CHAPTER TWO

THE PROP ROOTS
OF POSTDEVELOPMENT PRAXIS:
FROM PRACTICAL PHILOSOPHY
TO TRANSFORMATIVE PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract

In its search for alternatives to capitalocentric-orientalist development thought, this paper encounters a banyan of developmental alternatives, also alternatives to development, including postdevelopment. In its search for alternatives to development studies, it encounters developmental practice. In its search for alternatives to extant developmental practices hegemonized by philosophies of more – more production, more income, more power – it encounters a banyan of alternative developmental practices. In its search for an alternative to the theory/practice divide in development, it encounters the forgotten tradition of Practical Philosophy. Deconstruction of Practical Philosophy in turn births Transformative Philosophy. Transformative Philosophy is a Moebius of transformation of philosophy and philosophy for transformation – of both self and social (and which is not just 'philosophy of transformation'). The paper is also a self-critical reflection on the birth, history, and action research work of the Centre for Development Practice. Did the action research work of the Centre decentre the extant theory/practice divide in development? Did the Centre manage to integrate in its action research work alternative development thoughts and alternative developmental practices? Did it inaugurate in its "immersive be-ing in the rural polis", in its "turn to praxis", in its "attention to phronetic and asketic truths", and in its "engagement with subaltern know-hows, life-worlds and worldviews" a prop root perspective in the banyan of transformative philosophies?

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> We cannot be *intelligent* without being *good*.
> Aristotle, 1985, VI.12, 1144a36

This paper takes a turn to the forgotten tradition of practical philosophy to work through the theory/practice divide in development. It argues that while we have hitherto worked our way towards alternative development theories as also being alternative development practices, what is it to work towards an alternative to the theory/practice divide? What is it to work through the divide between alternative theories and alternative practices? This paper builds on the metaphor of the banyan tree – found in South East Asia – to show how, one, the main stem of Development Theory (i.e., capitalocentric-orientalist development; see Chakrabarti and Dhar, 2009) could be put under erasure by the proliferating prop roots of developmental alternatives and alternatives to development, and, two, how the main stem of Development Practice (marked by the philosophy of *more* – more production, more income, more power) could be put under erasure by the equally proliferating prop roots of alternative practices – practices of care, nurturance, interdependence, sharing, and cooperation – practices that differ from practices that cultivate greed (and by default cultivate envy). What is it to bring to dialogue such alternative theories and alternative practices? Does a deconstructive return to the forgotten tradition of practical philosophy help us inaugurate and take forward such a dialogue between alternative theories and alternative practices? Does a third set of prop roots – designated the "prop roots of postdevelopment praxis" – grow out of such a turn to rethink practical philosophy?

Pre-History: From Development Studies to Development Practice

It all began in 2011; at least, it did for me.[2] PRADAN[3] – a leading development sector actor – approached Ambedkar University Delhi (AUD)[4] to set up a master's programme in development practice. While the then

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[2] Or perhaps it began much earlier. In 1997–98, 'we' – from the Medical College, Kolkata – started *reconstructive* work on public and preventive health in rural contexts in Murshidabad, Bengal; along the banks of river Mayurakshi. Those days, we were adept at (Marxist) *critique*; A critique of capitalism. This was our first attempt at what Tagore calls rural reconstruction. We faltered. Our inexperience in reconstructive praxis showed. Was Development Practice a *return* to such a reconstructive effort in rural areas?

[3] https://www.pradan.net/

[4] www.aud.ac.in

AUD faculty recognized the need for a programme in development practice (in addition to the already existing programme in development studies), the debate was about whether the programme should be a master's level programme or a research level programme. The then AUD faculty, in collaboration with PRADAN, settled for a *research* programme (which would later develop into an *action research* programme), primarily because it was felt that there was not enough material or a rigorous-enough corpus of writing on practice that would suffice for 64 credits of master's level teaching, that material or that corpus of writing (given that it was not easy to *write* [on] practice) needed to be painstakingly created and collated. Instead, a research programme in the form of an MPhil would help develop a scholarly body of reflections and writings on what could come to be known as the discipline of development practice; writings that have now taken the form of 103 action research dissertations (2012–2020) and could feed – in spite of all their limitations – into a master's level programme. The idea was that the MPhil and a subsequent PhD in Development Practice will also birth a group of action research scholars trained in rural development practice.

The MPhil programme in Development Practice[5] was envisaged in 2012 and the Centre for Development Practice (CDP)[6] was set up in 2013 to empathically relate to social suffering (Kleinman, Das, and Lock, 1997) as well as contribute to the alleviation, if possible, of such suffering. Development practice was also seen a platform for the much-needed dialogue between theories of development and practices of development. This included dialogue between action researchers in development, development practitioners/activists, and development studies academics; as well as dialogue, most importantly, between action researchers and marginalized communities about their life-worlds, worldviews, and know-how (Lacan, 2007). Dialogue with communities has taken two forms since 2012: (a) dialogue with *extant* communities (the communities we work with in rural India are largely Gond, Kondha, HO, Santhal, Oraon, Munda, Baiga, Kuduk, Lohra, Tamrakar, etc.), and (b) dialogue with *emergent* communities[7]

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[5] http://cdp.res.in/about-the-mphil-program/

[6] www.cdp.res.in

[7] *Eka Nari Sanghathan* by Bhavya Chitranshi and Ashutosh Kumar in Odisha (see Chitranshi, 2016, 2019; and http://cdp.res.in/ashutosh-kumar/), *Kinare* by Nishant Chaudhary in Delhi (http://cdp.res.in/nishant-chaudhary/), *Ayang Raji* by Neeraj Kapoor in Jharkhand (http://cdp.res.in/neeraj-kapoor/), *Lahanti Club* by Gautam Bisht in Bihar (see Bisht, 2020) and *Chinhari: The Young India* by Swarnima Kriti in Chhattisgarh (https://www.chinhari.co.in/; see Kriti, 2019) are a few examples of

(emergent because our engagement with issues in extant communities also gives birth to or leads to the *creation* of new communitarian formations as well as new philosophies and ways and practices of "being-in-common" (Nancy, 1991).

AUD was set up with the objective of giving shape to what it designated as *engaged social sciences*. What, however, is *engaged* social sciences? The idea was to engage empathically with society and conduct social sciences in tune with the concerns of society as a whole as well as intervene non-violently in terms of ushering in social justice and social well-being. It was also inspired by the long history of nonviolent engagement with communities – so as to *heal* unbearable inner conditions – in the Gandhian tradition. CDP – as one of the research centres of the university – foregrounded the question of (rural) *transformation*, including the transformation of/in human subjects, at the core of its research. The question of transformation (as distinguished from dispassionate *knowing*) foregrounded, in turn, the question of practice. The idea was to reflectively engage with both developmental discourse and practice and "usher in psychological-psychoanalytic sensitivity in our work with communities", including an acute awareness of questions of the unconscious and of transference (Lacan, 2015). Development research and practice have largely disavowed a rethinking of research and practice in terms of the workings or the logic of the unconscious of individual humans as well as groups and communities. CDP has tried to inaugurate the question of psychoanalysis in development (building on Sudhir Kakar, one can designate it as *psychoanalysis under a tree among self-help group women* [SHG]) and thus rethink and rework the associated developmental sectoral practices and practices of "self, social and political transformation" in rural and forest communities (see Chakrabarti and Dhar, 2015).[8] In other words, CDP embarked on the generation of knowledge of transformative social praxis while engaging, taking part, ushering in, and catalyzing transformative social praxis.

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emergent communities Development Practice MPhil alumni have birthed since 2013; also see Namrata Acharya's work in Gujarat (http://cdp.res.in/namrata/).

[8] "The need for self-transformation (though reiterated at times in terms of certain ascetic/moral practices or conversely through training in violence as in projects of class annihilation) was never foregrounded in politics" (see Dhar 2015b https://www.csu.edu.au/research/grahamcentre/international/australia-india-project). The assumption was that the change of structure would take care of the change of/in the self/subject; a parallel (and overdetermined) *working through* to an 'ethics of the self/subject was never on the agenda" (see Chakrabarti and Dhar, 2015a).

This *two-ness of being* was not an easy register to inhabit, all the more because both theory and practice had their own idiosyncrasies. Theory had its high handedness; one thought one knew, that one can *judge* practice. Practice, on the other hand, had a kind of moral high ground; one was good because one was engaged in doing-s. Practice at times critiqued theory for being armchair, distant, detached. Theory looked down on practice for being interventionist or activist. How to work through the mutual mistrust? While as academics we were setting up a deconstructive relationship with developmental theories, our relationship with practice was somewhat naive, all the more because we at CDP had taken the *turn to practice* as sacrosanct. We were content being *in* practice. We had begun to see practice as the new *alternative.* Earlier, we would see the work of Sen, Escobar, or Nandy as instituting alternatives to growth-centric development; thus, alternative developmental theories were seen as alternatives. Now an *alternative to theory* – practice – was seen as the alternative. We were thus not managing to interrogate practice, disaggregate kinds of practice, or distinguish between practice and practice; say, for example, distinguish between Women in Development (WID), Women and Development (WAD), and Gender and Development (GAD) approaches when we were working with SHG women (Rathgeber, 1989).

Practice also looked to have an unbearable weight of its own. It seemed to have a self-perpetuating character. It was difficult to reflect on practice while *in* practice; the Archimedean distance was difficult to institute. We were also not managing to connect specific developmental theories with specific forms of developmental action and vice versa. What kinds of practices would emanate from the capabilities approach? (Sen, 1985). What kinds of practices would the postdevelopmental perspective engender? (Klein and Boada, 2019). What would the critique of capitalocentrism and orientalism (Chakrabarti and Dhar, 2010) in development give birth to in terms of practice? What is the nature of postcapitalist and post-orientalist[9] practice? Did we need to move from production and income-centric practices, from mere practices of empowerment to a banyan of alternative practices? Could the experience of such prop root practices in the polis, the dirtying of one's hands, engender alternative theories or alternatives to the theory/practice divide?

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[9] Orientalism leads to the reduction of the heterogenous register third world to a homogenous register which is seen to be *pre*-capitalist and *under*-developed.

Banyan: "The Plant That Is Not One"[10]

On the one hand, we questioned the mainstream or the main stem of development thinking (Chakrabarti and Dhar, 2016). Capitalocentric and orientalist development thinking had been disaggregated into developmental alternatives (Sen, 1984a, 1984b, 1990, 1997, 2003; Sen and Nussbaum, 1993), alternatives *to* development (Escobar, 1995; Nandy, 2004), and postcapitalist post-orientalist perspectives (Chakrabarti, Dhar, and Dasgupta, 2015). On the other hand, we had put *under erasure* the mainstream or the main *stem* of developmental practice – dominated by philosophies and practices of *more* – more production, more income, more power – to arrive at a pluriverse (Kothari et al., 2019) of prop root practices – practices that institute grounded philosophies of marking *difference*, practices that bring to multilogue developmental alternatives, alternatives *to* development, and postcapitalist post-orientalist perspectives. The banyan of developmental alternatives and the banyan of alternative developmental practices had, in the process, become superimposed on one another.

   Such a superimposed pluriverse of prop root praxis undertaken since 2013 by action research scholars in the MPhil programme in Development Practice in 112 villages in the remotest parts of central India, the seven districts of Odisha, Jharkhand, Bengal, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, and Gujarat, and in a rural context in Delhi by MPhil alumni designated *Fellows in Action Research* builds on the *support tree* of developmental thinking and practice to initiate prop root alternatives in the thinking and practice of policy, governance, livelihoods, ecology, health, and education. This gives form to what could be metaphorically designated as a *banyan of alternative praxis*. Are these alternatives put in place by CDP nascent or embryonic enunciations of rethought forms of practical philosophy (we have designated 'rethought practical philosophy' as *transformative philosophy*), forms that bring reflection to dialogues on the "intelligent" and the "good"?

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[10] The banyan puts under erasure the idea of "unity and identity", "in a word: unicity, of ontology or existence; amidst the "prevalence of monocrops that militate against vegetal multiplicity in the name of agricultural efficiency and market considerations". The banyan as "an infinity of dispersed growths" or an *originary multiplicity* of prop roots, questions the ideal of an "organismic totality" where "parts are subordinated to the demands of the whole" or the One; where the prop roots are "free from the ironclad ties" of "inner essence": that of root or stem (see Marder in Magun, 2013: 115–130; I am indebted to Praveena Mahla for having drawn my attention to this text).

What precisely is a banyan of alternatives? Banyan trees are characterized by aerial prop roots that are both roots and trunks; because they are directed towards the soil, they are designated roots but morphologically they are trunks. Such roots-trunks thicken with time into woody trunks, albeit directed downwards. With age, the woody trunks become increasingly indistinguishable from the main trunk. Old trees thus spread out laterally, and not necessarily vertically. The prop roots come to cover a wide area, metaphorically spanning 112 villages and eight sites in India, traditional and modern contexts, already existing *know-how* and modern science, spaces and subject positions hooked to the circuits of global capital, spaces and subject positions outside the circuits of global capital, and so on. In some species, the prop roots develop into a sort of forest, covering in turn the extant discourse and praxis of development. The topology of this structure of interconnections – called a *banyan vine* in computer science – is important to this paper; what is also important are the three constitutive elements of the banyan tree: (i) the support tree, which could get hollowed out with time; (ii) the main trunk of the banyan, which grows alongside the support tree; and (iii) the prop roots – which are neither roots nor stem but aerial; hence, stems directed downwards; hence, roots. Were a few prop roots, amidst the alternative banyan vine of postdevelopment praxis worldwide, engendered through the work, albeit modest, of CDP?[11] In the banyan that envelops a support tree, the mesh of roots growing around the support tree commonly renders the main tree or main stem redundant and the banyan becomes a columnar tree with a hollow central core. Has the growth-centric core of development been hollowed out, at least partially, through the proliferation of prop root alternatives in the 112 villages and the eight rural sites? Have they managed to bridge the gap between theory and practice? Have they inaugurated a rethought practical philosophy perspective? Does transformative philosophy as rethought practical philosophy make the studies and practice of development philosophical? Does the experience of development make philosophy practical and transformative?

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[11] The Centre for Development Practice has managed to give shape to this *banyan of alternatives* only with support and guidance from a host of other development sector organizations, like PRADAN, Living Farm (https://livingfarms.wordpress.com/project-overview/),
Sahabhagi (http://sahbhagicg.org/), as well as Basudha (http://cintdis.org/basudha/) and Vikalp Sangam – "*alternatives' confluence*" (http://www.vikalpsangam.org/).

Practical Philosophy, *Encore*:

We thus reached a banyan of alternative theories and practices but we hadn't yet reached an alternative *to* the theory/practice divide. Could prop root developmental theories and prop root developmental practices still be haunted by the theory/practice divide? The overdetermination was still missing. We swayed towards either the pole of thought or the pole of practice; criticality was usually not dual, doubled up, Moebius-like. Could a turn to practical philosophy help us integrate theory and practice? Or would we have to have a deconstructive relationship with practical philosophy so as to, once again, engender a banyan of practical alternatives to not just the main stem of philosophy but practical philosophy itself? We have designated such rethought or deconstructed practical philosophy as transformative philosophy.

This paper works its way through *studies* in development and practices of development to arrive at the forgotten tradition of practical philosophy to, *encore*, yet again arrive, after a modern hiatus. The paper argues that the perspective of practical philosophy could offer us a way out of the extant divide of studies and practice, of the respective insulation of university contexts and the development sector actors, of the silos of researchers and practitioners. Practical philosophy, in a rethought and deconstructed form (designated transformative philosophy), could become a space – a *third* space – for the integration of the hitherto hyper-separated twos – brain and hand, theory and action – in a largely caste-divided society marked by long-standing traditions of not just untouchability but also the eternalism of the divide between those who know and those who do, those who read the sacred texts and those who labour.

But what is practical philosophy? This paper sees practical philosophy as not just a branch of the main stem of philosophy, which is the usual politics of appropriation or subsumption, but as a banyan of prop root perspectives emanating from what mainstream philosophy has lost touch with (the book *Pluriverse* offers a pluriverse of prop root praxis between pages 79 and 338; our efforts at CDP are only a footnote to this "global tapestry of people's alternatives").

Practical philosophy sees philosophy as not just theoretical (*epistêmê*) but as practical (praxis); as not just speculative knowledge but as tied to questions of "ought". Speculative thinking is largely concerned with truth and falsity regarding the nature of reality while practical thinking is concerned with the good and not-so-good, the reasonable and not-so-reasonable with respect to *action*; speculative thinking is aimed at knowing the true, while practical thinking is aimed at achieving the *good*. What,

however, is the relationship between the true and the good? What is the relationship between the *study* of a village and community (i.e., the true) and the transformation of conditions in the village and community based on considerations of ethics, justice, and well-being (i.e., the good)? One would therefore need to keep speculative thinking and practical thinking in discourse in real-life rural situations and explore the dialectical relationship between the two. This is also to problematize the traditional and derivative opposition of theory and practice and begin to think anew what has come to be known as the theoretical and the practical, where the practical, a la Heidegger, is (a) rescued from the instrumental conception of action, (b) freed from the tyrannical imperative to produce effects, and (c) relieved of the manic race to exploit all resources, including the human resource.

This paper does not see practical philosophy as just a thought on ought, however rigorous, but as thought contributing to ought and the praxis of the ought as contributing to thought as well as thought emanating from actual transformative processes of ushering in ought and processes of transformative ought emanating from the rigorous review of and reflection on the history of thought and history of thought on ought. This is thus akin to an *ab*-originalization of practical philosophy in the second sense not in the first (Dhar, 2017, 2018c). *Ab*-originalization can be understood in two senses. The first is about the now-known history of the aboriginalization of certain cultures during the colonial era, the characterization of certain cultures as 'aboriginal' and the consequent degradation and devaluing of such cultures as *under*-developed or backward (developmentalism is a product of the first form of the aboriginalization of entire southern or third world cultures).

> The first is about Orientalism (both white and brown), the second is about a possible post-Orientalist praxis. The first is about how [adivasi/indigenous] cultures were made and unmade [during the colonial by the imperialist elite, as also postcolonial period by the nationalist elite]. The second is about what [new] *cultures of knowledge* (as against the Orientalist knowledge of cultures) can be produced [through painstaking deconstruction of Orientalist knowledge]. (Dhar, 2017: 202-205; 2018c: 203)

This chapter is about the production of a banyan of practical philosophy that is not just *practical* but *transformative*. It is also about being in touch with the *enigma of adivasi life and culture* (Aind, 2009) and generating one's own philosophical investigations not from philosophical scriptures but from the adivasi way of life or adivasi modes of being-in-the-world (Davidson, 1995; Ganeri, 2013).

> The second is thus about creating cultures of aboriginalization [of knowledge] as against an extant aboriginalization of cultures. This is not just to render the origin genealogical (as in Foucault) or to put under erasure the original (as in Derrida). It is to render the philosophical originals *aboriginal.* (Dhar, 2017: 202-205; 2018c: 203).

Building on the second meaning of aboriginalization, one can argue that the resources for aboriginalization could come from three sources. Taking from Lenin, one can call it *the three sources and component parts of aboriginalization.* Component One: *deconstructed* epistemes – both western and eastern, northern and southern; deconstruction puts under erasure both epistemes. Component Two: historicization of, once again, both epistemes; critical historicization leads to a *genealogy* and *archaeology* of epistemes. Component Three: a critical yet empathic relationship with long-lost aboriginal or adivasi know-how. In the context of this paper, it is also to render developmental originals *aboriginal.* It is not just to make micro-changes in philosophy (or development), keeping its architechtonics intact, but to *aboriginalize* the very archi-texture of philosophy as well as practical philosophy (including that of studies in development and developmental practices).

In other words, we see thought and ought in their mutual constitutivity; we see practical philosophy as a form and practice of philosophy and philosophical thinking/questioning that is closely integrated to questions of ought in actual concerns in everyday life, lived experience and the larger social. In that sense, practical philosophy is about a *socialized ought* (Rescher, 2000; Raabe, 2006).[12] It would, however, mean the marking of a distinction between the *dogmatic ought* (which goes by a strict enumeration of duties and virtues: one ought to do x, one ought not do p, as in the *Dharmasastras*) and *critical thinking about ought* (which asks how the words of the texts supposed to prescribe the duties and virtues and prohibit their opposites are to be interpreted). Practice also need not be made a "hand-maiden to a comprehensive theory [of ought] which sets the goal, legitimizes the goal as well as the means, and demonstrates its realizability" (Mohanty, 1995).

The idea that philosophy could be *therapeutic* (Carlisle and Ganeri, 2010; Avicenna, 2005) or socially therapeutic and that this is philosophy's first function was indeed widespread in Indian philosophy, and the analogy

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[12] Practical philosophy, in our work, is also in conversation with philosophical perspectives like process philosophy and philosophical counseling.

between philosophy and medicine[13] was put to important use in both Buddhist (the medical analogy features in the Theravāda and Mahāyāna schools of Buddhist conceptions of philosophical practice) and non-Buddhist schools of thought on ought. *Philosophy as therapy* is not, however, an exclusively Indian conception. There are continuities within and across philosophical traditions. In the West, too, this conception of philosophy has displayed a great resilience, persisting long past the Hellenistic age (Deleuze, 1988). The conception of philosophy as therapy allows for, and even necessitates, a new reading of the history of philosophy, one in which deep continuities come to the surface across East and West, ancient and modern, which have been obscured. This reading also contradicts those who maintain that philosophy is a peculiarly European cultural product (in developmentalism, this takes the form first world = developed/ third world = under-developed).

This is to also have an element of *philosophical thinking* and philosophical questions – like questions of existence, including questions of being and becoming (Dhar, 2020), reality (Dhar and Chakrabarti, 2019), knowledge (including questions of methodology), and ethics, politics, (social) justice, and well-being in all developmental endeavours (faced with such questions, how do we work towards a pluriverse of practical and "hands-on material solutions" (Kothari et al., 2019) in our action research?. Practical philosophy is thus work on the *practical aspects of philosophy* (for example, questions of moral philosophy – including meta-ethics, normative ethics, and applied ethics [especially bioethics], philosophy of the social cost of science and technology (including developmentalism, growth ideology, risk, and uncertainty) and the *philosophical aspects of practice* (for example, questions of agency, distributive justice, social suffering, social healing, responsibility, welfare, egalitarianism, economic democracy, population ethics, ethics of global warming, rational and social choice, evolution of norms and cooperation, etc.).

The researchers shall not just be "artists of reason" (Kant uses the phrase to designate philosophers interested only in pure speculation) but action researchers (more on this in later sections). The idea of a philosophy reduced to its conceptual content is what we encounter in our university courses and in textbooks; one could call it the classical, scholastic, university conception of philosophy. We argue instead for *philosophy in the polis.* We also argue for a negotiation between philosophy *of* practice (where philosophy passes

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[13] *Which* philosophy of medicine would inform philosophy? Would it be 18th-century anatomo-clinical medicine? Or a praxis of (social) *healing* different from the anatomo-clinical? Which medical perception was guiding philosophy? What was the content of the medical analogy? Was the medicine a curative or a prophylactic?

judgements on extant practices) and philosophy *in* practice, including philosophical questions born *from* practice (where philosophy gets displaced and reformed due to the experience of practice).

The Loss and Recovery of Practical Philosophy

Stephen Toulmin, in a paper titled "The *Recovery* of Practical Philosophy" (in this paper I highlight both loss and recovery – the loss of the tradition of practical philosophy and the need to return to a rethought form of it) shows how "one particular style of philosophizing – a "theory-centred" style, which poses philosophical problems and frames solutions to them, in timeless and universal terms", and which is tied in turn to a "quest for certainty", was taken as the *defining agenda* of philosophy from the 1650s (Toulmin, 1988). Toulmin foregrounds the loss or the setting aside of "four sets of topics and spheres of thought" in 17th-century philosophy: the oral, the particular, the local, and the timely.

I would like to argue in this paper that what is purloined, largely in developmental practices, are the perspectives of the particular (as against Universalist paradigms of development), the local (Dhar and Chakrabarti, 2019) rather than globalism, and temporal limits (as against the timeless dimensions of the good). While studies in development are focused largely on intelligence (see Aristotle above) and knowledge production, it, at most, develops a theoretical take on the good but doesn't get so much into what Marx designates *dirtying one's hands.* Developmental practices in the sector largely focus on the good without perhaps rigorous reflection on what *is* good and its dynamic nature; its relationship with the good is largely pragmatic. Each needs the other; practical philosophy could be the cusp where each comes to dialogue. In that sense, the *alternative* is in practical philosophy. One needs to inaugurate the perspective of practical philosophy in our prop root practices as against the mainstream/main stem focus on mere interventions, easy solutions, and quick cures (*what one needs to cure oneself of are the paradigmatic 'cures' in the development sector*). Or, perhaps, the prop root practices inaugurate the perspective of practical philosophy. While Toulmin locates the moment of loss in European enlightenment modernity, I would present the history of philosophy in this paper in terms of at least *four originary losses* (Dhar, 2018).[14] The four

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[14] Kriti (2020) argues that efforts at the *recovery* of the spirit of practical philosophy shall remain incomplete if philosophy's relationship with a "fifth originary loss", the Diotima-Irigaray axis of the *feminine*, "continues to remain undiscovered" (also see Chitranshi, 2019).

losses, in addition to the ones Toulmin foregrounds, inaugurate for me the rethought turn (or the *ab*original turn) in practical philosophy; we designate it *transformative philosophy*.

First Loss: Being in the polis

Arendt shows in *The Promise of Politics* how philosophy has lost touch with the "old and short-lived Socratic urge" to *be in the polis* or be connected with the polis; i.e., to lead a life of philosophical enquiry tied to the polis and not far removed or detached from it (Arendt, 2005). In that sense, Socrates marks the beginning of practical philosophy: practical in being concerned with questions of what one ought to do as an occupant of some social role, or more generally with how one ought to live as a human being [this takes us to philosophy as a *way of life* and not just a way of knowing]; and philosophy as being engaged analytically and dialectically, with the aim of arriving at some true account of these matters.[15] In other words, practical philosophy is an attempt to be close to the social or the *bios politikus*. Do our studies in development need to come closer to the "old and short-lived Socratic urge" of *being in* the polis, or at least being *close* to the polis? Is being *in* or being closer to the polis and perhaps the life-world/worldview of the 'other' an alternative to how we have hitherto conducted studies in development?

Do we need to critically reflect on the somewhat given and unquestioned research-process 'field work'? In the MPhil in Development Practice and at CDP, we have tried to move from fieldwork – paradigmatic in the social sciences – to immersion. The web brochure of the MPhil in Development Practice states that the two-year MPhil has a (rural) immersion component of one year, which is to (a) experience, engage, and relate in a sensitive manner with adivasi life-worlds (as well as Dalit contexts) and worldviews (attending also to unconscious processes); (b) co-research with the community on questions, issues, and problems relevant to the community (including attention to psycho-biographs of hope, despair and desire); (c) arrive at an action research problematic collaboratively with the community; (d) develop a framework of actioning the co-researched finding(s); and, finally, (e) research in a theoretically rigorous manner the actioning process.[16]

We at CDP thus argue for three departure points in our rewriting of fieldwork *as* immersion. One, for us, is that the field is prior to the research

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[15] See https://ceppa.wp.st-andrews.ac.uk/commentaries/practical-philosophy-a-historical-introduction/

[16] See http://cdp.res.in/about-the-mphil-program/

question; in other words, the research question emanates from the field (akin to psychoanalysis; in psychoanalytic research it is the analysand; in development practice it is the village or the community). Experience generally, and researcher experience in particular – listening, communicating, and relating with the 'other'– hence become crucial in the form of action research we have undertaken and developed. Two, the focus is not just on knowledge production. The focus is also on transformation. Knowledge production (i.e., standard forms of research) is the foundation for the identification of the problematic on which one shall initiate the process of transformative social praxis. Three, community, through the catalytic action of the action researcher, takes hold of the process of self and social transformation; the community is not a passive recipient of development but a co-participant in action research; hence the need to also understand communities, groups, or collectives psychoanalytically.

Does immersion take us closer to the polis, to adivasi and Dalit life-worlds? This is a question we have been reflecting on, including the pitfalls of immersion itself and the landmines that await one in an immersive experience. What does it mean to live with a host family in the village? What does it mean to be hosted by the community in the village, where the community is by no means a homogeneous whole but a hugely disaggregated entity marked by innumerable contradictions (and not just consensus), including unconscious processes like envy, greed, aggressivity (*jwalan* and *jadu-tona* being one example in rural Madhya Pradesh)? Immersion in Development Practice meant that one was what Asha Achuthan calls an "embodied insider", someone too close to the village community. Did the proximity blind us? Did it blur our vision? Or did it help us have a feel of the community with our other senses; did touch and smell compensate for the blur closeness incurred? Did we get to hear more because we were partially blinded? Did the taste of the food *Didi* cooked give us a different sense of adivasi and Dalit life-worlds? While none of us were hard of hearing, we were definitely *hard of listening*, at least, partially. We realized that we had to work on our capacity to listen to a different language, to different worldviews (Pandikattu, 2002). We needed to learn to relate, to communicate. But to listen to the Other, to relate to the Other, we (i.e., the action researchers) needed to learn to listen to ourselves, our own inner voices; we needed to learn to relate to ourselves, our repressed parts, our disavowed parts, and our not-too-palatable parts (see Chitranshi and Dhar, 2018).

Second Loss: Dirtying one's hands

Philosophy has lost touch with, as Marx (1845) in *Theses on Feuerbach* suggests, praxis or the process of "dirtying one's hands" (Marx, 2016)[17]; or, as Tagore (2011 [1925]) suggests in his *Prospectus* for the Viswa-Bharati Institute for Rural Reconstruction at Sriniketan, *coordination of brain and hand*[18]; or as Gandhi designates in *Constructive Programme (its meaning and place)*, the "divorce of intelligence and labour". The studies of development and developmental practices historically lack this coordination. While we have had theoretical debates on development – on growth, capabilities, functionings, etc. – as well as theoretical debates regarding the practical fallouts of such theoretical debates, and while we have had debates around good practice and not-so-good practice, we have rarely had an integration of theoretical paradigms and practical paradigms. When we dirtied our hands, we exercised our brains less, and when we exercised our brains, we tended to dirty our hands less. Can we do both? Is it possible? Will it produce some new perspectives? Is it another alternative to our standard alternatives? Is practical philosophy then another alternative to

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[17] This is an allusion to the Jewish God of the Old Testament, who had to get his hands dirty while making the world. The Jewish God's dirtying of hands is marked by Marx in terms of a symbolic contrast with the Christian God of the Word. It was as if the Jewish God of the Deed was symbolizing practical life (Marx, 2016; Dhar, 2018b).

[18] "The aim of the Institute [founded near the village of Surul] is to train its apprentices [most of the students are drawn from the cities] to not only earn their livelihood but also to equip them to initiate village welfare and *reconstruction* work, and to stimulate among villagers . . . the spirit of self-help [*atmashakti*]. It is required, however, that an apprentice should have learnt beforehand the *coordination of brain and hand* (Tagore, 2011: 137–39). 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. (see Dhar, 2018a, 2018b). The inspiration for the setting up of CDP comes from Sriniketan. It also comes from the '*dehaati* Aristotle', Heidegger. Heidegger resisted the "political and cultural dominance of [elite] Berlin" by declaring himself a *localist* in his Germanic affiliations, and a "philosopher rooted in his home provinces of Baden and Alemannia, in the country's southwest". He wanted to remain, in his practice of philosophy, "a *village craftsman* like his father and grandfather" (see Chamberlain, 2019).

standard alternatives in development – an alternative that brings to the discourse the intelligent and the good – not just theoretically, but practically – not just practically, but theoretically?

Third Loss: *Phronesis*

Within the dominant culture of modernity, the concepts of phronesis and praxis have been rendered marginal and now face something approaching total obliteration.
Carr, 2006: 434

Philosophy has lost touch with what Heidegger – building on Aristotle – designates as *phronesis.* This paper distinguishes phronesis from "sophia" (wisdom) and "episteme" (science); phronesis as the "other reason" or the other (way to) *truth*; pointing to the possibility of developing a critically self-reflective model of ontological knowledge firmly embedded in the *finite* world and in *life* (Heidegger, 1985; Bowler, 2008).[19] It also shows how phronesis – a *practical reason* or reason premised on *experience* and *concrete practical action* – is backgrounded in the history of philosophy through the foregrounding of theoretical or speculative reason and abstract deductions.

The fundamental distinction between phronesis and sophia would be in the form of the knowledge or truth each would engender. Phronesis is a form of knowledge or truth that is engendered through a critical reflection on the conditions of its production and genesis; it is about being related to what Heidegger designates as the "with-which" – the embedded process of "being-with" (*mitsein*); it attends to the *contingent* (i.e., what can be otherwise) nature of our *being-in-the-world*. Sophia, on the other hand, seeks "eternal certainty" (i.e., what cannot be otherwise). While the phronetic attitude works with dynamic principles (see Long, 2002), sophia remains obsessed with first principles. In that sense, the phronetic path in development would be sensitive to the question of the inassimilable Other; one's experience and concrete relationship with the Other; and the truth that would be produced of the Other out of the vicissitudes of such a relationship-in-flux would be different from the universal knowledge the perspective of sophia engenders. An ontology of development directed by phronesis rather than sophia would recognize its inherent embeddedness in

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[19] In his 1924–1925 course on the *Sophist*, Heidegger offers a re-reading of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. Such a re-reading inaugurates the old Socratic question of practical philosophy; it rethinks ontology in the tradition of practical philosophy and takes us beyond the traditional theory/practice dichotomy.

the world of praxis and of being-related and would thus be capable of critically considering the historico-ethico-political conditions under which it is deployed (see Dhar and Chakrabarti, 2016; Dhar, 2018b).

Clark (2002: 10) shows how Heidegger's entire oeuvre is a critique of the assumption that action was about having a [pre-determined developmental] theory and then putting it into (developmental) practice, that there are key ideas in the sense of "well packaged conceptual packets" that can then be exchanged like commodities across a counter, and that the work of developmental theory is about making its commodity form available for development sector actors. Heidegger tries to free us from "the technical interpretation of thinking". For him, thinking is not a kind of *inner tool kit* containing ideas to be picked up and used on problems as occasion requires. Instead, Heidegger foregrounds in his re-reading of Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics* the importance of conceptualizing truth as phronetic; where truth is intimately tied to relationships (i.e., being-with the with-which) and transformative praxis. The truth of praxis and the praxis of truth are as if co-born. One does not precede the other. We shall see in the section on action research how we have tried to work our way through such understandings of theory, thought, or truth (one could designate them as Lewinian; see Adelman, 1993) to a more dialectical relationship between theory and practice, and thought and action, including a turn to *phronetic truths* – i.e., *experiential, concrete, contingent, practical truths of being-related-to-the with-which*; in other words, *immersive truths*.

Heidegger thus puts into crisis the extant division of *thinking* and *doing*. The deed of thinking is neither theoretical (i.e., contemplative *theoria*) nor practical. For Heidegger, thinking is a deed that also surpasses all praxis. Thinking acts in so far as it thinks. We also see in Heidegger not just thinking on thinking but an entire rethinking of praxis, an emphasis on concern and analyses of the everyday being-in-the-world. It was as if he was thinking through the *practical senses of ontology and the ontological senses of practice*. Ontology thus understood by Heidegger is always *practical*, always *engaged*, and always already refracted in the world of turbid finitude.

Fourth Loss: Subaltern's know-how/*lokavidya*

Lacan, in *Seminar XVII – The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, suggests in the context of his discussion on the master-slave dialectic as well as the Master's Discourse that philosophy has also lost touch with what he calls the slave, with slave life-worlds, and especially with the slave's know-how (I would like to replace slave with subaltern life-worlds and subaltern know-

how [*lokavidyas,* to be precise, building on Basole]) (Lacan, 2007; Dhar, 2018b).

What is it to lose touch with the subaltern, the subaltern life-world and worldview, and subaltern know-how? What happens to philosophy (or development) when it loses touch with the 'with-which' of subaltern worlds, when it fails to 'be-with' the subaltern? What *elitism* inflects philosophy – elitism of abstraction, theoreticism, universalism? Is the turn to immersion in Development Practice (as against fieldwork) also a turn to subaltern life-worlds, worldviews, and know-how? Is it also a turn to the *how* – to *doings* – to praxis?

In *Seminar XVII*, Lacan foregrounds the "abduction" of the slave's know-how – and not just 'surplus labour' as suggested by Marx – through the cunning maneuvers of the Master in Plato's *Meno*. What we now call sophia or episteme – what presents itself as abstract theoretical universal knowledge – is a product of the abduction of the know-how embedded in the everyday praxis of the craftsmen, of the serfs, of women working in households; what Aristotle calls *theoria* is a product of this abduction of the slave's know-how. The separation of 'know' and 'how' – the abduction of the register of the 'know' by the 'Master' leads to the transmutation of know-how into 'deracinated discourse' (Lacan calls it Master's Discourse). On the other hand, the subaltern is left with the remainder – an alienated 'how' (i.e., *how to do)*. This divides the social into *those who know* and *those who do* (labour); those who read-write and those who work.

The turn to practical or transformative philosophy is to question, one, this originary abduction of the adivasi and the Dalit's know-how; two, the relegation of the adivasi and the Dalit to the realm of the "how" (i.e., to "how to *do*"), the realm of doings, and the default elevation of the elite or the Brahmin to the realm of "knowing", to the possessor-master of knowledge; and three, the historical privileging of the know over the how, the brain over the hand, knowledge over labour, and thought over practice.

We have hence felt the need at CDP to take practical philosophy beyond mere philosophy *into practice* (the idea of which is no longer to reason *about* practice but to render reason practical in a virtuous way so that ultimately practice itself can be said to be reasonable). This paper thus revisits the largely forgotten tradition of practical philosophy, not in its original form but in its *ab*-original form; in, perhaps, a new or contemporary form provisionally designated *transformative social praxis* or *action research with communities* (Cotton and Griffiths, 2007).

Action Research: Writing on "Righting Wrongs"?[20]

The words of that philosopher who offers no therapy for human suffering are
empty and vain.
Epicurus (341–271 BC)

We thus arrived at the need for a *trialogue* between three sets of prop roots: (i) the prop roots of studies in development, (ii) the prop roots of developmental practices, and (iii) the prop roots of practical or transformative philosophy. Action research *with* communities (and not just *for* communities), action research in its rethought form, a form that sets up a critical relationship with the Lewinian form, and a deconstructive relationship with the educational form had become the placeholders and contexts for the trialogue between the three sets of prop roots. Building on Carr and McTaggart, one can argue for two significant moments in the history of action research (McTaggart, 1991). The MPhil in Development Practice, as well as this paper, however, tries to inaugurate a third moment; not forgetting the first two moments but, rather, taking off from them and taking them forward.

The first moment (between the 1920s and 1950s), marked by the "application of scientific methods to the study of social problems", was pioneered by Kurt Lewin, who developed a method of testing "the established laws of social life" in practice. Lewin thus inaugurated a turn to practice and a kind of turning away from mere "thick description". He devised an action research method in terms of a spiral of three steps: (i) planning, (ii) action, and (iii) fact finding and reflection on the result of the action, so as to engender a return to the second cycle of planning, action, fact finding, and reflection. The first moment, however, remained wedded to the applied science view; here planning preceded action; hence (developmental) theory was largely like what Heidegger would call an *inner tool kit* (see Clarke, 2002: 10). I would designate this moment as action research *for* communities; at times, it takes the form of action research *on* communities.

The second moment was marked by the resurgence or revival of action research in the context of pedagogical and curriculum research in the early 1970s. It was premised on a critique of the positivistic research methodology. It, instead, turned to interpretive methodologies (Elliott, 1991, 1998; Sanford,

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[20] See Spivak, 2013, 523–581.

1970; Stenhouse, 1975; Wallace, 1987).[21] Action research was seen as a form of inquiry that utilized qualitative rather than quantitative research methods. The qualitative turn meant a focus on the *perspectives of participants* and social actors. It generally took the form of case studies of specific pedagogic situations, classroom contexts, etc. What also 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 principal exponents now insisted that action referred to an *ethics of practice* (as well as the 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. Practice as understood by action researchers at CDP is *informed committed transformative social action*. 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 test the theories implicit in their practice by treating them as experimental hypotheses to be systematically assessed in specific developmental contexts. Reviewed and revised in this way, Lewin's action research cycle was transformed from a method wherein practitioners applied social scientific theories to their practice into a method that allowed researchers, activists, and practitioners to assess the practical adequacy of their own tacit theories in action; transformative social action could now give birth to new theories.

The third moment builds on the second moment and sees action research as a modern manifestation of a much older tradition of *practical* or *transformative philosophy* we had perhaps lost touch with (as we have seen in the previous sections in terms of the four losses). The third moment (let us call it *transformative philosophy*) 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

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[21] See the action research work of Sindhunil Chatterjee and Arunopaul Seal in https://practiceconnect.azimpremjiuniversity.edu.in/bringing-santhali-traditions-to-mainstream-schooling-lessons-from-lakshmi-murmu-smiti-vidyalaya/; and Bishakha Mishra in *Pahadi Padhai* (http://cdp.res.in/bishakha-mishra/).

(e) the "slave's know-how" (Lacan, 2007) compared to the hyper-separation of thought and action (Arendt, 2005), and the world of knowing (*theoria*), making (*poiesis*), and doing (*praxis*) (Carr, 2006).

One may ask why we have made an attempt to move from philosophy to transformative philosophy and from conventional research to action research. Why is such a move necessary? Apart from the reasons cited above, it could also be, as Spivak suggests, for responsible and aesthetic education in the era of globalization, the last available instrument for implementing the somewhat unending programme of global justice and democracy. We wonder whether it is also to train the imagination. To work incessantly at the troubled interstices of the ethical, the aesthetic and the political? Is it for the development of a student body capable of developing its own sustained self-critique; destabilizing, defamiliarizing self-critique? Is it to create an opening to inappropriate(d) others? Is it to prevent the collapse of differences in a developmentalist regime? Is it to engender a dialogue between rights-based frameworks and responsibility-based frameworks? Is it, as Spivak suggests, to learn to learn from below; through what Spivak calls a no-holds-barred self-suspending leap into the Other's sea, as in *immersion*?

Becomings: Swaraj in Praxis

Do we thus arrive at more meaningful philosophies of transformation (and transformative philosophies), either unthought or partially thought? Action research dissertations in the MPhil programme in Development Practice could be seen as nascent theorizations of such philosophies, which in turn redefine philosophy itself. Philosophy is no longer an academic discipline but a way of life/living (Hadot, 1999; Ganeri, 2007) or an art of living counter to all forms of fascism (Foucault, 2000), where the practice of philosophy is a way of *becoming* and philosophical activity was not a form of accumulating knowledge but an *exercise in self-transformation,* an *askesis (*Foucault, 2005*)*. Philosophy was to *form* and *transform*, and not to just to inform, and philosophical practice was to transform oneself and the way one sees, to regard otherwise the same things. Philosophy was the practice of a certain way of being with oneself and with others, and an exercise in self-transformation and world-transformation. The above discussion on transformation stems from my problems with the concept of political transformation, a conceptualization that at times is reduced to *badla* (revenge) and misses out on the necessity of *badlao (transformative*

becomings).[22] It also stems from, on the one hand, the denigration of social transformation, of the work of rural *reconstruction* in Tagore and *swaraj-swadeshi-satyagraha* in Gandhi, and on the other, the unquestioned overvaluing of any kind of transformation, World Bank-sponsored social engineering, and the default devaluing of the *Vikalp Sangam[23]* of transformative practical philosophies and the prop roots of postdevelopment praxis.[24]

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[22] Gibson-Graham offers us interesting models of 'socialised politics' or 'politicised social transformations' (see http://www.communityeconomies.org/Home).

[23] See http://www.vikalpsangam.org/about/the-search-for-alternatives-key-aspects-and-principles/

[24] See http://cdp.res.in/publications-2/

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