

The Living Dead

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No one *believed* my story and no one ever *understood* my pain. I had no choice but to keep my *sadness* to myself. I could not share it with anyone, so I never *shared* it with anyone. ... But *now* I share my feelings with my *Sanghas* in the *Sanghathan* because they believe what I say and they [perhaps] understand my pain ...

Rupayi Pedenti, Member *Eka Nari Sanghathan*¹, Emaliguda.

This paper builds on an ‘action research’² project that took ‘transformation’³ as an object of inquiry in the context of the collective mobilisation of single women and formation of an *Eka Nari Sanghathan* (*Single Women’s Collective*) in a distant tribal⁵ village called Emaliguda in the Rayagada⁶ district of Odisha. The lived experience of *being* single, the condition of *singleness* (as

¹ *Eka Nari Sanghathan* is a Single Women’s Collective in Emaliguda, Rayagada district, in Odisha, India, forged by forty rural tribal single women.

² Put telegraphically ‘action research’ is reflective *writing* on the reflexive process of *righting* wrongs. In other words, action research is both about righting and writing. It is about writing on the actual or lived process of righting wrongs – a process lived by both researcher and community. Righting wrongs is about: (a) engendering a process of *necessary* transformation, a process owned by communities in which the transformation process is being initiated through some kind of catalytic activity, (b) documenting the process in its infinite complexity and contradiction, and (c) generating somewhat abstract learnings and explanatory frameworks out of the experience of transformation for the community and the development sector at large. In short, action research is about (a) research-*ing* a problem, (b) action-*ing* based on research findings and problem identification and possible (re)solution, and (c) research-*ing* the process of action-*ing* retrospectively (see Dhar 2015).

³ Dhar (2015), Chakrabarti and Dhar (2015a) and Dhar and Chakrabarti (2015b) marks the question of transformation along three mutually constitutive axes: (a) the axis of the self/psyche, (b) the axis of the political (usually reduced to the liberal State and the vote and they remain critical of such a reduction) and (c) the axis of the larger social including community or collective formation.

⁴ Single Women (in mainstream discourse) are those who: (i) have reached a marriageable age and are yet not married, (ii) are widows, (iii) are divorced or separated (see Krishnakumari, 1987: 3). The *Sanghathan* – the Single Women’s Collective – however, also includes women who are married and have a husband but face conditions that are similar to those faced by women who do not have or live without a ‘legitimate’ male sexual partner (widows, separated and never married women). Thus the condition of *singleness* – as distinguished from singlehood (the *widow* being a paradigmatic case for the Indian State) – largely depicts loneliness and alone-ness (*Eka Nari* means both single/alone and lonely), including economic, political and cultural exclusion, perpetual states of financial and emotional insecurity, work burden residing entirely on the woman’s shoulders, etc.

⁵ ‘Tribal’ as a descriptor has been deployed by largely British colonial anthropologists in India to identify the native equivalent *adivasi*, partially translated as indigenous people, ab-original inhabitants/settlers etc. The tribal community mentioned here are the *Kondha* tribes who identify themselves as *Kuvi-Lukon* (meaning ‘*Kuvi* speaking people’, *Kuvi* being their native language). We would have liked to deploy *adivasi* as a descriptor for the population we were working with; but keeping in mind an international audience, we are with some hesitation deploying the descriptor tribe in this paper.

⁶ Rayagada district consists of 11 blocks, 171 *panchayats* and 2,667 villages. The *Kondha* tribe forms the majority of

distinguished from singlehood) among rural tribal women including forest societies, and the process of the public articulation of othering, led to the *becoming* of a collective where women who have been abandoned by their families, or have been widowed, have been left unmarried, or women whose husbands' are critically unwell have come together with an objective of paving the *Sanghatban's* (i.e. the collective's) own path, spelling out its own well-being, carving out its own language of empowerment, and taking charge of a possible common future, a future beyond mere and already stated and dictated developmental agendas. This paper thus builds on a movement – movement from *being* single to *becoming* an emergent and contingent *being-in-common* – the *Sanghatban* – that premises itself on the one hand, on an ethico-politics of pluralism, and on the other, on the (im)possible forging of relationships, love and friendship.

The Dead in the Living:

No one *believed* my story and no one ever *understood* my pain. I had no choice but to keep my *sadness* to myself. I could not share it with anyone, so I never *shared* it with anyone. ...

Rupayi Pedenti, Member *Eka Nari Sanghatban*, Emaliguda.

While the above section offers a background, the specific focus of the paper, one would like to reiterate, is on the world of the living dead in village Emaliguda. It is on stories of tribal women who are single (let us call them in this paper hereafter 'tribal single women') in Emaliguda – stories of the *dead buried in the living* and the thin stream of that which is *living⁷ in the dead*. It is about lives rendered dead, rendered silent by deep and long-drawn experiences of pain, violence, of Otherness; not necessarily overt or coercive violence; but the subtle and surreptitious, yet ubiquitous violence of capital, of primitive accumulation, of displacement-dislocation, of landlessness, of *being-woman*, being a sexuated object, *being-a-single-woman* in the world of a largely polygamous patriarchal culture, of *being-tribal*, in a word of being the *lacking other* of what has now come to be known in the Southern hemisphere as 'inclusive development'⁸ – hence the

the population followed by Souras in the district.

⁷ One however cannot take the question of living – even if minimal – living, even if in the dead – as given. Malabou quotes Foucault: "For millennia, man remained what he was for Aristotle: a *living animal* with the additional capacity for a *political existence*; modern man is an animal whose politics places his existence as a living being in question" (1978: 143). One remains aware through Malabou of the *politicization of life* and the *biologization of politics* and hence cannot take life-living as 'metaphysics of presence'.

⁸ As this ongoing action research initiative (2013 ...) moved towards a possible 'collective (in) action' – the *Sanghatban*, while engaging nevertheless with the State, the society at large and one's own self as ethico-political subject, the attempt has been to critically revisit the hegemonic understanding of development. The interrogation of the Capitalocentric and Orientalist nature of mainstream development, including a re-imagination and re-

lacking other is in need of either assimilation as ‘victim other’⁹ in the world of the elite, or outright annihilation; inclusion into Empire-Nation-State structures lead in turn to a “breakdown of form of life itself ... as also breakdown of a culture’s sense of possibility itself” due to fundamentally the “loss of concepts” and the loss of fundamental concepts (Lear, 2008: 83, 123). This paper thus has to contend with the deadness of three mutually constitutive registers (or the Borromean Knot of): being-tribal, being-woman, being-single in what Barthes calls a singular ‘figure’ (2001: 3-5); where a figure for Barthes is like “fragments of discourse”, and is “outlined like a sign”, and “underneath each figure lies a sentence, frequently an unknown (unconscious?) one”.

Moreover, this paper also attempts to reach and bring to ‘life’, perhaps document, even if tentatively, the *living in the dead*. Living in the dead in two senses: (i) the resisting rem(a)inder of that which is *still* living in the dead and (ii) the process of *living* even in the dead-ness; the living (of the) *Adivasi Eka Nari Sanghathan* – the *Sanghathan* as transcending at least alone-ness, if not lonelines, altogether – in the largely dead(ened) world of the tribal single woman. *Eka Nari Sanghathan* has thus been an attempt to ‘recover’ (amidst what Lear calls loss of concepts) conceptualizations of loss and the lost, so as to reach the language/logic/ethos/be-ing of those who have not found themselves speaking/living in the so called developed/developing world. Finally, in this endeavor, this paper also seeks to explore whether this reaching out to the living in the dead, bringing it to life and recovering the lost concept or the concept of the lost is even a possibility? How far can we reach? What all can we recover? Can one *see* the dead?¹⁰ Can the dead be brought back to life? Can the *living* in the dead, speak, in the last instance, for the dead(ened)?

formulation of developmental philosophies (see Chakrabarti and Dhar, 2009), is thus a running footnote to this paper. This running footnote as a kind of sub-text thus gestures towards, albeit fleetingly, to a possible philosophy of transformative praxis that engenders change and collective formation among the gendered subaltern through an engagement with Marxist, Gandhian, and Tagorite takes on transformation, as also contemporary (trans)formations around feminism and new social movements, post Laclau and Mouffe (1985).

⁹ The role tribal communities have played “in defining India’s cultural identity, creativity and dignity has [paradoxically] been rewritten as a history of underdevelopment” (Nandy, 2013: xi). Tribal communities have been branded *victim others* – victims of structural poverty, victims of their own backwardness, non-scientificity, superstition, even anti-modernness – by contemporary cultures of *third worldisation* of parts of Southern societies (see Chakrabarti, Dhar and Cullenberg [2012] for a critique of third worldisation).

¹⁰ One can ask in this context: do we have the ‘sixth sense’, to even ‘see the dead’, let alone the ‘living in the dead’; given that India faces in the contemporary a serious loss of sensibility towards the tribal Other, as also the Dalit Other and the Muslim Other? Young Cole Sear – in the film *The Sixth Sense* – could see the dead. Initially Cole would be frightened by visitations from those who appear from the shadows of death. But once Cole shares his anguish with child psychologist Dr. Malcolm Crowe, Cole manages (thereafter) to set up a relationship with the dead, as also address what was seen to be a ‘living remainder’ or a ‘reminder of the lived past world’ in the dead. We invoke the sixth sense in this paper as a metaphor of such an uncanny (political) sensibility.

Being-tribal:

These stories were collected at a time when a majority of India's roughly 250 tribes "face a new [and resurgent] India that wants them to retire into history [and into museumized artifacts], vacating space for more spectacular [forms of capital-centric] development. ... Pushed into destitution, marginalized, and denied even a vestige of dignity by modern India, [the tribe – as the Other or the necessary double of an 'eternal/Vedic/Hindu India' has] now become targets of a new form of double displacement" (Nandy, 2013: x-xi): (a) "the territorial displacement" and 'everyday dislocation' (see Chakrabarti and Dhar, 2009) of traditional forms of habitat and (b) psychoanalytic displacement marked by the "new brown man's burden" and an neo-Orientalist equation: "tribal India today is what we were yesterday and their tomorrow is nothing other than what we are today" (Nandy, 2013: xi). New emergent India has nothing but contempt for the tribal; strangely, it is contempt for one's own past; a past one wishes to disavow; at most, new India has some pity for the tribal – pity for a petty third world figure of 'lack' – a figure already in its final journey into oblivion – a figure whose epitaph is always already written – a figure we have called the living dead. Nandy calls this new emergent India "regimes of narcissism"; and for Nandy, "regimes of narcissism are built not only on individual psychopathology, as Christopher Lasch recognized in the late 1970s, but also on political cultural realities" (Nandy, 2013: ix). Regimes of narcissism, according to Nandy (2013: xii) are marked on the one hand, by extreme self-centeredness and hyper-eroticized egoism, *but* on the other, by also "incapacitating self-doubt and feelings of inferiority" – a self-doubt and inferiority new emergent India has managed to project onto the tribal. Marked by such interiorized doubt and inferiority the 'terminally ill' tribal emerges as the figure of the living dead. What is to be woman in the midst of such cultural crisis and devastation looming large, and from which there appears to be no apparent escape (as if a kind of 'historical inevitability' of slow demise has been tattooed on split bad parts of an otherwise confident India)?

Being-Woman:

Arnalu Miniaka (Aiya) is a 45 year old woman who lives alone in a small self constructed house in the village. She was 10 years old when she began working outside home. Due to the need to share responsibility of work both at home and outside, her parents never allowed her to go to school. She was 15 years old when she was forcefully married to a much older man. Her husband was an alcoholic and used to abuse her verbally, physically and sexually. At this age, when she did not understand many a things, it was very difficult for her to cope up with all the violence. Every

time her husband forced himself upon her, she would be in pain for a long time. Even before she could recover from the physical pain, she was again sexually abused by her husband. At times when she tried to stop him she would be beaten badly. Even after about thirty years of separation from her husband, the scars of the violent marriage continue to haunt her. Her vision has got affected since her husband hit her on the left side of her head with a hot burnt log. In about a year of her marriage, she was pregnant with her first child. The first child died soon after birth and within six months she was pregnant again.

One night when I was sleeping my husband came home all drunk. I was scared. I did not get up. My husband got a big knife from the kitchen and tried to slice my neck. The next day I left my husband's home. I came back to my parent's house.

Her second son was a few months old. But her husband did not let her keep the child. He took the child away and after a couple of months he re-married. Her parents did not take the separation very well. She was forced time and again to go back, make peace and live with her husband. But, Aiya was determined *not to go back* (“not to go back” is an important political position in a largely patriarchal tribal culture) and began working as a wage laborer in a factory. Seven years later, she fell in love with another man at her workplace and decided to re-marry. The second marriage lasted nine months. Her parents-in-law were not happy with this marriage and according to Aiya, they drugged her husband with a kind of medicine (called Mohini) that “disables a person's senses and corrupts his behavior.” With time her new husband also became violent and asked her to leave the house. One night, he locked Aiya outside the house. She wept all night waiting for the door to be opened, but no one heard her cry and no one opened the door for her. In the morning, she decided to go back to her parent's house.

This time when she came back to Emaliguda, her brother who lived with his parents refused to support her and after her father's death, he abandoned not just her, but their mother and their unmarried elder sister. Aiya now began a ‘new life’ with her mother and sister; a kind of a woman-woman continuum. Her mother and her sister worked as wage labor on other people's farms and she worked in a factory. Even after her mother died, Aiya and her sister was not supported by her brother. A few years later, Aiya's elder sister also passed away. Since then Aiya has been living alone in Emaliguda in a small self constructed house.

Being-Single:

The night shall end, our stories will not...

Salme Pedenti, Member, Eka Nari Sanghathan

Sometime later Aiya left the factory job and began cultivating a small piece of 'encroached' government land (landlessness remains a major issue among tribal single women in Emaliguda); these days whatever she produces on that land, is what sustains her throughout the year. These never-ending struggles have paradoxically made Aiya quite independent, and have not crushed her altogether, but this still does not take away the loneliness and insecurity about the future, that she experiences. There are even days when she sleeps on an empty stomach, the days when she is extremely tired or ill and is unable to cook or work in the field. She has no one to share her grief with. Her nights, she says, are spent in crying remembering her sister and mother.

This is my life and this is how it is going to be till I die. If I do not work, I will not get to eat. I am very old and even if I am in pain or I am unwell, I still have to go to work. There has not been a single day, after my husband's death, that I have not gone for work.

Lachchi Pedenti, Widowed Single Woman, Emaliguda

Lachchi *didi* is a 70 year old widow who leaves the village at six in the morning in search of daily wage work. She got married in the same village. Seven years back, her husband passed away. She has two sons and one daughter. When her husband was alive, she used to live with her younger son, but one year after his father's death, he abandoned Lachchi *didi*. None of the sons look after her now. Her husband owned 2 acres of land and both the sons have divided 1 acre of land each and have left nothing for her to survive on. For the last five years she lived all alone and ensured her survival with little help from Manika *didi* (who is her niece and lives in the same village). For the last two years, Lachchi *didi* has been living with Manika *didi* and her family; the house that Lachchi *didi* had built fell apart due to bad weather conditions. Lachchi *didi* now works with Manika *didi* on her land and she also goes to work on other people's land as agriculture wage laborer. She gives all her daily wage to Manika *didi* for buying household items as also for saving in the Self Help Group (SHG). She says, "My niece takes care of me, so I give all the money to her. What will I do with the money? I have no need for it. Manika takes care of me and that is all I need. That is enough for me. I feel much better at her house. At my son's house, there were always fights. My daughter-in-law used to abuse me a lot. *Here, I am free. I work, I eat, I sleep.*"

My husband used to beat me a lot and when I was about to give birth to my second child, he threw me out of his house. I came back to my village. I thought I *belonged* here. But, people in this village do not think the same way. I paid 5000 to get a small portion of land in order to build a house. My house is *keuchcha* and dilapidated. Whenever it rains, the house is filled with water and there is no place to sleep or sit. The rice that I store gets destroyed. Now the landowner wants me to return his land to him but I have no place else to go. I am fighting everyday to *ensure a roof*¹¹ over my head.

Jiya Pedenti, Separated Single Woman, Emaliguda

The issues of single women in Emaliguda revolve not just around landlessness, but also homelessness. How to ensure livelihood, how to ensure a roof, including a washing soap and a pair of slippers is an everyday question to single tribal women. Trunji *didi*, is in tears as she says, softly,

I think *it has been 7-8 years since I have bought anything for myself*. Whatever my brother and sister-in-law think appropriate for me to have, they get, and they get that much only. *I have no say and I not allowed to make any demands*. What I wear is also what my mother gets from her brothers. Who will believe I have not used soap in a long time to wash myself? I do not even have a pair of slippers to wear.

Hidden in this narrative of apparent poverty is also a sub-narrative of choicelessness and voicelessness. However, what is perhaps most important in the above narrative is the fact that she can't make any demands, demands on an Other, demands on this world. She is, as if, friendlessly kinlessly single¹²; absolutely single; a singleness that defies standard experiences of loneliness. Male *didi* narrates,

¹¹ Dai *didi* is old and is often abused and beaten by her brother: "I fear where I will go if my brother asks me to leave the house. How will I survive? Since I am old and cannot manage on my own, I cannot live alone. At my brother's house I have to make many compromises, but what choice do I have? Even what food I get to eat and in what quantity, is decided by my sister-in-law. If some day something good is bought, it will first be eaten by my brother and his family. *Only if there is any leftover, I will get to eat it. But, at least I get to satisfy my hunger*".

¹² In the dominant discourse of the developmental state, a woman is regarded *single* not because she does not have family, friends and acquaintances, but because she does not have a husband. Women who are widowed, divorced, separated, deserted and unmarried are commonly regarded as single in the Indian state's limited imagination. It appears this 'absence of a husband' in a rural tribal woman's life begins to shape the nature of her other social relationships and as a result she is single(d), thereby marking the husband's absence as a primary attribute dictating and determining her gendered existence, or for that matter, her *sexistence*. At times, accused of being the cause for the (untimely) death of the husband, she is socially cornered further and 'punished' into leading a life alone.

... it feels sad when one has to return to an empty house. When one lives alone and comes back to a house where there is no one who is waiting or there to talk to, one feels very lonely. Even if there are at least two people living together, one does not have to lock the house. But to come home, open the lock and enter into a pitch dark house is like entering into the abyss of loneliness.

The life of a tribal single woman is, as if, lived between humiliation and helplessness¹³, sadness and silence, pain and perseverance, in a word between an unlivable life and a death deferred.

Gundayi didi used to live with her brother and his family. She was unwell for a long time but no one in the family looked after her or took her to the doctor. She died. And after her cremation her brothers took all the gold she was wearing. This is our place in the eyes of the people we live with. We cannot depend upon anyone. People will leave us to die. There is no guarantee that we will be looked after by those who we have looked after all our life.

There are also narratives of single women dying alone as a result of acute hunger, illness, homelessness, etc. At times their dead-bodies were found, after a few days, in the midst of the forest (where they had perhaps gone in search of food and died); dead-bodies left unclaimed, after the gold worn by women had been ripped off their bodies. This imagery represents extreme forms of cruelty subjected to not only single women but even to their dead-bodies. It marks the never-ending nature of brutality, ruthlessness and violence which is a part of a single woman's everyday living and continues to haunt her till her death and even after death.

From Singlehood to Singleness:

In the context of the action research project, as our explorations into the narratives of tribal single women – narratives largely of deadness – gained momentum, there was a simultaneous movement in the 'sharing group' from an understanding of the 'single-hood' of woman (understood in turn simply as the *absence of a husband*) as a marker of identity and a state of being or a positionality in the larger social (say, widowhood) to delving deeper into comprehending

¹³ Tulsi didi's narrative demonstrates how lives are lived between humiliation and helplessness. She had performed some religious ritual for a family and having performed her duties as she was about to leave, the family accused her of stealing money that was kept near the idol. Abused in front of the whole hamlet, the incidence was an attack on her self-respect. The fact that she was single and that she was poor made it easy for people to point fingers at her. However, in spite of being humiliated Tulsi didi did take the handful of rice as her remuneration for performing the religious ritual. She did not wish to; but she had to. Otherwise that night she would have had to go without food. She was, as if, 'forced' to place her helplessness above her humiliation.

'singleness' among women as a lived everyday experience (i.e. the experience of *feeling* single), as also a (chosen) way of *be-ing*. In the first, single-ness was an experiential fact even if there was a husband, partner, or companion. In the second, single-ness was not a state of being (for example, widowhood), but a way of *be-ing*. The movement from single-hood to singleness led in turn to the foregrounding of the everyday negotiations and battles of tribal women, leading to a sharing of the varied forms of struggles they face(d), their disparate ways of coping, the inner strength that has sustained them through the deadness and the possibility of resistance therein; in other words possibilities of *living*, even if minimal amidst the deadness.

The various forms of discriminations, oppressions, exploitation and violence perpetuated by the larger hetero-patriarchal world upon tribal single women was seen to range from 'social ostracization' to subjecting them to numerous kinds of taboos, restrictions, and controls; making them economically vulnerable and depriving them of their rights over food, wages, family property and land; as also invisibilizing them, keeping their specific issues and concerns outside the domain of the political and developmental discourse:

... no one *believed* my story and no one ever *understood* my pain. I had no choice but to keep my *sadness* to myself. I could not share it with anyone, so I never *shared* it with anyone ...

Even if they are visibilized they are seen as third world victim subjects in need of state-support or World Bank benevolence. Third worldism around the individual victimhood of the single tribal woman is, as if, "a certain organization of places [*lieux*] designed to *lead astray*" (xxxvi); Derrida calls such a displacing organisation of space/place *crypt*¹⁴; for Derrida "the crypt hides as it holds"; third worldism – i.e. the presencing of parts of the South as *lacking* – hides as it holds the narrative and pain of the tribal single woman; the grounds [*lieux*] are so disposed as to "disguise and to hide ... but also to disguise the act of hiding and to hide the disguise ... what is at stake here is what takes place secretly, or takes a secret place, in order to keep itself *safe* somewhere" (Derrida in Abraham and Torok, 1986: xiv). What then is being kept safe? What is

¹⁴ Derrida makes sense of the crypt, however, in three senses. Crypt is at one and the same time, (i) 'a certain organization of places [*lieux*] designed to *lead astray*' (the crypt does not presents itself); the grounds [*lieux*] are so disposed as to 'disguise and to hide... But also to disguise the act of hiding and to hide the disguise: the crypt hides as it holds', (ii) 'a topographical arrangement made to keep (conserve-hidden) the *living dead*', and (iii) a 'cipher, a code' (Derrida in Abraham and Torok, 1986: xiv-xxxvi). We shall invoke the two other senses of the crypt in the later sections of this paper. The three senses of the crypt form for us the Borromean knot of (i) third worldisation of the tribal single woman's lived experience, narrative, language, logic and ethos, (ii) which in turn renders dead the living, or that which is living in the tribal single woman, and (iii) the need, hence, for a de-ciphering, for what Derrida calls "the science of cryptological interpretation" (1986: xv) of the living dead.

being kept in a safe place? By what (not by whom)?

The *key word*, no doubt unutterable... and unknown for the moment, would have to be polysemic, expressing multiple meanings through a single phonetic structure. One of these would remain shrouded, but the other, or several other meanings now equivalent, would be stated through distinct phonetic structures, that is through synonyms... We would call them *cryptonyms* (words that hide) because of their allusion to a foreign or archaic meaning... Certain words suffered an extraordinary exclusion and that this same exclusion seemed to confer on them a genuinely magic power... because a given word was unutterable that the obligation arose to introduce synonyms even for its lateral meanings, and that the synonyms acquired the status of substitutes. Thus they became *cryptonyms*, apparently not having any phonetic or semantic relationship to the *prohibited* [or the *taboo*] word.

(Abraham and Torok, 1986: 18–19)

In the context of Derrida's invocation of the crypt and of cryptonymy, a lingering kind of self-doubt begins to take shape: is 'development' itself a cryptonym (a word that hides)? Does it hide some *key word*, no doubt unutterable... and unknown for the moment? Does it lead us astray? Does it shroud the language of the tribal single woman? Do certain *words* – in the tribal single woman's world – suffer an extraordinary exclusion? Is it because a given word, a key word, or some words in the tribal single woman's world are unutterable – unutterable not as such, but unutterable in the Capitalocentric-Orientalist as also androcentric imagination of development (see Chakrabarti and Dhar, 2009)? Does development as a substitute signifier, as a *cryptonym* render *prohibited* [or *taboo*] the wor(l)d of the tribal single woman (see Abraham and Torok, 1986: 18–19)?

The crypt is then a "tombstone of the illicit".

The tribal single woman thus has two faces; one of which is illicit; illicit in the mainstream discourse of development. On the one hand, is the appropriate(t) image, the third worldish image of the tribal single woman; which is the image of the *widow* – an image tattooed in the language of victimhood (the spotlighting of widowhood as singlehood renders dark/invisible/dead the experience of singleness). On the other, is the inappropriate(d) image, the illicit, the prohibited, the tabooed image of the tribal single woman; which is the image of the *single* or of *singleness*. It is, as if, one particular image of the composite 'tribal single woman' – the image of the widow – is not taboo to development; the widow is a victim; give the widow her pension (of about 4-5 dollars per month! ... per month!). What is taboo is the image of the

single – the *unmarried* woman? What is to be hidden is the image of the single – the *abandoned* woman; abandonment in turns points to structural violence in tribal contexts; it also points to polygamy? Would a sustained and “progressive elaboration” of the tribal single woman’s “personal dictionary” (Abraham and Torok called it ‘The Wolf Man’s *Verbarium*), the cataloguing of “deciphered hieroglyphics” and *anasemic* research (anasemic research approaches symbols as an archaeologist struggles to decipher documents in an unknown language; however, to fully complete the work of deciphering, “one must restore the entire functional circuit, which implies and implicates a multiplicity of teleological subjects, and within which the symbol-thing acts as a mere relay”) take us closer to what Derrida calls the key word(s), the prohibited or taboo words (put in Lacanese, one could say, foreclosed [*verwefung*] signifiers)?

Crypt:

Derrida invokes the concept-metaphor of *crypt* to also designate “a topographical arrangement made to keep (conserve-hidden) the *living dead* (xxxvi). The cryptic place for Derrida is also a “sepulchre”, the “place of a non-place”. The inhabitant(s) of a crypt are always a living dead, a dead entity, semantically dead; as if neither can be inserted in the syntactic chain; or even the chain of signifiers; as if both are “words buried alive” [1986: xxxv]; both are “defunct words” [1986: xxxv], words “relieved of their communicative function”. Is the tribal single woman the *living dead* of the Indian nation-state, of a regime of narcissism, of a developmental imagination premised on capital accumulation and primitive accumulation? Is (inclusive) development the crypt – the delusional topograph – to keep (conserve-hidden) the living dead? Or has the living been rendered dead by the third worldisation of the lived experience of tribal single women? Has she been rendered semantically dead, even if she is biologically alive? She can’t be inserted in the syntactic chain of the Empire-nation-state exchange; Spivak calls her the gendered subaltern.

Which tribal single woman is then the living dead? *Not the widow*. But the *single*. The widow is instead *foregrounded*. The figure of the widow – the third world victim – is around which developmentalism obsessively circulates. Put in Lacanese, it is the single who is perhaps *foreclosed*. The one at the doorstep, at the threshold of the consciousness of *singleness* is foreclosed; where singleness is an experience of deadness; as also an experience of being-alive, an experience of that which is alive or living even in the deadness. The next section tries to make sense of the living in the dead.

Turning from Within Without:

In the context of the action research project, the collective analysis of singleness not only generated a feeling of shared sadness in the group but simultaneously led to the building of anger. With the realization that “my experience of oppression, of being a single woman, does not belong to me alone, but is an experience shared by many others”, that “I might be single but I am not alone”, generated a need to stand together for oneself and for others; to be able to raise collective voice and the voice of the collective, to ‘visibilize’ in the developmental sector and in political praxis hitherto invisibilized tribal single woman, to bring the condition and issues of singleness to the surface; in other words, to foreground the hitherto foreclosed world of the tribal single woman.

This process helped birth a new subject position of tribal single women who were now becoming aware of their political potential and envisioning transformation that required them to take charge of ushering larger changes and not just remain mere beneficiaries and victims. This marked the beginning of the constitution of tribal single women in Emaliguda as contingent-emergent agents of transformation and the *Sanghathan* that they forged as contingent-emergent *being-in-common*; where *Sanghathan* was a horizontal and hyphenated (not vertical, hierarchized and top down) association of beings, wherein there is also space for difference, contradiction and antagonism. Thus, a sense of ownership, ethos and responsibility on behalf of the woman members emerged as an important feature of the *Sanghathan*, that in turn expanded its way through women’s networks and interwoven lives, and which brought hitherto private concerns, concerns rendered frozen, even dead, out into the public.

The Living in the Dead:

... But *now* I share my feelings with my *Sanghas*¹⁵ in the *Sanghathan* because they believe what I say and they [perhaps] understand my pain ...

The paper is also on that which is still living, thriving still in the world of the dead(ened), deadened by violence; a kind of ‘vitalism’¹⁶ (see Wolfe and Wong, 2014) irreducible, on the one

¹⁵ The term *Sangha* in Oriya means friends.

¹⁶ “French biophilosophy in the 1950s-1960s means at least three names – Georges Canguilhem, Raymond Ruyer, and Gilbert Simondon. ... Biophilosophy during its relatively brief tenure was a project distinctively different from Anglophone ‘philosophy of biology’. Notably, it does not present philosophy as coming second in relation to a foundational or normative status of scientific practice. In this context we frequently encounter reference to Life, the thinking of Life, the meaning (*sens*) of Life, and of course the idea of a philosophy of Life, along with a focus on vitalism. Here, the influence of Bergson is non-negligible” (Wolfe and Wong, 2014: 2).

hand, to Maoist politics of guerilla class war in tribal contexts in India, and on the other, to Indian feminism's reliance on the state and the developmental sector's reliance on funded activism; thriving beyond marauding regimes of narcissism in new emergent India and regimes of despair in tribal backwaters (see Nandy, 2013). The paper is thus about the two-fold nature of stories of single women emanating from a distant village in India; stories that are not believed; stories that are not understood; stories that are hence kept to oneself; stories that are not shared. Hence the long-drawn silence; a silence that presents itself on the one hand, as the pain of silence; a silence that presents itself, on the other hand, in the forging of the *Sangbathan* – the single women's *collective (in) action* – as also silent resistance or the resistance of silence. The death of language or the deadness of language in the living gives way, as if, and somewhat paradoxically to the collective language of living. Mami *didi* – one of the more active members of the *Sangbathan* asserts,

Our happiness is ours and our sadness is also only ours. We do not have to worry about keeping a husband satisfied and happy. We can earn our own money and at times even spend it upon ourselves, which is very difficult for a married woman (in our context) to do.

“Our happiness is *ours* and our sadness is also *only ours*”. Mami *didi* shifts the question from whether one is happy or sad to the *subject* of the affective state: happiness-sadness. It looked like unmarried single women feel they are comparatively much more liberated and can plan their life *on their own*, even if there are restrictions and control of a different nature. Even separated single women suggested that given an option they would not want to remarry. They do not want to suffer again and experience the same kind of violence, detachment, alienation, negligence, stress, and crisis that they had to face when they were living with their husbands. Many of them strongly believed that marriage brings only sorrow and control in women's lives and hence they feel they are better off being single and living away from their husbands and in-laws. Some said, “husbands tend to increase a woman's burden of work, create unnecessary troubles and disturbances at home; husbands also dominate”. Thus, most unmarried single women, in the *Sangbathan*, having crossed the so called ‘marriageable age’, mentioned that they do not really regret not being married. In fact they feel they are better off than the married women who are constantly engaged in the routine and somewhat monotonous domesticity of a married life. Demystifying the common and popular assumption that marriage leads to happiness, Jaga *didi* asks,

... it is not as if I am very happy at the moment, but *what is the guarantee I would have been happy, had I been married?*

This question – “what is the guarantee I would have been happy, had I been married?” – is at least a skeptic’s reflection on, if not an outright critique of, the dominant institutions of marriage, reproductive heteronormativity and family. It is perhaps a question posed to the larger hetero-patriarchal structure that has constructed what happiness would and should mean for women and which, with an objective of exercising its control over women, has normalized the importance of marriage in women’s lives. Is it also a question to Indian feminism wherein even with the existing critique of institutions of obligatory marriage and motherhood, this myth around marriage and motherhood leading to happiness and security has still not been fully problematized. Is the tribal single woman’s singleness then urging Indian feminism to have a deconstructive take on coupledness itself? Is it also putting to question the dominant developmental paradigm – paradoxically focused on Self-Help Group (SHG) women - that has left unattended and unaddressed, personal yet political issues related to marriage and family? Is it questioning the apparent gynocentrism of development – i.e. development focused ‘on women, of women, by women, *but for family and community*’ – by showing how it misses questions of gendering? The only agent of change the developmental sector can now think of is women; however, the same sector does not focus on change in the personal space of the agent; change in gendered relations in intimate/sexual spheres, in relationships, in family, in kin clusters, in the immediate community. Is it also putting to crisis Indian Marxism – which is largely gender blind – and which is driven by economism and the historical inevitability thesis (i.e. the sad but inevitable demise of pre-capitalist qua feudal qua tribal/aboriginal qua pre-modern/traditional spaces through primitive accumulation – a thesis *late Marx* firmly abandoned [see Dhar, 2003, and Chakrabarti and Dhar, 2009])? Do some of Mami didi and Jaga didi’s words remain buried in developmentalism (as also Indian feminism and Marxism); like what Derrida calls “words buried alive” [1986: xxxv]; as if, these are “defunct words” [1986: xxxv], words that have been “relieved of their communicative function”? While some other words, words of largely victimhood – simple linear kinds of victimhood – victimhood simplified (for example, widowhood in women), made easy – are foregrounded.

The hills in *Emaliguda* look to be green in pain; or brown as dead dried leaves; what narratives of pain the hills hide; what histories of pain the hills harbor; pain of an intolerable interminable millennia. We wonder: does tribal language in general, and does the language of single tribal women in particular, have a signifier for pain? Tribal signifier of pain, or signifier of

tribal pain: in elite register, in traditions of Marxism, in practices of psychoanalysis? Can the gendered subaltern speak in Marxism, in psychoanalysis? Can the gendered subaltern be heard in Marxism, in psychoanalysis? Does the act of speaking mean speaking in the language of Capitalocentric-Orientalist as also androcentric forms of development, or liberal feminism, or historical materialist Marxism, or violent Maoism? Does it hence mean a loss of concepts? Further, can psychoanalysis make sense of pain and trauma that is not necessarily individual; pain and trauma that is not necessarily emanating from childhood familial experience; pain and trauma that is *social* and is of *adult-onset* and is cocooned or crypted in long-drawn and millennial tribal or woman's histories of violation-subjugation-othering-marginalisation? It looks like contemporary psychoanalysis does not have resources rich enough to make sense of the complex archeology of the psycho-social or the discursive nature of childhood, adult-onset and social trauma (see Boulanger 2007); which is why perhaps the action researcher finds it difficult to hear the language of 'social nightmares'. Does hearing in turn mean putting to question our own knowingness, or own habit(at) of concepts? Perhaps it means closing one's own eyes; slitting one's own gaze, one's own vision, familiar vision – too familiar, such that our blind spots break into a dance.

No one *believed* my story and no one ever *understood* my pain. I had no choice but to keep my *sadness* to myself. I could not share it with anyone, so I never *shared* it with anyone. ... But *now* I share my feelings with my *Sanghas* in the *Sanghathan* because they believe what I say and they [perhaps] understand my pain ...

Rupayi Pedenti, Member *Eka Nari Sanghathan*, Emaliguda.

The first part of the quote shames us, those of us who have historically failed to listen or perhaps have still not learned to listen or attend to the language of pain that constitutes the suffering of those who are Others, Other(s) whose lived world(s), whose experience-language-logic-ethos has remained foreclosed in capitalism, as also much of Marxism and feminism; in State or world Bank aid as also development practice.

The second part of the quote makes space for subaltern voice – not in the language of Marxian revolution, but in what could be called the language of (the) tribal woman's *Sanghathan*. When we break down or break open the term *Sanghathan* as *Sangha* and *Ghathan*, it is seen, on the one hand, as a coming together of friends (*Sanghas* means friends in Oriya), and on the other, as organization building (*Ghathan* in Hindi implies coming together in order to build, construct and organize). Thus *San(gha)than* for tribal women is the building up a space where friends would come together, to be with one another and be there for one another. It also means organizing.

Sanghatan in this sense has meant a way of relating with each other, especially the significant other who is also *Eka Nari* (Single Woman) like oneself.

From Cipher to De-Cipher:

This paper was an effort at foreground-*ing* a small yet significant part of the hitherto violated, wounded and pained body-being of the world of tribal single women. It was an attempt to explore possibilities of resistance(s) residing in this experience of Other-*ing* and *silencing*. In other words, it was to foreground, with the foregrounding of the world of the tribal single women, the worldview of the single tribal women, and a possible ethico-politics of the living dead emanating from such a world(view). This paper took an empathetico-political entry into the lived worlds of tribal single women in Emaliguda, into the untold and unheard stories full of everyday challenges and sufferings that a single woman goes through in the absence of a 'legitimate' male sexual partner, mainly a husband in her life. Amidst many such unshared, kept within, silenced and lost, yet available in scatters, fragmentarily in here and out there, speaking hesitantly and softly, partially found stories of singleness among women, forty single women envisioned a collective or what could be called a 'social dream' (see Lawrence, 2003) – a dream, an *utopos* that is social – as also a socialization that looks to be a dream amidst the violence and deadness that has been experienced for long; a dream where they found each Other, a significant Other, where they listened to each other, empathized with each other and believed and understood each other; in other words, a dream that took a social character; and in this process, they began to also find their own self-s; self-s that may have been repressed, foreclosed, disavowed, negated; self-s that got (re)formed in the process of social dreaming. This social dream is the *Sanghatan*, named *Eka Nari Sanghatan*; a dream that gave Rupayi didi and all others, Sanghas (friends and companions) who believed each other's stories and understood each other's pain. Can classical Marxism – focused on class struggle and the violent revolution – make sense of the second part of Rupayi didi's narrative – a narrative focused in turn on a 'non-violent politics of friends'? The question before us: can there be a (alternate) politics of the living (in the) dead? What however can be the politics of the living dead? Can, on the one hand, the world of Capitalocentric-Orientalist development in the South (subsumed in the banal oneness of the modern and the west, as also third worldism) and on the other, the world of traditional Marxian politics waiting for an ultimate violence: *the* revolution (both flourishing perhaps through the foreclosing of the world of the tribal single woman) stand to learn from the (im)possible politics of pluralism and politics of affect(ion) that the gendered subaltern seems to offer? What would be to learn from the

*scrypt*¹⁷ of the tribal single woman? Derrida invokes the crypt as also “a cipher, a code”; this is a movement, as if, from crypt as noun to crypt as verb. “To crypt is to cipher, a symbolic or semiotic operation that consist of manipulating a secret code”. What then would be to decipher?

¹⁷*Scrypt* is both the ‘script’ of the hegemonic (here development) and the ‘crypt’ *within* the script of the hegemonic, that is *hermetically* sealed. The subject is then about a secret script; the script of a crypt; or the crypt of a script; a *scrypt*.

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