

## **Introduction**

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It all started in February 2015. An impossible path was put to exploration. Is it possible to continue work – action research work – in the village in which one had done her Immersion during the MPhil? Is it possible to extend the existing action research work to adjacent villages or to a block or district? Would one *expand* the work to include more villages? Or would one *deepen* the work in the host village? But to do so or explore these difficult questions one had to take a few not-so-usual steps. One, one had to free oneself of the model of continuing education: MA followed by MPhil followed by PhD in step ladder succession. Post-MPhil, one could explore the possibility - however difficult - of long term engagement with rural and forest societies as also with adivasi and Dalit life-worlds and worldviews. Two, one had to reduce one's financial need; one would now have to survive with a small action research fellowship; small; very small. It meant travel by train; not flights. Three, one had to set up home far away from Delhi; in a remote rural location of central or eastern India; close to or adjacent to the forest. Most adivasi (indigenous) inhabitants in these parts of India usually lived close to the forest. It meant a life away from the comforts of urban metropolitan life. It meant a turning away from the seduction of capital. It also meant a turn to the life-world of the subaltern; not to study 'it'; but to relate; engage; connect; if possible transform. Transform self; transform Other; transform the self-Other relationship. Would it mean a partial subalternizing of the elite – albeit incomplete, albeit inadequate – and not just an

elitizing of the subaltern? Elitizing the subaltern looks to be the paradigmatic philosophy and path of mainstream development. Could one approach 'development' from the other side, from the side of the subalternization of the elite, subalternization of ourselves? Would it mean a revisiting of the long-lost elite-subaltern relationship? Would it mean a revisiting of the familiar – all too familiar – steps of knowledge-generation and the standard pre-occupation of the elite: *research*? Would it mean a revisiting of standard models of practice and transformation in the development sector as also in politics? Would it mean a rewriting of the discourse of development? Including the discourse of developmental praxis? Would it mean a re-envisioning of the theory-practice divide? Would it then – in the last instance- mean a re-searching of methodologies? One thus did not take methodology to the space of research. One did not just search for methods and methodologies. *One researched methodologies itself, in itself*. One also took the Lacanian maxim seriously: “There is no such thing as a sexual relationship” as marking, somewhat analogously, the incompleteness at the heart and “origin of subjectivity” as also the “ultimate deadlock”, or impasse, or impossibility in the process of setting up of a relationship between ‘elite’ and ‘subatarn’.

This volume brings together the action research efforts of seven “catalytic agents” – catalytic to transformative praxis in just and ethical directions (including considerations of well-being) – in central India, in adivasi or Dalit villages, or forest societies. It is not a mere documentation of their action research work in the developmental sector. It is a reflection on the methodology they deployed or failed to deploy. It is a kind of looking back at their work in the ‘rearview mirror’. In terms of the methodology of their work. In terms of Immersion, Co-Researching, Collective Action, Group Processes and Group Formation(s); and how they researched methodologies;

how they reflected on methodologies and put to partial praxis minor methodological alternatives.