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Participatory Co-Research:

Working Through Collective Imagination of 'Cohabitation'

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This paper is based on the experience of conducting action research work in Khursuta village in the Gumla district of Jharkhand.It asks: how do we move away from the conventional methodologies of approaching research in the rural? How do we move from practice to praxis?

Let us ask ourselves a few elementary questions. Why do we want to undertake research in the rural? What is the purpose of this pursuit? Why is rural a site for finding 'wrongs' or 'righting wrongs'? What makes us think that rural requires 'development'? Before we quickly try to frame answers to these questions let's take a step back and look at how 'communities' came to be studied. The anthropological view of the indigenous/ tribal/village, have for a long time, 'othered'[1] the ways of lives that did not conform to the larger western rationalities (dominant notions of a good life valued as material excesses). Discipline of anthropology has for long looked at 'difference'as inferior or superior; primitive or modern; magic or science; savage or civilised; tribal or colonial. The anthropological pursuits were the colonial projects; they were civilising missions and paved a way to legitimise control in studying cultures in the production of knowledge production. Hence, we need to reflect and question whether as researchers or practitioners of 'development' do we also engage in constructing the 'other' as a colonial

[1]Alexander Hinton distinguishes between "essentializing Others" and "annihilating Others," where essentializing Others is creating dichotomies where Others are considered filthy, impure even animalistic, and are henceforth symbolically essentially different and separate from the in-group. Annihilating Others is the literal and physical destruction of the out-group. Between these two processes we also have social destruction: the social deprivation and destruction of social and cultural indicators of the group that has been targeted. What is of importance here is that a dominant culture group, facing a social and political crisis, looks inward to establish a new sense of Self by inventing an Other.

project. Do we through this approach then again risk subsuming 'otherness' to 'sameness'?

Clinical approaches to sociology, anthropology, and community development projects limits the knowledge production by negating the 'know-how' of the communities. And therefore, it seems there is a need to move away from conventional methods of conducting quantitative and qualitative research to more *democratic* ways of generating data as co-owned knowledge amongst the researcher and the community. When a research scholar collaborates with the people from the community to undertake participative research there is a possibility of *democratising*knowledge production; as well as opening up avenues for *transformative* action.

Structures of discipline, standpoints of ideologies and frameworks of theories enable us to make meaning of experiences as we encounter them. At the same time many experiences need to be theorised as we engage with them from diverse perspectives. This is the genesis of praxis. Immersing into the everyday life in the village of Khursuta (inhabited by *oraon* tribe and *rautiya* caste) in Gumla district of Jharkhand was a site for encountering 'unmarried' pregnancy. In the mainstream development discourse 'unmarried' pregnancy is often categorised into teenage pregnancy and seen to be as a 'risk' to the productive capacities of individuals as well as deviant to institutional legalities such as marriage, family and religion. The developmental interventions approach it from the angles of Sexual Reproductive Health (SRH) which in turn is centred on Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM), use of preventive measures (from HIV/AIDS) such as condoms and contraceptives for birth control, abortion rights and sex education. However, narratives from the community on 'unmarried' pregnancies present a complex narrative on choice of partners, community's practices of holding sexual subjects and social sanction to sexual behaviours and practice outside marriage. This helps to articulate the community's ethics on 'cohabitation' that is not in the language of 'risk'. Viewing of 'unmarried' pregnancy as cohabitation opened up possibilities of expanding the conversations on youth sexuality. This possibility shaped up through a continuous dialogue between present day realities of the tribal youth with their customary laws and norms.

The present day reality is influenced and shaped by a variety of factors such as impact of homogenising practices of religion such as Hinduism and Christianity, capitalism and migration and discourses on development such as education and health. Further a dialogue between *Brahmanical*way of life and *Oraon-Rautiya* way of life happened. In the former occurrence of pregnancy outside marriage is unimaginable while in the latter marriage is not a binding arrangement for choosing to live with a partner and has a social sanction of the community. Further a dialogue between the ethics of right and wrong amongst the community happened with the ethics of feminism. Evident from the fact that marriage is not in opposition to cohabitation, rather as a part of the same continuum where different ways of intimate relations co-exist and are practiced. Sex education in the community is the presence of family engagement such as acceptance of sexual choices through practices such as *dhuku, paithu*[2] and institutions such as *Dhumkuria*[3] and *mooliparha*[4] and not relegated to formal educational institutions alone.

In this way an alternative to framing the problematic of 'unmarried' pregnancy emerges by moving away from sexual health to sexual well-being. The framing of community's rationalities with respect to diverse sexual behavior and practices requires construction of their everyday reality as a different way of life and not as a reduced form

[2]*Dhuku and paithu* are practices of forceful entry by the girl into the boy's family outside the ritualistic tradition of marriage. Through this the girl begins to live in the house as a daughter-in-law sharing the full responsibility of the household.

[3]*Dhumkuriya* is the youth dormitory of the Oraon tribal community of Jharkhand. It provided education to young boys and girls on socio-cultural, politico-economic and religious issues, along with mores of collective living. Dhumkuria encouraged learning by doing, as well as teaching while learning-to younger and from elder cohorts, simultaneously. Here, knowledge was mostly orally accumulated, education was an act of sharing skills and values for collective and harmonious living and pedagogy was dialogical and co-constructive. However, this practice was lost due to cultural changes, outmigration, impact of formal religious practices and then encouragement given by Colonial and Indian Government to formalised schools and colleges. Also, for intellectuals and knowledge brokers, working within positivistic framework, youth dormitories like *Dhumkuria* represented backwardness and promiscuousness. Such epistemic violence humiliated tribal communities and eroded several of their institutions and practices. Nevertheless, in the last few years there has been an attempt to resurrect pivotal tribal institutions.

[4]Each of the Oraon villages in a region were loosely formed a part of a greater confederation, so that they could help each other and jointly protect themselves, called *Parha*. The *Parha* is a confederacy of a number of neighbouring villages with a central organization called *ParhaPanch*. *Mooliparha* makes people aware of the religious place of *Sarnas-SeetaNala*, and conduct mass marriages in *sarana* tradition to counter the dowry system that has seeped into the *aadivasi* culture. By organizing *Khodamela*, this *parha*sensitises the youth to protect the aadivasi culture.

of living. This is where the responsible ethical practice of researching with the community becomes essential.

Ethics in researching *with* the community?

It would be useful to acknowledge that as a researcher or a practitioner we are the 'other' in the village. This other is a stranger, a stranger who is a threat. Do we slip back into construction of reality in a manner that 'threatens' the 'difference' of a community's way of life or their life-world? Or do we attempt to become a reflective researcher/practitioner or both. This would require for us to move away from the participant observer, to remove the gaze of the 'other'. But move to what? There is an ethical responsibility for us as development practitioners to not reduce the 'other' to sameness of 'my' views. How do we do that? In foregrounding the 'other' could we construct the reality with the participants? Could we integrate the community's questions with our quest for knowledge? Could we maintain the truth voices that emerge from the community? As a researcher can we be reflective enough to not only do, but to be aware of what not to do. Can we be reflective of the 'other' in us as we relate with the community?

In Khursuta, within the SHG space, women come together once in a week to do saving, inter-loaning and have discussions on CIF and revolving funds, initiating economic activities such as agriculture and horticulture etc. For a development practitioner this collectivisation of women however is also an opportunity to address poignant social issues. Only that none of the social issues in the village is discussed in this platform apart from planning agriculture. Social issues such as disputes within families, cases of runaway brides or grooms, cases of violence, land disputes etc. are brought to the village *parha* (panchayat). This *parha* is headed by 3-4 eldest men in the village. A trial is held in presence of the people from the village and the verdict is issued.

After one such SHG meeting, when a question was posed to the group of women, 'what happens to social problems that we are facing in our lives and whether we would

like to discuss it here'? There was an uncomfortable silence before Shanti didi, member of the SHG, spoke up and shared that her daughter Sheela has returned back from Kerala (she had gone there to work in a garment factory) as she is pregnant. Sheela's lover, Gautam belongs to a different caste and she wanted some women to accompany her in holding negotiations with his family to figure out the future of her daughter. As I waited for other women in the group to respond, she asked me directly if I could accompany her. I agreed but also urged other members of the group to volunteer. Two more women agreed to join for the visit to the boy's family in an adjacent village. As an 'outsider' I was viewing this situation as a case of 'unmarried' pregnancy which is a risk to the mother and the unborn child as well as the Shanti didi's family. The questions that confronted me were those of legitimacy of the child, legal entitlement to land for mother and the child for future sustenance, possibilities of social outcasting of Shanti didi's family and emotional trauma and pain associated with this situation.

It was during the negotiations of the village women and boy's mother that the customary norms and social practices with regards to companionship between the girl and the boy were revealed to me. However, as I continued to hold the lateral position with the village women during negotiations with the boy's family, I could only gradually understand that the perceived 'risk' in the case of unmarried pregnancies has a potential of crisis when the alliance[5] is inter-tribe or inter-religion or inter-caste and in cases where the men's family or the man himself denies cohabiting with the woman. The alliance of a man and woman goes beyond legal sanctions or ritualistic traditions in Khursuta village. The first sanction (allowance, acceptance) is partner's consent. Usually men pursue women but at times it is also a mutual choice. The second sanction is sought by introducing the families. The girl's family visits the boy's house and vice versa. This verbal alliance is recognised in the village and the society accepts this without any ceremony or ritual. To strengthen and formalise the bond *lota-paani*[6]takes place at both

[5]Although alliance in kinship studies is used to signify marriage, I am using the term to denote its dictionary meaning. The dictionary defines alliance as a union or association formed for mutual benefit. It is a relationship based on similarity of interests, nature or qualities, it is a state of being joined or associated.

[6] Lota-Paani is a ritual where the closest kins of girl's family visits the boy's family and vice-versa. A feast is organised and selected households in the village of the boys/girl's family are invited for the ritual. In order to invite the people in the village a member from the family goes around the village inviting the kins for the ceremony as well as showing the water in a copper urn. It is a formal announcement of association between the two families in the village.

the houses. Usually after *lota-paani* there is no urgency of marriage as the boy and girl can start living with each other in any one of the houses or when they migrate together. In case the girl gets pregnant she does *dhuku*[7] and begins to live in the boy's house. In other cases if there is an urgent need to be taken care of such as somebody's illness or death and there is a need for the labour in the boy's family, the girl is requested to live with her in-law's family. The marriage ceremony is a grand event for the families and they usually take time (sometimes it can be more than five to seven years) to prepare for the marriage before commemorating it.

Back in the village when this issue was further discussed in the SHG I was told that this is indeed a problem and the girls are at a perpetual risk of getting pregnant by the boys in the village especially as they migrate to cities to work. Since they are the ultimate victims, by the virtue of their biological capacity to reproduce, something about this should be done. Parallelly, in my discussions with older women, priests at the church and adolescent girls and boys I found that almost every household has alliances outside marriage. In fact, many older women have been known to have lived all their life with their partners in his house, had children and even died without formalising their marriage.

On one hand the discussions with women in the SHG and *sahiyas*[8] at the CHC suggested that unmarried pregnancy is a problem of recent times alluding the casualty to migration (for work or education). On the other hand the narratives with adolescent girls and boys living in cohabitation hinted towards customary norms that allowed occurrence of companionship between a man and a woman without undergoing the ritualistic practices of marriage. Amidst this tension, the methods of engagement on the issues surrounding 'unmarried' pregnancy emerged which centred on developing an understanding of the present day realities of youth sexuality. Keeping with the ethics of collaborative research when the possible actions were explored inside the SHG space, it was suggested that *kishoribaithak* be held with young girls in the village upwards of 10

[7]A ritual through which the girl forcefully enters the house of the boy and begins to live a conjugal life along with his family.

[8]Sahiyas are the community health workers also known as ASHA and are supported by government run CHC or Community Health Centres to ensure institutional delivery, vaccination of children and nutrition of children at the Anganwadicentres

years old and educate them on preventing these situations. The tension further deepened as this suggested approach seemed to concede to mainstream notions of health, development and education, penetrating the villages through vehicles such as SHG, CHC, missionary schools and religious institutions such as church. SHG premised on the economic principles of development rationality condemns any situation that impedes the productive capacity of individuals such as teenage parenthood. The women collectives in the gendered theories of empowerment are trained on sexual reproductive health from the perspective of preventing (STDs and pregnancy). CHCs further the overarching rationalities on health that again reduces women and teenage girls to SRH, institutional delivery and population control. Preaching of the church condemns sex outside marriage as a sin. The church through their representatives in the village identifies couples practicing cohabitation and mobilises them to undergo blessed marriage but only after they have attended pre-nuptial classes where they are preached the importance of institutions such as marriage and family.

Explorations with young boys and girls on their experiences of choosing to live with a partner outside marriage presented a different framing of the reality of the youth sexuality in the village. The everydayness of sexuality emerged in terms of choice, social sanctions, inter-tribe dynamics and acceptance of sexual subjects in the life-world of Khursuta. For instance, while inter-tribe marriage is not allowed, an Oraon mission and a Munda mission can marry. If a girl gets pregnant she may choose to do *dhuku* and start living with the family. As a girl or a boy chooses their partners they can bring each other to their homes and live together in the family. Choice of partners is not based on educational qualification, financial stability but the value of being with each other as they derive it. In most cases the young boys and girls choose their own partners. No monetary transactions are carried out between two families as each family hosts their own feast in respective villages.

Using the PRA tools or holding *kishoribaithaks* would not have helped to arrive at the complexity of this reality. Developing a perspective on understanding the issues of youth vis-à-vis their sexuality required an approach away from intervention. Therefore, in collaboration with the *sahiya* of the village, who had the mandate of conducting

*kishor*and *kishoribaithak* under the RKSK programme of the national government, I called for *Yuvamaitribaithak* as a conscious choice. Interestingly I encountered a youthful group (all those who considered themselves to be young) which came for the meetings. Realising that approaching the issues around 'unmarried' pregnancy from the angle of sexual health would be limiting, I opened up the questions around desire, love, companionship, commitment, parenting and suffering. Hence, I moved away from informing to discussing things that they would like to do. The desire to watch movies and travel together held the group meetings together. It was also an opportunity to recognise that when we try and hold a group meeting on the issue which is non-economic or non-purposive in nature, it gives freedom in the ways in which people associate with each other. As I began to conduct these meetings, the number of people who came, the age group of the people who attended and the place of the meeting remained fluid. The axis of transformation was to be able to generate dialogues amongst us on the issues which are usually limited to intimate relational spheres. I intended to open up the familial spaces for initiating dialogues on adolescent sexuality as used to happen in *Dhumkuria*. However, I couldn't reach upto that stage. Parallel to this, I found that the familial spaces are already sensitive to the physiological and emotional needs of the youth and therefore a close examination of practices of cohabitation is crucial in framing our language in which development[9] is associated with sexuality.

It is significant to highlight the things that were consciously not done in this whole process of enacting the participatory inquiry. Firstly, as a practitioner we are tempted to act, collectivize and conscientise and therefore as Sheela's problematics were encountered during the negotiation with Gautam's mother, I felt the need to interject and intervene to evident injustice. However, maintaining a lateral position helped me witness the community's viewpoint on action. It helped me readjust my own lens and shift the gaze from 'risk' in 'unmarried' pregnancy to choice of cohabitation. While this choice is not devoid of fall outs, it has a value to the subjects living it. Secondly, un-layering the complexity of everydayness of cohabitation as lived in the village helped in segregating the acquired voices to innate ones in a continuous dialogue. Both the voices

[9]Through health and sex education

are real and existing in the current life of the village, however, a conscious choice was made to not let the normative viewpoints of women in SHG and *sahiyas* at CHC frame the course of action. Thirdly, y*uvamaitribaithaks* were held instead of *Kishoribaithaks* to expand the discussion amongst men and boys and not limit the discussions on pregnancy to girls and women alone.

How do we *action* research?

The objective of 'research' is to study'difference'. But what is this difference? This is a non-hierarchical studying of difference as an ontological question which is both ethical and political in nature. Hence, for instance if one wants to understand the 'domestic violence', it is simultaneously a question of 'private spaces' and a political question. This would require the movement from constructing the 'other' as a colonial project to the construction of the 'other' as a vernacular construction of another one.

The youth in the Khursuta village live their lives at the cusp of modernity and traditions where dominant practices and customary norms with respect to alliance form, shape and reframe the manners in which associations are fostered. Whereas, the narratives on cohabitation help in constructing the alternative history of sexuality through community ethics on sexual behaviours and practices such as '*dhuku'* and lost traditions such as *dhumkuriya*, there are also incidences of resurrection of these practices by institutions such as '*mooliparha'* that aim to re-establish the practices of marriage in *sarana* tradition by eliminating material or monetary exchange which largely has been influenced by 'The Great Indian Weddings'. In attempting to frame the sexual behaviours and practices of the community in terms of cohabitation, the idea is not cultural preservation, but a political question in how we want to keep the community's ethics alive lest their robustness in holding sexual subjects become obsolete. This question becomes all the more important in the wake of prosecution and murders by *Khap panchayat* of Haryana where lovers who defy gotra rules are mercilessly murdered.

One of the methods to engage in discussions with the youthful group at Khursuta was to screen the movies. This was a desire that the group had expressed and I had agreed upon. It was however, ridden with a dilemma-what if the visual pleasure translated into physical violence because there is politics around watching. Since, I was privileging their choice the tension between striking a balance between desire as 'objectification' and desire as 'claim' remained. I constantly faced a challenge on how to inaugurate questions of desire in a dialogic mode. Since, PRA would not be useful in this context I relied on listening, relating and communicating. This opened up the possibility of an alternative imagination where development is associated to sexuality in their everyday existence as sexual beings to be framed as sexual well- being. In trying to find other languages, the axis of transformation was to inaugurate cultures of relatedness around questions of desire amongst the youthful subjects. This relatedness is not imposed on individuals based on alliance due to marriage and descent alone but also includes diverse forms of relationship such as cohabitation and motherhood outside marriage.

How do we be reflective of action?

Let go of the 'Expert'.

The next question then that emerges is that as a development practitioner how do we behave when we are in the village? Firstly, we need to be aware of the axis of power where we as researchers are placed, the moment we enter into a village. The researcher usually comes with the power position of 'I know'. Hence, first and foremost we have to give away that position of 'knowingness'.

As a middle class upper caste woman armed with the ideas of radical feminism while pregnancy outside wedlock was a risk, the victim status of the woman was to be responded with immediate abortion or filing a case against the man responsible for it. Additionally, financial empowerment became critical to enable a safe, successful survival of the girl. Alas! this was true of me and not of Sheela, Tara, Savitri, Urmila and others in the village. Sheela was not suffering from a social taboo but was anxious of

Gautam's lack of conclusive response, she was not considering abortion as an option as she knew her family would take care of them, she was not really anxious about the future of her child as she knew she was not dealing with issues of illegitimacy here but was evaluating the possibilities of migrating to city for work post pregnancy. Her family was not restless and upset about dealing with social taboo but concerned whether or not Gautam's Rajput family would accept their alliance despite caste differences. This wouldn't have been so grave a concern if the alliance had been formed amongst *rautiya* and *oraon*, for instance. Once I let go of my neo-liberal perspectives on engaging with the issue of 'unmarried' pregnancy I was able to decipher what the community was not articulating but living in their everyday lives as given and ordinary.

From Asking to Listening

Secondly, as we try to navigate through the life-world in the village and engage in conversations, we need to be reflective of what we ask, how we ask, who we ask? As we move away from being 'observers', the researchers need to 'listen'. We move away from observing the other to listening to another one. In this case, therefore the process of knowledge production is more democratic in nature.

As I began inquiring about the practices of choosing partners, I was given information in a language that the community perceived I would understand. Hence, people in the village referred to partners as 'girlfriend', boyfriend' and cohabiting as 'live-in relationships' as I engaged in conversations with them. However, as I listened to their experiences and stories I found out that choosing a girl or a boy partner is referred to as '*ladkidhoondhahai*' (found a girl) or '*ladkadhoondhahai*' (found a boy) respectively. The sexual intimacy is referred to as '*milansamaroh*'. The narratives of men, women, priests, parents helped build a theory on cohabitation practices of the community as a different way of living a conjugal life in the same continuum as that of marriage.

Let interventions take a pause

This process of knowledge production also calls for movement from understanding the reality as it is; and not treating the realities in the rural as problems. This is because the

moment we construct reality as problems, resolving the problems becomes the agenda of the research. The objective of the research is to create an idea and hence elementary questions need to be asked. 'Unmarried' pregnancy therefore is not to be treated as a problem that needs to be fixed but a reality depictive of the ways in which young people choose their partners, ways in which society as whole contains the sexual subjects through social sanctions rather than ritualistically commemorating or legally institutionalising them.

Hence, the research could begin with what is there rather than what should be there. To have a critical view of widely held notions, the 'normalised' perspectives and existing knowledge systems becomes crucial in undertaking the research.

The people residing in the village are continuously interacting with the outside world which in turn is shaping their everyday reality. This reality is lived in the reminiscence of past traditions and criticalities of the contemporary world. For instance, while in the village the customary norms allow sexual intimacy between an adolescent girl and a boy, the moralising ethos of missionary schools where these children study condemns it. The recital of prayers in the current times on the occasions of Saint Monica Day, Mother Mariam Day, Sunday schools etc. deliver a particular kind of preaching which is also a present day reality and needs to be acknowledged as we try and understand the sexual behaviours and practices in the village. The larger counter wave to these schools of thoughts propagated by Brahmanism or Christianism is also expanding in terms of legalisation of homosexuality, live-in relationships, multiple marriages etc and youth who migrate to metro cities like Delhi experience it as they move out of the village. Therefore, enabling a candid deliberation on the notions of desire, choice, freedom, contingency of motherhood on marriage and parenthood etc. became critical to foreground what is there in the village with respect to cohabitation.

Furthermore, sexuality is a subjugated knowledge that is manifested in social behavior as given and also cornered from public imagination under inner beliefs and choices. The scope to understand its complexities is limited and therefore to generate dialogue around one's sexuality is a difficult task. Holding deliberations in a mixed group was an attempt to bring the boys and girls together to build a collective

understanding on issues surrounding youth sexuality. This knowledge paves a way to engender development where sexuality is looked at from the angle of sexual well-being of individuals for a good life.

Ethics of representing

Researcher

As researchers what we think leads to what we ask which in turn leads to how we ask. In analysing the experience or empirical data we bring our own ideologies that shape our own perspectives. It is important to acknowledge our own ideological position as we write the research or construct the reality of the rural.

Therefore, foregrounding my own subjectivity towards unmarried pregnancy, motherhood, love, desire companionship, shaped up by the virtue of being brought up in a middle class, *Brahmanical* household and currently located in the radical; neo-liberal feminist structure becomes critical. The dialogic exercise, carried out with the SHG didis, youth groups and individuals shaped up an understanding of alternative ways of choosing and living with partners. In the process, the interventions to address adolescent sexuality through sexual and reproductive health and sex-education are also critically evaluated as lacking and unresponsive to the issues of youth sexuality. In attempting to understand sexuality as perceived in the tribal life-world through practices of cohabitation and companionship outside of institutional practices of marriage, it is implicit that it is an effort of unshackling.

Reality

What questions one must ask to attempt to arrive at the 'reality'? When the method of research questions a range of social relations, there is a possibility of arriving at the 'reality'. The hierarchy of social relationships reflect economic, social, cultural and political existence. For instance, posing a question on income from agriculture in the village, one would like to find out the following:

- What people have in terms of assets/endowments?

- What is the nature of labour being used?
- What is the ownership of surplus (retained surplus above subsistence)?

This quest would remain unfulfilled with a question like how much do you earn? At the same time the analysis of the responses to above would help build an index of exploitation by mapping the concentration of land in agriculture which also reflects inequality in the society. Similarly, if one needs to understand the economic organisation of a physical space, it would be significant to look at labour, capital, state, patriarchy, religion and caste. The framing of questions would be useful if it assimilates all of this as we ask questions.

In order to fully explore the reality of the everydayness of youth sexuality a range of questions were framed. Some of them were as follows: What are the existing marriage practices? What are the rules of cohabitation? How are pregnancies outside the wedlock viewed? Does the community come together to address such issues? What are those spaces? Do they exist in practice? What is the role of religion in formalising the marriage practice? How does community articulate right and wrong with respect to sexual behaviour and practices? How are issues of sex, desire and intimacy articulated amongst the community by men and women? What are the norms to be followed and respected? What are the norms that can be relaxed? Who confesses, to whom and how? What is it that they thought of communion? How does it happen? Where does it take place? Is there a right time for this?

As we engage with the community in asking, we are also questioned in return. In being questioned on issues of love, marriage, divorce, using contraceptives, in my world the community and I listened and related with each other.

Experience

This then brings us to recognise that research based on experience and relationships help us understand the structures in which a subject lives. For instance, in order to understand the relationship between a man and a woman, the structure in which these relationships are performed becomes essential as it constructs the hierarchy in how they

relate to each other such as patriarchy, sex or gender. The experience of the subject will depend on where she exists in this structure. This will also require of us as researchers to move away from essentialising or generalising. Hence, if we make a statement- 'Women face domestic violence', it risks overlooking that women are not homogenous identities. They reside in a complex matrix of caste structures, class structures and gender structures. Hence, it would be crucial to attend to their location in the village amidst these structures. Experience of Sheela with Gautam is shaped differently because of inter caste dynamics while that of Abeel who is an Oraon mission and Tara who is a Munda mission is negotiated differently. Response of Sheela to her situation is shaped by her agency as an independent working woman. Tara is also influenced by her higher educational qualification than Abeel with the ways in which she negotiates her work load in his family. The location of men and women in the caste-tribe structures, class and gender shapes their choices around companionship and cohabitation.

Writing

Next, comes the question of analysing or writing the research. This brings us back to the question of are we studying the villagers as objects or are we studying the village with them? This is a methodological question. In attempting to reproduce the reality which in our case will be documentation (of any form) we should be aware of maintaining the authenticity of the voices that emerge. This is an attempt of the research to be true to the research. Researcher as a stranger need to be aware to not portray their own voices or opinions as the 'other's'. If the entry to the research is experience then the voices of the researched, researchers and the community will have to be presented on different axes. The knowledge thus produced will reflect multiplicity and present partial perspectives.

The action research on which this paper is based was analysed on three different axes. The first axis represents the narratives from the field, and attempts to articulate a culture of relatedness unique to the tribal life-world in the language of cohabitation. This society has the capability to recognise sexuality in its everydayness and not steeped in morality or religion. However, shackles of religion on marriage as a social institution cannot be ignored. This is evident in the changing rituals around marriage and the increasing role of the church in marriage ceremony. Although, in this life-word, there is

a space for trust between two partners that is self- acknowledged, yet the parameters of social recognition around institutionalisation cannot be ignored. Alliance takes on new forms but it does not escape the social norms of endogamy that many caste groups believe and practice. Therefore, the ethics of right and wrong are ambiguous, and its contours shift with every case.

The second axis is the existing theories on the knowledge of tribes and their limitations and highlights that it might be a little farfetched to understand these forms of cohabitation in the available idiom of cultures of relatedness that (Carsten 2000) indicates in her work.

The third axis is reviewing existing action with respect to youth sexuality and it's limitations. Actioning research through holding *yuvamaitribaithak*, going on a trek and screening movies as a precursor to discussions helped in understanding practices of cohabitation in the life world of Khursuta that was not available to me when I tried to understand 'unmarried' pregnancy in isolation – as a risk, as a problem that needed fixing with reproductive health discourse. Actions towards deepening of understanding of cohabitation practices beyond descent and marriage allowed for cogenerating an ethics of practice.

Conclusion

Action Research as a process cannot define methods of engagement in an absolute manner. Experiences of being *with* the community helps *evolve* and engineer methods best suited for engaging with the problems of the community. With the *fusing* of the framework of engagement between the researcher and the community, the data thus generated is co-owned and is a process of empowering the community itself. It also further gets translated into *collectivisation*that promotes an opportunity for *transformative* action.

The engagement with the youth was a small way of inaugurating questions around desire, love, companionship, parenting etc. in a collective space. Sexuality in

development is limited to spreading awareness through sex-education amongst others especially when the target is the youthful group. However, the issues are not just about sex, it has psycho-social-relational layers which escapes the current imagination of the interventionist strategies. Amidst the extreme positions taken against sex-education in the Indian political discourse it becomes difficult to talk about sexuality. It is essential to recognise, first and foremost that sex and sexuality are not synonymous. Sexuality encompasses not only sex but also the construct of gender, body image, consent, intimacy, sexual activities, sexual abuse and harassment, sexual identities, pleasure and fantasy, relationships and emotions. Sexual well-being is intrinsically connected to various other aspects of a human life. The silence around human sexuality within the construct of family leads to confused knowledge amongst adults and children.

The present work can be delineated to say that in the current development paradigm, sexuality remains unaddressed. Increasingly through statist interventions like RKSK policy, MTP Act and introduction of sex education in school curriculums, sexuality is depoliticised into a mere sexual and reproductive health. This work, therefore, departs from mainstream understanding and calls for a need to politicize sexuality in development. Sexuality is not about the way people understand it through formulating policies on adolescent health, reproductive health and namesake sex education. It is about articulating our sexual desires without fear or shame. This needs to be practiced in everyday life which will make the environment conducive such as it will no longer be stigmatised. And people will value our choices and live our desires with confidence.

The tribal life-world of Khursuta presents diversified ways and situations in which a man and a woman cohabit with each other. The intergenerational practices of cohabitation where the younger generations are supported by their family embedded in a larger cultural setting is a way forward to think about youth sexuality in contemporary societies. The mainstream society often jumps in to concluding what is morally right and wrong, and often tries to bind such differences in homogeneous norms, through standardization of the practices. Nuances of sexually intimate practices coexist amidst conflicts and non-acceptances with the practices of inter-caste, inter-tribe cohabitation.

For instance, a father speaks of his "unmarried' teenage' daughter's love without getting embarrassed at all. Brother remains worried not for his sisters' cohabitation and 'pre-married' pregnancies but to enhance his family's income. On the other hand, there are also some cohabitation practices which were soon getting tied under wedlock, or already '(wed) locked'. It is a relief that there exist practices where love is not tied through lawful activities. This sense of relief has emboldened within me a hope; the hope of fusion of sexuality into development and vice versa, where sexual well-being is recognised as significant to lead a good life.

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