

Proof

Part III

**Imagining an ‘Other’
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7 What if the university is a *parrot's training*?

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Once upon a time there was a bird. . . . It sang songs, but did not read the scriptures. It flew, it jumped, but did not have the faintest sense of etiquette. The King said, "Such birds! They are of no use at all . . .". He called the minister, and commanded, "Educate it". . . . The scholars held long discussions, the subject being "What is the reason behind the foolishness of this creature?" The conclusion was: much learning could not be stored in the tiny nest that the bird could make with just chips and twigs. So, first of all, it was necessary to build a good cage¹ for it. . . . The goldsmith started building the cage. . . . Some said, "Education indeed!" Others said, "Education or no education, at least the bird has got the cage! . . .". The pundit came to teach the bird. He took a pinch of snuff and said, "A few books won't do". The nephew summoned the scribes. They copied from the books and copied from those copies and made an enormous mound of such things. Whoever saw it, said, "Bravo! Learning is going to overflow!" . . . The King wished to see for himself the lightning speed at which education was proceeding. . . . And he saw it. Very pleasing indeed. The method was so overwhelming compared to the bird that one could hardly notice the bird. . . . There was no corn in the cage, no water either. Only heaps of pages [and Course *Outlines*] had been torn out from heaps of books; and with the tip of a pen, those pages were being stuffed into the bird's mouth. There was no room in the mouth for the bird to squeeze out a cry, let alone a tune. It was really a terribly pleasing sight.

- Rabindranath Tagore in *The Parrot's Training*

What if Tagore was offered a professorship in (comparative) literature in the University of Calcutta after he was awarded the Nobel Prize? What would Tagore have done? Would he have taken up the position? Or would he have stuck to *Santiniketan* (the "abode of peace")? Why did Tagore in the first instance set up *Santiniketan*? Was it a rejection

of the then existing University of Calcutta, set up largely by the British, by the *colonizer*? Was it a rejection of the university (system), a system that trains students and inducts them into capital-logic, the temporal rhythm of industrialism (even if students are being fed on ‘critiques of industrialization’ in class) and the everyday practice of putting labour-power in the market as commodity?² What was wrong with the extant idea of the university that Tagore had to reject it?

Was it simply because the idea of the university was always already coloured with colonizing intentions? Was it because it was an ‘alien’ plant born in a distant land/soil; the plant-soil metaphor recurs in Tagore’s writings (see “Founding of a New Education” [Tagore 2011]) on what he calls his “educational crusade”:

if you want to grow a tree on the sandy soil of a rainless desert, then you not only have to borrow your seed from some distant land, but also the soil itself and the water. Yet, . . . the tree grows up miserably stunted; and even if it does bear fruit, the seeds do not mature. The education that we receive from our universities . . . is for cultivating a hopeless desert, and that not only the mental outlook and the knowledge, but also the whole language must bodily be imported from across the sea. And this makes our education so nebulously *distant* and *unreal*.

(Tagore 2011: 158)

Or were there deeper critiques, critiques beyond education being an alien apparatus? Was it then a rejection of the ‘university’ as a concept?

Was Tagore setting up in *Santiniketan* the other kind of university,³ a university that was marking difference with the university imagination itself, a university that was not a university in the classical (European/Western) sense? Tagore argues that the students of the European universities not only have their “human environment of culture”, they also acquire their learning “direct from their teachers”. We have, on the other hand, “our hard flints, which give us disconnected sparks after toilsome blows; and the noise is a great deal more than the light. These flints are the abstractions of learning; they are solid methods, inflexible and cold” (such methods are like “hard-boiled eggs from which you cannot expect chickens to come out” [Tagore 2011: 151]). “To our misfortune we have, in our own country, all the furniture [i.e. we have the cage] of the European University – except the human teacher” (Tagore 2011: 156) and “like Hanuman of our ancient Epic, who, not knowing which herb might be wanted, had to carry away the

whole mountain top”, the students, “unable to use the language intelligently, have to carry in their heads the whole of the book by rote” (Tagore 2011: 159).

We [thus] have, instead, merely purveyors of book-lore, in whom the paper god of the bookshop seems to have made himself vocal. And, as a natural result, we find our students to be ‘untouchable’, even to our Indian professors. These teachers distribute their doles of mental food, gingerly and from a dignified distance, raising walls of notebooks between themselves and their students. This kind of food is neither relished, nor does it give nourishment. It is a famine ration strictly regulated, to save us, not from emancipation, but only from absolute death. . . . Our education to us is like the carriage to a horse; a bondage, the dragging of which merely serves to provide it with food and shelter in the stable of the master (more on the ‘Master’ and the relationship between ‘Master’ and ‘University’ in the next section); the horse has not the same freedom of relationship with the carriage as its owner, and therefore the carriage ever remains for it an imposition of beggarly necessity. (Tagore 2011: 157)

While Tagore’s journey was premised on a critique of the mindless adoption of the European model of the University (Indian universities were like deserts absorbing rain water, and not ponds which contribute in turn to rain clouds), he also had a deeper critique: the critique of university as such. Tagore inaugurated in *Santiniketan*⁴ and thereafter in *Sriniketan* (the ‘abode of the aesthetic’) the perspective of praxis; praxis as the foreclosed of the university imagination – an imagination steeped in and limited to the learning, teaching, writing of the cognitivist sciences; while the classical imagination of the university sharpened largely the cognitive and the intellectual self, Tagore inaugurated in the ‘culture of the self’ the creative expression and praxis of the affective, the aesthetic, and the ethical; the praxis of being-in-the-world which is “disclosed”; being-with-nature; the praxis of labouring activities in the “average everydayness” of the ashram; the praxis of self- and social transformation. Tagore’s turn to *Santiniketan* and *Sriniketan* could be seen as a departure from the classical university imagination and from the kind of cognitivist student subject the university mass-produces; such mass production of cognitive student subjects in turn creates a culture of *turning away* from the masses; more on the history of this turning away in the context of the birth of western philosophy in Plato’s dialogues below.

Thus “Tagore, intellectually, was not only outgrowing the discursive liminalities of official nationalism [see Dhar and Chakrabarti 2017: 53–6] but was also formulating his own theories of the nation-building project [we argue in this paper, how Sriniketan could also be seen as his way of nation-building; where building, re-creating, re-constructing the gravel strewn rural everyday emerge as the ideal kind of nation-building] . . . and the hugely important role education and educational institutions should play in that grand exercise. Hence, his attention, for a longish period, became steadfastly focused on his . . . schools, . . . one in Santiniketan and the other in Sriniketan” (Roy 2010: 679). Santiniketan as an institution of [elite] pedagogy and Sriniketan as an institution of grassroots level *transformative social praxis* – praxis that is patient, long term, sustainable and non-violent, praxis that could lead to non-coercive reorganizations of the graph of desire, involving the life, worlds and philosophies as also *lokavidyas* (see Basole 2015) of subaltern bricoleurs – are two path-breaking imaginations of institution building, imaginations fundamentally different from the models of institutions hitherto given in modernity. Santiniketan and Sriniketan would, for Tagore, “ultimately bridge the ever-widening gap between the country and the city; a gap, that originated from the unleashing of forces of ‘colonial modernity’ by the imperial rulers” (Roy 2010: 679). Especially Sriniketan, which was the site for projects of rural reconstruction (*not* rural development⁵), co-operative movements, agricultural banking, and new methods in agriculture, largely amongst adivasis, etc. Tagore states in the Prospectus (1925) for “A Viswa-Bharati Institute for Rural Reconstruction at Sriniketan”:

The aim of the Institute [founded near the village of Surul] is to train its apprentices [not more than twenty; anyone who has passed matriculation and is seventeen years of age is eligible; the course lasts two years; most of the students are drawn from the cities] as to enable them to not only earn their livelihood but to equip themselves for initiating village welfare and reconstruction work, and to stimulate among villagers . . . the spirit of self-help. It is required, however, that an apprentice should have learnt beforehand the *coordination of brain and hand*.

(Tagore 2011: 137–9)

The objectives of Sriniketan were: (1) “to bring back life in its completeness into the villages making them self-reliant and self-respectful, acquainted with the cultural tradition of their own country, and

competent to make an efficient [and critical] use of the modern resources”, (2) “to win the friendship and affection of the villagers and cultivators by taking real interest in all that concerns their life and . . . by making a lively effort to assist them in solving their most pressing problems”, (3) “to take the problems of the village and field to the classroom”, (4) “to carry the knowledge and experience gained in the classroom and experimental farm [back] to the villages” etc. The coordination between brain and hand, thought and action, theory and practice, however, remained central in Sriniketan.

Lacan meets Tagore at Sriniketan

When the time comes for our thinkers and intellectuals to take agricultural activities under their responsibility, the schism that at present exists between the hand and the brain . . . will vanish.

(Tagore 2011: 139)

Tagore's critique of the classical university imagination and of the cognitivist perspective (Tagore's writings and Tagore's actions – i.e. Tagore's *turning away* from the kind of *parrot's training* universities impart and the creation of *Santiniketan* for practices of self-transformation through the realization of creative freedom and *Sriniketan* for practices of social transformation through 'rural reconstruction' – stand testimony to such a critique) finds a somewhat surprising ally in Lacan's (2007 [1969–70]) enumeration of the Discourse of the University *on the side* of the Master's Discourse, i.e. on the side of the master-as-oppressor, and of 'reaction'. We were expecting the Discourse of the University to be *on the other side* of the Master's Discourse, to be on the side of the lived experience and discourse of the 'slave'; the university looked to be aligned with the world of the 'slave'; which is also why we feel the need to protect the university; hence the incitement around a protectionist discourse on the university. Does the *existing* university need protection? Or does the university need *re-form*? Does the university need to shed its old habits and re-conceptualize itself anew? Does the university need to exist because the masses are in awe of whatever is going on inside the university? Or would 'legitimacy' among the masses be the ground and cordon of protection; a legitimacy that is born not out of the 'male perspective' ("my seed; my son"), but out of a culture of being-with-Others, a culture of caring connection with the masses? What is or should the university be: the secret theoretical justification for *turning away* or the ground and creation of the "potentiality-for-being-in-the-world"?

What, however, is the Discourse of the University? Lacan, unlike Foucault, talks of only Four Discourses: the Discourse of the University, the Master's Discourse, the Hysteric's Discourse, and the Analyst's Discourse. Discourse is for Lacan the structure of a "fundamental relation" "of one signifier to another" and from this relation emerges what Lacan calls "the subject" (Lacan 2007: 13). And all four discourses revolve around a fundamental impossibility: of education, of mastery, of "inciting of desire", and of analysis. Let us discuss the Discourse of the Master first; all the more because the Discourse of the University, contrary to all expectation, looks to be apposite to and not the opposite of the Master's Discourse. The Discourse of the Master can be seen in the master-slave relation or in authoritarianism where a 'master signifier' standing in for the master/dictator issues orders. In the Discourse of the Master, a master/dictator would speak from the position of agent unaware of its *own* vulnerability. Charlie Chaplin's *Great Dictator* is a representation of the rather tragico-comic relation between the master as actually a vulnerable subject and the master signifier as authoritarian agent; the menacing yet flaccid father or the authoritarian yet vulnerable man in a patriarchal culture is also representative of such a Master's Discourse. Let us now move to the Discourse of the University and its relationship with the Master's Discourse. The Discourse of the University is common to the educational context, where the master signifier is 'unconscious original knowledge' that supports the knowledge that is to be taught in say the classroom context, and the knowledge that is to be taught is addressed to the student-lacking-in-knowledge. The Discourse of the University, according to Lacan, is the secret rationalization of the Master's Discourse; it is the delusional veil of knowledge over the master's lack of discourse. While the Discourse of the University covers the master's lack, the Hysteric's Discourse – according to Lacan – uncovers/unmasks the lack. The Hysteric's Discourse is a kind of subversion of the Master's Discourse through submersion in the Master's Discourse; it is the Discourse which puts to question the Master's Discourse; which shows the limits and the limpness of the Master's Discourse. In the Analyst's Discourse, the analyst becomes the mirror of the analysand's object cause of desire and assists the analysand in her self-arrival at her own 'master signifier' (see Lacan 2007: 41). The Discourse of the Analyst is produced by a twist to the Discourse of the Hysteric, in the same way as Freud developed psychoanalysis by giving an interpretative turn to the discourse of his hysterical patients. The fact that this discourse is the inverse of the Discourse of the Master emphasizes that, for Lacan, the Analyst's Discourse is an essentially subversive practice which undermines

attempts at domination and mastery. Thus while the political embodying of the Hysteric's Discourse puts to question the Master's Discourse and while the Analyst's Discourse re-conceptualizes the master-slave relation, the Discourse of the University remains on the side of the master. In the ethical embodying of the Analyst's Discourse the would-be-university puts to creative questioning one's own premise of the university. In this discourse one doesn't just protect the university. The extant university serves as a mirror for a future university; which is also the future of the university.

Tagore explored such a creative future in his turning away from the University of Calcutta, i.e. from the colonial apparatus; he would also put to perpetual questioning his own institution/university: Santiniketan, which had made a radical beginning with respect to the work of decolonization in education; it is such a questioning that took him further to the founding of Sriniketan and the turn to praxis (in the form of rural reconstruction). If Santiniketan had addressed the first critique (i.e. *alienation* in colonial educational institutions), Sriniketan had approached the two unequal but interrelated halves of the second critique (i.e. *foreclosure* of praxis in education and *forgetting* of the 'slave's' knowledge-praxis-worldview). In that sense, Sriniketan had problematized an educational experience built around the Master's Discourse; it had instead tried to inaugurate an educational experience attuned to the 'slave' or the 'subaltern's' life-world; hence the turn to the 'rural'; as also to "Heidegger's Hut"⁶ (Heidegger's rhetoric of 'hut life' "located him in rigorous contact with existence" [Sharr 2006: 104]) and Socrates in the *haat* (which is about the philosophico-political praxis of being-in-the-polis, being-in-the-marketplace, and not in the private realm of the library [Arendt 2005: 5–39]).⁷

How, however, does the Discourse of the University take shape? Lacan foregrounds the "theft, abduction, stealing slavery of its knowledge, through the maneuvers of the master" in Plato's dialogues. The entire function of the *episteme* as "transmissible knowledge" is borrowed from the techniques of the craftsmen, of the serfs, of women working in households; "It is a matter of extracting the essence of this [community] knowledge in order for it to become the master's knowledge", or "theoretical knowledge" – theoretical knowledge in the emphatic sense that the word "theoria" has in Aristotle, or has in Hegel with respect to "absolute knowledge", and has in 'fieldwork' in the context of the University (Tagore was moving in Sriniketan from 'fieldwork' on the 'slave'/'subaltern' to *working in the fields* alongside the 'slave'/'subaltern'). Lacan is also concerned about the "persistence of a master's discourse"; what happens between the classical

and coercive Master's Discourse and that of the modern secular subtle master – the consent generating University – is a modification in the place of knowledge; knowledge becomes theoretical; knowledge becomes cognitive; and the western philosophical tradition “has some responsibility of this transmutation” (Lacan 2007: 31). “Philosophy in its historical function is this *extraction*, of the slave's knowledge [for Lacan, and of the woman's knowledge-praxis for Irigaray 1985], in order to obtain its transmutation into the master's knowledge” (Lacan 2007: 22).

Lacan uncorks the master's discourse, and what one gets is the University Discourse. University Discourse as the “new tyranny of knowledge”; University as the (modern secular) sieve through which we are on the whole, all recruited. The dominant position in the University Discourse is occupied by theoretical and cognitive knowledge. This illustrates the fact that behind all attempts to impart an apparently ‘neutral’ knowledge, one can see an attempt at mastery (mastery of knowledge, and domination of the Other to whom this knowledge is imparted). The Discourse of the University represents cognitive knowledge, particularly visible in modernity in the form of the hegemony of science and Law; the social sciences which are prompt in their critique of science and Law are, however, not exempt. Here I am reminded of *Women in the Beehive: A Seminar with Jacques Derrida*. While Lacan offers an interesting understanding of the Master's Discourse and the University Discourse as a veiling of the master's lack of Discourse, it is Derrida who offers a more nuanced reading of the University Discourse, in the context of the setting up of women's studies departments in the disciplinary beehive of theoretical and cognitive knowledge – the university:

Is there in the . . . idea of women's studies something which potentially has the force, if it is possible, to deconstruct the fundamental institutional structure of the university, of the Law of the university? There seem to be two hypotheses, two responses. On one hand, there is the *positive deconstruction*, which consists of saying that one cannot be content with only positive research, but that one must push to the end of the radical question concerning the university Law, and do more than simply institute a department of Women's Studies. That is the *optimistic deconstruction*, the deconstruction which would not submit to the Law. And then there is another deconstruction, perhaps not resigned or fatalist, but more conscious of the Law and of the fact that even the radical questioning, even the radical deconstruction of the institution of

the university by women's studies would not be able to reproduce the Law in the face of the Law . . . if one were to radically deconstruct the old model of the university in the name of women's studies, it would not be to open a territory without Law. . . . But it would be for a new relation to the Law. It is necessary to establish the departments of Women's Studies which would resemble their brothers and sisters of literature, philosophy, anthropology, etc., but after one had done that, one would already have found the Law again. But at least one would have radically changed the situation. One would have rediscovered the Law. . . . That would be the *pessimistic deconstruction*.

(2003: 192)

(we find ourselves in a similar situation with respect to the setting up of the *Centre for Development Practice* [not 'development studies'] in the university context; see below)

It is difficult to choose between what Derrida calls 'optimistic' and 'pessimistic' deconstruction. It is all the more difficult to imagine a secure path for women's studies or the women's/feminist movement (or for that matter, for the *idea* of development practice; see below). Just like it is difficult to choose a secure path for the future university or the future of the university. In this context, one can gesture towards two broad brush imaginations of the university. The first is a sort of emancipatory movement that is within the tradition of enlightenment and progress, and in some ways very boring, but very secure also, like Tagore's hard-boiled eggs; very necessary but also not so imaginative. The other imagination of the university is more than one more supplement to the beehive; at times it looks a little maverick. It's a way of doing things which can think almost *beyond*, or re-think the existing structure. This other imagination of the university is in destructuring structure or in destructuring Discourse, the Master's Discourse; which is why the protection of the extant university is never ever enough; one needs to *find* (in Tagore for example) and *found* (like Tagore perhaps) in the future another imagination of the University, an imagination that is not strictly cognitive, intellectual or theoretical, an imagination that is (1) *singed in praxis* and (2) that does not turn away from the slave's knowledge or that which is not just appropriative of the slave's knowledge.

The 'university' in that sense is something one cannot (not) give up. The extant imagination of the university requires a rethinking; amidst the protectionist discourse. The problem is that given the attack on the university the protectionist discourse shall prevail as the

only counter-hegemonic axis. This in turn may preclude possibilities of rethinking the basic premise and foundation of the university.

Development practice: an idea in search of a home?

Our *tapovanas*, which were our natural Universities were not abstracted from life⁸ . . . and the spiritual education, which the students had, was a part of the spiritual life itself which comprehended all life. . . . Such an institution must group round it all the neighbouring villages and virtually unite them with itself in all its economic endeavours. . . . In a word, it should never be like a meteor – only a stray fragment of a world – but a complete world in itself, self-sustaining, independent, rich with ever renewing life, radiating light across space and time, attracting and maintaining round it a planetary system of dependent bodies, imparting life-breadth to the complete [hu]man, who is intellectual as well as economic, bound by social bonds [not the “greed of profit”] and aspiring towards spiritual freedom.

(Tagore 2011: 160)

The nascent *idea* of Development Practice (*not* Development Studies), which at present has taken the form of an ‘immersion’⁹ and ‘action research’-based M.Phil programme¹⁰ at Ambedkar University, Delhi, tries to make two moves with respect to the discussion above. One, it tries to inaugurate in the “beehive” of the human sciences the fore-closed question of praxis, praxis as the “alluring call to a slave revolt” against university in particular and education in general. Two, it also tries to engage creatively with what Lacan designates as the register of the ‘slave’, or the register of what could be called the ‘subaltern’; engage with the slave’s ~~knowledge-praxis~~, as also work *with* the slave (and not *on* the slave) for a transformed future. Needless to reiterate, it is difficult to find a home for such an idea – an idea that draws heavily from Tagore’s turn to Sriniketan, which in turn is a turn to (transformative) praxis and the rural life-world – in the standard imagination of the university.

The question that thus haunts the idea of Development Practice is not just whether one is political or not, which has now become the paradigmatic caliper in the human sciences. The question is whether one is engaged in transformative praxis. How, however, does one distinguish between ‘being political’ and ‘being engaged in transformative praxis’? How does one distinguish between ‘interpreting the world’ and ‘transforming the world’ (questions of transformation, however, require an immediate attention to questions of ethics, justice and even

well-being)? One way, one demonstrative way, of distinguishing the two would be in terms of the distinction between anti-capitalism and post-capitalism. Anti-capitalism is *Sangharsh*; it is about *questioning* surplus appropriation by non-performers. Post-capitalism is *Nirmaan*; it is about *creating* sharing commons. Universities in their radical imagination have been contexts for anti-capitalist *critique*; could they also become sites for post-capitalist *praxis* (see Gibson-Graham 2006)? Universities in their radical moments have produced critiques of primitive accumulation; could they also become sites for what Tagore called social or rural *reconstruction* (not 'rural development'). Needless to reiterate, it is difficult to find a home for transformative praxis in the context of the standard language of the radical/progressive university: *critique*. It is difficult to find a home for, say, praxis in general and post-capitalist praxis in particular in the space of the standard idiom of the university: anti-capitalist critique; as if, the foregrounding of critique, forecloses praxis; the foregrounding of *sangharsh*, forecloses *nirmaan*.

What then is it to find home for (1) transformative praxis and (2) the 'slave's' knowledge-praxis within the perimeters of the university? One possible way would be to create a ghetto for such knowledge-praxis in one corner of the University, while it is business as usual in the university, while we conduct ourselves like before in the university. These securely secluded places would be given names different from the ones usual discipline-based departments would have; kind of a centre-periphery relation. The other possible way, which is also an impossible way, a very difficult way would be to re-envision the way the university conducts itself or has hitherto conducted itself. Can the university move beyond mere critical knowledge production? Can critical knowing get connected to critical questions around doing/praxis and being/self (the idea of development practice is an attempt to bring questions of knowing,¹¹ being¹² and doing¹³ to critical dialogue). What is it to produce students who are not mere copies of the 'master' but copies of the 'slave's' *forms of life*; who are respectful of the 'slave's' knowledge and praxis; and who do not share in the 'master's' disdain for praxis? Universities usually produce a theory of practice; universities pass judgments on practice. What is it to produce a praxis of theory, or a praxis emanating from theory; or theory getting borne in/by/through practice? What is it to *practice* development and not just study and report on processes of development? What is it to *make* a table, rather than *describe* a table? What is it to not just report on transformation, but engender transformation? What is it to engage in transformative social praxis in and *with* the rural, rather than conduct

‘village studies’ *on* communities? The idea of Development Practice is premised on a critical re-examination of the established idioms of ‘social science research’ and equally established idioms of ‘practice’. It questions the given methodologies of both; and tries to work towards what we call for want of a better phrase ‘action research’. Action Research is for us a shorthand for ‘action-ing based on sound research findings’ as also ‘research-ing actions undertaken’. In other words, it is about translating research into practice and taking practice towards research. Thus bridging the historical hyper-separation between research and action¹⁴ (hence ‘action research’) as also theory and practice (Tagore represented it in the Sriniketan Prospectus as brain and hand). It is to find a third – a third beyond conventional research and conventional (developmental) practice – a third beyond given frameworks of theory and given frameworks of practice.

Put telegraphically, action research is *reflective writing on the reflexive process of righting wrongs* (“righting wrongs” primarily in rural¹⁵ and community contexts; see Spivak 2004: 523–81). But how does one right wrongs? One needs to know, first, what is wrong? Or perhaps, it is not about a first step (i.e. first knowing what is wrong) followed by a second step (i.e. then righting wrongs). The first and second steps work in mutual constitutivity. The process of knowing generates an understanding of righting; the process of righting deepens knowing. In other words, action research is both about knowing and righting, as also righting and writing. It is about knowing what is wrong, but knowing collaboratively. It is about making efforts at righting wrongs, but righting not in a top-down manner, righting with the community as foreground and the researcher as background. It is also about writing on the actual or lived process of righting wrongs, a process lived and experienced by both researcher and community, which is why action research is not research *on* the community, rather research *with* the community.

The inspiration for an idea like development practice – premised on immersion and action research – premised on bringing to triadogue questions of ‘knowing’-‘being’-‘doing’ – comes not just from Sriniketan, but also from *phronesis*, à la Heidegger, and *askesis*, à la Foucault (2005). Marx remains a running footnote in this turn to transformative praxis in educational contexts. Marx (2016 [1845]) begins “Theses on Feuerbach” with the question of the “chief defect[s] of all hitherto existing materialism”. One of the defects is that in *The Essence of Christianity*, “Practice is conceived and fixed [by Feuerbach] only in its *dirty* Jewish manifestation” (Marx 2016). Why, however, is practice Jewish? Why is practice dirty? Here Marx makes a

distinction between the Christian discourse on creation and the Judaic discourse on creation: “‘Dirty Jewish’ – according to Marshall Ber- man, is an allusion to the Jewish God of the Old Testament, who had to ‘get his hands dirty’ while making the world, and is tied up with a symbolic contrast between the Christian God of the Word, and the God of the Deed, symbolizing practical life” (Marx 2016, note 1). Marx is thus foregrounding (Jewish) Deed, i.e. praxis over the (Chris- tian) Word (see Dhar and Chakrabarti 2016: 563–83). It is hence never enough to *teach* Marx in the university; one needs to *be* Marx; one perhaps needs to inaugurate the question of Deed/praxis in the university to be Marx(ian); one needs to *dirty* one’s hands; and Tagore, the ‘poet’ did precisely that in and through Sriniketan; we dirty our hands in Development Practice.

Late Foucault’s turn to *askesis* (as against Christian *asceticism*) brings the subject’s ‘being’ into play. It inaugurates the question of self-transformation. It also argues, that knowledge – which is what the university deals with – *could be* transacted, imparted, and received in the university context, *but* ‘truth’ *cannot* be glimpsed without the long labour of *askesis* (Foucault 2005); i.e. without self-transformation. The standard model of knowledge production in the university, which believes that knowledge can be produced without the researcher being fundamentally touched or transformed by the object of knowledge, is thus put to question by Foucault. Foucault brings truth and self, knowing and being to dialogue and makes one reliant upon the other. Not just reliant. He argues that truth *cannot* be reached without self-transformation (psychoanalytic self-work would be a modern example of Greek *askesis*).

Heidegger’s turn to the Aristotelian¹⁶ concept (invoked in Book IV of the *Nichomachean Ethics*) of *phronesis* (as distinct from “sophia” and “episteme”), which is also an overturning of the concept, inaugu- rates the question of ‘doing’; *phronesis* as pointing to “the possibility of developing a critically self-reflective model of ontological knowl- edge firmly embedded in the finite world”, in life and lived experience (Long 2002, 36); *phronesis* as being-related to what Heidegger called the “with-which”. In one sense, *phronesis* is practical reason, as dis- tinct from theoretical reason. In another sense, it is reasoning based on concrete action, as distinct from speculative reason. In yet another but related sense, it is reason based on life experiences as distinct from abstract deductions (see Heidegger 1985, 1997) (~~also see Dhar and Chakrabarti 2016~~).

The idea of development practice – built on and inspired by Tagore’s educational crusade at Santiniketan-Sriniketan, especially

Sriniketan – is placed at the cusp of askesis-phronesis-praxis; could this *seedling*, struggling in turn to find home in the standard university imagination, be the germ for a ‘future university’, or the ‘future of/for the university’?

Notes

- 1 Tagore shows in this piece how much of the education has become a process of constructing cages and less about actual learning; how teachers are increasingly becoming goldsmiths; and how students are learning less, and learning instead and more to abide by the rules and regulations of a caged life-world; how best to live in a cage, how best to lead a caged life; how best to be prepared for what educationist Sujit Sinha calls ‘industrialism’; as if, training in the 10:30–4 school schedule is the ground for induction into the industrial schedule.
- 2 “What we now call a school in this country is really a factory, and the teachers are part of it. At half-past ten in the morning the factory opens with the ringing bell; then, as the teachers start talking, the machines start working. The teachers stop talking at four in the afternoon when the factory closes, and the pupils then go home carrying with them a few pages of machine-made learning. . . . One advantage of factory is that it can make goods exactly to order. Moreover, the goods are easy to label, because there is not much difference between what the different machines turn out” (Tagore, 2011: 112).
- 3 “[W]hen I sent my appeal to Western people for an International Institution [Viswa-Bharati] in India I made use of the word ‘University’ But that word not only has an inner meaning but outer association in minds of those who use it, and that fact tortures my idea into its own rigid shape. It is unfortunate. I should not allow my idea to be pinned to a word like a dead butterfly for a foreign museum. It must be known not by a definition, but by its own life growth. I saved Santiniketan from being trampled into smoothness by the steam roller of your education department. . . . [M]y bird must still retain its freedom of wings and not be turned into a sumptuous nonentity by any controlling agency outside its own living organism” (Tagore, 2011: 125).
- 4 “Given that the majority of Indians lived in the villages, Tagore found the Santiniketan ‘human’ landscape ~~in rural Bengal~~ with its Hindu, Muslim and Santali villages to be an authentic picture of the social and racial differences of the neglected village. It was an ideal site to give the urban children of his school an education about the ‘real’ India. . . . His . . . justification was to build an education on the ‘firm basis’ of the ‘life of the people’ where the existing colonial mode of education chose deliberately to be ignorant of ‘our country’s’ life (Das Gupta in Tagore, 2011: xxvii–xxviii). Sadler (in Sharr, 2006: xii) shows how the thinking of the Frankfurt school, on the one hand, and of Heidegger’s school, on the other, continue to define “two forms of modern truth”: “the one discovered, through work in the metropolitan library and urban loft, by the dialectic of ideal and real, the other revealed by an encounter with an uncorrupted ideal at the rural retreat”. Tagore opted for the latter form.

- 5 “[W]hen the charitably minded city-bred politicians talk of education [or development] for the village folk they mean a little left over in the bottom of their cup after diluting it copiously” (Tagore, 2011: 133); the bhadrak class regard the rural people as *chhotolok* meaning, “literally small people”. “Given such contempt for their own village people, educated Indians prefer to learn about their country’s history and society from the Europeans” (Tagore, 2011: 133).
- 6 In summer 1922, Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) moved into a small cabin built for him high in the Black Forest mountains of southern Germany (fig. 1). Heidegger called this building, approximately six metres by seven, “die Hütte” (“the hut”) (see Sharr, 2006).
- 7 Arendt shows (2005) how “the gulf between philosophy and politics opened historically with the trial . . . and condemnation. . . [and] death of Socrates”. This led to Plato’s “despair of polis life” or ‘life in the polis’ or the “philosopher’s life in the polis, tied to the polis, to life in the polis, to polis life. It came at a cost, a deadly cost: death; and with the death of Socrates came the death of the philosophic-political praxis of being-in-the-polis”.
- 8 “[T]he thrust of Heidegger’s critique is not that previous philosophies had simply failed to grasp life, although that surely happened, but that previous philosophies presuppose life and also the living character of philosophy itself. In essence, their failure to grasp life in and for itself is due to the fact that life is always already present in the background of their philosophy”. However, “what is at stake for Heidegger is not whether philosophy can or cannot give us access to life and lived experience [in a radically new, pre-objective, pre-theoretical way], but rather to understand how philosophy itself is lived and situated in life . . . previous attempts to grasp life philosophically failed because philosophy itself had become divorced from life and therefore the attempt to approach life philosophically was an artificial effort to grasp life ‘from outside’ . . . this required retracing the way in which philosophy becomes alienated from life” (see Bowler, 2008: 2–6 and 116–37). Thus if Heidegger was trying to resituate philosophy in life, Tagore was trying to resituate education in “spiritual life” which in turn “comprehended all life” (Tagore, 2011: 160).
- 9 The M.Phil Programme in Development Practice (total duration: two years) has a (rural) Immersion component of one year; which is to (1) experience, engage and relate to in a psychoanalytically sensitive manner with *adivasi* life-worlds (as also Dalit contexts), (2) co-research rigorously with the ‘community’ on questions, issues, problems relevant to the community (including attention to psycho-biographs of hope, despair and desire), (3) arrive at an action research problematic collaboratively with the community, (4) develop a framework of action-ing the co-researched finding(s), and finally (5) research in a theoretically rigorous manner the action-ing process.
- 10 The M.Phil programme in Development Practice places the question of (rural) transformation – including transformation of human subjects – at the core of its enquiry, research and practice. The overarching objective of the M.Phil programme is to critically engage with and reflect on existing developmental discourse and practice, usher in psychological-psychoanalytic sensitivity in our work with communities (including an awareness of

questions of ‘transference-resistance’ in group contexts) and thereby rethink and rework the associated developmental sectoral practices in the rural and forest communities. In a word, the M.Phil programme – through M.Phil dissertations – generates knowledge on transformative social praxis while it engages in, takes part, ushers in, and catalyses transformative social praxis in largely adivasi and partly Dalit contexts. The programme hopes to engender a classroom and field based learning process that brings to dialogue the three hitherto hyper-separated components of ‘knowing’-‘relating’-‘doing’ through a one-year long Immersion experience in central India and an ‘action research’ based pedagogy.

- 11 The process of knowing in Development Practice involves inculcating a critical-analytical-reflective relationship with the dominant discourses of development. Students come to conceive of ‘development’ beyond quantitative, top-down and statist approaches. They arrive at a more human-focused, relational or psychologically sensitive understanding of development. It also helps them move from an understanding of “what is wrong” in the rural and in forest societies as also in practices of development to how one can “right the wrongs”.
- 12 The process of ‘learning to relate and listen’ and ‘communicate non-coercively’ is engendered in the student. One of the foci of Immersion is on the ‘self’ of the student, and her experiences of being in close touch with the rural community or the forest society as also the process of being in touch with her own feelings, dreams, hopes and despair. An appreciation of the ‘community’ as an ever-emergent ever-transforming ‘being-in-common’ (and not as something given) is also facilitated. One of the other foci of Immersion is on the ‘community’ and on ‘group processes’; it is about building relationships with the rural community/group, and finding community/group voice to arrive at a shared action research agenda emerging out of a dialogue and deliberation on the community’s needs/desires.
- 13 The dimension of ‘doing’, i.e. transformative social praxis with rural communities in undertaking in and through action research. On the one hand, while we try to make sense of, understand and analyse macro and micro-processes of rural transformation, we also, on the other hand, try to engender/facilitate/catalyse through sustained community participation and collective action processes of ‘desirable’ (we, hence reflect on and remain reflexive as to ‘what is desirable’) transformation in rural spaces. We see rural transformation as not a State/government driven affair but a community-driven affair, through a kind of “non-coercive reorganization of community desire”. This is also important because bottom-up or grassroots level developmental work in the community is not just about knowing or getting the numbers right, but has much to do with feeling-states; feeling for the Other, as also feeling into one’s own Self; including one’s nascent identification with (suffering, and why not, the hope, joy, despair of) rural lives. Knowing, relating with community and collective doing thus come to a productive dialogue in the M.Phil action research work with rural communities. The idea is to see what the community/group ‘need’ is and relate ‘my need to know’ with the ‘community/group need to transform’, bringing the two needs to a productive dialogue and a dialectic, to reach a middle ground. In this work ‘poor rural women’ are not our objects of knowledge, but our co-researchers. They are not

- just 'native tribal/Dalit informants' but 'co-producers of knowledge'. The 'gendered subaltern' thus becomes a colleague, albeit with much difficulty, in our community level research and community guided action.
- 14 Arendt (2005) foregrounds the "abyss" between thought and action, "an abyss which never since has been closed".
 - 15 Heidegger's Hut: Heidegger's turn to the (rural) 'hut' was not a simple turn to the countryside, as against the city. At stake were two distinct philosophical possibilities. The first philosophico-existential perspective would eschew a concern with the "primordially of either time or being". The second would foreground, even demand it. The idea of the 'hut' comes to the fore within a philosophical project that conceives of time and being in this latter sense.
 - 16 Bowler (2008) argues that while with respect to phronesis if there is a 'turning away' from Aristotle, there is a 'turning to' and an appropriation of Aristotle's conceptualization of praxis in Heidegger's invocation of 'philosophy as praxis'.

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