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Eka Nari Sanghathan: Towards Affective Becomings

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After a long day of hard toil, on a hot summer evening, two groups of *Kondh adivasi* women gathered in two separate corners of a village in distant Odisha. In one group, 12 women sat in a perfect circle collecting their individual savings and taking decisions on individual loans. The 'trained' leader of the group, shared the details of a government scheme pertaining to irrigation pumps and much of the *noise* revolved around ways in which individual claims could be made over the scheme. In the other group, prevailed a disturbing *silence*— a silence hinting at a *loss of words/language*. This silence is the result of what an aged single woman, Tulsi Pulaka had just shared: an instance from her life she believed she could never forget; and yet she did not want to recall— a memory that haunted her, nevertheless. This happened a few years ago when she was accused of theft in the neighbouring house where she had been invited to perform a religious ceremony and was humiliated in front of the whole village. While narrating the incident, she got up in a haste, threw open the end of her *saree,* and revealing her bare fallen breasts, cried in pain.

I stood before them like *this* and said, "look for your money. Where is it? Find it." Later I went inside that house and forcefully took a handful of rice as my remuneration for performing the *pooja*. I know I should not have taken rice from the household where I was insulted. I should have refused any offerings from that house; but then I would have slept empty stomach that night. That night I was forced to place my helplessness above my humiliation.

A frail, thin and *pained* body was trembling with anger in front of the single women listening to her. And there was silence all around. The single women in Emaliguda village had gathered that evening. This was the first time they had *gathered* to share with each other their experience of living (in) singleness and holding each other

in silence.

This paper builds on the stark difference between the two above mentioned groups, (a) a *group of women* (a micro-credit based self-help group) that discusses and works upon issues of self-interest, material benefits such as individual savings and loans and claiming of individual rights, entitlements and/or material/tangible resources and, (b) a *women's group* (an *adivasi* single women's collective, *Eka Nari Sanghathan*) that deliberates and reflects upon questions of gender and power in intimate and relational contexts, as it recreates new and ethical relationalities, spaces and possibilities for a common and transformed future. In other words, the paper points to difference between the 'noise' developmental work and pragmatic politics of rights and entitlements makes, and the 'silence' that (the politics of) *affect* is subjected to. Through marking this difference, the paper questions whether excessive reliance on so called *effects of development* takes us away from the *affective* states/experiences and affective (routes/roots to) transformation?

This paper is a part of an ongoing action research work with *Eka Nari Sanghathan* (a Single Women's Collective) in the Rayagada district of Odisha and builds on the affective everyday of the members of the *Sanghathan*. This work in the rural *adivasi* area is situated amidst the hegemony of the developmental State. Along with it, NGOs are trying to understand what happens when development is displaced from an obsession with the *effective* to the *affective*; from enunciations of the rational, 'conscious', the utility maximizing rationale to what Seigworth and Gregg (2010) call "gradient of bodily capacities to act and be acted upon, born in *in-between-ness* and residing as accumulative *beside-ness"*? Where do forging of affective collectivities, such as the *Sanghathan* take us? Do they help us move from women centric philosophies of development to gendered philosophies and practices of transformation? Can the emphasis on affect, then open up for us the question of the feminist political in an altogether different way? Can the *Sanghathan* as a contingent-emergent affective becoming against a sum total of self-interested individual actions, offer us a way?

Encountering Affect

The work with *adivasi* single women in Rayagada began in 2013, with 11 months immersion in the Emaliguda village of Gadiseskal Panchayat in Kolnara Block. I lived in the house of a separated single woman, named Arnalu Miniaka. She was in her mid-forties then and lived alone in a small self-constructed house in the village. Arnalu Miniaka (who I call *Aiya*, meaning mother in the *adivasi* Kui language) offered me a space not only in her house but eventually also in her life. Throughout the day, Aiya and I would work together, and in the evening, she would happily take me around the village and introduce to everyone as her daughter whom "God had finally sent." At night when we lay together in a small dark room, she used to tell me about her life, about why she left her alcoholic and abusive husband, how her few days old son was taken away from her, how her natal family refused to support her and how she had been living all by herself for the last twenty years. I would hear her cry night after night, not knowing what I could do except holding and assuring her that I was listening. I used to understand very little of what Aiya would say to me in her native language; but at night as we would 'hold' each other, language often ceased to be a barrier.

However, learning the language became extremely important for me to be able to converse and relate to Aiya and others in the village. There were many single women households and I wondered if every night, like Aiya, these other women also cried themselves to sleep. I wanted to connect with these women and understand the condition of singleness with them; how they managed their lives alone, where did they get so much strength from, what were their everyday struggles and sufferings and how did they negotiate with challenges and problems that the larger village 'community' threw at them. Through these conversations the attempt was also to relate to each other and hold each other in our loneliness. After all I was also trying to find answers to my own experience of singleness; I was also looking for meaningful relationships away from family and friends.

A few women from the neighbourhood would gather every evening to teach me their language and how to 'live' and how to 'be' in the village. As they laughed together at my lack of knowledge about the village, the language, and at how *different* I was from

them. However, there were also moments in which they shared their life-stories with me. Often, their words accompanied tears. As women slowly began opening up in the silence of the night, something started connecting us all; we all seemed *similar* in those moments. These conversations about life of singleness had now become a routine and as our engagement deepened their concerns had become part of my life as well. It is difficult to say what brought us all together in the dead of the night, but when we sat together and shared our stories, we felt alive. Could that force between us be called affect?

'Affect' resists a given definition; affect also resists any point of origin. It arises as Seigworth and Gregg argue,

> amidst *in-between-ness* and acts as visceral forces or intensities "beneath, alongside, or generally *other than* conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion – that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension… At once intimate and impersonal, affect *accumulates* across both relatedness and interruptions in relatedness, becoming a palimpsest of force-encounters traversing the ebbs and swells of intensities that pass between "bodies." (Seigworth and Gregg, 2010: 1-2).

This force or the forces of encounter between bodies became a primary reason to take up the issue of singleness and to collaboratively forge a women's group that could cultivate affective relationalities and intensities. It was a matter of time before our informal night gatherings took the form of large public meetings. More and more women joined and the discussions in the group became more focussed. Some of the discussions we began with were: Who were single women? What did singleness mean? What were the reasons behind the condition of singleness among *Kondh* women? What kind of lives did single women lead (their insecurities, fears, pain, struggles, moments of happiness, future aspirations etc., the nature and burden of work on them, their access to resources and economic condition)? What was their position in the family and the larger village community? How were they perceived (their experience of marginalization, discrimination, oppression and taboos and restrictions faced by them)? And finally, what are their survival strategies? How did they cope with everyday

singleness? What resistance against the order of hetero-patriarchy did the condition of singleness harbour?

It was interesting that the public meetings that had initially begun with most women from the development led Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in the village were now slowly converting to only single women from the SHGs, regularly attending these meetings. As discussions became more centred around concerns of singleness, the attendance of SHG members who were married, began falling. Also, other single women in the village, who were not part of SHGs, began coming for these meetings. Eventually a need for a separate forum concerning issues of singleness was advocated and the *Eka Nari Sanghthan* (ENS) was forged. Within six months of its formation, married women with conditions of singleness began joining the *Sanghathan*. As a result of this change, women in the *Sanghathan* began exploring experiences of singleness lived within marriages and necessary coupledom. This involved women who were married and have husbands, yet face conditions that are similar to those faced by women who do not have or live without a male sexual partner (discussed later).

Given, the focus on the diversity of the gendered experience of singleness, this work, since the very beginning, refrained from assumptions categorizing 'women' as a homogenous whole—assumptions that are perpetuated largely by the so called women-centric developmental interventions that claim that women are always already collectivised by virtue of the homogeneity of their experiences. Premised upon these assumptions, the developmental organizations often fail to account for differences within and among women thereby putting them together as a self-help group. These groups of women are then sought to work on developmental issues (such as livelihood, health, education etc.) that claim to "empower" them, ironically continuing to leave behind issues of women's subjective being and their nodal experiences. This becomes evident in the ignorance of developmental organizations working in Rayagada that, in spite of the presence of a large number of single women (about 30 to 40%) in the area, have no idea (or at least did not have any idea till the *Sanghathan* came into being) about the issue of singleness. Even though 8 out of the 12 SHG members in Emaliguda (the "model" village of developmental work) are either widowed, never-married or

separated from their husbands, discussions around singleness among women never surfaced in the years of developmental interventions.

As a result, there was a need to mark a difference from the usual practices of development that organized women to fulfil developmental agendas set largely in the western discourse, thereby, viewing women in the 'third world' village contexts as poor victims in need of state sponsored support or World Bank benevolence. There was a need to move beyond developmental imagination that veils subaltern history, knowledge, worldviews, and practices that are part of the *adivasi* life-world.[1] In this direction, the 'crafting' of the concept[2], singleness has in a way introduced us to newer possibilities that could be engendered towards building non-teleological feminist futures rather than 'group actions' geared towards individual (material) benefit. One such collective endeavour is perhaps, the *Eka Nari Sanghathan*.

The *Sanghathan* builds upon the affective every-day or what Stewart (2007) calls as "ordinary affects"[3] to work through existing gender 'norms' and relations and co-create possibilities for alternative *becomings – affective becomings* informing relations of personal and political intimacy, desire and sexuated existence. Catering to the condition of singleness, women collectivize themselves around issues of interpersonal relations and gendered intimacies that directly concern them. This process works

[1]"As a system of representations, development discourse served to universalize and homogenize third world cultures, creating the possibility of subjecting 'developing' countries to economic, cultural, and political transformations offered in the name of eradicating underdevelopment and ushering them onto the path of development... power is exercised among and over the peoples of the third world not so much through repression but through 'normalizing' the condition of *under*-development and 'naturalizing' the need for development" (Gibson-Graham and Ruccio, 2001: 159).

[2] "Deleuze (1925–95) saw himself as part of a tradition of philosophy which challenged and disrupted life, such that new concepts and ideas would result in new possibilities for action and practice" (Colebrook, 2002: 11). This action research work with *Kondh adivasi* single women is an attempt at '*doing philosophy',* at '*crafting concepts'* and at *conceptualizing political praxis* in the context of collectivization of single women in the Rayagada district. This work *of* (and *not* simply on) "practical philosophy" (Carr, 2006), engages with Deleuzian-Guattarian thought to make better sense of arriving at new 'problems', opening up new ideas, and exploring new ways of collective 'becoming.'

[3] "Ordinary affects are the varied, surging capacities to affect and to be affected that give everyday life the quality of a continual motion of relations, scenes, contingencies, and emergences. They're things that happen. They happen in impulses, sensations, expectations, daydreams, encounters, and habits of relating, in strategies and their failures, in forms of persuasion, contagion, and compulsion, in modes of attention, attachment, and agency, and in publics and social worlds of all kinds that catch people up in something that feels like *some*thing. Ordinary affects are public feelings that begin and end in broad circulation, but they're also the stuff that seemingly intimate lives are made of. They give circuits and flows the forms of a life" (Stewart, 2007: 1-2).

towards also creating a safe and supportive space where women could come together to share their lives with each other and work through their condition of singleness. In other words, this work is in constant search of a probable relationship between singleness (harbouring a potential for possible feminist futures) and the *Sanghathan,* a collective-caring 'anti-Oedipal/non-fascist' (Delueze and Guattari, 2009) space — reimagined beyond the Oedipal institutions of family and marriage; where the solitude in/of singleness could come to join hands with emerging collectivities and feminist solidarities.

Being **Single:** ***Becoming*** **Collective**

Singleness in this work is understood not as a social identity (singlehood[4]) but more as an affective-subjective state that can be seen as both a condition *affected by* socio-political, economic and cultural exclusions as well as an "accretion of force-relations" that harbour "real power of affect as potential" (Seigworth and Gregg, 2010) – a *potential to affect* the larger 'reality.' In the dominant discourse, a woman is regarded single not because she does not have family, friends and acquaintances, but because she does not have a husband. Women who are widowed, divorced, separated, deserted, and never-married are commonly regarded as single. This 'absence of a husband' in a woman's life begins to shape the nature of her other social relationships and as a result she is single(d), thereby, marking husband's absence as a primary attribute dictating and determining her gendered identity and existence.

In the *Kondh* culture, women and their families have to wait till a marriage proposal arrives from a man's family; a woman's family cannot propose an alliance. Thus, in case of no marriage proposal, a woman remains unmarried. Also, the eldest daughters in the family are mostly retained in order to support the parents and perform care work for the siblings and the elderly. Apart from this, most women who are either abandoned by their husbands due to reasons of domestic disputes, polygamy and

[4] Singlehood is defined as a *state* of being single or a particular social positionality due to the absence of a male sexual partner – a marker of a woman's identity; such as the identity of a widowed, separated, abandoned, deserted, divorced, never-married woman.

preference of a male child and so on, or by the in-laws after the death of the husband return to the natal family. However, acceptance in the natal family is rare for women who return after marriage, especially women who are abandoned or get separated from the husband. When women grow old and are unable to perform labouring activities (including married women) they are considered to be a burden. They are often abused and held responsible for family disputes. Eventually they are either abandoned or they decide to leave. Many a times, married women also face similar exclusions and get disowned by the family. Thus, most *kondh* women live under constant fear of getting abandoned someday. In addition to loneliness and unwantedness, the fear of abandonment haunts the lives of these women. Singleness, thus, can be provisionally understood as a condition of loneliness and alone-ness, including economic, political, and cultural othering and exclusion, perpetual states of financial and emotional insecurity, life devoid largely of relationships and care, a huge work burden residing entirely on the woman's shoulder, and the everyday life of a woman subjected to varied forms of socio-political discriminations and violence.

This dynamic and contingent-emergent meaning of singleness as a lived condition (as against fixed and rigid identity of singlehood) also extends itself to involve experiences of married yet single women. Aunla Kadraka, whose husband works in the railways, although, earns a monthly income but brings nothing home. He spends all the money on consumption of alcohol. Aunla is old and lives alone in a small dilapidated hut in the corner of the village, despite of having a husband, four sons, two daughters-in-law and grandchildren. While talking about her husband, she says,

> he does not come home for months. When his money is spent, he comes back to me. I have to then take care of him and feed him. I am old and have to work all day in other people's field to manage a one-time meal. But my husband does not understand any of this. He keeps complaining that I can't give him proper food to eat. From where am I supposed to get the money for food? He spends everything he earns and when he is left with nothing, he comes back to trouble me. … When I was pregnant with my first child, he left home and returned after 4 years. I raised my son with so much difficulty. Now all my sons refuse to look after me. Two of them are married. They live in the same village with their wife and

> children, but they refuse to keep me.

A man, who works, brings money home and does not beat his wife, is considered a "good" husband. But is that enough is what Basanti asks. She opens up the experience of singleness beyond the physical presence or absence of a male partner. Basanti (22 years old) lives with her husband who does masonry and brings substantial money home. She says, with a sad smile on her face,

> He is a good husband. He does not beat me like other men beat their wives. But there is no happiness between us. He goes for work in the morning and comes back late at night. There is no problem as such, but we never spend time together. He does not even talk to me.

The conditions of singleness that are lived within marriage range from singleness among (older) married women whose husbands are (physically or mentally) unwell, women with alcoholic husbands, women with husbands who contribute to the household in no way whatsoever, women whose husbands are abusive and violent, women whose husbands have migrated and have not returned, to women living with men who care the least and are often indifferent to the presence of these women in their lives. It is thus, a movement away from understanding *woman as an individual biological entity/identity to singleness as a lived experience and a socio-political condition* – an experience or condition not limited to the widow or the poor or the *adivasi* – but which could be *shared* across age, marital status, ethnicity, class, and caste positions.

However, singleness (the way the Sanghathan understands it) is not an experience of oppression alone. In its two-fold understanding, it is also a condition that has enabled women to lead at least a negotiated gendered existence in comparison to women under the strict control of the hetero-patriarchal institution of marriage. In other words, singleness is as much about negotiating, and coping with, as also resisting patriarchal structures, as it is about everyday pain and suffering. Mami Pedenti, a never-married single woman asserts,

> *Our happiness is ours and our sadness is also only ours*. We do not have to worry about keeping a husband satisfied and happy. We can earn our own money

> and at times even spend it upon ourselves, which is very difficult for a married woman (in our context) to do.

Like Mami, most never-married women in Rayagada feel that they are comparatively better off than most married women in the area. Separated single women also asserted that even if given an option, they would not want to remarry. They do not want to experience the same "violence, detachment, negligence, stress, and crisis" that they had to face when they were living with their husbands. Some women said, that "husbands tend to increase a woman's burden of work, create unnecessary troubles and disturbances at home; husbands also dominate." Demystifying the common and popular assumption that marriage leads to happiness, Jaga Pedenti asks, "… it is not as if I am very happy at the moment, but what is the guarantee I would have been happy, had I been married?"

> Like what Roland Barthes calls the "third meaning," they (affective states of singleness) are immanent, obtuse, and erratic, in contrast to the "obvious meaning" of semantic message and symbolic signification. They work not through "meanings" per se, but rather in the way that they pick up density and texture as they move through bodies, dreams, dramas, and social worlding of all kinds. Their significance lies in the intensities they build and in what thoughts and feelings they make possible. The question they beg is not what they might mean in an order of representations, or whether they are good or bad in an overarching scheme of things, but where they might go and what potential modes of knowing, relating, and attending to things are already somehow present in them in a state of potentiality and resonance. (Stewart, 2007: 3)

This immanent, obtuse, erratic and contingent-emergent understanding of singleness thus produces a *cut* in the common discourses that reduces women's experiences either to identitarian logic (such as singlehood) or objective understandings that represent them as poor *victims* in the third world context (as in the developmental discourse). The double or split concept of singleness has enabled us to disaggregate the hetero-patriarchal nature of the *adivasi* reality. It shows us that all of socio-cultural reality is not patriarchal in nature, where singleness is read as both a site of oppression (unacceptable in a largely hetero-patriarchal world obsessed with the dominant

institution of marriage) as also a site of resistance and affirmation (as it works its way through and beyond the institution of marriage and the everyday practices of patriarchy). It was amidst this collective-sense-making of the dual nature of singleness as an experience of oppression and as a condition of affirmation that ENS was born. Through a disruption in what Deleuze calls the 'common-sensical' way of life (marked by standard structures and discourses of patriarchy, capitalism, and development), the *Sanaghathan* was conceptualized as a space of friendship and belongingness for women who experience 'singleness' as a result of social/familial othering.

However, holding regular meetings, keeping the rhythm going and ensuring participation of all the members was bit of a challenge in the beginning. Given women's hectic work schedules and responsibilities, we had to first focus upon creating a new time-space continuum in the *Sanghathan*. Some women who were active in the process were key catalysts in mobilizing other women and laying a strong foundation. The discussions around the importance of meeting each other, forging solidarities, undertaking different actions towards change etc. formed part of initial discussions. Within a couple of months of *Sanghathan's* formation, we received the opportunity of attending a conference organized by National Forum for Single Women's Rights (http://www.rightsforsinglewomen.org/Issues.html) in Delhi. Three women from the *Sanghathan,* Aiya, Mami Pedenti and Relama Pedenti attended the conference and later shared their learning and experiences with other members in the collective. The national conference exposed us to the large presence of single women in various parts of the country. It helped us understand how various associations of single women in different States were organized and functioning and the kind of action-based struggles different forums were involved in. This engagement with the national forum was an inspiring head start for the ENS.

Thereon, in addition to personal sharing and connecting with each other, *Sanghathan* members also began contemplating what 'actions' could be undertaken to engender possibilities of transformation. There were several activities that helped us reflect and dwell upon directions we could take. We watched films together, narrated stories of women from other parts of the country, listened to the songs written by

different women's groups, wrote our own songs on singleness and the *Sanghathan,* engaged in lengthy discussions around each of these mediums, and conducted workshops on gender and collectivization etc. We also simultaneously participated in the village level meetings and Panchayat meetings, met the Sarpanch, Block Development Officer and the Collector and organized a village gathering in order to open up a dialogue around singleness at various levels and institutions.

As one of the early initiatives, women decided to open personal savings accounts in the nearby bank in order to secure themselves financially. This was done primarily to deposit part of their monthly state pension (that they together claimed through a continued process of lobbying with the state) and the money they receive from their respective families as part of their remuneration for working in the family farm and performing housework. As a result of our discussions on gender and women's labour, the *Sanghathan* members negotiated with their respective families and ensured remuneration for the work they performed in/for their families. This led to a significant change in not only how single women perceived themselves, but also how they began to be perceived by their families and the larger society.

Thus, from beginning till date the *Sanghathan*, has been working towards hosting companionships and a sense of *care* for women connected through the shared condition of singleness (Chitranshi, 2016). Women in the *Sanghathan* provide each other with emotional and financial support and look after each other in times of difficulty, despair, and illness. They listen to each other's pain and suffering and they also laugh and sing together in moments of joy. The *Sanghathan* thus, in a way, tries to work through existing and (im)possible forms of relationality and relations of affinity, rethought beyond repressive structures of family and Oedipality. However, the *Sanghathan* functions not only as a support group but also as a *transformative space* that can move beyond the standard models of addressing (single) women as victims to making sense of singleness as a process – as also a response and challenge to hetero-patriarchy. Women in this collective journey have been engaging and (re)thinking critical questions related to development, well-being, solidarity, rights, feminist consciousness, and politics. The initial discussions around singleness as a gendered condition, issues beyond singlehood

and instances of singleness among married women have been the stepping stone. Eventually, issues related to different forms of gender discrimination, sexual division of labour, women's health, alcoholism leading to abuse, marital/sexual violence, masculinity, body, and sexuality have been surfacing time and again. In response, the women have been sensitively engaging, reflecting, and acting towards co-creating mechanisms of negotiation, resistance and affirmation that can take us to non-violent and non-fascist ways of doing transformative gender work. Thus, for us, *Sanghathan* is both a politics of friendship and a form of a collective struggle and action.

Additionally, the collective has also been involved in *building models of self-sustenance*, in *creating processes of working together and generating surplus* in order to take care of the financial needs of single women, especially women who are now old and are not in a condition to self-sustain. For instance, the women in the *Sanghathan* collectively prepare *ambo-soda* (a traditional mango pickle) from the mangoes gathered from the forest. Some of the pickle is kept for self-consumption by the women themselves and the rest is sold to generate *surplus which is collectively appropriated*. The idea of making pickle is not to make a business venture but to *come together as labouring-creating subjects*. In the last 4 years, women from the *Sanghathan* have also engaged in ecologically sensitive farming to *collectively cultivate paddy* and finger millets by leasing plots of land around the village. Their bond has strengthened as they laboured together. Not only the performance of labour, but even the appropriation and distribution of the produce, has been a collective endeavour (Chitranshi, 2019). In order to celebrate this collective labouring process, the women from the *Sanghathan* organise a *bhoji* (feast) every year at the end of the agriculture cycle. Near the Nagaballi river (that flows through the village), under the mangrove, we (including friends and acquaintances from outside who have been supporting the work and are our 'loyal customers') meet, play games, sing and dance, and prepare food and eat together. The sharing of collective joy is considered as important as the sharing of the pain.

Reflective (Re)thinking: In Lieu of a Conclusion

Since the *Sanghathan* belongs to the *adivasi* single women, the questions concerning

women, gender, and hetero-patriarchy as well as the other collective endeavours that the *Sanghathan* undertakes, are all placed well within the particularity of the *adivasi context*. Building heavily upon the *cultural resources, ethos and spiritual systems* that tie them together, women in the *Sanghathan* have been *re-creating new relationalities* and redrawing old ones (those engrained in hetero-patriarchal systems), building ethico-political practices of transformation and rethinking gender work in/with the *adivasi* world. This work does not intend to romanticise *adivasi* culture, ethics, and values as one remains aware of the inherent antagonisms, conflicts, discriminations, and marginalisations that are part of the *Kondh* life-world. But it builds upon the disaggregated nature of *adivasi* society that has a lot to offer us in terms of rethinking and co-creating ethico-political values and transformative praxis.

The ongoing process of collectivization and affective becoming in the *Sanghathan* reflects upon the important question posed by Seigworth and Gregg,

> How does a body, marked in its duration by these various encounters with mixed forces, come to shift its affections (its being-affected) into action (capacity to affect)? … Cast forward by its open-ended in-between-ness, affect is integral to a body's perpetual *becoming* (always becoming otherwise, however subtly, than what it already is), pulled beyond its seeming surface-boundedness by way of its relation to, indeed its composition through, the forces of encounter. (Seigworth and Gregg, 2010: 2-3)

Along with this, the action research work in Rayagada also engages with Deleuze and Guattari's ideas that help us to take a detour from contemporary developmental work and even forms of feminisms that are installed in the language of identity, representation, rights and the forging of women's groups in order to amplify 'numbers.' Illusory bonds of 'unity' among self-interested subjects driven by a sense of sameness and common cause seems to have become paradigmatic of most developmental and political interventions taking place in adivasi contexts. The so called "third world victim woman" is brought to the forefront as a homogeneous entity, thereby, eclipsing all existing and possible forms of differences and flows of power among and within women. The Sanghathan tries to depart from this kind of homogenising and obscuring, thereby arguing for treating the process of coming together of women as an end in itself rather

than just a means to attain some pre-determined goal. One among many principles that Foucault mentions in the preface to *Anti-Oedipus* (Deleuze and Guattari, 2009: 14), principles that may guide towards an anti-Oedipal way of life, is,

> Do not demand of politics that it restore the "rights" of the individual, as philosophy has defined them. The individual is the product of power. What is needed is to "de-individualise" by means of multiplication and displacement, diverse combinations. The group must not be the organic bond uniting hierarchised individuals, but a constant generator of de-individualisation.

In the process of what Foucault calls "de-individualisation", what can be the multiple modalities of different body-beings in touch with each other sharing an "affective social field" is an on-going enquiry of this work. Can the working of the Sanghathan take us to newer modes of "becoming with" and "becoming towards" the other? In what ways can a Sanghathan of "multiplicities composed of heterogeneous singularities in dynamic compositions" (Sotirin, 2005: 99), explore flows and intensities of rhizomatic 'becoming'? Can reflections and re-workings premised upon Guattari's idea "we are all groupuscles" take us towards "the search for a new subjectivity – a group subjectivity" (Deleuze in Guattari, 2015: 7)? The meaning of transformation for us, lies in this process of immanent thinking and living which on the one hand, challenges and disrupts common sense and everyday ways of life and on the other, produces newer, divergent and differentiated forms of relations, thoughts, becomings and life. Our work in *Rayagada* stands testimony to such an unfinished journey.

To understand the difference between the workings of the Sanghathan and that of the developmental organizations, a graphic representation of what we have called, *"the circle-triangle distinction: From Resources to Relationships"* becomes significant.[5]

[5] This exercise was designed and developed with Prof. Anup Dhar, Director, Centre for Development Practice, who has been a mentor and a co-traveller since the inception of this work.

The circle stands for resource related issues in women's life, for example, shortage of drinking water, inaccessible road, lack of electrification, absence or malfunctioning of governmental institutions, provisions and policies etc. — issues of village development that surface immediately as part of any conversation around transformation. The triangle, on the other hand, stands for (interpersonal) relationship based concerns in women's lives, thereby, representing issues like singleness, violence, gender discrimination, woman's relation to her own body-being, health, sexuality etc. — issues that are always rendered secondary to more "prominent" agendas of (village) development. This separation between the circle and the triangle highlights that the issues tied to the circle, at one level, require a negotiation with the state and government officials, largely as 'rightful' beneficiaries of developmental policies and programmes, however, the concerns tied to the triangle require a rethinking of gender(ed) relationships, ethico-communitarian ways of being and transforming ourselves and our socio-economic-cultural context and conditions. Women are burdened by conditions tied to the circle and the triangle. But *how to address these concerns and what we become in the process* is an important question that gets opened up through marking this distinction between the circle and the triangle. This also takes us to other questions such as, (a) Do we remain as 'beneficiaries' relying solely upon the developmental State and other organizations (something the 'circle' insists we do) or do we take charge of transforming our present and future through transforming ourselves, our social relations and context (something the 'triangle' becomes symbolic of)? (b) Where do we begin from, the circle or the triangle? Can working through the triangle strengthen our position to negotiate better with (non) governmental organizations? Can rethinking

social (gender) relations and strengthening 'local' collective bonds take us towards transforming the self, the social, the economic, the ecological and the political?

This exercise, through marking a sharp distinction between the work of development and the work of the Sanghathan and therefore, opening up these questions, has helped us destabilise the dominance of practice and discourse of mainstream development in the villages we are working. It has enabled us to prepare a fresh ground of our own.

Further, towards this thinking, Deleuze and Guattari's understanding of *becomings* – *becomings* which are always "in the middle and in-between" – takes us beyond the essential forms, fixed identities, pre-determined subject positions, structured functions, transcendent values, logical and moral explanations, and molar oppositions. The concept of 'becoming-woman', especially finds relevance with regard to this work, as it signifies becoming something *else,* something beyond that which always already exists in the form of being' a woman in the hetero-patriarchal normative world. Becoming-woman, for Deleuze and Guattari is not to imitate or imbibe womanliness but to defy dominant molar forms and relations in order to conceive "molecular woman" and "molecular political movement" that "slips into molar confrontations, and passes under or through them" (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005: 276). Although, this concept of becoming-woman has been put to critique by 'difference feminists' – focused on the question of sexual difference, it finds relevance in its creation of possibilities around what life and body can do through challenging molar identities and binaries, like woman, like singlehood.

In this context, Braidotti (2002) urges us to explore connections between sexual difference and becoming-woman as she believes that the question of sexual difference can be opened up given the transformatory nature of becomings. Since Deleuze and Guattari, through the problematising of the man-woman binary, argue for a possibility of a "thousand sexes" (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005: 278), their conceptualisation of the sexes cannot be reduced to the logic of the One or the Same.

> In relation to their [Deleuze and Guattari's] becomings, they are certainly

> opposed to neutrality and sameness since becomings, becoming-woman, child, animal, molecular are the process by which molar identities are complicated. They see a proliferation of multiplicities and differentiations in their understanding of becoming. For Braidotti and other Deleuzian feminists, becomings break desire away from repression, away from the [Freudian theatre of the] unconscious and oedipal desires. Becomings are new transformations that are always occurring and never stop. (Blake, 2009: 69)

Becoming-woman, thus, helps us not only rethink questions of body and politics beyond identity but also urge us to explore recomposition (not decomposition, which surrounds the discourse of feminist politics today) of masculinities and femininities through deterritorialising opposing sexual binaries as "both men and women become-woman" (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005: 278). The Sanghathan could be seen as *that* evolving space where these questions and concerns are discussed and analysed, and efforts are undertaken to work through standard or given structures and discourses of hetero-patriarchy, capitalism, and development. Thus, how can transformative praxis be conceptualized beyond fascist, reactionary, confrontative, and paranoid modes of organizing and in-between molar and molecular forms of politics, or what Deleuze and Guattari call in-between macro and micro-politics, is a question that requires serious attention.

The hypothesis that this work with single women in Rayagada proposes is that working through the condition of singleness and gender relations in the particularity of adivasi space, can perhaps slowly take us to affective intensities that carry the potential of disrupting fixed sexual binaries, put under erasure the category 'woman' and challenge the hetero-normative way of life. Or perhaps it is the other way round; I remain undecided. Some of these processes are partially evident in the work of the Sanghathan. The concept of singleness, which is perhaps an anti-Oedipal concept in itself, has helped us problematize the binary man/woman by splitting up the homogeneous categories and showcasing fractured matrices of dominance, oppression, resistance, and affirmation.

Alongside, the Sanghathan can be read as a form of revolutionary desire that post-Deleuze and Guattari is understood as a positive creative *flux* and potential force of life.

I say this because the Sanghathan as an affective desire could move towards producing life and diverging multiplicity of relations that are constantly transforming and getting created. Deleuze and Guattari render desire political through moving beyond the Oedipal understanding of desire as negative, or as repressed resulting in turn from the logic of lack; this kind of understanding of desire requires "thinking of a different kind of body and a way of thinking about the body differently" (Blake, 2009: 34).

Similarly, the Sanghathan of *Eka Nari* (Single Women) as desiring-production, in taking us beyond the unit called family, acts as a connecting force that may produce relations of affinity and affect between multiplicity of body-beings. While arguing for anti-Oedipal desire, the Sanghathan tries to inaugurate a different idea and imagination of the larger social rather than simply getting produced by it. Thus, the Sanghathan on the one hand, can be understood as the force, the desire which connects differentiated bodies in order to think and produce life creatively and differently, and on the other, it may also move towards production of non-familial anti-Oedipal flows that can deterritorialise molar forms and structures.

Moreover, the collective repeatedly undertakes several processes in order to analyse and reflect upon group behaviour, group functioning, communication patterns, power dynamics, external/internal influences and so on. Importantly, this work revisits the familiar idiom of "representation" and "leadership" and resists the formation of 'woman leaders' as it sees the very idea of 'leadership' (privileging and placing power in the hands of a few) as patriarchal. The Sanghathan has *no elected/selected 'leaders.'* Whoever wants to join comes and whoever wants to share, speaks. All the members of the collective form the core of decision-making and facilitation among themselves. Different roles and responsibilities are fulfilled by taking turns that are decided through consensus. The members labour together and simultaneously work towards mitigating power relations within the Sanghathan in order to arrive at a *common* and a *non-hierarchised* space.

Sanghathan then becomes a struggle between what Guattari calls "subjugated groups" and "group subjects."

> Groups are subjugated no less by the leaders they assign themselves, or accept,

> than by the masses. The hierarchy, the vertical or pyramidal organisation, which characterises subjugated groups is meant to ward off any possible inscription of non-sense, death or dispersal, to discourage the development of creative ruptures, and to ensure the self-preservation mechanisms rooted in the exclusion of other groups. Their centralisation works through structure, totalisation, unification, replacing the conditions of a genuine collective "enunciation" with an assemblage of stereotypical utterances cut off both from the real and from subjectivity. (Deleuze in Guattari, 2015: 13-14)

Group subjects on the other hand are defined by "coefficients of transversality" that ward off totalities and hierarchies. Guattari treats the question of "transference as *vehicular"* and takes it away from dual relations to group relations, as also from that of vertical hierarchies to horizontalities. For Guattari, they are agents of enunciation, and environments of desire. The question to us is do groups of women in development stand closer to subjugated groups? How and whether Sanghathan – a women's group, will become group subjects? What would its relation be with subjugated groups? Would it itself end up becoming a subjugated group? Is the coefficient of transformation, then in the coefficient of transversality? Is it in the tension between becoming subjugated groups, marked by the role of a synthesizer operating through rationalisation, totalisation, exclusion, and becoming group subjects, where unification occurs through analysis? How do we analyse affect in relationalities, amidst in-between-ness and how would affective analysis take place amidst the flows that constitute myriad lines of flight in adivasi society?

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