

The Feminine in Philosophy:

Recovering the Umbilical Cord of Praxis

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This paper is bifocal. On the one hand, the paper makes space for praxis *in* research. On the other hand, it synchronously argues that such research cannot be engendered without a turn to the question of ‘gender’ or without researching the (nature of) the presence and absence of the ‘feminine’ in philosophy, particularly, in methodology. The paper thus, explores two related questions – the question of praxis and the question of the feminine – in their mutual imbrication. Such an imbrication makes space for the turn to Practical Philosophy. The paper makes an effort to show that they are rather *braided*, how they form a Moebius¹.

The paper also emphasises on discovering a knotted lineage among praxis, phronesis and the feminine; praxis, being marked by phronetic philosophy and the feminine logic of action. In order to gradually unfold the argument, the first section of the paper discusses the relationship between praxis and phronesis; where phronesis is the guiding principle of praxis; whereas the second underscores the relationship that the feminine logic of action has with phronesis and praxis (with practical philosophy). The latter path shall be traced through philosophies of women like Arignote, Theano of Crotona, Diotima, Hypatia, Beavouir et al.

The urge to read and research the relationship between the feminine logic of action and praxis comes from an on-going action research work with *Chinhari: The Young India*², in Dhamtari district of Chhattisgarh. The work co-researches and co-

¹ The Mobius strip is the double looped line of an eight, it works on the illusion of being two sides yet remaining to be one (See Will Greenshields, *Writing the Structures of the Subject: Lacan and Topology* [Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017], 48). The Mobius strip is thus where relations between inside and outside are in a flux.

² *Chinhari: The Young India* (www.chinhari.co.in) is a collective of young women working in Dhamtari district of Chhattisgarh. The collective was formed in 2017. Chinhari has been working on questions of sexual division of labour, eco-sensitive agriculture, marriage, experiences of youth in Gond contexts etc.

writes³ (with young women) what stands at the cusp of resource-labour-gender-youth. Here, we together question the hierarchies coded within development, the lop-sidedness of the sexual division of labour, constructed meanings of marriage etc. It is here that a relationship between the feminine logic of action and praxis was discovered.

The paper may also be seen as an extension of “Melancholy Philosophy⁴: Polis-Praxis-Phronesis and the Slave’s Know-how”. It argues that efforts at the *recovery* of practical philosophy shall remain incomplete if Philosophy’s relationship with the Diotima-Irigaray continuum of the feminine, including the feminine logic of action, continues to remain undiscovered. In other words, if praxis, phronesis and the feminine are followed together a different kind of know-how emerges, that is attached-involved, embedded in the everyday and walks the path of the ‘in-between’⁵.

Relevance of the Feminine

When down from the moon stepped the goddess of the night, she bid Minerva/Athene come to her. “Minerva/Athene,” she said, “you sprang fully formed from the head of your father. Now all the daughters of mankind think they, too, are as rootless as you. Tonight I bid you dance, join the circle round that tree glistening with the clarity of wisdom. Mother Natural and Lady Philosophia, hands together, already have begun the promenade of myth and allegory.”⁶

This quote from Dykeman’s book *The Neglected Canon: Nine Women Philosophers* underscores a distinct narrative. The narrative entails of the Roman goddess Minerva and/or the Greek goddess Athena who are most times named together, albeit one cannot strictly say they have struggled through the same history⁷. Minerva is worshiped as the goddess of poetry, medicine, wisdom, (defensive) strategic warfare,

³ See <https://www.chinhari.co.in/newsletter> for a minor attempt at putting to print subaltern women writing.

⁴ Anup Dhar, “Melancholy Philosophy,” in *Abjection and abandonment: Melancholy in philosophy and art*, ed. Saityabrata Das (Delhi: Aakar Books, 2018), 11-34.

⁵ Luce Irigaray and Gillian C. Gill. *An ethics of sexual difference* (Cornell University Press, 1993).

⁶ Therese Boos Dykeman, *Neglected Canon: Nine Women Philosophers: First to the Twentieth Century* (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2010), ix.

⁷ It is difficult to say whether Minerva and Athene can be used interchangeably. The paper, although tangentially, states that perhaps we must think deeper before merging subjectivities. Can women be spoken of as a homogeneous group? I raise these questions because they trouble me when I bring theories from/of the ‘particular’ and the ‘universal’ together.

commerce, weaving and the crafts. Athena, on the other hand, governs wisdom, handicraft and warfare. The association makes one think through the given alignment of *woman-wisdom-poetry-warfare-weaving*. The discomfort coded in the above statement sails through the recent history of philosophy where combinations such as woman-wisdom, woman-warfare, poetry-warfare, weaving-wisdom are hardly discussed together and distinctly cut through classic gendered compartmentalization within discourses. The paper shall closely engage with the question: have we, in our journey through different epochs in the history of philosophy, lost (touch with) the feminine and its logic of action? The paper considers this loss to be an important one, for this *melancholic moment* in turn changed the nature of philosophy, research and methodology.

To go back to Dykeman, as Minerva sprang fully formed from the head of her father Jupiter⁸, ‘daughters of mankind’ had started to believe they were rootless, lacking and parasitic. Drenched in the collective (including the daughters of mankind she represented) being of rootlessness⁹, Minerva was asked to seek *nature* and *philosophy’s* help. Minerva danced in circles around the glistening tree of wisdom till the break of dawn, and as the new light fell on her she “found herself suddenly [turn into] a budding flower on a tall branch, and even more swiftly a crystalline fruit, rivaling the morning sun, refracting the light. Behold, she had grown roots, difficult to discover down in the dark of history, deep in the solid knowledge of earth. And the daughters of humankind saw and reveled in their roots”¹⁰. It may be important to evidence that Minerva/Athene does grow roots, albeit with the help of Mother Nature and Lady Philosophia. Perhaps when Minerva/Athene (woman-feminine), Mother Nature (understood as immanent everyday experiences) and Lady Philosophia (philosophy) come together, a different matrix of transformative social

⁸ The Greek mythology believes Minerva is the daughter of Metis and Jupiter. Jupiter had forcefully impregnated Metis. Jupiter believed in the prophecy that he would be killed by his own child; and feared Metis would bear him a son. He thus swallowed Metis; but Metis gave birth to Minerva inside Jupiter’s body. Born inside Jupiter with an armour and weapons, Minerva left him in an agonizing pain. Vulcan used a hammer to relieve Jupiter’s pain. The use of the hammer split Jupiter’s head and from the cleft appeared Minerva in her armour.

⁹ Minerva’s rootlessness may perhaps be referred to the non-present umbilical cord (as she appears in ‘this’ world from Jupiter’s head and not from her mother’s womb). The cord is the connection the infant has with the mother. Minerva’s absent umbilical cord is perhaps the representation of a lost past (the eventual loss of touch with feminine logic of action), and a past denied in the present.

¹⁰Therese Boos Dykeman, *Neglected Canon: Nine Women Philosophers: First to the Twentieth Century*, ix.

practice is born¹¹. Minerva's growing roots may be seen as a transformative moment, seeds of which are perhaps embedded in the forgotten tradition of 'practical philosophy'. The paper however argues that the feminine way of thought and action was similarly lost (or neglected) in the early pages of philosophy's history. The paper suspects that the loss of the practical philosophy perspective is tied to the loss of the feminine.

The paper highlights an un-thought tangent to practical philosophy. It argues, the lost stream of practical philosophy will not only have to be traced through the theory of praxis¹², but also through the feminine logic/reason/style of philosophising as also mode of actioning. The turn to the feminine foregrounds a methodological departure in how action research has been and can be thought especially in developmental contexts¹³. Thus, a time travel to the past in lieu of tracing Practical Philosophy cannot simply halt at Aristotle's "The Nicomachean Ethics" but, will perhaps do well to visit philosophies of women since antiquity. Woman's wisdom, nature (read as the empirical world marked by senses and experiences) and philosophy together set the ground for practical philosophy; the paper argues, the feminine logic of action is an integral part of such a rethought form of 'practical philosophy'.

Practical Philosophy

Philosophy being "virtually all forms of serious intellectual inquiry"¹⁴ had perhaps shared a different relationship with 'action' in the past. In Hadot's re-reading of 'ancient philosophy' the *practical* (that which is directly related to action) *spectrum of philosophy* could be traced from the work of the Sophists as also from Socrates¹⁵. This tradition from antiquity diverted from merely 'informing' people towards 'forming people and transforming souls'. They focused on *dialogue*; dialogue as a

¹¹ Chizu Sato, "Two Frontiers of Development?: A Transnational Feminist Analysis of Public-Private Partnerships for Women's Empowerment," *International Political Sociology* 10, no. 2 (2016), 150–167.

¹² Anup Dhar, "Melancholy Philosophy."

¹³ The work with Chinhari is perhaps a small step in that direction.

¹⁴ Wilfred Carr, "Philosophy, methodology and action research," *Journey of Philosophy of Education* 40, no.4 (2006), 425.

¹⁵ Pierre Hadot and Arnold Davidson, ed. *Philosophy as a Way of Life* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).

methodology, as a ‘means’ to ends, to self-knowledge. The primacy of means rather than the end marks its inclination towards a practical way of life where ends are largely unknown. For Hadot, the aim of philosophers from antiquity was not “acquisition of purely abstract knowledge ... [but] *transformation* of one’s vision of the world and a *metamorphosis* of one’s personality. The philosopher needed to be trained not only to know how to speak and debate, but also to know *how to live*”¹⁶. This question of how to live – *in* this world and not after, before or beyond is a marker of living in the present, in the immanent. Also, ‘how to live’ is a living question of practical philosophy, i.e. to learn which philosophers of antiquity and how they took refuge in an enmeshed version of theory and practice.

Aristotle, in his book “Nicomachean Ethics” elaborates on kinds of human action and the knowledge governing them. In the process, he narrowed down to two important kinds of reasoning behind categories of human action: *poiesis* and *praxis*¹⁷. In Gadamer and Risser’s reading, Aristotle, the son of a physician, had a non-objective relationship with life¹⁸. His approach had an inclination towards “the phenomenon of life and to the model of movement”¹⁹ in life. A decisive difference between Plato and Aristotle, which presumably led to a difference between *poiesis* and *praxis*, was the prevalence of Mathematics in Plato, in contrast to predominance of “the model of the living body, of life, in the approach of Aristotle”. *Poiesis* informed the activities undertaken by human beings in life, which had their ends and means predetermined; i.e. the process and the goal were as if known in advance. This form of action was guided by the reasoning of *techne* or ‘productive philosophy’ i.e. one that needed mastery, proper method, technical skills and a definite product like in case of weaving, pottery etc. Carr, incisively marks differences between *poiesis* and *praxis*: first, *praxis* is an ethical doing to reach a ‘constitutive good’ enmeshed in human living (living as a verb; as being *in* a process of action), rather than a form of action that produces a product or an artefact; second, *praxis*, unlike *poiesis*, cannot function with an *a priori* knowledge of its end²⁰. It is knowledge ‘*in the making*’ as it

¹⁶Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*. 21.

¹⁷Carr, “Philosophy, methodology and action research”.

¹⁸ Hans Georg Gadamer and James Risser, “Practical Philosophy as a Model of the Human Sciences,” *Research in Phenomenology* 9, (1979), 74-85.

¹⁹ Gadamer and Risser, “Practical Philosophy as a Model of the Human Sciences”, 78.

²⁰Carr, “Philosophy, methodology and action research”, 425.

remains perceptive to the contingent life-worlds. It is the 'rhythmic' process of knowing what the 'good' is and simultaneously applying it in one's life. Aristotle calls this form of reasoning *phronesis*, which "is not a method of reasoning, but a moral and intellectual virtue that is inseparable from practice and constitutive of the moral consciousness of those whose actions are rooted in a disposition to do 'the right thing in the right place at the right time in the right way'"²¹.

Heidegger's last endeavour i.e. the 'introduction' of a book, which was left unfinished remains important for this paper. In the 'introduction', titled "Indication of the Hermeneutic Situation", Heidegger diagnoses "philosophy to [be] still mov[ing] inauthentically in Greek conceptuality (PI 238-39). The "authentic path" lies in a return to the original motivating sources, to the sources of Practical Philosophy. Heidegger calls this re-turn philosophy's "destructive confrontation with its history" (PI 249) and identifies it as a "phenomenological destruction" (PI 251)"²². Heidegger begins with Aristotle's five ways in which the soul attains truth to further accept or deny it: *nous*, *sophia*, *episteme*, *techne* and *phronesis*; but he narrows down to *sophia* and *phronesis*. Heidegger translates *phronesis* as *prudentia* or "practical reason". It is a 'logic of action' that functions with caution and is wise in practical affairs for it keeps the future in mind. "*Phronesis* secures the "for which and the how" of those dealings concerning human life which are not productive in the sense of *poiesis*, but are actions with the character of *praxis*. What this means is that *phronesis* "makes the situation of action accessible""²³. *Phronesis* as logic of *praxis* creates a relationship with the 'now' or 'that which is happening' in the form of 'a moment of crisis', that which demands an action. This principle of phronetic action was called "*houheneka*"²⁴ (or the crisis/reason/sake of which the action is performed) by Aristotle. The above statements elucidate that phronetic action is not about application of given rules and scripted theoretical affirmations. It rather engages with the present moment or situation using practical wit. To this Heidegger adds an

²¹ Alasdair MacIntyre, "Social Science Methodology as the Ideology of Bureaucratic Authority", in *Through the Looking Glass: Epistemology and the Conduct of Inquiry*, ed.. Maria J. Falco (Tulsa: University Press of America, 1979) as cited in Carr, "Philosophy, methodology and action research", 425.

²² Robert Bernasconi, "Heidegger's Deconstruction of *Phronesis*," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 28, (1989): 131.

²³ *ibid.*, 132.

²⁴ *ibid.* 134.

important milestone i.e. temporality, which creates a fecund moment for action; which is called *kairos* or in Heideggerian translation *augenblick*. This also makes the overdetermination of spatiality and temporality an important factor of phronetic action.

“Melancholy Philosophy” takes forward philosophy’s “destructive confrontation with its [own] history”²⁵ by presencing “four moments of loss in the history of western philosophy: loss of touch with the polis, loss of the perspective of praxis (and the consequent hyper-separation of thought and action) and phronesis²⁶ (and the overemphasis on theoria, sophia or episteme), loss of contact with the slave and the slave’s know-how”²⁷. Philosophy (in the shift from Socrates to Plato) seems to have initiated a property settlement between its two heirs: thought and action. Carr²⁸ shows that thought found an exceptional acceptance in the dominant culture of modernity, whereas the perspective of action in philosophy faded into negligence²⁹. “Melancholy Philosophy” shows how a return is attempted by Marx, Tagore, Lacan, Heidegger and Arendt. Marx in the “Thesis on Feuerbach” highlights an uneasy contrast between the Jewish God of Deed (practice) and the Christian God of Word (thought)³⁰. It is in practice (praxis)/doing the deed/dirtying of hands that the Marxian perspective to materialism can be found. Tagore on the other hand, creates space for the ‘praxical nature of thought’ (in Shantiniketan and later in Sriniketan) where life at the University is not abstracted from the everyday. Lacan in his accidental yet surprising communion with Tagore not only critiques the classical university structure and discourse but also exclaims that a) the praxical nature of

²⁵ Robert Bernasconi, “Heidegger’s Deconstruction of Phronesis,” 131.

²⁶ See Anup Dhar & Anjan Chakrabarti, “Marxism as Asketic, Spirituality as Phronetic: Rethinking Praxis,” *Rethinking Marxism* 28, 3-4 (2016): 563-583 for a discussion on truth and the invocation of two notions of truth one has lost touch with: *ascetic truth* and *phronetic truth*.

²⁷ Anup Dhar, “Melancholy Philosophy”.

²⁸ Carr, “Philosophy, Methodology and Action Research” 421-435.

²⁹ This shift concretised the psychic difference between social science and natural science too, where philosophy was destined to be restricted to thought, and any kind of ‘action’ or ‘doing’ would be taken care of by natural science. This understanding has corrupted our perspective of approaching action itself in ‘action research’ thus, it becomes difficult to think of ‘scarcity of water’ as a gender-labour question. It becomes difficult to mark a deviation from an accepted technical-infrastructurel-developmental response to problems in the rural. This example is born out of an experience in Mardapoti, where I *with* a group of young women and men rethought the question of ‘panikisamasya’ (vaguely interpreted as ‘scarcity of water’) to finally reach the issue of unequal division of household labour. The same collective expanded itself to Dokal in 2018 and named itself ‘Chinhari: The Young India’.

³⁰ Anup Dhar, “Melancholy Philosophy”.

thought is in the slave's know-how and b) we have but lost this know-how to the master's knowledge foregrounding thus the "theft, abduction, stealing slavery of its knowledge, [plundering, spoliation of what, at the beginning of knowledge, was inscribed, hidden, in the slave's world] through the maneuvers of the master"³¹. For Arendt, the hyper-separation designed from within philosophy between thought and action found its constitutive reflection in the outside. As philosophy lost touch with the political, practice of politics lost touch with (ethical) thought. Socrates' trial and condemnation is one of the many pieces of its evidence. Arendt's emphasis on the positioning of Socrates in the polis and not in the library is perhaps hope for a *return of philosophy to the polis*. It could be seen as a movement from the invocation of the question of *politics in philosophy*³² to the invocation of the question of (practical) *philosophy in politics*.³³

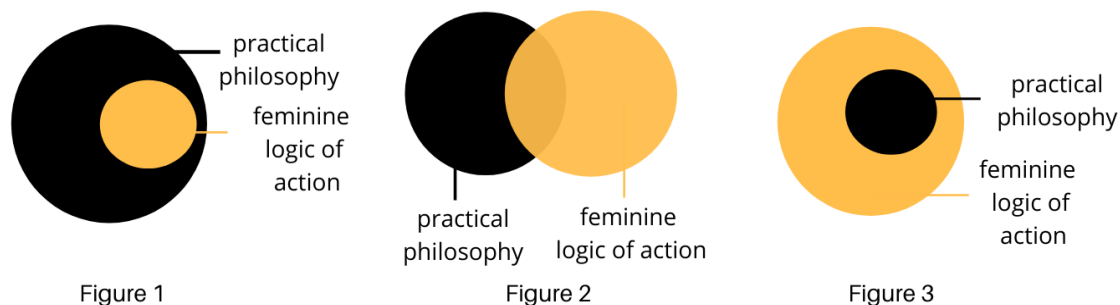
This section elucidates four important steps in the process of rediscovering-reviving practical philosophy: (1) Hadot's invocation of spiritual exercises, (2) Carr's turn to praxis, (3) Heidegger's turn to phronesis and (4) Dhar's deconstruction of practical philosophy. Dhar does not just theorise the loss of the practical philosophy perspective but also lays down an actionable process of 'how to recover practical philosophy'. Dhar's paper is thus, motivated by an action i.e. finding and taking the road to practical philosophy. It thus presents to the reader that perhaps by – being in the polis, through praxis and phronesis, coordination of the brain and the hand and rediscovering the slave's know-how – one may be able to reach the practical philosophy perspective. His paper tries to establish practical philosophy as an amalgamation of all of the above. This paper may be seen as an incremental work on "Melancholy Philosophy". It argues for the need of the feminine (logic of action) in

³¹ Jacques Lacan, "The other side of psychoanalysis 1969-1970," in *The seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book 17*, trans. Russel Grigg (New York: WW Norton & Co 2007) as cited in Anup Dhar, *Melancholy Philosophy*, 28.

³² This is not to say philosophy is apolitical. 'Politics' in philosophy, as referred here, may be largely understood as the politics of phallocentrism, death of paganism or appropriation of the slave's know-how (see Anup Dhar, "Melancholy Philosophy"). Such a kind of politics seems to have amputated philosophy and disabled its esthetic (derived from sense, referred to as being receptive or perceptive) character and restricted its mere poesis. The amputation here is a metaphor for losing touch with practical philosophy.

³³ Have we in politics moved away from the "reconstructive" path in the last couple of decades? Have we lost touch with the reconstructive practice of being in touch with the world (*of being in the polis*) and creating engaged-attached relationships – relationships that act as dialogues. Dialogues that enables one to not only know the other but oneself too. If politics takes this turn to dialogue and discussion, being in touch with the world and creating engaged-attached relationships it will perhaps become more spiritual (See Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*.), praxical (See Wilfred Carr, "Philosophy, methodology and action research.") and phronetic (See Robert Bernasconi, "Heidegger's Deconstruction of Phronesis.").

practical philosophy. Positioning of the feminine in relation to practical philosophy may be understood in three ways - (1) feminine logic of action as a *fifth originary loss*— as a missed element of practical philosophy (2) feminine logic of action as a *conjoined twin* of practical philosophy and (3) practical philosophy as one of the many elements of feminine logic of action. The three combinations are represented in the form of Venn-diagrams (see figure 1, 2 and 3) below.



In each case of positioning, feminine logic of action influences practical philosophy (including all its intersecting elements - Dhar's four originary losses). This influence aims at sexuating the blurred theory-practice divide and immanent actioning in practical philosophy. Practical philosophy without the feminine (sexuated) logic of action perhaps remains incomplete.

The sections ahead make an effort to discover a) history of marginalization of the woman-feminine in philosophy and b) the relationship feminine logic of action has with praxis and phronesis. In relation to the first statement the section also thinks through if practical philosophy was buried in the pages of history because the feminine know-how/logic of reasoning/logic of actioning needed to be forgotten.

The Kantian Turn

"Possibly scandalous" is what O'Neill calls 'absence of women' in the history of philosophy³⁴. She highlights that, many, including Gilles Menages, Marguerite Buffet, Thomas Stanley, Mathurin de Lescure, and Victor Cousin kept writing on and about women philosophers in the eighteenth and nineteenth century; such writers, their writings and the will to write on and about women were gradually lost. This 'era

³⁴ Eileen O'Neill, "Early Modern Women Philosophers and the History of Philosophy," *Hypatia* 20, no. 3 (2005): 185-197.

of silencing' was an era of the 'purification of philosophy'³⁵. Philosophy underwent 'purification' perhaps under the umbrella of Christianity. Contrary to popular belief, the spirit of Enlightenment could be seen as the secret work of "secular theology" or a "far-reaching Christianization" of modern life³⁶. This influence, including many other factors, carried masculine rationality and stabilized strict and conservative sexual difference: masculinity/femininity. In other words, post-Enlightenment Kantian philosophy marked by rationality looks isomorphic to some of the secret tenets of Christianity³⁷. One may wonder, if the pre-enlightenment era was not contoured by the androcentric and phallogentric biases (marked or unmarked by Christianity). Perhaps, the Christianization-Enlightenment nexus anticipated the disturbance that may occur because of *overt* muffling of women (bringing back the memory of Hypatia's³⁸ murder). Thus, making space for a covert (but a more impactful) route. It seems the nature of this transformation was such that many Hypatias would have their thoughts murdered but their bodies would remain untouched and intact.

The 'Kantian turn' in the history of philosophy becomes important for the paper because it reminds us of the remainder (of the woman and the Irigarayan feminine) that philosophy carries. Where most women wrote on topics such as family, marriage, sex, or women's nature and their role in society, *the modern understanding of Kantianism as culmination of modern philosophy rendered women's philosophical quest an anthropological question*³⁹. The object/objective of philosophical research was being shaped and sharpened in this era; in the process, perhaps what was left out, was philosophy by women, their context and their ancient know-how. The rebirth of philosophy post-Kant had definite parameters for being a philosopher: "to be a philosopher in this period was to be a shaper of culture: it was

³⁵ *ibid.* Both Toulmin and Dhar problematize this "purification".

³⁶ Michel Foucault, Valerio Marchetti, Antonella Salomoni, and Arnold I. Davidson, *Abnormal: lectures at the Collège de France, 1974-1975* (New York: Picador, 2003).

³⁷ Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason: 'Male' and 'Female' in Western Philosophy*, (London: Routledge, 1993).

³⁸ Hypatia of Alexandria (born in c. 355 C.E.-died on March 8, 415 C.E., Alexandria) was a Hellenistic Neoplatonist philosopher, astronomer, and mathematician. She was murdered in c. 415 C.E. The murder has three historical accounts: one, where Hypatia fell victim to Christian anti-intellectual violence; two, where the event was a consequential re-action of dangerous political climate produced by Cyril of Alexandria; and third, where Christianity heroically won over paganism (See Edward Watts, "The murder of Hypatia: Acceptable or unacceptable violence," in *Violence in Late Antiquity: Perceptions and Practices*, ed. Harold Allen Drake[Alershot: Ashgate, 2006], 333-342.)

³⁹ Eileen O'Neill, "Early Modern Women Philosophers and the History of Philosophy," 185-197.

to have the power to *demarcate and distinguish* all the branches of knowledge, and to *decide the value* of alternative avenues of inquiry and philosophy”⁴⁰. Questions about intimacy, domestic, sexuality, sexuation were rendered part of the branch of knowledge within philosophy that stood much lower in the decided value chain and thus, were found better to be forgotten or lost touch with.

“Warnock (1996) claims that the generally held views about philosophy forced her to omit the writings of women who seemed to “rely more on dogma, revelation or mystical experience than on argument... The great subjects of philosophy . . . must be concerned with ‘us’ in the sense in which ‘we’ are all humans. The truths which philosophers seek must aim to be not merely generally, but objectively, even universally true. Essentially they must be gender-indifferent”⁴¹. In 1937 Beauvoir’s first short story collection “When Things of the Spirit Come First” was rejected. The publisher informed Beauvoir that her book violated the society’s rule regarding which kind of writings could be published *by and about* women; a major part and perspective of the short stories reflected ‘what women think’⁴². Beauvoir realised that she needed to either comply with the existing social norms or appear to do so. Her second book *She Came to Stay*⁴³ dodged all attempts to be visibly philosophical (and still inspired much of Sartre’s work in *Being and Nothingness*⁴⁴) or talk specifically about women. It was published in 1943. There seems to be a rule book consisting of - what of women’s writings would be accepted in the public domain. The rules were such that a) sexual difference in philosophy stood marginalised, b) what women thought and did became an anthropological question and its philosophical rigour was left unattended, and c) *écriture-feminine* could not find space within philosophy. A concretized turn taken by philosophy to become gender-indifferent remains disturbing. It is rather troubling to see, philosophical quests (in the name of sexual-indifference) have been narrowed down to become masculine quests. As the paper

⁴⁰ Eileen O’Neill, “Early Modern Women Philosophers and the History of Philosophy.” 187 (italics mine).

⁴¹ *ibid.*, 191-192.

⁴² Edward Fullbrook & Kate Fullbrook, *Sex and Philosophy: Rethinking de Beauvoir and Sartre* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2008), 92.

⁴³ Simone De Beauvoir, *She came to stay*.

⁴⁴ Edward Fullbrook & Kate Fullbrook, *Sex and Philosophy: Rethinking de Beauvoir and Sartre*, 92.

navigates through these questions, it argues for a knowledge system that is also marked by 1) the woman's know-how and 2) the feminine logic of action⁴⁵.

Revisiting the Lost

"Melancholy Philosophy"⁴⁶ takes up the 'woman question' momentarily as it argues for the woman's know-how. The paper aims to attend to this question and at the same time makes an effort to locate the feminine logic of action as: 1) already embedded in praxis and phronesis and 2) sexuation of praxis⁴⁷. The paper takes up the path of researching philosophy by women to reach the crossroads of practical philosophy, woman's know-how and feminine logic of action. Philosophy by women is important here because it may take us to a sophisticated understanding of how we *do* philosophy (than merely how we think philosophy); how we write a book *of* ethics, for example, and not just a book *on* ethics⁴⁸.

The early traces of '*written* philosophy' by women are perhaps those by Pythagoreans like Themistoclea, Arignote, Theano of Crotona, Phintys and Perictione, Theano II, and so on. The philosophies of these women have more often been rejected and they have been called 'home economists'. The premise of this rejection i.e. philosophy and home economics have no intersection, is unsettling. Waithe in the "Introduction to the Series" from her book "A History of Women Philosophers 1" shows, how women philosophers analysed "...the Pythagorean concept *harmonia*⁴⁹ applied to the structure and running of the state, and to the

⁴⁵ The paper does not just argue for the presence of women (females) in philosophy. It takes inspiration from Moi's argument: "the very fact of being female does not necessarily guarantee a feminist approach. ...not all books by women on women writers exemplify anti-patriarchal commitment." (See Toril Moi, "Feminist, Female, Feminine," *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*, ed. Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore, [Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006], 120). The paper does not see a *necessary* relationship between woman (female) and the feminine, it also does not look at females and feminine as mutually exclusive. This is not to take away repression or struggle from women's experience but to mark an important difference among feminist, female (woman) and the feminine.

⁴⁶ Anup Dhar, "Melancholy Philosophy", 11-34.

⁴⁷ Chinhari struggles between the praxis of the feminine and the feminization of praxis

⁴⁸ Michel Foucault, "Preface," in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, ed. Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari (USA: Viking Penguin, 1977 as cited in Anup Dhar, "The schizo-political: Repression, liberation and the beyond," *Critical Cultures and Cultural Critiques in Psychology* 1, no. 2 (2016): 13-17.

⁴⁹ Pythagorean theory of *harmonia* addressed that the Earth with other planets revolved around a ball of fire according to a numerical scheme. The theory believed this movement of spheres lead to a musical sound. This musical sound and the hidden numerical schema brought an "intuitive feeling of the harmonia ("fitting together") of the kosmos ("the beautiful order of things")" (The Harmony of the Cosmos. (n.d.). In *Encyclopedia Britannica* 97. Retrieved from <https://www.oakweb.ca/harmony/pythagorean/pythagorean.html>).

structure and running of the family, viewed as a microcosm of the state. They [women philosophers] discussed how a woman might apply this principle in raising children to become just, harmonious individuals, and how a woman might apply that principle in other areas of her daily life”⁵⁰. *Harmonia* was Order-in-abstraction; it was about ‘sync’ in the other world - in the universe among planets. It largely remained unrelated to the everyday of ‘*this world*’ - the world where order had to be brought and was not pre-existent, where food had to be cooked, the house had to be managed and children had to be raised. However, women philosophers from antiquity saw harmonia as pertaining to everyday doing-actioning-practice; in that sense, it was perhaps phronetic; or the substrate and substance of the phronetic is the *écriture-feminine*. They philosophised harmonia from the other side – from the side that functioned on the need for action and post-facto reflection on action (both, as if, functioning in a loop). Their philosophy of liv-ing projected itself onto the question of the ‘how’ – how to live/how to do philosophy/how to interpret philosophy in one’s everyday life. Theano of Crotona (also wife of Pythagoras of Samos) represents ‘numbers’ (that enunciate the clear ‘order of things’) as non-corporeal and as a system that is irrelevant if it remains abstract and uprooted. She rather uses numbers to arrange things in the immanent world and to distinguish between/among them. For Theano, thought and action had to make meaning in the real world. They had to connect to the everyday and create a better place for a better living. We can go back to Carr and refer to his understanding of praxis as an ethical doing to reach a ‘constitutive good’ in life of human beings⁵¹. The philosophical-actionable interpretations by Theano (and several other women whose examples one may find below) perhaps represents a relationship with praxis. It may be difficult to understand praxis as other worldly-transcendental-metaphysical. Carr’s discussion on praxis suggests praxis takes form when thought is rendered practical and when practice becomes more nuanced-reflective-thoughtful. Theano’s philosophical work and Carr’s reading of praxis seem to carry a connection or an underlying common philosophy i.e. practical philosophy⁵². This may lead us to think if practical philosophy gave form to the feminine logic of action. Or was it the feminine logic of

⁵⁰ Mary Ellen Waithe, “*A History of Women Philosophers: Volume 1*,” (Dordrecht: MartinusNijhoff Publishers, 1987), xi.

⁵¹ Wilfred Carr, “Philosophy, Methodology and Action Research,” 421-435.

⁵² Arunopol Seal’s paper in this volume is a rich reflection on the question of praxis.

action that rendered philosophy practical and gave philosophy its praxical-phronetic-merger of brain and the hand characteristics. Or are they mutually constituted by (uncanny parts of) each other.

Diotima of Mantinea (circa 440 B.C.E) an ancient Greek prophetess and philosopher, played an important role in Plato's *Symposium*. Socrates proclaims "...he learned everything he knows about love from Diotima and that he remains convinced by her teaching"⁵³. Diotima's ideas are at the origin of the concept of Platonic love⁵⁴. Her thought has three important moments: one, she breaks down rigid binaries and explores the conceptual 'in-between'. Diotima, through her own rendition of dialectics, establishes the *intermediary* as a means or a path that reaches a 'third' term which is *non-destructive* and *non-reductive* of the two terms but is nevertheless a progression - such that one can look *at* the Moebius of a problem than merely being *in* the problem. She thus negates the condition of working at the extremes⁵⁵. "Irigaray⁵⁶ [building on Diotima] through her invocation of the in-between, urges for an engagement between thought and living, life and labor, love and touch etc. There is also reflection on the enmeshed ontology of *praxis*; for Diotima, knowledge is born from reality and reality is born through knowledge."⁵⁷ The second moment is when Diotima states, "... contrary to the usual methods of dialectics, one should not have to give up "love" in order to become wise or learned. It is love that leads to knowledge, whether in art or more metaphysical learning"⁵⁸. For Diotima, love is the condition of knowledge, for love stands between wisdom and ignorance. The one who is wise does not seek for knowledge anymore, and an ignorant person has no value for knowledge. The one who is a constant seeker of knowledge shall keep attaining wisdom. The ability to constantly seek knowledge

⁵³Andrea Nye, *Socrates and Diotima: Sexuality, Religion, and the Nature of Divinity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 1.

⁵⁴ Mary Ellen Waithe, *A History of Women Philosophers: Volume 1*.

⁵⁵ M.C. Howatson and C. C. Frisbee Sheffield, *Plato's Symposium*, trans. M.C. Howatson (Cambridge: CUP, 2008), 206e.

⁵⁶ Luce Irigaray and Gillian C. Gill, *An ethics of sexual difference*.

⁵⁷Swarnima Kriti, "Deconstructing Theory-Practice: Re-Thinking Methodology," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 20, no. 3 (2018): 62-73. (footnote within the reference separately)

⁵⁸ Luce Irigaray and Gillian C. Gill. *An ethics of sexual difference*, 21.

is born out of love for knowledge⁵⁹. The poverty of discourse has been such that knowledge has been largely looked at as devoid of love. Diotima's urge to reconnect knowledge and love takes us to lesser walked paths in contemporary research practices i.e. the path of "engaged-attached"⁶⁰ processes. These processes create a relationship with the context and its elements – individuals, families, belief systems etc. These processes perhaps give us a window to be phronetic. The paper tries to think, if Diotima's invocation of love is an example of knowledge that is sexuated. The third moment is when the object of love for Diotima is not simply the beautiful, but "...procreating and giving birth in/to the beautiful"⁶¹. She perhaps focuses on *becoming* (not as a passive being but as an active agent); and calls every moment in which our becoming is birthed as beautiful. This 'beautiful' is also not pre-given, it is the ethical struggle and phronetic working in and around procreation and birthing that makes the moment beautiful. Diotima thus marks a shift from the 'concept' of the beautiful to the practices that *make* something beautiful. She thus marks a shift from *concepts* to *practices*, *life* to *living*, *is* to *ought*, *what* to *how*, '*beautiful*' to *procreate and give birth in/to the beautiful* (*Tagore takes a turn to the beautiful as against the hyper-moral on the question of the political in an Other world*). The three moments enunciated by Diotima i.e. the path of the "in-between", the work of love as a condition for knowledge and the shift to the notion of beauty *in* practices may be seen as an opening into practical philosophy.⁶²

Diotima argues, "If we did not, at each moment, have something to learn from an encounter with reality, between reality and already established knowledge, we would not perfect ourselves in wisdom"⁶³. The primary trope of Diotima's argument looks to be the need to *perfect* oneself in wisdom. To perfect oneself in wisdom may be understood in two ways: 1) to perfect oneself in wisdom at a given time in a given context 2) *perfecting* oneself in wisdom as a continuous process. Both meanings are interconnected (because the former is coded within the latter), but not overlapping.

⁵⁹ Through such a statement Diotima makes a claim about both love and knowledge i.e. being in love and in knowledge are a constant process and must not be seen as something that takes place once or twice in life.

⁶⁰ See Swarnima Kriti, "Deconstructing Theory-Practice: Re-Thinking Methodology", 70 where *engaged-attached* practice is referred to as involvement-attachment.

⁶¹ M.C. Howatson and Frisbee C. C. Sheffield, *Plato's Symposium*, 206e.

⁶² Swarnima Kriti, "Deconstructing Theory-Practice: Re-Thinking Methodology," 62-73.

⁶³ Luce Irigaray and Gillian C. Gill, *An ethics of sexual difference*, 21.

Does Diotima tend to suggest that although we have known things, we have still not known them perfectly/fully or we have not been in the *continuous* process of knowing them? Does she urge for a more engaged-attached practice in philosophy or knowledge-making? Would such engaged-attached practice help us find (or keep finding) ‘perfection’ in wisdom? For Diotima, the object of analysis here looks to be ‘reality’. She thus, perhaps suggests an engaged-attached interaction with reality may perfect one in wisdom. What then is ‘reality’? Should we understand reality as a social setting of lived experiences, as a psychological setting of sensory experiences, as a network of practices and belief systems, as that which is grounded in the immanent or perhaps as a complex combination of all those above, as well as other interactions/interpretations? In order to understand reality as an important component of wisdom and to de-puzzle its relationship with praxis, we can perhaps refer to the two phrases in the given statement: first “encounter with reality” and second “between reality and already established knowledge”. Diotima’s claim for an ‘encounter with reality’ urges the philosopher to be *in* this world, it urges the philosopher to also involve and interact with what is going on *in* the world rather than abstractions that search for a larger truth beyond our empirical existence. As discussed earlier, praxis is grounded in the immanent:

For Aristotle, phronesis is inseparable from, and can only be acquired in, practice, it cannot be developed or improved by appealing to theoretical philosophy which provides a purely abstract and intellectual understanding of the idea of the good. Similarly, to assume that phronesis can be informed and guided by ‘productive philosophy’ would simply be to transform praxis into a form of poiesis. Indeed, for Aristotle, the peculiarities of phronesis—its embeddedness in praxis and the way in which 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 praxis⁶⁴.

In the twentieth century, Beauvoir in her autobiography, stated that since her early days in the literary professional training she would be anxious to find ways to mend the distance between ‘literature and life’, ‘things and words’ that could capture

⁶⁴ Wilfred Carr, *Philosophy, Methodology and Action Research*, 425.

the 'here-and-now presence' of reality⁶⁵. Similarly, Kristeva in her reading of Arendt's life says,

Caught up from the outset by this passion in which *life* and *thought* are one and the same, her varied yet profoundly coherent intellectual odyssey never ceased to place *life* - in and of itself, and as a concept to be elucidated- at the centre. For, far from being a 'professional thinker,' Hannah Arendt puts her thought into action in her life: in this specifically Arendtian trait, we might be tempted also to see something unique to women, since 'repression' (in the Freudian sense) is said to be 'problematic' for women and thus they are prevented from isolating themselves in the obsessive fortresses of pure thought, where men compete so successfully, and are anchored instead in the reality of their bodies and in relationships with others⁶⁶.

Arendt's diversion from the trap of 'pure thought' is important for Kristeva. Kristeva found this ability specific to women. There, as if, remains a praxical bent in how (these) women philosophize. Having taken ahead this way of doing philosophy Arendt claims that after Socrates' death the politico-philosophical being-in-the-polis was lost. 'Being in the world' and 'philosophising about the world' became two separate non-overlapping spaces, and none carried any responsibility for the other. In the post-Romantic era of the nineteenth century, 'politics' became 'political science', which stopped all its exchanges with philosophical and methodical sciences⁶⁷. This shift brought a change in the nature of politics. The dismantling of such layered and complex systems of thought seem to have led to loss of depth in knowledge production. An attempt to go back to these complex systems was made by Husserl through what he called 'life-worlds' '*Lebenswelt*'. Husserl made an attempt to broaden the phenomenological approach beyond scientific activities and include everyday ordinary experiences of life⁶⁸. Such systems of thought, promoting non-compartmentalisation of different genres of life, can be traced in philosophy by (some) women like, "Olivia Sabuco de Nantes Barrera's philosophy of medicine includes a theory about physical diseases that are rooted in psychological causes

⁶⁵ Simone De Beauvoir, *The prime of life* (Harper and Row, 1976), 40 as cited in Edward Fullbrook and Kate Fullbrook, *Sex and Philosophy: Rethinking de Beauvoir and Sartre*.

⁶⁶ Julia Kristeva, *Hannah Arendt: Life is a Narrative*, trans. Frank Collins (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 3-4.

⁶⁷ Gadamer, H. and Risser, J. (1979). Practical Philosophy as a Model of the Human Sciences.

⁶⁸ *ibid*.

which, she argues, are themselves the products of personal moral conflict or of the failure to exemplify certain virtue” as also “Hortense Allart de Meritens' *Novum Organum* *Saintete Philosophique* is an attempt to understand natural religion as an object of scientific inquiry. On the other hand, Shikibu Murasaki traces the effects of competing concepts of free will and determinism in the development of social and political philosophy characteristic of feudalistic Japan”⁶⁹.

It is important to note here that women have most times not had the liberty to remain quilted in transcendence or in other-worldly reasoning. As they thought, they reared the child also, and thus, reached philosophy. This made the immanent exceedingly important for them. Which is perhaps why we can see a connection between their logic of action and praxis. Philosophical writings of Theano, Diotima, Beauvior, Kristeva and Arendt show that women⁷⁰ could connect abstract philosophy to their existing life-worlds. Theano II used the concept of *harmonia* to respond to a woman who was struggling with an unfaithful husband. She believed the concept could help the woman decide what she should do and how she should act. On the other hand, Phintys and Perictione used the same principle to answer a broader women's question i.e. how must women act in public and private lives⁷¹. The urge to philosophize, for these women, emanated from their need for a better way of living. Aristotle suggested that any investigation into the “basis of the good life, of happiness, of virtue, of practical reason, should also contribute something to the goodness of human life”⁷². Thus, to say these philosophies of women are closely knit to the coordinates of practical philosophy will perhaps not be a far stretched argument.

Metanoia: becoming in the world

This paper is written with the hope of a “transformation in consciousness”⁷³. It calls for a revival of practical philosophy, woman's know-how and the feminine logic of

⁶⁹ Mary Ellen Waithe, “*A History of Women Philosophers: Volume I*,” xiii.

⁷⁰ The paper does not hope to homogenize women, it rather understands the category woman in its constitutive multiplicity.

⁷¹ Mary Ellen Waithe, “*A History of Women Philosophers: Volume I*,” xiii.

⁷² Hans Georg Gadamer and James Risser, *Practical Philosophy as a Model of the Human Sciences*, 80.

⁷³ Luce Irigaray and Gillian C. Gill, *An ethics of sexual difference*.

action. A revival of the particular, of phronetic wit, of woman's know-how, of the undivided working of brain and the hand, of engaged-attached practices and the theory-practice merger. The paper hopes for a transformative practice such that 'action' does not remain restricted to activist critique but manages to reach the philosophy of *reconstructive* work. The paper takes inspiration from *a posteriori* sexual difference (as against *a priori* sexual difference as an anterior substance; that which already exists because one is woman or man). *A posteriori* sexual difference is a subset of *becoming*. One that carries a *sexuated perspective*, to life, labour, love; at the same time it is a standpoint from which one can think being-in-the-world, think the revival of practical philosophy. It is a shift in practice that shall lead one to a sexuated future. One reaches sexual difference through "transformative social praxis" that involves an attached-engaged methodology of work – an experience of working *with* the community – than mere sloganizing conditions or perverting politics with questions of identity and ungrounded theory. Sexual difference as not a question of being; but a question of becoming-*in-the-world*; contingent-emergent becoming. The paper finds feminine logic of action and practical philosophy in a Moebius, in mutual imbrication, in a knot that is difficult to untangle. Thus, if either of the two are stuck at the margins of discourse, revival of the other is merely a dream.

Here I would highlight a more recent work that has inspired this paper.

I lived with a separated single woman, Arnalu Miniaka (Aiya), who mothered me like her own daughter. She had no family and I was far away from mine; our loneliness brought us together. As Aiya slowly introduced me to her life full of suffering and pain, she also taught me her language and how to live and relate in the village setting. I would spend most of my time labouring with her and other women in the fields and inside-outside the household. As we worked together, bathed in the same stream of river and slept in close proximity in the dead of night, my relationship with other single women in Emaliguda also strengthened over time. We often engaged in the affective exchange of our memories and life stories and instances of the lived experience of singleness surfaced and connected us.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Bhavya Chitranshi, "Beyond Development: Postcapitalist and feminist praxis in adivasi contexts," in *Postdevelopment in practice: alternatives, economies, ontologies*. Routledge, ed. Elise Klein and Eduardo Carlos (Oxon: Routledge, 2019), 121.

This rather moving description of how Chitranshi spent each day with Arnalu Miniaka, during an immersive experience in a *kondha* adivasi village, takes us to the specifics of her relationship with the Other. It also gives us a sense of personal predicaments and quests. Perhaps such serious engagement with the ‘particular’ creates a fecund space for new theories like *singleness*⁷⁵ (marking difference from singlehood) by Chitranshi and *Eka Nari Sanghathan*⁷⁶. As Chitranshi and Arnalu Miniaka slept in close proximity they shared their “loneliness”. This moment gave birth to the need for praxis –to take care of single women in Emaliguda, around Aiya (Arnalu Miniaka). Attention to the particular and conceptualization of ‘singleness’ is perhaps an effort towards being praxical. It is a debatable question if attention to contextual need, phronetic wit and theory-practice merger was always already a part of adivasi women’s worlds or a culture they slowly imbibed while becoming *Eka Nari Sangathan*(ENS) or partly both. The turn to support, care, healing and joy in ENS marked a shift from the prominent rights and income based narrative of empowerment. The work further strengthened its reconstructive philosophy when it started collective farming. Inspired by ENS, *Chinhari: The Young India* started working in 2017. Chinhari: The Young India is a reconstructive initiative that believes in becoming-in-the-social and works for the becoming-of-the-social. It is difficult to say whether it is my minimal engagement with ENS and/or my journey of action research with Chinhari (including very early days in 2017 in Mardapoti, when Chinhari was not even named) that led me to the feminization of ‘melancholy philosophy’ or vice versa. Chinhari’s journey is a reflection on action research

⁷⁵ “Singleness in our work has been understood: (a) 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 a woman’s shoulders, and the everyday life of a woman subjected to varied forms of socio-political discriminations and violence; and, (b) as also a condition that has enabled women to lead at least a negotiated gendered existence in comparison to women under 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.” Bhavya Chitranshi, “Beyond Development: Postcapitalist and feminist praxis in adivasi contexts,” 121

⁷⁶ “...theorizing about practical matters always involves a special risk —the risk that through this theorizing, which is always connected with a generalizing, the special case, the particular situation, comes to be seen in the light of general rules, so as to lose somewhat its own urgency and its own moral challenge.” (See Hans Georg Gadamer and James Risser, “Practical Philosophy as a Model of the Human Sciences,” 80). One can think of three ways in which theory and practice are brought together. One, when theory is used to understand practice (in a particular context). Two, when practice gives birth to new theories. Three, when one and two take place together. Praxis looks to be inspired by the third understanding where theory and practice can be in a moebius. Chitranshi’s attention to the particular and conceptualization of ‘singleness’ is perhaps an effort towards being praxical (see Bhavya Chitranshi, “Beyond Development: Postcapitalist and feminist praxis in adivasi contexts,” 121). Also see <http://ekanarisanghathan.blogspot.com/>.

methodology, a reflection that helped us imagine and build a repository of collective-collaborative work. This work is motivated by practical philosophy, that in the process re-found its relationship with the feminine logic of action. Chinhari, like ENS and with help from the Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies⁷⁷, has been doing collective vegetable farming with indigenous seeds since 2019. Chinhari has also created a written platform i.e. a *Newsletter*⁷⁸, for the young women where they can write about their experiences and their worldviews; a platform perhaps where these young adivasi women can 'represent' themselves. One issue, however, this paper does not take up but which remains relevant for our work in forest societies in East and Central India is the *adivasi context* and the need for the aboriginalization⁷⁹ of action research methodologies.

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⁷⁷ <http://cintdis.org/basudha/>

⁷⁸ <https://www.chinhari.co.in/>

⁷⁹ Dhar invokes aboriginalization in a two-fold manner. The first is about the now known history of the 'aboriginalization of certain cultures' during the colonial era. The first is about the characterization of certain cultures as aboriginal and the consequent degradation, devaluing. The first is about Orientalism (both white and brown). The second is about a possible post-Orientalist episteme. The first is about how cultures were made and unmade. The second is about what cultures of knowledge (as against the Orientalist knowledge of cultures) can be produced. The second is about creating cultures of aboriginalization as against an extant aboriginalization of cultures. This paper remains informed by the second meaning of aboriginalization (see Anup Dhar "Girindrasekhar Bose and the History of Psychoanalysis in India," *Indian Journal of History of Science* 53, no. 4: 198-204). In the context of this paper one can ask: how do we ab-originalize action research methodologies? How do we reach a post-Orientalist understanding of action research methodologies? How do we create cultures of ab-original methodologies?

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