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## Deconstructing Theory-Practice: Re-Thinking Methodology

By Swarnima Kriti<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

This paper is based on an 'action research' work (in Mardapoti, a largely Gond Adivasi village in Chhattisgarh, India) on the 'gender-labor continuum in household spaces', where I, along with a group of young women and men (who are within the age group of sixteen to twenty-two) re-thought research as 'co-research with community' (and not *on* community) and methodology (as actioning research and researching action) in the context of transforming the extant structure of the sexual division of labor in the village and the household. Together, we worked towards a deconstructive relation with the problem of the scarcity of water to arrive, in turn, at the underlying problem of labor sharing among women and men in the household. Through this mixed group of young women and men, we tried to re-orient the young men to participate in household labor (especially that of fetching water from faraway sources). The experience of immersion (not fieldwork) in community contexts and the practice of engendering labor sharing in household spaces brought me to the threshold of questioning the existing set of methodologies; or perhaps questioning of methodologies brought me to the question of 'praxis'. The overdetermined experience of 'knowing the researched' and 'being of the researcher' are perhaps not enough for a methodology to be feminist. One perhaps needs to engage in transformative social praxis with women (and men). One needs to engage collaboratively with the community in researching of the problem and actioning based on those research findings for a possible feminist future (in this case the question of labor sharing). The paper argues that this branch of feminist methodology calls for questioning of strict compartmentalization of disciplines, which has made me (re)think binaries like natural science/social science, fact/value, objective/subjective. The paper in the process asks: What is knowledge? What makes knowledge possible? Is 'attachment' a hurdle in production of knowledge? Or does it facilitate a different kind of knowledge?

*Keywords:* Action Research, Gender-Labor, Immersion, Feminist Methodology, Praxis

### Introduction

The idea and argument that is being put forth in this paper is born out of 'action research' work in Mardapoti (a village in Chhattisgarh). This village is approximately ninety kilometers south of Raipur and situated at the Narharpur diversion on the Dhamtari-Nagri highway. The village has 73 households. This is largely a Gond<sup>2</sup> village (49 Gond households), with also Yadavs (10 households), Tamrakars (10 households), Muslims (2 households) and Devdas (2 households).

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<sup>2</sup>Gonds are an Adivasi community, who live in Central India and largely speak the Gondi language. They generally situate themselves in the governmental category of Schedule Tribe.

The action research work navigated through three immersion experiences to make sense of the question of ‘scarcity of water’ and its relationship with ‘labor’ within the household. This not-so-obvious-relationship between scarcity of water and the sexual division of labor was placed before me by a group<sup>3</sup> of young women and men who also helped me re-think research as co-research with community (and not on community), methodology (as actioning research and researching action) in the context of transforming the extant structure of the sexual division of labor. The group traversed and worked through the problem of ‘scarcity of water’ to collectively discover the knotted difficulty of labor sharing among young women and men. Through the mixed group of young women and men, we tried to re-orient the young men to participate in household labor (especially that of fetching water from faraway sources). Such experiences of immersion (*not* fieldwork) in community contexts and the practice of engendering labor-sharing in household spaces brought me to the threshold of questioning existing set of social science methodologies, methodologies that were circumscribed by the logic of knowing, whereas we tried to inaugurate questions and processes of ‘being’ and ‘doing’ along with ‘knowing’. Or perhaps, questioning existing methodologies brought me to the question of transformative praxis.

### Marking a Difference

Having presented this paper under the (technical) session title “the nature of research and writing by and about women” in the 4<sup>th</sup> World Conference on Women’s Studies, 2018, I wondered if the “about” in this question of research carries us to debates on vanguardism, or that which also resembles the basic co-ordinates of governance feminism<sup>4</sup>. The methodology of immersions partially discussed earlier, as against ‘field work’ takes us beyond research and writing ‘about’ or ‘on’ women. It reaches the new difficulty of co-research, of researching with women. I do not, however, elaborate on any model of success. I present, instead, one of the many ways of research and writing; in this case, an immersive way of research and writing. Thus, this paper parts its ways with one, research on women, two, methodologies of ‘knowing’ women, and, three, writings that are about women.<sup>5</sup> This paper thus underscores a different feminism—a feminism marked by both co-research and transformative social praxis. It is also a feminism intertwined with postcolonial perspectives in the Gond Adivasi contexts.

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<sup>3</sup> The group had been kept open for the young in the village, yet it had nine constant members of which six were young women and three were young men.

<sup>4</sup> Governance Feminism not only ‘has a will to power’, but ‘it has actual power’ which extends from the highest echelons of state (courts, legislatures, ministries, commissions, committees) to the whole range of private actors (corporate houses, corporate social responsibility agents, gender budgeting, NGOs) and “to the minute power dynamics that Foucault included in his theory of the governance of the self.” Governance feminists “[b]y positing themselves as *experts* on women, sexuality, motherhood...walk the halls of power” as they work closely with the state and law in the sphere of policy-making, legislation and litigation as well as in consciousness raising and grassroots campaigns. In their strategies there is a strong tendency towards accessing state-centered power through Law with an overwhelming emphasis on criminal law remedies and enforcement. Thus, we need to acknowledge that Governance Feminism has a dark side to it. In Janet Halley’s provocative words, “[t]hat dark side includes its vanquished, its prisoners of war...[it is] Feminism with blood on its hands.” Therefore, in the current legal milieu, unless feminism takes a break from itself, “it can’t see injury to men. It can’t see injury to men by women. It can’t see other interests, other forms of power, other justice projects” (see Vashisht, 2018).

<sup>5</sup> Though I must admit, the paper I write and the work I embark upon grapples with the idea of writings ‘by’ women (considering in turn the sense of ‘plurality’ or originary multiplicity that would haunt women’s writing), highlighting in the process the existing limits of translating ‘co-research’ into forms of ‘co-writing’.

The next section tries to develop a deeper understanding of ‘action research’ such that one can mark traces of co-research and transformative social praxis in it; such that one realizes the need to make a movement from ‘research’ to ‘action research’ and think through questions of practical philosophy, justice and well-being in feminist methodologies.

### **Revisiting Action Research**

This work does not just take to action research (as against research). It also revisits the extant and canonical idioms and methodologies of action research. Rethinking of action research, and not just the turn to action research, also contributes to rethinking of feminist methodologies. This turn to rethinking action research was brought to me by the Masters in Philosophy (MPhil) programme in Development Practice.

In the MPhil programme in Development Practice at Ambedkar University Delhi ([www.cdp.res.in](http://www.cdp.res.in))<sup>6</sup>, to study groups and unconscious group processes, to take a step towards transformations in the self, social and the political, we arrived at the idea of action research (Dhar, 2018b; p. 154-158). The idea was to enter a live laboratory with an unknown research question, hypothesis and methodology. In other words, it was about entering a functioning human situation, as if carrying the observational capacity of a psychoanalyst; not as an observer or an ethnographer, rather as a participant but not a passive participant, giving the process time, becoming a part of the situation and analysing the complexity of its unfolding layers. It was also about building a certain kind of adaptability. It was about unlearning first and then co-learning with the ‘community’; for it is only in the process of unlearning and co-learning that one can finally (although partially) solve the problem of translation between/among different life-worlds (in this case, ‘my’ life-world and the young group’s complex heterogeneous forms of being-in-the-world). The major aim that Development Practice as an action research programme manages to inaugurate through the process and journey of village immersions is to minimize the difficulty of translation between life-worlds; thus, I, as a Development Practice action researcher lived during my immersion in Mardapoti, at the boundaries of the two life-worlds for ten months. This section shall further analyse the changing nature and structure of action research since it was first conceived to the more recent period when it meets ‘immersion’ in the MPhil programme in Development Practice.

I shall discuss first the two known periods of the development of action research (Wallace, 1987; Kemmis, 1988; McTaggart, 1991; as cited in Carr, 2006). The first period (between the 1920s and 1950s) was marked by the “application of scientific methods to the study of social problems” and was pioneered by Kurt Lewin (Adelman, 1993; as cited in Carr, 2006). He developed a method of testing “the established laws of social life” in practice and in terms of their practical effectiveness (Lewin, 1952; as cited in Carr, 2006). This included devising of the ‘the action research method’ portrayed as a spiral of steps, each of which is composed of ‘a circle of ‘‘planning’’, ‘‘action’’ and ‘‘fact finding’’ about the result of the action’ (Lewin, 1946). The first period remained firmly wedded to the ‘applied science’ view of the relationship between social science and social change and was embedded in the epistemological assumptions endemic to the

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<sup>6</sup>Development Practice is an MPhil programme offered by Ambedkar University Delhi. This course enables scholars aspiring to engage in action research, to work in one of the five states – Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Orissa. These are largely *Adivasi* contexts where we work with the help of a non-governmental organization named PRADAN. One can further read about the programme on the website.

positivistic culture that largely dominated social sciences in the 1940s (Sanford, 1970; as cited in Carr, 2006).

The second period was marked by the ‘resurgence’ or ‘revival’ of action research in the context of educational, pedagogical and curriculum research in the UK in the early 1970s (Elliott, 1998; Kemmis, 1988; Stenhouse, 1975 as cited in Carr, 2006) that led to the rejection of a positivistic research methodology in favor of the kind of ‘interpretive’ methodologies that were increasingly being employed in the social sciences. Action research was mostly seen as a form of inquiry that utilized ‘qualitative’ rather than ‘quantitative’ research methods, that focused on the perspectives of participants and social actors (Kemmis, 1988; as cited in Carr, 2006) and that generally took the form of case studies of specific situations (Wallace, 1987; as cited in Carr, 2006). What distinguished this revised version of action research was a radically different conception of its object of study. Whereas Lewin and his followers had construed ‘action’ as little more than a practical skill or technique to be assessed in terms of its instrumental effectiveness, its principle exponents now (post the ‘revival’ of action research in the social sciences) insisted that ‘action’ referred to an ethics of practice (as also practice of ethics), including well-being and justice considerations, which in turn, was understood as ethically informed ‘transformative social action’ through which certain values were pursued (Elliott, 1991; as cited in Carr, 2006). Practice was thus viewed by action researchers as informed committed transformative social action (Kemmis, 1988; as cited in Carr, 2006). As a result, action research was no longer seen as a method for assessing the practical utility of social scientific theories but as a means whereby researchers, activists and practitioners could in turn test the ‘theories’ implicit in their own practice by treating them as experimental hypotheses to be systematically assessed in specific (largely educational) contexts. Reviewed and revised in this way, Lewin’s action research cycle was transformed from a method by which practitioners applied social scientific theories to their practice into a method which allowed researchers, activists and practitioners to assess the practical adequacy of their own tacit theories ‘in action’ (Elliott, 1991, 1998; as cited in Carr, 2006); transformative social action could now give birth to new theories. One had also moved from mere practice to praxis and from *poiesis* (i.e. making/production/repetition) to *phronesis* (i.e. reflexive doing in particular contexts) (Dhar, 2018a). One had also moved from the applied science model to the process of reflexive praxis. There was, however, one fundamental lacuna. In the second period, the community was not included in the action research. The action research question emerged from the community context (which is why the second period is not application of knowledge produced elsewhere), say the classroom, but did not emanate from the community, say the community of students in the classroom.

Building on the two periods described above, I come to the third period. In the third period, action research question comes *from* the community (and not just from the community context) and its experiences of discrimination, injustice, marginalization etc.; say ‘pani ke samasya’. The community and the researcher thereafter co-researched the ‘problem’ and co-worked towards a solution. The solution integrated self, social and political transformation. The third period sees action research as a modern manifestation of a much older tradition of practical philosophy but with which one has perhaps lost touch. The third period turns to (a) the old and short-lived Socratic urge to be in the polis (Arendt, 2005), (b) *praxis* (Marx, 2016), (c) the coordination of brain and hand (Tagore, 2011 [1925]), (d) *phronesis* (Heidegger, 1985) and (e) the “slave’s know-how” (Lacan, 2007; [a] to [e] as cited in Dhar, 2018a) as against the hyper-separation of one, “thought and action” (Arendt, 2005; as cited in Dhar, 2018a) and two, the world of knowing (*theoria*), world of making (*poiesis*) and the world of doing (*praxis*) (Carr 2006; as cited in Dhar, 2018a). Action

research in the third period is thus a form of research that understands ‘knowing’, ‘being’ and ‘doing’ in its deeper and interrelated complexity. It is through a deeper exploration of questions of ‘being’ that deeper ‘knowing’ can be attained and a meaningful ‘doing’ can happen in turn.

Through immersion and living in the village one cannot but enter into a relationship with the people in the village. This relationship can vary in its nature, but it does exist. Such action research then keeps space for a blurring, even if limited, of the differences between worlds of the researcher and the community co-researchers. This difference gets blurred specifically through processes of unlearning and co-learning. Conducting a research through knowingness or through a priori axioms fail us in the creation or engendering of new knowledge; all the more if knowledge is to be co-created. Knowingness constitutes itself as a hurdle in group work; thus to be able to move ahead we must go back, we must forget and forgo. Such research does not study a community, but enables a search that the community (co-researcher) and the scholar (action researcher) undertake together.

Action research distinguishes itself from any other form of research through the difficult conduit of transformative social action or praxis. Action research moves beyond merely simple, complex or analytic reading of a situation to reach a common or shared problematic. The need of reality is perhaps more than what natural, social or psychologised sciences can provide in their bounded upbringing. In uncontrolled conditions, that which recognizes *dis-ease* (not disease) and identifies with social suffering, a need asserts itself for something to be done. Action research then plans to do something or perform an action in context of the problem it encounters in the village. Though we should be clear that, an unthought, unreflected, uncritical action is worse than non-action; action research hence hopes to combine critical theory and reflective/nuanced practice to create context serving praxis. Action research through its concrete shift from ‘knowing and doing’ to ‘being, (un)knowing and (un)doing’ brings the space of development practice and that of the university as knowledge producers closer to each other.

The greater aim of research however has been knowledge production, one that is closest to actuality, but the broader “inherited divisions of fact/value, sensory-experience/lived-experience, objective/subjective, universalism/contextualism, explanation/interpretation” (Dhar *et al*, 2017, p. xx) restrict access to real knowledge. Knowledge “need to interrupt each other, so as to give birth to possible third spaces<sup>7</sup>, rather than be simple add-ons which do not disturb the basic premises of each discipline” (ibid., p. xxi; italics and footnote mine). As practice is interjected by theory, and as theory is interjected by practice, it gives rise to praxis. The request for functioning in the village in a certain way, does not aim or preach for an unreflective union of opposites, but an analytical shift to understanding union itself, *encore*. For example, the experience of community dining in the village can be a value laden fact. It is an experience that is both lived and sensory. It is an event that has several truths and several myths. Practice thus sits uneasily at the cusp of fact and value, sensory experience and lived experience, as also objective and subjective axes; because practice is both an off-shoot of reality and reality is in turn an offshoot of practice. Reality however is never one; reality is rather bent, dented, sometimes broken into pieces that we rather fit in our limited understandings of bineric frameworks. The naive oscillations between constructed opposites in theory have left spaces between sameness and difference as clogged and undiscovered. Thus, a moment of oneness and beyond has to be captured between the two; to decipher the best of both and yet, more.

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<sup>7</sup>It is such *possible third spaces* that I would later argue for under what Diotima calls the ‘in-between’.

### **Foregrounding ‘Outsideness’ of Adivasi Life-World and Feminist-Feminine Attributes**

The action research work I undertook in Dhamtari, Chhattisgarh was undertaken in a largely Gond Adivasi village/context. Thus, this section will focus on highlighting the ‘outsideness’ of this context and its attributes. The discussion brings to light difficulties of action research in Adivasi contexts, in contexts where the “other” must not be reduced to logic of the “same” (see Irigaray, 1993). It is on such grounds that I urge for a ‘new’ methodology; one that has some ability to address the nuanced realities of this context.

The Adivasi context where I worked, has for some time been undergoing ‘cleansing’ in the name of development. The Adivasi form of life has been represented as primitive and understood as the past stage/state of a westernized modern developed face of India. In this context, the Adivasi must “...retire into history [and into museumized artifacts], vacating space for more spectacular [forms of capital-centric] development...” (Chitranshi & Dhar, 2016, p.4). The Adivasi is, as if, the lacking other—the underdeveloped other of a narcissistic resurgent India, an India that lives as a split subject between being egoist and feelings of inferiority—an inferiority it projects on to the Adivasi. In the midst of such a discourse and politics of development the Adivasi emerges as the living dead (Chitranshi & Dhar, 2016) that erases or sacrifices its own past and present to fulfill the dream of a capital-centric, westernized, modern and developed India (ibid.). As development creates ‘dependent’, ‘underdeveloped’, ‘psychologically malnourished’ subjects (who are made to believe they belong to the register and realm of the past, who need to be dynamic, who need to change as soon as possible and who are made to live in the guilt of being who they are), ‘development practice’ remains incapable of accessing the life-world, experience, suffering, grief, and pain, as also joy of the Adivasi ‘community’. Development has created its own narrative that we as subjects have learnt to recite at every possible event; such that problems in the ‘rural’ become limited to infrastructural development and the State-sponsored deepening of the ‘beneficiary psyche’. Data and statistics about such life-worlds look to be emotionally impoverished, and psychologically detached. Developmentalist social science manages to see only the smooth surface workings of such life-worlds whereas the “other” suffers within and beneath. Such suffering remains unknown, remains crypted. While extant natural science and social science largely lack the ability to feel pain and identify with suffering, Adivasi reality on the other hand looks to be entrenched in both.

Thus, Adivasi logic-language-ethos remain crypted, remain outside the knowledge systems, that have created their respective methodologies. A closer engagement with this life-world reveals its experience of “outsideness”, where they have most often been worked on and for but not worked with. Which methodology do we then carry to these spaces? Perhaps we need a deeper understanding, a new logic and a new methodology to interact with an Adivasi life-world.

Further, women and the woman question (especially those from Adivasi contexts) have similarly remained excluded. In recent times—through the efforts of the women’s and the feminist movement in India—women have been included within institutions and within discourse; but gendered perspectives and feminist-feminine attributes still remain largely absent. Absence of women and the woman’s perspective brought philosophy and nature of knowledge into question. “In a series of influential books and articles, the traditional stance of the man of reason (independent, neutral, and unemotional) was shown to be an illusory ideal, made possible only when fundamental features of human nature were bracketed and then dismissed as “womanly”” (Falmagne & Hass, 2002, p. 2).

A masculine omnipotence has taken over the logic and lens of the world such that feminine logic (which is not necessarily the logic of femininity; the invocation of the logic of the “two lips”

by Irigaray as against dry erectility of “phallic logic” is closer to what could be provisionally designated feminine logic; feminine logic puts to question two-valued logic; feminine logic inaugurates the *écriture* feminine) has got “foreclosed” (Dhar, 2012). This is not only about the choking tentacles of patriarchy and androcentrism but of the giant invisible phallogocentric culture that we are absorbed in. Andrea Nye’s *Words of Power: A feminist reading of the history of logic* found formal logic guilty of powerful suppressions of speech/expressions that had little capacity of resistance. The constant quilting of experience in formal logic, according to Nye, is a secret desire for power and control (ibid., 2002, p. 3). Trudy Grovier finds the neutral looking norms of formal logic also serving forms of repression and silencing (ibid., 2002, p. 3). The desire for power and control, laws of repression and silencing have always had a sexual backbone. Thus, such a context requires a deeper analysis of language, logic and reasoning. Irigaray “...argues that the supposedly neutral symbolic mechanism conceals a hidden isomorphism with our cultural structuration of masculinity” (Hass, 2002, p. 71). Irigaray finds empirical evidence to state that language is never sexually neutral. *When law, language and logic that birth and raise (action) research methods and methodologies are tainted with biasness, perhaps we need a new logic and new methodologies.* Irigaray’s response to such prejudice has been “towards an alternative representational structure that can serve as a counterpoint by symbolizing that which remains necessarily un-symbolized in the system” (ibid., p. 71). The structures of law, language, logic and economy lack the touch of the feminine; the feminine essentially represents women’s bodies through the selective imagery of flow, fluidity, indefiniteness etc. Against this foundation, this paper explores new methodologies—at the cusp of feminism and action research—that can be more reflexive in their nature.

### **Undoing Binaries: Re-Doing Methodologies**

As I create space for discussions on a different methodology, that which we (the development practice [not development management/intervention] community) call ‘immersion’, it becomes important to spell out its meaning. Immersion presents itself in this paper as a constant and troubling parallel to existing forms of methodologies. Immersion builds on the realization that “reality is complex and quasi-natural” (Dhar *et al*, 2017, p. xx); and perhaps an interdisciplinary peeping into knowledge of reality—as also an integration of natural and human science perspectives to reality—would give us a comprehensive view. Understanding reality through the compartmentalized lens caught in the system of binaries or that of perceived opposites perhaps are not enough. The paper creates space for a holistic perspective. On most days in the village I have found myself ill-equipped in methodology to study realities that function under uncontrolled conditions (where people, time, weather conditions, subjectivities, everyday occurrences etc. are never constant). The action research work hence had to draw upon multiple knowledge systems (Psychology, Political Science, Sociology, Anthropology and so on) to cater to an overdetermined contingent reality that is constitutively created of natural science, social science, myths, lived experiences, cultural norms/values, practice of community legislations etc. to reach a nuanced sense of practice as also a nuanced and reflective practice of transformation – transformation with considerations of social justice and well-being in mind; where nuanced and reflective practice is the flash of critically reconstituted theory—reconstituted not in the classroom but in the field—amidst largely *Gond* life-worlds. This is also important because on the one hand, this work operates at the cusp of “politics of water” (which in conventional developmental discourse and practice looks to be a natural science question) and on the other, the “politics of the continuum of gender-



labor” (which again in the standard practices of gender empowerment is seen as a social science question). The work at the intersection of the two in Mardapoti necessitates the integration of natural and human science perspectives and perspectives of theory and practice to reach an action (a care system that is both sustainable and sensitive). Reality, life and living are a conglomeration and complex coming together of natural science-social science, theory-practice, truths-illusions, facts-values, sensory-lived experiences etc. Immersion enables the action researcher to reach its co-researchers not only through ‘one’ disciplinary lens but through what lies ‘in-between’ them.

### **The In-Between**

Irigaray in “Sorcerer Love: A Reading of Plato, Symposium, “Diotima’s Speech”” from her book, “An Ethics of Sexual Difference” (1993) breaks down ‘binaries’ and explores the ‘in-between’. Diotima, through her rendition of dialectics, establishes an intermediary as a means or a path that reaches a ‘third’ term which is non-destructive and non-reductive of the two terms but which nevertheless is a progression: “from poverty to wealth, from ignorance to wisdom, from mortality to immortality” (Irigaray, 1993, p. 21). Similarly this paper makes space for a third, a third beyond and yet born out of – natural science and social science, practice and theory, fact and value, sensory and lived experiences as also knowledge and reality. Irigaray through her invocation of the in-between urges for an engagement between thought and living, life and labor, love and touch etc. As Irigaray re-produces Diotima, she opens up reflection on the enmeshed ontology of praxis; she breaks into the reality/knowledge divide. As for Diotima, knowledge is born from reality and reality is born through knowledge. Thus, to reach wisdom we would have to unblock roads of the in-between, and to attain wisdom our theories will have to confront experience. Knowledge in the Adivasi life-worlds are not manuscripts in libraries, they are living traditions that reach every generation with some gain and some loss; as remainders that are also reminders of their uncanny non-existence, their erasure by the discourse of development. In the experience of immersion there is no theory devoid of the everyday and no everyday bereft of theory; where knowledge is not restricted to questions of science or myth, but grows through engagement with emotions – one’s own as also that of the community; the relationship between one’s own and that of the community; the point where the two meet.

Knowledge is thus, partially premised upon the relationship between the researcher and the community. But to get into a relationship one needs to be in contact; one needs to be in touch; not in physical contact or touch that demands proximity; rather touching the other’s life-world. It is in this regard that during immersion the researcher stays for ten months in the village; to at least be in touch or reach the other’s (the community’s) life-world. Immersion then is a way of engagement that facilitates building of relationships among the researchers; especially between the action researcher and her/his co-travelers. Immersion becomes an important mode to cater to the two important words in the stated title of this session which are— “research(er)” and “women”. I understand ‘woman’ in its constitutive multiplicity/plurality; the category woman cannot but operate under the umbrella of an originary multiplicity/plurality. During the experience of immersion the researcher lives with a host family in the village and shares with them their everyday lifestyle, food habits, labor habits, language etc. The researcher’s everyday constantly rubs against the rural (most times Adivasi; most times women’s) life-worlds. It is through such efforts and experiences that the(action) researcher connects to the multiplicity/plurality that the term “woman”

carries; such that one reaches the complexity of subjectivities and life histories scribbled, as if, on the mystic pad<sup>8</sup>. This, in turn, complicates the intrigues of relationality.

Diotima says, “If we did not, at each moment, have something to learn from an encounter with reality, between reality and already established knowledge, we would not perfect ourselves in wisdom” (Irigaray, 1993, p. 21). Thus, wisdom in immersions is also a question of self-transformation. It becomes important for the research to consider how does the ‘being’ of the researcher connect to the ‘being’ of the community, catering in turn to the dynamics of desire and transference. Quoting Diotima, “... contrary to the usual methods of dialectics, one should not have to give up “love” in order to become wise or learned. It is love that leads to knowledge, whether in art or more metaphysical learning” (Irigaray 1993, p. 21). Diotima creates space for an action researcher as an involved participant; for a lover cannot not be involved. She discards the process of observation without involvement, for she says “love leads to knowledge”. The urge to re-learn learnings tied to the relationships in the village—relationships of trust, dependence, value, interest, love, gratitude, honor etc. Thus love, knowledge and the barefoot philosopher walk together in immersions; they walk towards transformative social praxis. But what is knowledge? What is love? And who is a philosopher?

For Diotima, ‘eros’—which is one of the many forms of love—is the child of plenty and poverty. Having been the child of poverty “eros is always poor, rough, unkept, unshod, and homeless” ... “yet again, in keeping with his father, eros urges for the beautiful and good, is bold, intense, eager in invention, searching after wisdom and so on (Irigaray, 1993, p. 23). Like Eros, the one who stands between ignorance and knowledge remains the seeker of wisdom. Knowledge being also a quest for love—love for several things (beauty, wisdom, etc.)—leaves the philosopher as a ‘seeker’. Irigaray believes that the philosopher, should be poor, dirty, unhoused, struggling, but curious, skilled in ruses and tricks, a sorcerer, a sophist and so on; giving us in turn an imagination that completely remains opposite to how philosophers are—a well-dressed, learned person with good manners and who knows everything (Irigaray, 1993, p. 24). Diotima’s practical philosopher resembles the action researcher who is like a “barefoot waif who goes out under the stars seeking an encounter with reality, the embrace, the knowledge or perhaps a shared birth...of whatever benevolence, beauty, or wisdom might be found there” (Irigaray, 1993, p. 24).

‘Knowing’ born out of love, affect, care, relationality and such kinds of involvement-attachment is ‘different’ for it remains inspired by what is in-between the apparent two (i.e. the researcher and the community). Similarly, the action or the ‘doing’ born out of an ‘involved-attached knowing’ is different. My journey in Mardapoti since January, 2016 shall perhaps give us a sense of what I am, while in search of a better phrase, is designating ‘involved-attached knowing-doing’. January to February 2016 was my first immersion in Mardapoti. During the first immersion, I tried to understand the context of the village; although the tools to understand the village were different than the standard tools of personal interviews, surveys, focused discussions etc. I would rather work with the women, walk to the forests with them, help them collect forest products, play with the children, work in the fields, etc. During the second immersion that started in July, 2016, I would generally work in the fields with the women for it was the agriculture season,

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<sup>8</sup> The mystic pad is deployed as a metaphor for the human psyche by Freud (1925) in his essay “A Note upon the ‘Mystic Writing Pad’.” One could write on the surface sheet/layer of this pad and eventually also erase the written note on the surface sheet/layer. Impressions none the less remained on the wax slab below. Freud looked at the surface/primary layer to be the system of perception-consciousness and the deeper wax slab to be our unconscious. Freud thus highlighted the uncanny functioning of how our everyday life leave illegible traces on our unconscious and how such traces in turn affect conscious life.

and as we worked we discussed issues of violence, water, health etc. During the second immersion we (women in the village and I) reached the question of ‘scarcity of water’ as their primary concern. In January 2017, when I came back for the third immersion I continued to research the question of scarcity of water, although this time with young unmarried women and men. Gradually, the issue of ‘scarcity of water; unfolded into ‘unequal division of labor’ (or the ‘sexual division of labor’) as the root cause of their concern rather than mere availability of water; a concern that women wanted to deal with by installing ‘Nal Jal Yojna’ or the tap water system; which was a displaced solution for a problem that could not be directly dealt with, given the extant structures of patriarchy. The concern for young women who labored extensively through the day and carried buckets of water from the source to their homes, made us (including the men in the group) rethink our actions, as well as our solutions; the problem was not just the dis-ease but the cure or the nature of the cure as well. An unattached research would have left a lot of space to conclude ‘Nal Jal Yojna’ or tap water system in the village as the primary solution; but, an attached-involved co-research (that took approximately six months stay in the village to reach the problematic) found that the discontent was inside the household and not outside. Having reached this ‘self-knowledge’, the group of young women and men thought through sharing of household labor in the community (between women and men); and their first step was towards transforming themselves. The three young men in this group started working towards transforming themselves, but they had to constantly fight their old habits, their peers, their fathers and finally, the ‘image of man’. The young men in the group walked against the stream as they gradually started helping in or contributing to household labor. At the end, the group scripted and planned to perform a play that highlighted experiences of the young women in the group. They finally performed the play on 26<sup>th</sup> January, 2019.

This paper thus brings together an experience of co-researching and collaborative collective action with a mixed group of young women and men while the action researcher was in immersion in a rural Adivasi context. The transformative praxis thus engendered was constitutive of self, social and political transformation.

## **Conclusion**

The paper thus argues for five inter-related departures in the context of feminist methodologies:

One, it argues for a movement from conventional research to action research; such that one does not just research on women and write on women, but also tries to “right the wrongs” in women’s life-worlds.

Two, it argues for a movement from fieldwork, including participatory observation to immersion.

Three, it argues for a movement from disciplinary silos to integrating natural and social science perspectives in action research. Or perhaps, action research requires an integration and movement beyond extant silos.

Four, it argues for a movement from ‘detached knowledge-making’ to ‘attached knowledge-making’—thus making a case for (a) Immersion-based relational knowledge and (b) a breaking of the binary of reason-emotion.

Five, it argues for a movement from researching on communities to researching with communities, including collaborative transformation of the self and the social in group contexts (in this case a group of young women and men).

The paper argues, its time the ‘discourse in/of the university’ meets ‘practice’ and vice versa, it’s time we move from mere interpretations to transformative social praxis. However, a shift to transformative social praxis would need *new* techniques or a new tool box, that I call methodology in this paper, such that transformation in the social through praxis can be worked towards. The new methodology, and I hesitate to say “new”, urges for (a) an attached-involved perspective and (b) a critically charged theoretical lens so as to be able to deconstruct effects of hegemony. This framework tries to problematize the hierarchy between the researcher and the researched to reach a model of co-researching, one that credits the “slave’s know-how” or the subaltern *lokavidya* (Basole, 2013), and thus, inevitably works towards making the boundaries of hitherto detached disciplines/perspectives porous. This work remains important to me because compartmentalization of theory and practice may be threatening. For example, an uncritical and unreflective practice of feminism—the emergent need to be empowered (which at times turns to be-ing ‘masculine’) and the leaving behind of the (Irigarayan) ‘feminine’—may end up leaving us further trapped in the phallogocentric structure or the hegemony of the masculine. Thus, the form of feminism I propose in this paper is marked by a “philosophy of praxis—which in turn is related to a) lived experiences in our gendered lives, b) an insistent need to keep in touch with ground realities and c) deeper analytical understandings of hegemonic structures that produce them.

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