designing MS presented itself in the late-1980s, some activists saw it as a chance to take their feminist ideas of gender equality and social change to scale—that is, to reach out to large groups of marginalized women, to use state resources for social transformation, and to "mainstream" gender within state institutions (Jandhyala 2001). This decision did not, however, preclude debates about reformist versus radical activism. Many questions were raised about the why and how of feminist collaboration with state agencies. Kaveri Mani, a member of the initial MS team, remarked:

> When I joined MS, there was horror and outrage from colleagues. "What are you doing! How can you join a government program!" We had never experimented with feminist ideals as part of a huge structure like this. [But] one had a stake in proving that ... it was possible to go to scale with women's organizations .... We created a kind of protective shell around the program ... as a conscious strategy.

This protective shell materialized in MS's hybrid GONGO form, which attempted to merge the benefits of small NGOs with large-scale government development programs.

Nearly all my informants cited the state's wider reach and greater resources as the main benefits of state involvement. Some MS activists also saw state participation in grassroots development efforts as a matter of the state's duty toward its most marginalized citizens. These were duties that the postcolonial state had willingly assumed and that it could not privatize. "The government *should* take responsibility for its people .... NGOs cannot take on the state's job," explained Versha Rai. An added benefit of state involvement, as far as government officials were concerned, was the authority and legitimacy that the state label carried in

government circles. As Sunita Pathak, a bureaucrat associated with MS, put it,

> I think where it helps the program, really, being a government initiative, is ... the authority it gives it. And ... legitimacy. Because an NGO has to really prove itself. You write "Government of India," and everybody knows that you are a government program. [It] helps [with] credibility .... It is also easier for government departments to work with MS than it is for [them] to work with an NGO because if there is a problem with an NGO, there is no responsibility.

The government label also came with a set of negatives. "The main problem is that a state, given its very nature ... says that if program A has three components, program A will have three components forever," claimed one bureaucrat, as he discussed the rigidity of the "typical" bureaucratic way of doing things. Other disadvantages, according to my informants, included a target-driven and top-down approach to development, red tape, political expediency, inefficiency, corruption, and a rule-boundedness that discouraged flexibility, innovation, and motivation.

Kaveri Mani highlighted more problematic aspects of state-sponsored empowerment. "To be able to question issues is not something that the government and the state would like. It has a class bias. It has an urban bias. It has an elitist mode. So why should it ... initiate a program which is going to question its own role and interest!" Furthermore, as Nina Singh, a bureaucrat who had worked on many government-sponsored gender projects, elucidated, "A government program ... does not integrate the element of struggle that lies at the heart of empowerment.... That is the biggest constraint—that struggle is not understood in a government lexicon. [Bureaucrats] reduce everything to a safe thing called 'development.'" The government, according to these women, could not be trusted as the sole agent for women's empowerment, given the inequalities it congealed and its potential to depoliticize struggle.

The activists and bureaucrats who designed MS desired a partially nongovernmental program structure that would mitigate the problems with state development models and bring in added benefits. NGO advantages, as described by my informants, included grassroots-level accountability and legitimacy, bottom-up approaches, decentralized planning, participatory and democratic ways of working, flexibility, and a motivated workforce.[24] In Kaveri Mani's words, "While women's groups have the advantages of being small ... of being close to the people ... [and] of having a committed staff, the advantage of the state was its outreach ... and large scale. And so there was this feeling that it is possible to marry the two."

This "marriage" resulted in MS's crossbred GONGO structure. At the national level, MS is a central government program, housed within the Department of Education of the Ministry of Human Resource Development in New Delhi.[25] The national MS office is run by a team of feminist and development activists but is headed by a Department of Education bureaucrat. At the level of each state in which it operates, MS is implemented through nongovernmental "MS Societies."[26] State-level MS offices oversee the work of district-level offices, which in turn support the work of block-level offices.[27] The block or "grassroots" level is where

MS participants are located, and this is where program planning is supposed to happen—with the active participation of its clients, rather than top-down planning on their behalf. MS staff members at the state-, district-, and block-level offices are drawn from the NGO sector.[28]

MS's GONGO form sheds light on how the discrete identity and autonomy of the state is constructed as an effect of everyday development practices (see also Mitchell 1999). In designing MS, planners attempted to fuse state and nonstate structures. However, this effort was premised on the idea that these two mutually exclusive "pure" spheres exist in the first place—"crossbreeding" after all assumes distinct breeds. Even as MS's GONGO formation attempted to blur and transcend the boundary between state and nonstate arenas, it also concretized that boundary and reified these two arenas as essentially set apart. The "N" in GONGO served as the limit at which the difference between state and nonstate realms could be produced.

The MS program's form and practices not only helped to draw the line between state and nonstate spheres but also to arrange them hierarchically. For instance, my informants characterized the state through its larger scale and authority. In so doing, they reiterated the verticality of the state, a spatial metaphor denoting both the state's higher position and greater dominance vis-à-vis the nonstate sphere (Ferguson and Gupta 2002). By drawing attention to the wider reach and resources of the state, my informants also enforced the spatial metaphor of "encompassment" (Ferguson and Gupta 2002) that imbued the state as an entity with a larger scope and sphere of influence than nonstate actors. Meanwhile, my informants defined NGOs through their "grassroots level" accountability and legitimacy, "local level" care-based work, and "bottom-up" approaches.[29] They thereby located NGOs as the spatially rooted, inferior, dominated, and enveloped "other" of the translocal, macro, vertically authoritative, and spread-out state.[30]

My informants' representations of discrete and hierarchically ordered state and nonstate sectors also gendered these realms in interesting ways. At one level, they feminized NGOs and masculinized the vertically encompassing state. According to Wendy Brown, "The masculinism of the state refers to those features of the state that signify, enact, sustain, and represent masculine power as a form of dominance" (1995:167). Verticality symbolically encodes social conventions of masculinity that represent men as dominant and authoritative. Encompassment expresses the ability to define and control particular discursive and sociopolitical terrains; it arguably connotes both masculinist power and the hegemonic image of the state as a sovereign entity with the legitimate power to define, manage, and protect (often through violent means) territories and populations and regulate proper subjectivity.[31] In contrast, NGOs are positioned as localized and feminized bodies that take on charitable welfare (maternal) tasks and whose staff members and clients are dependent on outside funds and support. These characteristics deprivilege NGOs vis-à-vis the public sphere of state activity and rights and the for-profit private sector; they are seen as social, economically nonproductive altruistic agencies that do reproductive work naturalized as feminine.

At another level, however, my interlocutors, echoing contemporary neoliberal discourses, also troubled easy binaries between masculinist states and feminized NGOs. Proponents of neoliberalism depict NGOs as efficient, trim, disciplined, flexible, knowledgeable, powerful, and arguably masculinist actors. However, they simultaneously reinforce the feminization of NGOs by primarily relegating to them the "feminized" tasks of care and welfare. Neoliberal ideologies paint a similarly complex picture of the gender of the state. The massive, corrupt, slow, ignorant, and weakened state that neoliberalism seeks to transform and cut to size is an "emasculated" state. What neoliberalism seeks to conjure instead is a strong "hypermasculine" state that is lean, mean, and devoid of excesses, inefficiencies, and feminized welfare functions.

Even as the transnational neoliberal development regime, consisting of organizations like the IMF and the World Bank, attempts to reshape the potency of the state, it also challenges this vertical masculinism by directly intervening in the sovereign policy affairs of Third World states. The implementation of empowerment programs and the establishment of para-state organizations such as GONGOs are among the ways in which Third World states respond to these neoliberal contradictions. By engaging in grassroots empowerment precisely when its ability to assert sovereign control over national affairs and to deliver on the promise of development is compromised, the Indian state is able to re-present itself as transformed. By taking on the "unstately" task of empowerment, it sends the message that this is not government as usual. Empowerment projects also help to redefine the state's paternal benevolence and developmental responsibility. Instead of being tied to its capacity to directly care for its citizens through redistributive programs, the state's commitment to national development is expressed through its ability to empower marginalized subjects to care for themselves. Furthermore, by creating a GONGO to do empowerment, the state is distinguished as a separate and superior actor, as a leaner and more efficient entity, just when its vertical authority over sovereign affairs is threatened by translocal factors.

What does this reformation of the neoliberal postcolonial state mean on the ground? My informants' concerns about state involvement in MS and their desire to shield the program from a bureaucratic takeover hinted at the problems that MS's GONGO structure poses for its field-level staff; it is to these issues that I now turn.[32]

Two Conundrums and Two "Hats": MS as a Moving Target

Government participation in MS's GONGO structure raised two conundrums for its workforce. First, MS representatives had to decide on how to identify the program in front of different audiences with varied imaginations of, and expectations from, state and nonstate actors. Second, MS functionaries had to determine their work identities for themselves. Were they government employees or NGO employees? NGO employees received less remuneration but had more flexibility in their work, whereas state functionaries earned more but had to work within

governmental dictates. MS's GONGO identity raised these dilemmas for its workers, but interestingly, it also provided a partial resolution. MS functionaries shifted back and forth in how they positioned the program, using both the GO and NGO labels to negotiate the paradoxes that MS's GONGO form raised. These practices reveal much about the discursive nature of the state and about the contrary logic of state-initiated women's empowerment.

A key issue that MS representatives faced was how to position their GONGO program in different situations. Although they readily described the program's crossbred structure to me, I never saw them identifying the program as a GONGO in other contexts. Instead, they shifted the program's identity between the governmental label and the nongovernmental label. As Prabha Kishore, a mid-level MS employee, explained: "MS . . . wears two hats—one is a governmental hat and the other is a nongovernmental hat. We have made very good use of both these hats." She told me that she kept two letterheads. "When we write to NGOs, we use the . . . letterhead that states that Mahila Samakhya is a voluntary organization registered under the 1860 Societies Act and gives our registration number. We open [the letter] with 'Dear Colleague or Dear Friend, *Namaste,*'" she said in a sweet voice. "[But] when we need to put pressure . . . [we use] the letterhead bearing the words, 'Ministry of Human Resource Development.'" Prabha Kishore enunciated the last phrase slowly, emphasizing each word. "This letterhead evokes the reaction," she lowered her voice and fearfully stated, " 'Oh God, this is a government program!' We even stamp our seal on these letters and sign them—we write them exactly like government letters are written." Ms. Kishore conveyed the sense of power that official letters carry and the wariness that they instill in people. To express authority, MS workers used "official" labels, styles, languages, and tone of voice.

I observed them don this official garb when introducing the program to state administrators. For presentations such as the one at the Nizabad block office, these workers identified MS as a government program to garner the support of officials who might be hostile toward NGOs that do women's empowerment work. At the same time, they worked the bureaucratic hierarchy to their advantage by emphasizing to state-, district-, and block-level officials that MS was a program of the highest national-level government body.[33]

MS workers also took on the government label in front of rural audiences when they wanted to perform statist authority. For instance, Leela Vati, a fieldworker, used the government tag to intimidate her clients. She went to some MS villages from where the program was being phased out and ordered the participants to return the few things, such as rugs and water pails, that their village collectives had received from the MS program. She did not have any explicit mandate from her superiors for doing so. MS participants in Bilaspur village told me that Leela Vati had threatened them when they refused to comply: "If you don't return the things, the government jeep will come tomorrow, forcibly take everything, and dishonor you in front of everyone!" She even took the village collective leader's

signature on a blank sheet of paper. Bilaspur's residents alleged that she could easily avoid being implicated in any wrongdoing by writing a note on that piece of paper stating that the village women had voluntarily returned the things to her. Leela Vati had effectively used statist symbols and practices to perform "official" power and played on the women's fear of the coercive state-as-taker.

Not all MS representatives were as successful in deploying the state label. Rani Kumari, for example, identified MS as a government program in Banipur village so that she might conduct preliminary household surveys. Using the state label gave her the authority to ask villagers questions and get answers. Most residents agreed to be surveyed, but only after they had condemned failed development initiatives in their village and asked for MS's help in obtaining cash, food, and water facilities available through government programs. They saw Rani as a government functionary and rightfully demanded development assistance from her. Two residents, however, refused to participate in the survey. "People have come here before and taken our names, and then nothing happens," stated one man, criticizing the illegitimacy of the state-as-taker—in this case, taking information without giving anything in return. Rani's use of the government label in this instance did not guarantee her unquestioned authority and compliance.

When it was not authority but legitimacy that MS staff members desired or when they needed to justify MS's lack of resources, they took on the NGO label. For instance, when introducing the program to potential participants, MS representatives often stated that as NGO workers they were interested in building meaningful and supportive relationships with their clients. They explicitly differentiated their unselfish and committed NGO-style work ethic from that of uncaring state employees. NGO identification also helped when potential clients asked what tangible resources they would receive from MS. Program representatives were well aware of how popular the image of the state-as-giver was among rural actors who expected that government development programs would provide for their material needs. Representing MS as an NGO in such situations helped to convey why MS had little to give and allowed staff members to fend off clients' expectations.[34] Staff members also used the NGO label when they had to explain the temporariness of the program. For example, program participants in Seelampur block, where MS was being phased out after nine years of operation, confronted Danu Bai, an MS fieldworker: "You are leaving us alone," they accused, "now who will support us!" Danu Bai replied that MS was a NGO project that had to end and not a government program "that [would] go on forever."

MS functionaries' mobile positioning of the program, as either an NGO or a GO, in different contexts and in front of diverse audiences, both catered to and shaped their interlocutors' ideas of the state and NGOs. People's imaginations of these entities are based on their social locations, on previous interactions with bureaucracies and NGO workers, and on public cultural representations (Gupta 1995). For subaltern actors, the "ideal" state should be like good parents (*mai–baap*; lit., mother–father) and take care of their survival needs.[35] In practice, however,

officials were dishonest, untrustworthy, and uncaring. The experiences that rural subaltern actors may have had of the authoritative state-as-taker (which took away information, possessions, and even fertility) compromised the legitimacy attached to the ideal parental state-as-caretaker. MS representatives had to navigate around such sedimented understandings of the state when pitching the program to differently positioned audiences. They played the divide between the two sides of MS's GONGO identity, constructing NGOs as legitimate, time-bounded entities with no resources and the state as an authoritative, somewhat perpetual entity flush with resources but the legitimacy of which was questionable. By positioning the program in this shifting manner, MS workers discursively constructed the boundary between state and nonstate realms.

However, although they wore different hats in different situations as a programmatic strategy, most MS functionaries saw themselves as allied with a just, legitimate, and compassionate NGO world. For example, Seema Batra, an MS employee, told me, "People who work for MS do not treat it like [a] government job. The salaries [we] get are not enough for survival. So the people who work in MS do so only because they have a certain devotion toward their work. You don't see that in government departments [where] people come only for the sake of their salaries." Criticisms about the "nine to five" mentality, lack of motivation, and low productivity of government workers abound in contemporary Indian public discourse, and the efforts of MS employees to dissociate themselves from this state-related negativity partook in this widely prevalent critique of the state. Their careful self-positioning as NGO workers reproduced an image of the state as an entity that fosters sloth and apathy and employs inefficient people who treat their work merely as a job. They implicitly constructed the nonstate sector as a distinct space characterized by creativity, hard work, enthusiasm, and innovation.

The self-identification of MS personnel with the NGO world proved expedient for state officials. They positioned MS workers as NGO employees when it came to determining compensation and benefits. But in situations in which this NGO labeling could prove problematic, especially in matters relating to antistate mobilizations, state officials identified MS workers as government functionaries. This is yet another contradiction that resulted from state participation in MS's GONGO structure, and it had material consequences for MS staff members, as illustrated below.

Because of MS's GONGO status, its personnel are not considered a part of the government system. This means that MS employees are hired on performance-based *anubandh* (annual contracts) and not in permanent government jobs. Their compensation takes the form of *maandey* (honoraria), which are less than comparable government salaries and do not include the health or pension benefits that state employees receive.[36] Categorizing MS personnel as nongovernmental is not only financially convenient for the state, but it also gives the impression of a more streamlined state in the form of a smaller and more flexible work force. However,

this means that MS employees suffer job insecurity, low earnings, and few benefits, despite the fact that the majority of these employees are single women.[37] As one employee put it: "[MS] is famous for attracting 'abandoned' women— women whose husbands kick them out, who are divorcées or widows. [They] need this job for survival." But MS staff members were not considered actual or effective heads of households whose earnings might be critical for their families. The irony was that many officials, activists, and program clients defined the ability to "be able to stand on [one's] own feet," as one of the key pillars of women's empowerment; nonetheless, the survival needs of the women who worked for this program tended to be overlooked.

This lack of attention might itself be a reflection of the feminization of empowerment work as "unskilled" and "voluntary." Seema Batra recounted an occasion when a bureaucrat in charge of program finances refused a request by some MS workers for a salary increase. He allegedly told them that they should be grateful for employment in MS because, with their inferior skill and educational levels, they would not even be considered for government jobs.[38] His comments would seem to suggest that empowerment work is less skilled and more expendable than employment in the formal structures of the state. They also hint at a neoliberal logic of government that marginalizes empowerment and poverty alleviation work, shifts it from state agencies to civil society institutions, and redefines proper state work as facilitating productive economic growth (through less intervention).

These examples underscore the gendered and classist ideologies woven into MS's employment practices. The work that MS's predominantly female employees are required to do is considered altruistic social work that is extra-economic, unskilled, and naturalized as what they should be doing as good female citizens anyway.[39] Paying women supplemental "honoraria" for feminized reproductive work and denying them state-associated benefits ensures MS women's continued economic dependency while reinforcing patriarchal notions about women's work and identities and normalizing a middle-class and caste-based, male-headed family in which women's work is marginal. MS's employment practices ironically end up perpetuating some of the very classist and gendered hierarchies that its empowerment goals seek to unravel.

Although MS personnel cherished their NGO-like work ethic, they often criticized the official slights and material disadvantages they bore as a result of their NGO linkage. In two of the three states in which MS was first initiated, field-level workers challenged the material and ideological inequalities perpetuated by the program by attempting to unionize and demanding a regularization of their jobs. Both these mobilizations were squashed, and in one state, many of the workers who took up the unionization fight were fired. A program whose very objective is collective empowerment denied its own employees the opportunity to demand their rights collectively as workers.[40] The threat of destitution wielded by state agents to curb dissent reaffirmed the state's vertical authority and effectively countered MS women's resistance against the social and material hierarchies that underlie the

program.[41] MS's employment practices, thus, illustrate how empowerment, as a GONGO-based, quasi-state project of governance, can subvert the goals of gender equality and social change and end up disempowering women in some contexts by furthering the gendered and classist ideologies that overdetermine state power (see Brown 1995).

The paradoxes implicit in the GONGO structure were further revealed in the instances in which MS staff members were treated as government workers by state officials. For example, the government prohibited MS employees from spearheading or participating in antistate protests. Even though they did not earn the compensation and benefits associated with government jobs, MS functionaries, along with other state employees, could not mobilize against state agencies. Ironically, most issues that MS women took up, in their projects for empowerment and social change, involved the state. Whether it was the issuance of land titles, dealing with police matters or legal issues, or fulfillment of basic needs, most problems that MS's clients sought to resolve were connected with specific state bureaucracies. But the women working for MS, positioned here as quasi-state employees, were forbidden to take part in the explicitly antistate struggles of poor women. Seema Singh, a mid-level MS functionary, explained this catch-22.

> All the issues that we take up are, in some way, connected to the government. So if we come within the ambit of the government and succumb to governmental pressure, we will not be able to take up any issues. For example, the government issues licenses for *thekas* (liquor shops). In our district we took up a big fight on this issue. In one village the police beat up women with wooden sticks as they were trying to bust the local theka. Many women had broken bones but we did not back off and surrender to the government. A few days later, the theka closed down . . . . If we had caved into governmental pressure, we would have never been able to take up this fight.

Seema Singh told me that in her program area, the presence of a government-licensed liquor store in the market area had increased incidents of harassment and domestic violence against women and girls.[42] The local MS office took up this issue. "We got a written notice that we could not participate in any *aandolan* (protest)," she explained. "[But] we devised ways of participating; we strategized. Can't participate? Hah! We spearheaded a big anti-alcohol campaign and shouted so many slogans against the government. During the protest, when government officials asked us who we were, we simply pretended to be village women!" Singh's team members filed properly worded leave applications at the office, took the day off, and protested as ordinary citizens. The creative self-positioning of MS workers as local residents and the careful adherence to bureaucratic procedures, such as filing written records, worked around the state's disciplinary strategies so that they could do the empowerment work they aspired to.

Sunita Mathur, another mid-level MS staff person, demonstrated a similar subversive use of statist proceduralism. She helped women belonging to the Kol tribe in Ganna village to obtain a section of the village commons for their survival needs. This piece of land was considered prime property because it bordered a

canal and a major road. Upper-caste men in the village were upset over losing this valuable piece of land and retaliated by razing Kol huts. When Sunita Mathur heard about what had happened, she instructed the Kol women in proper grievance procedures. She dictated to them the text of a formal written complaint detailing the incident. They were to bypass the local block-level administration and hand in two copies of the complaint directly to the subdistrict magistrate (SDM), a higher-level bureaucrat. Furthermore, they had to make sure that the SDM signed and stamped both copies, and they were to keep one copy for their records. The Kol women followed her instructions and were able to retain the disputed land. Sunita Mathur, thus, successfully negotiated with the local state machinery by tactically using governmental procedures such as filing "official" looking applications and keeping records for ensuring accountability. She also trained village women in these methods and taught them how to use bureaucratic proceduralism to their advantage.

However, these strategies have contradictory implications for empowerment. On the one hand, they governmentalize women's everyday lives and tie them to the networks of bureaucratic power and disciplinary rule. They also construct problematic hierarchies between MS functionaries and participants, particularly when staff members use bureaucratic language and methods to demand compliance from the very women they are meant to empower (as in Leela Vati's example above). These hierarchies might ultimately subvert the equality-oriented agenda of the MS program. On the other hand, encountering officials, gaining information about how bureaucracies work, and learning statist methods can also be seen as enabling subaltern women to mobilize and demand accountability and entitlements from state agencies. These methods also benefit field staff. The empowerment work that they do can sometimes be dangerous, and MS workers often face threats of violence and destitution. Their use of proceduralism in these instances and their creative positioning of themselves and the program allow them to circumvent repressive power, as illustrated by the following incident.

In the village of Naudia, Sunita Mathur's team assisted lower-caste women in fighting upper-caste control over land. With Sunita's help, MS clients called a meeting of the entire village to discuss land-related matters. Sunita asked the village chief to include a meeting announcement in the *panchayat* (village council) register that was circulated among all residents. When upper-caste men saw the notice, they threatened to attack MS staff members and participants. They also (mis)informed the local senior superintendent of police (SSP) that MS had mobilized a large group of people who were planning to surround the police station in protest. On the day of the meeting the forces of five local police stations, including policewomen, surrounded the meeting participants. The SSP, the SDM, and other local officials were also present and summoned Sunita Mathur to a place some distance away from the gathering. She was unwilling to meet them alone, but the officials refused to walk over to where she and some of the other women were standing. In the end, some of the village women accompanied her to the spot designated by the officials,

acting as chaperones and witnesses to the exchange that ensued. Here is how she described it:

> The Circle Officer [a police officer] asked us a lot of questions—as a harassment tactic. He pointed to the MS jeep and asked me whose vehicle that was. I just shrugged my shoulders. "Where did you get this vehicle?" he questioned. The jeep had Government of India written on it. I avoided answering the question directly and simply stated that we got it from whoever gave it to us. . . . He asked me for my name. I said, "You can write it down—my name is Sunita and I work for Mahila Samakhya." "Is this a government program?" he asked. "Well, if the board on the jeep says Government of India, then maybe [it is] a government program. I, however, am not from the government," I answered. Then he told me that he . . . had received information that we were going to surround the local police station. "You have put a Government of India board on your vehicle and you dare to work against the Government of India! You are going against the administration!" he accused. "We are not doing anything against the administration," I replied, "and this meeting has not been called by MS. Here is the meeting announcement written by the village chief." I showed him the village council register with the recorded announcement. "The issue . . . was put forward by village women. MS staff members are not involved in this. Just like you are here to provide security, we . . . are here [as] representatives of a women's group to support the village women's cause."

The circle officer flaunted his male official status and his governmental position to intimidate the MS women. His self-positioning as a faithful officer defending the interests of the state and society also constructed the state as a superstructure that can secure social order (Mitchell 1999). Police representatives and bureaucrats were present in Naudia to protect the interests of landowning upper-caste men, to defend state institutions from being challenged by subaltern women, and to secure their own positions as powerful state officials. Their display of prestige and authority enacted the prerogative dimension of state power, which, according to Brown (1995), rests on the state's monopoly over legitimate violence. Their use of concerns about "security" to threaten MS women reveals how violence undergirds governmental concerns about the care and protection of society (Dean 2001), and here it was being deployed to secure the welfare of some members of society over others. Sunita Mathur had to avoid becoming implicated in instigating an antigovernment protest and endangering the social order; at the same time, she had to forestall imminent violence from government functionaries and powerful landowning men. Her vagueness about MS's GONGO identity, her own self-identification as an NGO activist, and the use of written meeting announcements sent out by the village chief were among the tactics she used. She explained:

> I felt that if I really had been a government representative, then I would not have been able to accomplish anything [or] . . . do anything against the government. You see the local mafia is supported by the administration. And we have to fight against the mafia because otherwise the issues of land and violence will never get solved and economic self-reliance will never happen . . . . That is why I have strategically decided not to use the government label.

Sunita Mathur described the connections between the landowning elite, local government functionaries, and organized corruption and crime as a "mafia." Upper-caste landowners acquire common lands under their own names with the help of local officials who authorize land titles. They routinely threaten low-caste women who challenge them, hiring goons to beat or rape the women, burn their fields, or tear down their houses. The police and local administrators collude with landowners by refusing to prevent land encroachment and violence and by refusing to assist low-caste women in bringing cases against them.

The Naudia incident delineates the entanglement of state officials in the issues that concern poor women. This view from the bottom illustrates the untenability of defining a clear boundary between state and nonstate arenas and actors. The embeddedness of local officials in relations of power reveals that the state is sometimes imagined not so much as a spatially distinct entity but as a key node in a network of power relations through which other power inequalities, such as class, caste, and gender, are channeled and reproduced (see Ferguson 1994). In this context, power and authority are messy and not neatly contained within the conventional limits of the state. The struggles of MS participants are not always directed against a distinctly constructed or abstract state but against entrenched webs of power in which state officials are key players. This blurring is all the more reason for them to re-create the state locally as the defender of law and protector of order through periodic exhibitions of power and prestige. These local struggles also produce images of a spatially separate translocal state writ large—a "just" state consisting of higher-level government officials who can perhaps be called on to discipline lower-level functionaries and intervene on behalf of the marginalized.

Sunita Mathur's story vividly illustrates the dangers and dilemmas that are raised by MS's linkage to the state in pursuing social change. Its field-level staff members need to navigate official dictates and violence while also tackling local gender, class-, and caste-based power inequalities in which state functionaries are embedded. This often requires them to dissociate themselves from the state. As Seema Singh explained, "The police belong to the government, the courts belong to the government. . . . When we take up a fight, we have to fight at all these levels. If we start believing that we are working for a government project and that we are government workers, then how will we fight . . . [other] government people?"

By consciously distancing themselves from the government, positioning the program in ways that take advantage of its hybrid nature, and deploying bureaucratic procedures, MS staff members are sometimes able to steer clear of official disciplining. How successful they are at strategically negotiating governmental repression, however, is not a straightforward matter. If anything, the incidents narrated above reiterate the gender-, class-, and caste-inflected power currents that crisscross the state. They demonstrate that power is not simply disciplinary and productive (Foucault 1995) but also repressive and deductive (Foucault 1990) and that the state can operate as a "vehicle of massive domination" (Brown 1995:174) even in the absence of any singular intention. They also illustrate the ever-present

illiberal underside of neoliberal governmentality (Dean 2001; Hindess 2004) that helps to reinforce the state's hypermasculinity.[43] The state's prerogative to wield violence is used to uphold social power hierarchies, to protect the institution of private property and the interests of propertied classes, to enact violence on subaltern classes and deny them justice, and finally, to entrench the authority of state institutions. MS women staff members encounter this illiberality often in their empowerment work with their rural clients, and this is where the program's GONGO positioning both poses obstacles and also, at times, allows them room to maneuver.

Conclusion

In this article, I have examined ethnographically the intersection between neoliberal ideologies, empowerment strategies, and quasi-state organizations to signal how the developmentalist state and government are being reimagined in postcolonial India and to illustrate the paradox-laden nature of state-sponsored women's empowerment. Neoliberalism is knotting together different social actors with varied political projects in a networked apparatus of self-rule (see Barry et al. 1996) that is altering the contours of the state. Richa Nagar and Saraswati Raju claim that in contemporary India not only have "NGOs have become an arm of the government [but also] the government has become the biggest NGO" (2003:3).[44] This neoliberal blurring of the divide between state and nonstate realms underscores the need for practices that restore the distinctiveness and authority of the postcolonial Indian state while helping it to shrink—both literally and symbolically. GONGOs help fulfill this function. Their presence constructs a reified image of the state as an authoritative yet leaner entity.

The Indian state's move into grassroots empowerment further reconfigures the state and its governance. Empowerment, as Hindess (2004) and others contend, has emerged as a key modality of neoliberal self-government and an alternative to more coercive and direct forms of rule.[45] The coming together of GONGO structure with empowerment strategies in the MS program, as I have discussed above, degovernmentalizes the state and proliferates nodes of governance outside of its formal structures. This neoliberal shifting of responsibility for governmental functions, such as development programs, to rapidly multiplying quasi- and nonstate entities in the Indian context, however, is partial. The examples above show that these processes do not imply independence for nonstate actors but point instead toward these actors' increasing entanglement within the webs of governance as instruments and not just targets of rule. Moreover, the postcolonial Indian state cannot completely privatize governmental functions such as development that are an inseparable part of its identity. The implementation of empowerment programs by semigovernmental bodies perhaps allows for a reconciliation between the developmentalist and neoliberalizing facets of the Indian state, enabling the state to continue to perform its legitimizing development duties by building the capacities of various actors to ensure their own basic needs. The state can thus appear

to become smaller and cut its social-sector budget while still not abandoning its development role.

Despite its innovative design, commitment to radical pedagogy, and feminist goals, the MS program unwittingly ends up becoming implicated in these broader neoliberal processes. This raises the vexing issue of how to think about feminist partnerships with state agencies in alternative projects for social change. What are the dangers and possibilities unleashed by such collaborations in a context in which empowerment has gained worldwide recognition and legitimacy as a hegemonic neoliberal strategy of development and governance? If feminist disengagement with Indian state institutions seems ill-advised at a time when social-sector spending cuts, the shifting of state welfare functions to NGOs, and the rising danger of increased poverty are threatening the lives of marginalized women (Agnihotri and Mazumdar 1995; Menon-Sen 2001; Nagar and Raju 2003; Sunder Rajan 2003:77–78), then one needs to look seriously at the risks as well as the opportunities of involving state agencies in feminist projects for social change under neoliberalism.

A central issue that the MS program faces is the governmentalization of grassroots empowerment. Instead of working as an alternative means for consciousness raising, a spontaneous mobilization tactic, or a loosely defined blueprint for radical action against oppression, empowerment is increasingly becoming mainstreamed and packaged into government-sponsored development programs—it has, in other words, become a "category of governance" (Chatterjee 2004:69). Governmentalization entails a bureaucratization of empowerment in its professionalization as an expert intervention and in its objectification as a measurable variable. Rendering empowerment into a development program requires setting up appropriate hierarchical structures and bureaucratic procedures. These processes can go against the very spirit of change and equality that empowerment is supposed to connote and engender.[46]

MS's institutional structure and practices show how the program becomes implicated in the spread of bureaucratic power throughout society (Ferguson 1994). Even though MS's carefully worked out GONGO structure was an attempt to prevent a bureaucratic takeover of the program, in practice, bureaucratic proceduralism has become a crucial part of MS's fabric. MS staff members deploy statist procedures in their daily work and also train program clients in these methods. Staff members use governmental techniques strategically as a subversive tactic to circumvent official repression. They also use these techniques to discipline program participants, thus illustrating the dangerous slippage between tactics of subversion and strategies of domination. Governmental methods are mired within the logic of disciplinary bureaucratic power; their proliferation through the program institutes hierarchies that are counterproductive to MS's goals of equality.

The mainstreaming of empowerment projects also carries the risk of an official subversion of their radical possibilities. Anil Bordia, the bureaucrat credited with

getting MS underway, was aware of this danger when he told me,

> The state, by definition, can only be ... status-quoist. [In] every program [like MS], there are seeds of destruction—because the people who control the resources, who have all the say, would not ... easily allow these things to happen.... The problem is [that these programs] are working in a very simmering or overt manner against a system that is rallied totally against [them].

In addition to the hurdles posed by officials who monopolize resources and who may not look kindly on empowerment processes that threaten their own positions within local power equations, the governmentalization of women's empowerment also imposes limits on its definition and deployment as a mobilization tactic against oppression. Quoting Anil Bordia again:

> By and large it will be true to say that empowered women would almost always take up causes which are humane, which are in conformity with law, and which are forward looking. I would not say the same for all sections of society because the CPI-ML people and the People's War Group [radical leftist organizations] are also empowered in a sense, but they do not always take a stand which is within the framework of law. But in the case of women, I ... know of no case where empowered women have ... taken the law in their own hands or have acted contrary to ... government policy; in fact, that is a good test of what policy should be.

Bordia's distinction between illegitimate empowerment struggles undertaken by radical leftist groups and desirable empowerment mobilizations of women reveals how state-initiated programs can potentially serve as vehicles for turning marginalized women into law-abiding, disciplined, and responsibilized citizen–subjects (Cruikshank 1999) who use legitimate civil-society mechanisms to fight for their rights. These women operate in the relatively unregulated negotiational domain of subaltern political society that is, as Partha Chatterjee (2004) claims, not centrally governed by elite civil-society ideals of law, rights, citizenship, and equality. Their tutelage under state-initiated programs can be seen, perhaps cynically, as fitting subaltern women to function as good members of civil society and to deal with formal political institutions. MS, for instance, trains its clients to participate in local legislative bodies. This may signal a formalization of political society mobilizations that seeks to deradicalize them and bring them in line with civil society.

These potentially disempowering effects of governmentalization have led some feminists to contend that states should stay out of grassroots empowerment (Moser 1993) and others to argue for feminist distancing from state programs (Brown 1995).[47] However, as I argue here, the neoliberal blurring of the boundary between state and nonstate makes it more difficult to determine whether states should get involved in empowerment and whether feminists should get involved with state institutions and processes. The governmentalization of empowerment is not simply a reflection of direct state involvement, but it is also an instance of the neoliberal practices of government that suffuse society at large. If we are to rethink the state conceptually so that we see that state and nonstate entities are part

of the same apparatus of government, then we need to examine the politics and paradoxes of empowerment programs undertaken by all kinds of institutions—GONGOs, NGOs, and others. NGO-initiated programs, after all, do not operate in a hermetically sealed context unaffected by state representatives and practices or by international funding agency agendas. Using the theoretical lens of governmentality studies also complicates the feminist debate on disengagement with state structures. Sealing oneself off from processes of government that permeate all of society may not be an option; rather it may be more useful for activists to assume tactical positions within the regimes of governance themselves.

Perhaps a more productive question to ask is what kinds of subjects are being produced by this use of empowerment and the resulting increase in interfaces between subaltern women and state agencies. Do women's "expanding relationships [to state institutions and processes] produce only active *political* subjects, or do they also produce regulated, subordinated, and disciplined *state* subjects?" (Brown 1995:173). My analysis of the MS program substantiates Chatterjee's (2004) claim that governmental programs do not just produce bureaucratized and passive state subjects. In postcolonial contexts, these programs produce active, sometimes dissident, political actors who can provide the ground for mobilizations of political society in which marginalized subjects make claims on the state, negotiate entitlements, and contest social hierarchies (Chatterjee 2004). Governmentalization does not depoliticize so much as it spawns a subaltern politics that may take new, unexpected forms.

My discussion of MS demonstrates the kind of politicization and empowerment that can happen unwittingly, "behind the backs of or against the wills of even the most powerful actors" (Ferguson 1994:18). MS women come to understand structural inequalities and how state officials are embedded in them; they actively engage local power networks that exceed the formal confines of the state but implicate particular bureaucrats, embedded within gender relations and other forms of hierarchies; and they learn statist languages and practices and use them as potentially subversive tools for demanding accountability. These processes can be empowering in helping women formulate tactics for challenging locally entrenched power equations. These tactics allow subaltern women to negotiate a broader, if contingent, notion of empowerment that is not so much about changing women's individual or collective gendered situations but about understanding and confronting the overlapping structural inequalities (e.g., of class, caste, and gender) that shape individual and collective realities. Empowerment is about taking up fights for issues that extend well beyond the scope of women's rights narrowly defined, insofar as these are centered on mechanical ideas of gender equality. Despite the fact that certain officials and local elites may not endorse this kind of women's empowerment, such processes, once initiated, may not be easily reined in.

Empowerment is a moving target whose meaning is constantly redefined through subaltern women's struggles. It has an ambiguous and open-ended quality that manifests itself in multiple and conflicted ways in women's lives. A

governmentalization of empowerment, therefore, may not just mean a potential formalization of subaltern political society. It may also open the door for a meaningful democratization of civil society and state institutions.

When poor, low-caste rural women struggle against violence or against upper-caste control over land or when they demand development, they try to make the state do what it is supposed to do—that is, guarantee their constitutional rights and survival. Subaltern women's struggles delineate the difference between the state "as is" (i.e., administered by people who have power that they abuse to further their own ends) and the ideal state as "it ought to be" (i.e., ensuring the rights and responding to the needs of all its citizens). The issues that women take up in their fights for justice and survival and how they implicate state officials in these issues could indeed serve as markers for how official policies, practices, and institutions must be altered if the goal of social change and the promises of democracy and equal rights are to be realized. The ways in which women construct the state, criticize officials to hold them accountable, and demand entitlements-as-rights point to alternative visions of state institutions and responsibilities. Governmental programs, perhaps unintentionally, make it possible for women to recognize that the goal of social change requires transforming governance and reimagining the state.

Empowerment as a quasi-state-implemented project of governance, when examined through the lens of neoliberal governmentality, is a double-edged sword that is both promising and precarious. Feminist collaborations with state institutions on the theme of women's empowerment are clearly opening interesting vistas for challenge and change. But the dangerous underside of such projects means that one cannot be overly sanguine about their libratory potential. As Mitchell Dean suggests, there is indeed no "system of safeguards that offers us a comfort zone when we engage in political action" (2001:62); many MS staff members confront these discomforts on a daily basis. The concept of empowerment has layered histories and multiple avatars: a leftist strategy for political conscientization and class-based politics, a feminist strategy for awareness raising and gender equality, and now a governmental and entrepreneurial strategy for development. Critical analyses of how these contentious meanings overlap and clash in different contexts, how they articulate with global neoliberal ideologies, and what risks they pose are crucial for scholars and political activists alike. The outcomes of these intersections are neither given nor unproblematic, and they point to the need for exerting constant vigilance when engaging in the politics of empowerment.

Notes

on earlier versions. I am grateful for the feedback of the reviewers of *Cultural Anthropology*, as well as of participants in "The Post-Liberalization State in India—Interdisciplinary Perspectives" conference at Stanford University (June 2004) where I presented an earlier version of this article. And finally, I thank Ann Anagnost for her intellectual advice and support.

1. The quotes around the word "empowerment" here denote its open-ended and contested meaning for different actors and in different contexts. Subsequent appearances of this word will not be in quotes although the same considerations apply. A block office is the seat of the block-level bureaucracy and is headed by a government-appointed block development officer (BDO). A block is an administrative subdivision of a district and consists of approximately 100 villages.

2. I have changed the names of all my informants, with the exception of Anil Bordia. I follow local name usage conventions throughout this article. Some of my informants, depending on their social and geographical location, did not use last names for self-identification. The "Rani" in Meena Rani's name, for example, is not her last name but is considered an extension of her first name that refers to her gender. I use the entire given names of such informants and no last names.

3. The 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments in India reserve 33.3 percent of the seats in local elected bodies for women. MS staff members provide their clients with information and training on the election process and on the responsibilities of elected representatives through songs, street theater, and other methods.

4. MS staff members used the Hindi word *sashaktikaran* (lit., empowerment) and the phrase *mazboot banana* (to make strong) interchangeably to describe empowerment.

5. MS is administered by the Government of India at the national or central government level but is registered as a "society" or NGO in each state in which it operates.

6. The liberalization of the monetary and fiscal regimes of the Indian government, dismantling of tariffs, and opening up of the market began with the Rajiv Gandhi administration in the mid-1980s. India faced a serious balance of payments (BOP) crisis in 1991, which initiated a particularly strenuous phase of economic and social-sector restructuring and adjustment. Although India's liberalization is generally seen as beginning with the BOP crisis of the early 1990s, many of the elements and processes of restructuring were already underway by the mid-1980s.

7. Foucault (1991) used the concept of governmentality to explain a transition in the aim and modes of governance from (repressive) sovereign power that was concerned solely with control over territory to a form of "biopower" and rule that is centrally concerned with the welfare, care, and security of the population living in a particular territory. In this article, I use the term *governmentality* to draw attention to the entire ensemble of practices and institutions, including but not limited to state agencies, by which the conduct of a population is regulated and directed toward particular ends (Dean 1999). For discussions of neoliberal governmentality in which functions of state power are ceded to nongovernmental actors, see Barry et al. 1996, Burchell 1996, Burchell et al. 1991, Ferguson and Gupta 2002, Hindess 2004, and Rose 1996.

8. Studies of neoliberal governmentality have largely focused on modern Western democratic states (Dean 2001). There is, however, a growing literature on governmentality in colonial, and postcolonial contexts. For example, see Chatterjee 2004; Das and Poole 2004; Ferguson and Gupta 2002; Ferguson 1994; Gupta 2001; Hansen and Stepputat 2001; Mitchell 1991, 2002; Paley 2001; Scott 1999; and Stoler 1995.

9. See, for example, Cohn 1987, Corrigan and Sayer 1985, Das and Poole 2004, Geertz 1980, Gupta 1995, Hall 1986, Hansen and Stepputat 2001, Joseph and Nugent 1994, Mitchell 1999, Scott 1998, Steinmetz 1999b, Taussig 1997, and Taylor 1997. Such analyses have refocused attention on questions of culture that were insufficiently addressed within certain

dominant Marxist and neo-Weberian analyses of the state. For a discussion of the place of culture within Marxist and neo-Weberian analyses of the state see George Steinmetz 1999a.

10. See Bhattacharjee 1997, Ferguson 1984, Fraser 1989, Gal and Kligman 2000, Gordon 1990, MacKinnon 1989, Orloff 1999, and Piven 1990 for analyses of different Western state bureaucracies and laws. There exists a rich feminist literature on the gender of the postcolonial Indian state. These analyses have approached the state through specific policies, laws, and agencies. For example, on the legislation regarding the repatriation of women kidnapped during Partition, see Butalia 1993 and Menon and Bhasin 1993; on forced hysterectomies, citizenship, and prostitution see Sunder Rajan 2003; on the politics of "protection" surrounding women belonging to minority religious communities see Pathak and Sunder Rajan 1992; on female feticide and abortion see Menon 1996; on development planning see Chaudhuri 1996; and on violence and state-initiated empowerment see Mathur 1999.

11. My reasons for approaching the Indian state through development are twofold. First, development is an intimate part of the Indian state's identity and legitimizing apparatus (Chatterjee 1993, 1998; Ludden 1992). Elite Indian nationalist leaders formulated their demand for independence from exploitative British rule around the trope of development and positioned the independent nationalist state as the legitimate harbinger of national development. This move has provided the postcolonial Indian state with its raison d'être and has also resulted in a conjoining of development and the state in the popular imaginary. Thus, development is a key site in which cultural narratives about the state are produced and contested. Second, hegemonic development ideas, such as empowerment, are produced and endorsed by powerful international organizations (like the World Bank) and circulate globally. These transnational ideas construct Third World states in particular ways. Approaching the Indian state through the lens of development, thus, helps me analyze Indian state formation as an effect of translocal discourses that crosscut different spatial levels.

12. Other international factors have also influenced the Indian state's involvement in women's empowerment programs. The transnational proliferation of the language of human rights, for example, and international accords, such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which obligate signatory states (like India) to protect the rights of oppressed groups and open them up to monitoring by international and local bodies, have pressured governments to implement specific policies relating to empowerment and the rights of marginalized groups.

13. GAD was formulated as a critical response to the Women in Development (WID) framework. WID advocates (Jaquette 1990; Tinker 1990), drawing on liberal feminist ideas, criticized the welfare approach to women's development that saw women simply as passive recipients of charity. They highlighted women's productive capacities and argued for the economic efficiency of including women as equal participants in development. GAD proponents criticized WID advocates for unproblematically deploying the category "women," for uncritically accepting the modernization paradigm, and for using economic languages and rationales to argue for women's development. Interestingly, however, the language of empowerment, which GAD popularized, has now been co-opted by dominant development institutions that use it to promote the competitive market logic of neoliberal economics.

14. USAID, for instance, is encouraging empowerment programs (Leve 2001); the Government of India declared 2001 as "Women's Empowerment Year" (Menon-Sen 2001), and the World Bank's "human" face is about poverty alleviation and empowerment (Kahn 2000).

15. I do not wish to portray Third World state actors as simply victims of SAPs. Governing elites in India have embraced these reforms and have benefited from them. Yet their enthusiastic response has to be seen within the context of the enormous clout that

lending institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank carry and their ability to pressurize Third World officials into adopting their expert recommendations.

16. Although the early postindependence phase in India was dominated by welfare-based Gandhian or religious voluntary organizations, the 1960s and 1970s saw an increase in the numbers and a diversification of the nature, goals, and ideologies of nonprofit organizations (Khan 1997; Sen 1993). This period witnessed a burgeoning presence of international NGOs, community-based organizations, and social action groups (Sen 1993). The focus of these new entities was not simply relief, but development, and in some cases, empowerment (Khan 1997; Sen 1993). During this period, the Indian government also set up large capitalist development-oriented GONGOs or "corporate NGOs" (Garain 1994) that focused on technical and financial inputs for capitalist development rather than on issues of marginalization, poverty alleviation, or empowerment (see Kamat 2002; Kothari 1986). The Indian NGO sector saw rapid growth in the late 1970s and 1980s. In addition to the increased availability of foreign funds during this period, this growth can be attributed to several factors, including (1) the failure of leftist Indian political parties to organize a sustained movement for radical change, making grassroots organizations a viable alternative for mobilization; (2) the failure of modernization theory and state development planning to reduce poverty and destitution; (3) the violent excesses of Emergency and the squashing of leftist student movements and other radical organizations; (4) the post-Emergency promotion of rural-based NGO efforts by the newly elected Janata government, which set up semigovernmental bodies such as the Council for the Advancement of People's Action and Rural Technology (CAPART) to support NGO work; and (5) increased funding made available by the Congress government of the mid-1980s to voluntary organizations doing "nonpolitical" work (Kamat 2002; Khan 1997; Sen 1993).

17. It is difficult to provide an exact count of the number of NGOs operating in India. Not all NGOs in India are formally registered, but those receiving foreign funds must be registered with the Home Ministry. Furthermore, to have a legal nonprofit designation, an Indian organization can be registered under any one of the following five acts: the Societies Registration Act of 1860, the Indian Trusts Act of 1882, the Cooperatives Societies Act of 1904, the Trade Union Act of 1926, and the Companies Act of 1956 (Sen 1993). These definitional problems of what counts as an NGO and registration issues complicate accurate calculations of the size and growth of the Indian NGOs sector.

18. The Indian government continues to run, and has even expanded, some large-scale welfare-based programs such as the Integrated Child Development Services program (Gupta 2001) that distribute food and other resources to those sections of the population defined as "at risk."

19. The Foreign Contributions Regulation Act of 1976, for instance, requires NGOs receiving foreign funds to register with the government and opens them up to governmental monitoring and intervention (Sen 1993).

20. MS currently operates in nine Indian states. These include Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka, Kerela, Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Uttaranchal, and Jharkhand.

21. For analyses of the impact of the Indian political context of the 1970s and 1980s on feminist mobilizations in India see Agnihotri and Mazumdar 1995, Gandhi and Shah 1992, and Philipose 2001. Philipose (2001) and Agnihotri and Mazumdar (1995) contextualize the discussion of Indian feminist organizing within international feminist trends (e.g., feminist organizing around UN-sponsored conferences). According to Agnihotri and Mazumdar (1995), the women's movement in India has been influenced by (1) the crisis of the state brought on by Indira Gandhi's declaration of a state of emergency, (2) the late-1970s rise in civil rights mobilizations, (3) a significant increase in women's organizations in the 1980s and the resultant inclusion of women's issues on the official agenda, (4) the rise in

fundamentalist movements that deploy essentialist notions of tradition and culture that are inimical to feminist agendas, and (5) the deepening crisis of the state and society during the 1990s because of economic globalization and the transnational spread of free-market capitalism and liberalization policies (processes that are a part and parcel of neoliberalism).

22. Carving autonomous niches did not, however, mean that women's movement activists in India isolated themselves from government agencies (Jandhyala 2001). Development, violence, and the law were prominent areas in which these activists critically interacted with state structures. In 1974, for instance, the Committee on the Status of Women in India published a report entitled "Towards Equality" (Government of India 1974). This committee was set up to fulfill the Indian government's obligations as a signatory to the 1967 UN-sponsored Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (Philipose 2001). "Towards Equality" examined the differential impact of the postcolonial state's modernization policies on women across regional, caste, and class barriers, highlighting women's marginalization from the processes and benefits of development, and calling on the state to do its constitutional duty of guaranteeing equality. This report set in motion dialogs between women's organizations and state officials on development issues and resulted in the inclusion, for the first time, of a separate chapter on women and development in the Indian government's sixth Five-Year Plan, 1980–85 (Agnihotri and Mazumdar 1995). Women's groups also engaged state agencies on the issues of violence and laws during the late 1970s and early 1980s, when a series of rapes were committed by police functionaries. In the Mathura case, for instance, the Supreme Court acquitted policemen who had raped a young tribal girl in custody (Gandhi and Shah 1992). The violence of the act of rape was compounded by the violence enacted on Mathura by a biased judiciary. This incident not only displayed the masculinism of the state's naked prerogative power (Brown 1995), which rests on ensuring gendered and sexual access and violation in the name of "protection," but it also brought to the fore the gendered bias of rape laws. Women's groups in India highlighted gendered forms of oppression and how state institutions produce structural violence (Philipose 2001). They lobbied for increased accountability and transparency of state agents and for constitutional and legislative changes that would ensure justice. See Gandhi and Shah 1992 and Agnihotri and Mazumdar 1995.

23. Some of these collaborations, however, were mired in controversy. For instance, the formulation of the government's National Perspective Plan for Women included women but involved little interaction with activists and representatives of women's organizations (Agnihotri and Mazumdar 1995). These activists demanded a national debate on the document prior to the formal adoption of its recommendations, but their demands went unheeded by the government.

24. These terms delineating the benefits of NGOs circulate widely in Indian scholarly and activist arenas. The following description of NGO advantages (over state bureaucracies) is fairly typical:

> [The] size, micro-level focus, essentially voluntary, nonprofit motivation and consequent commitment, and less diffuse accountability structures endow [NGOs] with advantages in some aspects of work with the poor over large, impersonal development bureaucracies. These include greater flexibility in work modes . . . and experimentation; more intensive contact with local people and situations; . . . and lower control loss in managing and implementing activities. [Khan 1997:9]

Although this may be a widely held view of NGOs, the actual experiences and diverse nature of NGOs do not necessarily square with this perception.

25. The primary responsibilities of the national office include communication with government departments and donors, managing program funds, providing programmatic

support to the state-level programs when necessary, and ensuring that the program fits within the larger policy framework of the state.

26. The program in the state of Uttar Pradesh was initially implemented in three districts through well-known NGOs. This strategy was later altered by setting up a registered MS society in the state that took over program management from the NGOs.

27. The organizational structure of state-level MS Societies mirrors the administrative subdivisions of the government. Each Indian state is divided into several districts and each district is further subdivided into several blocks.

28. The national- and state-level program advisory groups and oversight bodies are comprised of both ex-officio and nongovernmental members, with the latter having at least 51 percent representation. The program designers worked out this composition to ensure a nongovernmental majority and to avoid a bureaucratic takeover of the daily workings of the program. Government officials are, however, well represented within national- and state-level MS programs. Some of my informants reported that district and block-level MS offices have indeed enjoyed some independence from the Government of India (i.e., the New Delhi–based central government) in their everyday functioning. But they also told me that the more immediate, local-level government functionaries have intervened in the day-to-day administration of the program while seemingly steering clear of programmatic issues.

29. The grassroots nature and local-level work of NGOs, on the one hand, and the broader scale of state institutions, on the other hand, are commonly held perceptions in India. Where government programs have been described as "grass without roots," NGOs have been characterized as "roots without grass" (Khan 1997:12). Where scale and spread captures the spirit of grass-like government programs, localized root-like operations mark the essence of NGOs.

30. Here, I am specifically talking about the smaller NGOs and women's organizations invoked by my informants in their discussions of the pros and cons of governmental and nongovernmental entities. There are other kinds of NGOs, which my informants did not talk about, characterized by translocal, "state-like" spheres of action. Large transnational NGOs, for instance, operate virtually as state bureaucracies and sometimes even challenge the vertical authority and sovereign control of Third World states.

31. Scholars have analyzed how the discourse on protection is a crucial part of the postcolonial Indian state's patriarchal self-representation. For example, see Pathak and Sunder Rajan 1992 and Menon and Bhasin 1993.

32. In the field-level staff category I include both block- and district-level MS functionaries. I focus on this group because they directly interact with program clients, non-participating rural residents, and local-level bureaucrats, and, thus, have to negotiate these groups' perceptions of the state.

33. Despite these efforts, however, many local officials I encountered were either unaware of MS's existence or gave it little importance. Anu Chopra, a New Delhi-based development activist, told me that MS could never compete with other large-scale government development programs that distribute resources. "If you do not have anything to give, in the government's eyes . . . you are not important. Your mandate . . . is not significant at the government level." The relative lack of authority and significance accorded to a state-initiated program that targets women, employs primarily women, has a relatively small budget, and does not distribute tangibles to its clients also underscores the hierarchical and gendered ideologies congealed in statist structures.

34. At times they highlighted an important tangible benefit that participants would receive—a monthly small grant given to each village-level MS women's collective for a limited amount of time—but stressed that this grant would come directly from the government and not from MS. In so doing, they once again reinforced the image of the state-as-giver.

35. My rural informants often referred to the state, to government officials, and to powerful people more generally, as mai–baap. This popular subaltern discursive construction of the state as "mother-father," which alludes to the care-taking and protective roles of "good" parents, troubles any easy gendering of the state as patriarch-writ-large.

36. In 1998, for example, full-time field-level MS employees, called Sahyoginis, drew wages that were slightly above the government-stipulated minimum daily wage for skilled work. The prevalent minimum wage for skilled work was Rs. 54 per day. Assuming a 25-day work month, this translated into a monthly earning of Rs. 1,350. MS Sahyoginis earned an honorarium of Rs. 1,500 per month for working considerably longer hours. In addition to their honoraria, they received a travel allowance of up to Rs. 300 per month.

37. Besides drivers, accountants, and some messengers, all MS employees are women; this in itself represents a gendered typing of jobs.

38. This official's representation of the state as a zone of important and skilled work ran contrary to MS representatives' denigration of state work, and it attributed to the state the kind of vertical authoritativeness that neoliberal discourses about inefficient state agencies and their deadwood employees denied it.

39. For example, see de Alwis 1995, who argues that altruistic "social" work assumes a middle- or upper-class housewife as its paradigmatic subject who has the necessary resources and time to do voluntary work.

40. One of my MS-associated feminist informants told me that these women were not allowed to unionize because if their jobs were to be regularized and their salaries brought up to government levels, it would have serious financial implications for the government and for MS workers' identities and work habits. First, it would have forced the government to increase financial outlays for MS and other programs, which relied on low-paid "volunteers" to do the work. Second, once unionized, MS women would treat their work like a government job, and their productivity and quality of work would presumably fall.

41. A similar unionization-related incident also happened in the context of the empowerment-oriented, state-initiated WDP. At a unionization meeting of WDP's women volunteers in 1992, state authorities confronted the women and, under the threat of program closure, forced the meeting attendees to submit written promises that they would not unionize (Sathin Union Representative 1994). But when these scare tactics failed to stem the unionization tide in a particular program district, government officials sent letters to the husbands of women volunteers. They effectively ordered the men to prevent their wives from unionizing or else the government would not be held responsible for what might happen to the women (WDP Fact Finding Team 1992).

42. Government-issued liquor licenses constitute a women's issue because there is a correlation between the sale of alcohol, women's increased workloads, and violence against women. Over the last decade or so, women have led and participated in several anti-alcohol movements across India (e.g., in Andhra Pradesh). This issue has become significant enough to force some regional political parties to include anti-alcohol stances as part of their official agendas and platforms to garner the support of women voters.

43. The illiberal and masculinist underside of government and the dangers it poses for women's empowerment struggles were also highlighted in the context of the WDP program in Rajasthan. In 1992, Bhanwari, a lower-caste village woman and volunteer functionary of WDP, was gang raped by five upper-caste men in front of her husband. The rapists were punishing her for trying to stop a child marriage in their village. Bhanwari, as a representative of a government-initiated empowerment program, was simply doing her job—that is, upholding the law that prohibits child marriages. The institutions and functionaries of the state, however, did nothing to assist her in her fight to get justice. The police delayed Bhanwari's medical examination for over two days and forced her

to give her statement several times. Investigating officers dragged their feet over the inquiry, and the perpetrators were not arrested until 17 months after Bhanwari had been raped. Once the trial began, the presiding judge was changed several times. Finally, in 1995, three years after the gang rape, the district court acquitted all five men. For many women activists this case came to symbolize the violent and patriarchal nature of the state. State institutions had failed to protect and do justice to a woman who represented a government program and who was violated while doing her job of upholding the law (see Mathur 1999).

44. Lest we think that this problematic blurring of the sacred liberal boundary is yet another example of the supposed dysfunctionality of Third World states, consider the reprimand that some U.S. humanitarian organizations received at the hands of a U.S. state official for not doing more public relations work for the U.S. government. Andrew Natsios, the head of USAID, was upset that people in Iraq and Afghanistan were unaware that the humanitarian assistance they were receiving came directly from the Bush government. In May 2003, Natsios effectively ordered U.S. NGOs to make it clear to their clients that they are an "arm of the US government" or else their contracts would be rescinded (Klein 2003). Furthermore, many NGOs receiving government funds were told not to speak to the media directly—any requests for interviews needed to be approved by Washington (Klein 2003). Any veneer of autonomy that the "N" in NGOs is supposed to connote comes easily undone.

45. See also Dean 1999 and Cruikshank 1999.

46. MS staff members often talked about and attempted to address internal program hierarchies—among staff members of different educational and professional backgrounds, English-speaking abilities, and geographical locations, and between staff members and program participants—that have resulted from the bureaucratization and professionalization of empowerment (see also Nagar and Raju 2003).

47. See Jandhyala 2001 for a critical discussion of these debates in India.

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ABSTRACT *This article explores the politics and practices of a state-initiated, feminist-conceived empowerment program for rural women in India through the lens of neoliberal governmentality. Structured as a government-organized nongovernmental organization (GONGO), the Mahila Samakhya (MS) program seeks to empower and mobilize marginalized women for self-development and social change. The program's GONGO form and empowerment goals articulate*

with neoliberal logics of self-care and destatized rule to reshape the postcolonial liberalizing state and governance in India. Neoliberalism and the everyday practices of the MS program construct the Indian state as a distinct and vertically encompassing, if ambiguously gendered, entity. The organization's hybrid form and its employment arrangements and work practices end up reinforcing some of the very social inequalities and welfare-based ideologies that its empowerment focus seeks to challenge. Nonetheless, collaborative governmental projects for subaltern women's empowerment, which involve feminist, activist, and state actors, offer spaces of political possibility as well as risks in a neoliberal context. [neoliberal governmentality, state, empowerment, feminism, India]