

Revisiting Methodology:

Scripting, Stage and Transformation

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A reflective writing that follows the path of 'practical philosophy' in an adivasi village, Rukrum in Jharkhand, this paper is indicative of a methodology that does not base itself upon a pre-decided methodology separated by disciplinary silos, but one that is contingent, emergent, and indicative of new becomings. By bringing psychoanalysis and development to a creative dialogue through a process of scripting and performing, it lays the ground for a way (not 'the' way) of disrupting the common-sensical, as also paves a new way of 'doing philosophy'.

Researchers have hitherto carried out research like an elaborate, pre-decided performance. They decide upon a question, a hypothesis that *they* want to probe; the choice of the stage and the actors becomes simplified as the chosen hypothesis brings with it a careful selection of the stage that can best host it; they *go* to the chosen stage, their methodology pre-determined, conduct as many in-depth interviews as they can, all directed at their pre-decided question using their predetermined methodology; rejoicing when the actors respond in a manner that bats for the script that has already been scripted. It becomes an exercise in validating or disproving a hypothesis to satisfy an academic curiosity born in a university space and tested in a space that has been labeled third world, rural, tribal, undeveloped, poor, backward to name a few; a reality that has been conveniently made to fit into our standard binaries and is largely unknown outside of these dominant paradigms. The methodology is then *just* a section of this script, carefully curated into a structure that does not allow the actors in the research to tamper with what has already been written for them about *their* lives; a few non-conforming

ones are announced to being unfit for this particular performance – they become the ones that are written off as limitations.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith *shows how* ‘research’ leads to a gross generalisation of the being-in-world of the communities *on* which it has been carried out - “In a very real sense research has been an encounter between the West and the Other”¹. This way of ‘exploring’ the other, the (un)known, seeped down into the university system through the establishment of research societies, that further cement *a particular* way of exploration, of knowing, of generalisation. They become an extension of the colonizing mission. Posited at the heart of all disciplines, research then began to dictate truths about the other. Dhar extends the argument further and places the university’s extant determination to ‘extract’ and prioritise *episteme* as a way through which it has legitimised its position as a “consent generating, modern secular master”². How do these then shape the way research has hitherto, been imagined, and practiced? Where does this leave action research and subsequently, action research methodology?

Let us consider a different proposition. What if the script could not be envisioned before the stage? What if a stage gave birth to a script? That would seemingly upset the ‘natural’ order of things. It would invite scepticism in academic circles. How can one reach and get into a complex, de-decentred, disaggregated understanding of reality³, called ‘field’ without having a question and a methodology to investigate that question? Rarely have there been situations when the ‘field’ has been expected to give birth to the question; where being-in-the-world’s-worldliness comes first; where the actors are just not playing a part but become writers, directors, and editors of their own script. When

¹ Linda T. Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and indigenous people* (London: Zed Books, 1999), 8.

² In *What if, the University is a Parrot's Training?* Dhar (2015) shows the critical lens with which Tagore looked on at the modern university system, which has perhaps put on blinkers in its desire towards a cognitivist approach. Lacan befriends Tagore here and shows how the University discourse is apposite to the Master’s discourse. How? By extracting the knowledge of the community, it places it within the ‘hallowed’ halls of the university. It prides itself on the dissemination of this knowledge, a knowledge kidnapped from the ones that Smith (2009) called ‘indigenous’. There is some responsibility that Western philosophy also needs to take; as “philosophy in its historical function is this extraction, of the slave’s [know-how], in order to obtain its transmutation into the master’s knowledge” (Lacan 2007: 22 as quoted in Dhar, 2015).

³ See Anjan Chakrabarti and Anup Dhar, *Dislocation and Resettlement in Development: from third world to world of the third* (London: Routledge, 2009) and Anjan Chakrabarti, Anup Dhar and Stephen Cullenberg, *World of the Third and Global Capitalism* (Delhi: Worldview Press, 2012).

one opens oneself up to this possibility, it allows one to give up the power and the complacency that has engulfed academia for centuries. It allows the opening up of the countless radical possibilities, interpretations, and meaning-making processes that were hitherto, foreclosed in our imagination. The movement from how research has largely been practiced to a co-researched, co-constitutive, and co-creative exercise where the ones who have always been the objects of the process become the researchers themselves; sharing the reins; would allow for the voices that have been historically and violently muted; would create a space where we all learn to unlearn our privilege, become vulnerable and learn to listen to voices that might take us to realms beyond knowledge, say the truth. In attempting something so bizarre, we might end up co-creating space for those hidden voices, those silent musings, the forgotten stories; which might give us unconventional, queer ways of practice, which might open up the cracks in a seemingly smooth wall.

It has been a long time since I ‘left’ Rukrum, an adivasi village nestled in the Gumla district of the Indian state of Jharkhand. Sitting in front of the computer today, I wonder where to begin. I wonder how to begin. How does one write about work that is not based on a pre-determined methodology, but in itself is a methodology-in-the-making? A work, where the *what of it*, the *why of it*, and the *how of it* were co-created in and by Rukrum, thereby lending it a contingency, a particularity that remained in a tense conversation with *a priori* universals.

Premised on reflective writing on the *how* of action research, the paper deals with three distinct threads that intertwine with each other along with smaller, mini co-constitutive threads that create the methodological spiral. First, at its very core, how does one write a work that tries to recover a concept, an understanding, a meaning; one that has been hitherto foregrounded in our imagination as that half of the circle that is always trying to catch up to the other half. Second, what is it to write and how to write a work of transformative praxis that is itself writing itself, writing undertaken by the creators of this work who through their writing has constantly tried to critically engage with their anguish through a creative process. Third, how does one write a work that engages with a turn in self-representation, shifting subject positions and as a

consequence of that engagement pave the way for the question of subalternity in writing, acting and directing.

Walking through the discourse – from rural to *dehaat*⁴

We have hitherto, talked about and defined a certain ‘x’ in terms of ‘what x is not’; thereby becoming complicit (consciously or unconsciously) to the logic of One, a logic that censures us comfortably in a language that is comprehensible to us; leaving the many, queer possibilities and realities that cannot be assimilated out of the ambit – as a remainder, a relic of the past that we wish to disavow. In other words, there is a primary (let us call it ‘p’) and the other is a lacking or lagging other (let us call it ‘not p’). What this shows is that even when there is seemingly a two, there is always a One, which is ‘p’ and a lacking or a lagging version of that ‘p’ – ‘not p’. The ‘not p’ lacks any self-description of its own and is wholly dependent on the ‘p’ for one. Something similar has happened to the rural. In our haste to censure what we ‘know’ into neat compartments, we have collapsed the existing infinitude of possibilities that perhaps make the rural; to looking at the rural as a pre-capitalist, pre-modern, backward, underdeveloped, and superstitious space that has to be brought into the developmental *telos*, to be made like the urban, leaving whatever cannot be assimilated as a remainder, a relic of the past that is to be erased and forgotten from memory. The description of the rural has always been of one that is perennially trying to catch up to the urban, is there but not so there, yet. In other words, there is no possibility of its self-description, what is ‘urban’ is today, dictates what is ‘not-urban’ today, thereby leading us to the rural. This goes a step further when it dictates not just what the rural *is* but what it *should* be; where the capitalist-development agenda wants to do away with this pre-capital, pre-modern space and usher in a transition to the modern society that the urban is symbolic of. Our fundamental problem then becomes the way we define a landscape.

A small section on the *othering* of the rural in the Capitalocentric-Orientalist⁵, development imagination is necessary to understand the larger context in which the

⁴ The word *dehaat* has its roots in Hindi and it roughly translates into ‘countryside’. However, over the years it has come to refer to the village. The word is usually used to denote something that is very backward and underdeveloped and almost always has a negative connotation attached to it.

action research work is placed. It is of no surprise that one can see a mirroring of the same in the context of how the conception of the village in India has come about. Manish Thakur⁶ explores how the village, through becoming an object of study, was constructed and reconstructed by Western anthropology. Colonialism created a distinction between the village and the state for ‘supposed’ administrative reasons, but as most of their legacy, this particular construction of the village became paradigmatic even after their exit. We latched onto this understanding of the village as a site that lacked, ushering in development and welfare schemes that would take care of this backward entity. The politics of development is such – by reducing the infinitude into a dualism (‘p’ and ‘not p’) – capital and pre-capital, a dualism dictated by the post-colonial policymakers; all trying their hardest to make the rural become the urban, to put it on the fixed path of Capital-centred modernization.

Embedded discursively, in language, in common parlance; it is difficult to see beyond these descriptions and understandings. We are as complicit as we are hostage. Exploring the complexity of this brought me face to face with an understanding - it goes over the same insights a number of times, each time exploring a different aspect of the central relationship between subject and world through a different lens. As each lens is used, one becomes more and more aware of what it is that makes people become so naturalized to their world, what is it that makes them so ingrained in the contours of their environment. This brought me to dehaat. Or should I say, dehaat came to me?

The different ways in which villages have been historically understood has opened up the many ways of ‘acquiring’ theoretical knowledge about it. These have resulted in thicker and thicker descriptions, each trying to compete with the previous.

⁵ Capitalocentric-Orientalist is “the inalienable constitutivity of capitalocentrism and orientalism [in development], and the resultant displacement of [an otherwise disaggregated] economy into a dualistic frame [p/~p] ... through the overdetermination of capitalocentrism and orientalism, the space of non-capitalism is displaced into the derogatory other *pre-capitalist* ... Thus orientalism and capitalocentrism, in overdetermined imbrications, help to define the dualistic framework of a modern capitalist economy and a traditional pre-capitalist economy. This dualistic framework in turn gives the discourse of development a turn towards historicism represented by the category ‘progress.’” (see Anjan Chakrabarti and Anup Dhar, *Dislocation and Resettlement in Development: from third world to world of the third*. London: Routledge, 2009: 32-33). It combines the Capital-centric understanding of development with the ‘brown man’s’ burden to civilise, to chart out the path for how economies that are not capital must be sent along the path of capital-intensive modernization and progress. Dehaat becomes an object of such intervention.

⁶ Manish Thakur, *Indian Village* (New Delhi: Rawat Publications, 2014), 1-4.

These help and confuse at the same time. Manish Thakur helps me here, as I struggle to put my thoughts into words, “the terms social scientists use to articulate and express their concepts are generally drawn from the vocabulary of everyday language.”⁷. These terms may not always be coterminous with those used by the administration or policymakers. We have all heard of the rural and the village. Those familiar with the Hindi language would also know of *gaon*, a term that is used in every day as well as *grameen*, a term that is used in government reports and policies. The vocabulary is vast and distorted, with terms being interchanged with each other. Rukrum ‘distorted’ the vocabulary further, by introducing dehaat.

So when dehaat becomes a space which is ‘not a town’, geographically and developmentally remote; it takes meaning in itself – a meaning that defines what people imagine the world to be. Attending to language then becomes an important exercise, an exercise that demands the village to be seen from the vantage point of the village itself and not work on an infused a-priori meaning thought of, detached from the spaces the meaning is generated in the first place. Dehaat becomes important because, methodologically speaking it becomes one among the many mediums of making sense, of knowing, of understanding life-worlds.

The importance of maintaining the distinction between rural and dehaat lies in the fact that the rural is very much contextual and dependant on the idea of the urban, which in turn feeds into the creation of the broad realities of urban and rural. One way of understanding dehaat is to look at it from a very native, linguistic understanding of the space itself – if a village is dehaat then it needs to be understood by being there, instead of an urban vantage point because if one lapses into that then again the risk of perpetuating the rural-urban divide is eminent and inevitable. Are there other ways? Which praxis would then take us to the vantage point of the village?

In the stories we tell, the speakers reveal the power of counterstories to ‘expose the construction of the dominant story by suggesting how else it could be told’. As Mark

⁷ Manish Thakur, *Indian Village* (New Delhi: Rawat Publications, 2014), vii.

Freeman⁸ says, counter-narratives are those “culturally-rooted aspects of one’s history that have not yet become part of one’s story” and lie at the periphery of the discourses that are generated around. Dehaatwas signaling at such a story.

It becomes imperative to theoretically work through the layers of the discourse on rural and the village to understand the *how* of the *what*. I realise that one cannot limit writing on action research methodology to giving an empirical account of the process without a proper contextualisation of it in discursive shifts. Having said this, what does it mean to dream about a rural, one that is *outside* discourse, outside the language of the hegemonic, one that could be called “foreclosed”, ironically in the very foregrounding of the rural⁹? Does a possibility lie in the very imagination and creation of dehaat, not as a synonym of the rural or the village, but as the *other* within the rural, one that if ever, in myriad different ways struggles to come out, is relegated back to the censured domain? In other words, does the possibility of a dehaatis what gets foreclosed in the foregrounding of the rural as the backward, lagging, lacking other? *How* does one imagine and create this possibility?

Action Research Methodology, then

Is action research then a way through which we can ‘decolonize’ our minds and thereby, decolonize methodologies? A thought strikes – words such as exploration, understanding, recovery – have become so ingrained in our vocabulary that they flow uninterrupted in writing a work like this. I wondered if we will ever be able to create a vocabulary that does not is not so invasive. Perhaps, we need to limit our dependability on these familiar words and let the ‘how’ of the process supports us in creating something new, which we *might* wish to name.

⁸ Mark Freeman, *Charting the narrative unconscious: Cultural memory and the challenge of autobiography*, ed. Michael Bamberg and Molly Andrews (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Co.).

⁹ Chakrabarti, Dhar and Cullenberg (2012) reconceptualize ‘hegemony’ as the *Moebiusof foregrounding-foreclosure*. They see the “foreclosed” as that, which has never entered the world of discourse, or is “inappropriate” within the register of the Symbolic. What symbolization resists appears in the ‘real’, which is defined as a “non-place”. Since the foreclosed is outside the Symbolic, it leaves a gap, a rent in reality, and hence requires compensatory closure of the Symbolic. This is achieved through the foregrounding of substitute real’s. “The process of foreclosure, the process of the production of the register of the ‘real’ does not come about as isolated, but, somewhat paradoxically, in relation to processes of inclusion, inclusion of the ‘real’ within the Lacanian Symbolic, albeit in displaced forms. The ‘real’ is included not as ‘real’ but in a circumscribed and habitable form, in forms habitable for the hegemonic. The ‘real’ is, as if, put outside through the inclusion of substitute ‘real’-s.” (Chakrabarti, Dhar and Cullenberg, 2012; also see Lacan, 2006: 465).

Carr became an ally – what is the need to base a ‘mode of inquiry’ that wishes to understand how the practice of development operates, on a research methodology? He understands it as a “modern manifestation of the pre-modern tradition of practical philosophy”¹⁰. Let us enter into a conversation with Aristotle here. He drew a distinction between *poiesis* and *praxis*; *poiesis* is understood as applied philosophy, wherein the end result of the action is influenced by technical expertise (called *techne*) and *praxis*, where the end result of that action is not a product, but to facilitate a good life which can only be realised “in and through *praxis* itself” (426)¹¹.

A *phronetic* move towards making sense of the world is thus, intrinsically tied to the question of practice where both the process and the end are in a mutually constitutive deliberation and reflexivity. It allows practitioners to make sense of the practical knowledge sustaining their practice by letting them undergo a process of self-reflexivity of the knowledge created through their practice. “The peculiarities of *phronesis* – its embeddedness in *praxis* and how it is inseparable from the concrete situations in which it is applied – mean that it can only be advanced by a form of ‘practical philosophy’ that is exclusively concerned with sustaining and developing the kind of practical knowledge that guides *praxis*”¹².

The above can also be misconstrued, misunderstood, and lead to a gross generalisation that *anything* that generates practical knowledge through self-reflexivity can be clubbed under the umbrella of action research. The interdependence between *praxis* and a mode of inquiry that is bereft of methodological underpinnings that are *apriori* or pre-determined can perhaps, be the best ally for an action researcher. Posited on the cusp of an uneasy, yet deep ‘knowing’, ‘being’ and ‘doing’; action research is a process of an osmotic relationship between the researcher and the community’s ‘being-

¹⁰ Wilfred Carr, “Philosophy, methodology and action research”. *Journey of Philosophical Education* 4, 40 (2006): 421-25.

¹¹ For Aristotle, both *poiesis* and *praxis* are forms of action that are directed towards achieving some end. But there are some differences also. In *poiesis*, the methodology of achieving some pre-determined end is shaped by “principles, procedures and operational methods”. The end of *praxis* cannot be theoretically specified, neither can it be pre-determined. It can only be realised through the process of its doing in a particular context (Carr 2006).

¹² See Carr (2006).

in-the-world' that creates a possibility, and not *the* possibility of an ethical guide to a reflexive 'doing'; in this case writing a theatre script on Rukrum's dehaat.

Would this then help the body in dehaat dismantle the way with which it interacts with the world, thereby effectively destroying the controls and rules that are imposed on it in terms of definition, what it *is* and what it *should* be. Would this then help us deterritorialize the structures and become cognizant of the vast multitude and infinitude of intensities that are ever flowing, ever changing, getting rejected, and projected in dehaat? Can the writing of the theatre script provide us *a* way (not *the* way) of disrupting the common-sensical, a way of 'doing philosophy'?

One can then perhaps read action research as practical philosophy as opposed to applied philosophy or a philosophy of practice? Is there an attempt to re-conceptualise the world, engender rhizomatic ways of thinking; "not to tell truths about the world, but to open up spaces that allow us all to think how our worlds may be changed"?¹³. How did this happen in Rukrum?

Writing with Rukrum, 'Righting' with Rukrum

"Dehaat kya hai?" (What is dehaat?)

Meeting after meeting, it would more often than not yield similar responses – dehaat was what-was-not-a-sheher¹⁴, dehaat was primitive, backward, and undeveloped. The 'what is' would take us to the 'not p'. At times my inability to communicate the 'what is' frustrated and angered me and at the same time made me realise the limits of language. How do you even inaugurate a thought process that would make one think beyond the current understandings of dehaat that are so censured in the realm of the lack? This question was almost beginning to sound like a treasure hunt – dehaat is hidden somewhere, buried under layers of a developmental imagination, and has to be excavated out.

¹³ Tony Cottons and Morwena Griffiths, "Action research, stories and practical philosophy", *Educational Action research* 4, 15 (2007): 545-60.

¹⁴ The word sheher has its roots in Hindi and is translated into town, which is considered as a representative of the urban.

The struggle against a paradigmatic description and being complicit in its (re)production needs no introduction. Writings have systematically excluded the ones who are being written about. The language of the written word, the language of the story-teller is incomprehensible to the ‘object’ of the story. Yet, in these stories, the word ‘us’ is rampant in its usage. This creates an elusive coupling; of the author, the one who assumes the authority over the story, and the ones who struggle to locate themselves in the ‘us’. The action research work then became about creating a practice of dehaat, a practice where a *dehaati*¹⁵ can make sense of it, by the way, it makes itself to be or become or create itself to appear and required a methodology that would best aid in this creation.

Rukrum was oscillating between epistemic darkness, wherein the discourse of the rural as being the lacking other, the backward, and the underdeveloped was a truth that dictated their lives; and the darkness of their own experiences of belonging to dehaat. The pertinent question then became, that how would this action research experience this darkness – it is not just about knowing about the experience of darkness, but about taking that knowing as a step in developing a transformative praxis to deal with the darkness, to possibly heal the darkness. It is essentially about reversing the conventional order – you don’t have a theory with which you try to attach some practice in a community; your theory is born out of your practice, you theoretically engage with your practice.

How did we reach this shift in Rukrum? With the ‘what is’ question taking me back to the paradigmatic description of dehaat, a shift occurred with Sumitra *didi*, “Dehaat kya hai, toh sirf kami aata hai dimag mein. Haan, dehaati hone se kuch anubhav hain jo hum aap ko batana chaahte hain” (“What is dehaat, only lack comes to mind. Yes, what are the experiences of being a dehaati, which I would like to tell you”).

The articulation of ‘*what is the lived experience of being a dehaati*’ in Rukrum, were traumatic. I must clarify that it is not what is corporeal that is being spoken about; rather it is the psychic context of the trauma in the lives and experiences of the women

¹⁵ The word dehaati is used to describe anyone who lives in a space that is delegated as dehaat. It is used mostly as an adjective in common parlance, more so as a comment on the abject backwardness and inferiority of someone.

in Rukrum, which becomes important. Perhaps the most pertinent and the very core of the trauma was the lived experience of *being a dehaati aurat*. The constant, everyday reminder of being-not *p*, of being the lacking other of the urban, being the backward, pre-modern, one who is living and breathing and yet is ironically always under the threat of erasure because the development imagination does not approve of *her* way of being-in-the-world. It comes under the garb of promising a *better* way of being-in-the-world, effectively destroying any attachments that she might possibly have to her own way of living. The interiorization of being a dehaati in a milieu that is constantly battling for its transition, painting her canvas of desire with the desire of the development agenda. This is not to say that she is just a victim, she is complicit in this constant (re)production of a hegemonized subject¹⁶. This uneasy cohabitation between how she experiences her world and how the development would want her to experience her world becomes the secret that she carries with her daily, a burden that refuses to go because it is always produced and reproduced.

With the internalisation being so strong, the recurring experiences of being humiliated by the shopkeeper in a cloth shop in the town or a bank official become very real and hit hard home. The humiliation is not because she is a woman, or because she belongs to a certain caste; the humiliation happens because she is a dehaati and her existence is a living slap on the face of modernity. Gopal Guru¹⁷ mentions the different ways in which humiliation has been theorised and understood, but it seems that being a dehaati cuts across divisions of caste and gender and becomes "...a mental/psychological injury that leaves a permanent scar on the heart" (16). For the dehaati woman in Rukrum, the humiliation she feels when she is spoken to a brash, uncouth way because it is presumed that she would not know anything, or when she is treated by the other based on preconceived notions, that emanate from where she comes from and who she is; the pain of this subtle (and sometimes, overt) othering is a pain she feels very

¹⁶ See Anjan Chakrabarti and Anup Dhar, *Dislocation and resettlement in development: From third world to world of the third* (London: Routledge, 2009) for more on the question of the subject of the unconscious and unconscious subject-positions in development.

¹⁷ Gopal Guru, "Humiliation: Claims and context." (2011).

strongly. The hurt in this case is Real¹⁸, the hurt is ‘inassimilable’; we jump to put words to it. But perhaps, for her the hurt is something that she cannot quickly find words for; something she cannot quickly “symbolize”¹⁹. It might also hurt more when she is looked down upon by someone close to her, and she perpetuates the humiliation she underwent on someone else. To add onto this complex and convoluted narrative of pain, hurt, humiliation, and anger; there were small shoots of pride as well, small slivers of hope that all was not bad. How could the action research deal with these complex and mutually constitutive experiences?

Kala (art) was a recurring suggestion. As the idea of doing a theatre performance gathered momentum and excitement, the task at hand seemed to be the writing of the script. Had we remain fixated on the ‘final performance’ and had the script been written by me (someone who was considered to possess the skill involved in writing); it would have been a situation where the end result became more important than the means (hence, *poiesis*). The theatre would have easily lapsed into an awareness generating exercise. However, this is not to say that theatre performance did not become important. The act of writing the script through context-driven critical thinking together and my reflective writing on the process here can then be considered as a step in perhaps recovering the *praxis* that remains foreclosed in the imagination of the university²⁰.

Would art then be *a* way (not *the* way) through which we could hope to deterritorialize the standard discourse of development and unleash desire, desire understood as creative and productive energy, an energy that can disrupt common sense and everyday life? (Colebrook 2002). It happened through a process of sharing and writing where a group of five women and five young girls came together, not to collect, count, and save money, but to weave words through the complexity of their everyday experiences. There is a structure; a rigid organisational, teleological formulation in place

¹⁸ Dhar presences two readings of the Lacanian Real: one as *foreclosed* (see Footnote 9 above) and the other as the *inassimilable*, i.e. the “unknown” and “unspeakable remainder”, which lies *outside* the symbolic order, where experiences remain hidden in a somewhat non-symbolized manner. It is sometimes seen as that which is *beyond* language, the “leftover” in the process of symbolization, or the “unspeakable limit” to the process of symbolization (Dhar [2015]. *What If the hurt is ‘Real’? Psyche, Neighbour and Intimate Violence*).

¹⁹ See Anjan Chakrabarti, Anup Dhar and Stephen Cullenberg, *World of the Third and Global Capitalism* (Delhi: Worldview Press, 2012) for more on the relationship between the hegemonic Symbolic and the foreclosed Real.

²⁰ In Anup Dhar *What if, the University is a Parrot’s Training?* Dhar (2015)

that has already determined the path that dehaat has to follow. The mirroring of those experiences in the practice sessions and the performance were an anguished re-living, a mirrored re-telling, a past event that they wanted to forget, to disavow, but could not because being a dehaati never be looked upon as something favourable. Writing and subsequently performing the abuse one had to listen to from a shopkeeper as she did not know the name of the cloth she wanted to buy, her simple *saree* and broken Hindi giving enough signals to be relegated as uneducated; the quiet acceptance of it brought back the hurt and the humiliation, that part of the experience of it that one can never really put words to. We lack the language to talk *completely* about experiences of hurt and humiliation because there is always some part that is inassimilable and illegible²¹. It touched some part in everyone who watched the theatre unfold; the tears were witness to that. It was one thing to expect the others, the ones in the town, the urban to *not* look down upon them; but it was a bigger battle for a dehaati to not look down upon herself because of what she is, because of what she wears, how she speaks.

“The tragic is the highest form of artistic cognition, the deepest probing of the darkest truths of the human heart...”²². But is it ethical to open up a wound, a deep wound that is not psychical, but one that you carry with you everywhere because it is so ingrained in you, the language that you speak; without initiating a process of healing the wound, or to begin dealing with it. This is where the paper would like to bring forth and make a case for art as being therapeutic, a focus on both the product and the process.²³ For Rukrum, theatre as being therapeutic; a psychoanalytic tool to deal with itself. The script was earlier supposed to only talk about the traumatic experience, but as we walked together further along the writing road; we realised that there was also a need for us to talk about (both to ourselves and the rest of Rukrum) the doubts that those experiences were raising in us – the unjustified correlations and linkages that were formed about a dehaati by an ‘outsider’, which a dehaati also imbibes in herself. The

²¹ Anup Dhar, “What If the hurt is ‘Real’? Psyche, Neighbour and Intimate Violence” in *Sentiments, Politics and Censorship: The state of hurt*, eds. Rina Ramdev, Sandhya D. Nambiar and Debaditya Bhattacharya (New Delhi: Sage Publishers, 2015), 15-28.

²² *ibid.*

²³ For more on Art therapy as a process and product, see *Art as therapy: Collected Essays* (2000).

questionings *might* be therapeutic; might make us more acceptable of ourselves. The ‘outsider’ is not necessarily urban. It is also the woman’s intimate other, who comes back from the city and looks at his wife similarly. The theatre in Rukrum is a mirror in which the community begins to see itself, to see hope for transformation, hope for a possibility.

For us, the process of writing the script was where the disruption of the molar structures and transformation happened – it was not one moment, or event; but the flow of the pen capturing the essence of dehaat, the feeling of dehaat and the intensities and multiplicities that are forever getting (re)produced. The script was a movement from a representational structure of dehaat to ushering in a process of immanent thinking and living, whose target was split between challenging and disrupting common sense and everyday ways of life and on the other producing newer, divergent and differentiated forms of thinking and living that were rooted in the everyday life of a dehaati. When the body in dehaat, goes to the agricultural field and labours under the sun; she engenders a knowledge rooted in practice, the an-other form of knowledge. She might appear uneducated as she does not have the mandatory years of schooling, but she asks us to reverse the gaze – does working on the field, planting and harvesting of crops, cutting the trees in the jungle, collecting dry leaves to make a fire – not qualify as knowledge, a knowledge that makes her educated differently?

The shared space that began with the purpose of sharing one’s experiences born out of a representation that led to a loss of the self; became a site of resistance and creation. It unleashed a flow of desire that created a common, forged out of a need to self-represent, (re)cover, (re)create and pave the way for self-transformation. The holding of the pen by this common of women, thus became the moment where we mark a significant shift from perhaps what could be another attempt at representation to one driven by a desire to self-create, to write, and to right a particular kind of representation (where the dehaati is an uncouth, primitive and uncivilized and one where dehaat needs to follow the developmental *telos* and modernity and become like the sheher). In the very act of writing of the theatre script, in the flow of the pen became the methodological departure; the righting of a certain self-representation in its creation.

What did then the script do? By *not* following the teleological structure that imagines dehaat to eventually become like the sheher, the process of writing is thus not following what capitalism and modernity would want it to. It wrote about a practice of dehaat, a practice where the creative common could make sense of and imagine a vocabulary by the way it makes itself to be or become or create itself to appear. We can then lay the ground for arguing that a subaltern perspective was taking shape, in response to a world that is adamant about ushering in urbanization.

In the very act of writing, in the very weaving of words we orient our subject positions, identify and align with its meaning and thereby signal a movement towards becoming of a dehaati subjectivity that is not counter-responsive to the hegemonic, but is actively creating her ways of thinking, feeling, doing and relating to her world. It is not what the action researcher thinks, or what scholarly texts, films, and poems would like us to think; it is the imagination of the common of dehaati women, it is their story, their truth, their politics. The script gives us a window into the moments of subalternity; it is a convoluted movement between different subject positions. The same woman admits to being poor, but also understands collecting leaves as dehaat.

This action research work addresses the question from the end of the scriptwriter, performer, the performance as well as the audience. I say so because in the context of this action research, the scriptwriter and the performers were more or less the same; and the audience was in a multitude of different ways, part of the scriptwriting process and at the end of the day, part and parcel of a similar, if not same bucket of experiences and emotions. What is it to take theatre outside of the proscenium, to arrive at a 'x', marking the co-intensities, writing a script, and then performing with the audience where one is constantly in dialogue with the audience. "Art begins when a traumatic experience seeks an aesthetic form adequate to it"²⁴. It has the unique ability to enable us to find ourselves and yet lose ourselves at the same time. The case that I would like to build here is to not just limit the theatre as a traumatic event²⁵ but to *also*

²⁴ Walter Davis, *Art and politics: Psychoanalysis, ideology and theatre* (London: Pluto Press, 2000), 17.

²⁵ See *Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty* (1997).

consider it as a therapeutic process, a process of self-discovery through which the community can (re)describe, (re)define, (re)imagine, (re)create and (re)cover itself.

“On one hand, art is affirmed to be pure contemplation, and on the other hand, it is considered to present always a vision of the world in transformation and therefore is inevitably political insofar as it shows the means of carrying out that transformation or of delaying.”²⁶ (Boal 2008: 2)

Understanding dehaat not in terms of lack, but as a continuous flow, gives us a possibility to free ourselves from the limitations of the body (understood in the Freudian sense) and senses that subtract us from the teleological way of perceiving the environment. Questioning the conservative developmental notion of dehaat paves the way for more molecular, nomadic ways of thinking and living. The scriptwriting gives us an insight into looking at how bodies in dehaat become organised in an ever-fluid process; instead of thinking of them as static, already-organised in terms of how they experience the world. Bringing the body in dehaat closer to the flows that sustain it; by engendering an art of doing-living-being; there is an opening up of the possibility of *becoming a dehaati*. This conceptualisation²⁷ takes us beyond the fixed dehaat-sheher binary and its fixed identity, the predetermined subject positions that a dehaati occupies. Becoming a dehaati then signifies becoming something else, something that exists beyond what already exists in being a dehaati in a world that has already written its epitaph. Becoming a dehaati does not mean that the body in dehaat has to emulate or imitate certain characteristics and patterns of behaviour that would fit in with what is ‘conventionally’ expected from someone living in dehaat. Becoming a dehaati would precisely involve the opposite – questioning and defying such dominant molar forms and relations.

A beginning

²⁶ Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, trans. Charles A. McBride (London: Pluto Press, 2008).

²⁷ Deleuze and Guattari understand becoming as, “...not a correspondence between relations...neither a resemblance, an imitation or at the limit, an identification...becoming produces nothing other than itself”. See Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 237-38.

The writing of the script and the subsequent theatre performance in Rukrum, then can perhaps be a way of working through the darkness – of the self, the empirical and the epistemic – a process that can perhaps be a step towards the intensities and productive and creative flows of desire that carry the potential to break down the structure of meanings that dehaat has come to internalise over centuries. Dehaat and the experiences of being a dehaati allowed us to problematize the space that is referred to as rural, and is homogenously relegated as backward and underdeveloped. Art helped us to think about the desire not as oedipalized, emanating from lack; but as a creative and productive flow that would help understand dehaat as continuously transforming. Art can also be seen as the connecting force between the different bodies that wrote the theatre script together; that thought of ways to produce their life differently and creatively; where every word, phrase, and event in the script is a way to reinvent the whole process of thinking and living. The art that Rukrum produced was an outcome of the synthesis of intensities; of creating new styles of perception by exposing the rigidity in the existing styles of perception.

The disruptions in the structure were small; the molar structures of capitalism and development are strong. The body desires to break free, but for every chain broken, new chains are created. Working through these chains is a patient exercise, a continuous exercise. A chain breaks and a re-conceptualisation happens – the process continues. Which is why the scriptwriting was not about creating a correct picture or a correct theory of dehaat; it was about transforming dehaat.

By bringing to dialogue the politics of development and the politics of art/theatre through psychoanalysis, the action research work in Rukrum has attempted producing a psychoanalytic re-writing of what has been designated as ‘not p’, and take the ‘not p’ to a healing exercise and a healing experience through art, through theatre, but more particularly, through the writing of the script. The script – the act of collective writing – writing hurt, recovering hurt from the register of the Real, the realm of the inassimilable, ushered in, perhaps, a process of righting hurt – a historical hurt stamped and tattooed on the body-being of the dehaati aurat.

It builds on the framework of the algebraic 'p/not p' and the 'inassimilability of trauma', and through the creation of a transformative praxis of scriptwriting and its subsequent performance; brings these two sides together in a dialogue. By giving the 'not p' a psychic form, through a journey from inassimilability to legibility (somewhat) of trauma, it shows us how to be psychoanalytic in praxis.