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On *Becoming Ho*: Not (just) a film

“...the abstract doesn't explain, but must itself be explained.”

- *Deleuze, Dialogues, Preface to second edition.*

The transition from recorded history to tracing the subtleties of fragmented memory, culture becomes a modality of representing, re-creating, remembering and repeating these fragmented experiences, movements, stories and thus lives that happen to be in Turibasa. The forms in which these stories and nostalgia have been stored thus dictate its reconstruction and is dispersed by own differentials of experiences to pass on the weight of existence on the socio-political complex that constitutes the subject.

The film (both as a certain form of creative practice and also certainly a system of representation) that got made and around which this work is centred and tied, reflects on if and how visual language shows a certain truth of a life-world which is already there in a fully functioning form or do we produce the meanings around this world by representing it in certain ways. As Deleuze in *Cinema 1* (1986) remarks, “the essence of a thing never appears at the outset, but in the middle, in the course of its development, when its strength is assured” (p. 3), one has to go to the philosophical exegesis of the Adivasi life-world. The question that is being foregrounded in the paper then is – what is the interlocutor that ties the Being (of Adivasi), the making – maker (of verb as well as noun) and the Becoming (of the contemporary tribal subject)?

The film thus tries to reclaim both the freedom of time and practice and practical imagination through creativity, free from imperative to abstract and discipline time into the structure of chronology and representational knowledge. When in Turibasa, people decide to record the funeral of a child in the hamlet because funeral is a ‘celebration’ for them, the

remembering takes a new turn. I think the film (and by extension, cinema, the visual and the screen) becomes of paramount importance and the audio-visual medium becomes “the ground where the sight and sound meets and interlocks, an association of sense occur which in turn creates movement” (Bandhipadhaya, 2001). It represents difference from the more contemporary, urban dominated cultural forms (like documentaries based on adivasi issues, pictures, popular illustrations, tribal museums) both through its making as well as its presentation of certain content. It tries to demonstrate in its making how ethnic ‘difference’ and “primitive’ is not an historical archive or the represented and discussed ‘other’ who is essentialized and stereotyped and thus addresses creativity of the primitive through its very own notion of a story of certain practices it finds important to remember – memory thus through the film is not just what needs to be remembered of the past but what needs to become of the future – a possibility of the this film becoming more than what it is and what the new generation can hope for.

In a very Deleuzean way, this project is about exploring the multiplicities – the film as an abstract doesn’t explain, rather it the coming together of the film – the art form needs to be explained – its conditions, its Rhizome, it is a-centred loci. So, when Turibasa (even in its incomplete form) comes ‘together’ for even the creation of this film, the process ends up unfolding a logic – one of impersonal individuation (of singularities) rather than particularities – there is no-one and yet there is ‘someone’; a never completely specified project. The film takes away the particularity of the life and creates a life – a life of a community, an organism that will run with the logic of n-1. The film is n-1, will always be n-1 because the process demands the subtraction first (of individual subject positions) in order for multiplication (of singular life-world) and thus enters the domain of a living-creating-becoming organism. This is precisely because this can’t be called a film – it cannot be reduced to a particular image (of an Adivasi village, of Turibasa) only. It needs to transcend that and it does – that which is particular to that which is ‘common’ and ‘singular’. One needs to ask then that an idea in all its conception and nurturing born in Turibasa why does everyone decide to shoot the whole process of practices around death in another village with ‘other people’ – are they ‘other people’, is it another village? This decentring of the process of the film is Rhizomatic in its ‘becoming’. This film never was and never is, but for people it always had an imagination, a becoming of sorts, one that transcends time and

space and enters the realm of fiction, an imagination, a conception – it becomes a story. In that sense I would mark it as what Spinoza terms as a “singular essence”.

Capturing death or making of *hadiya* (local drink) then can only be properly understood in actually concrete forms where the meaning of these practices is assumed by the ones who perform it in concrete ways of signifying, reading and interpreting through actual symbols, figures, images, rituals and sounds - in which this symbolic meaning is circulated over the course of community's time. One then soon discovers that the meaning is not straightforward or transparent and does not survive intact the passage through representation – it needs both the maker and the audience to continuously, to consistently work with it as it is never fully fixed. It is a slippery customer, changing and shifting with context, usage and condition of existence. It is always already putting off or ‘deferring’ absolute truth, absolute Ho(ness), an absolute Turibasa. It was always contested, always negotiated (which scene, which song, which group, which event) and sometime bitterly fought over too. The differing overlapping circuits of meaning in any community at the same time impacts the discursive formations and the social transformation of that community where politics of creating something new or something which one is being subjected too, subjects to itself and thus expresses itself.

Art and Aesthetics of this form, practices (it is certainly a question of practice) will always demand a politics of synthesis, of non-categorical sort, which is built on the idea of multiplicity and associations. This transition of the register – from ‘self’ to a life (one that is always already immersed in a cultural code of living), an a-priori is also a transition from a personal individuation to a common multiplicity, a decentred community – since it transcends both Turibasa as an identity and Adivasi as ‘just’ an experience. The transcendental empiricism that Deleuze talks about is I believe is this common, this living of the ever-becoming community – sensation and network of associations and coming together, one that is transformational and transmutational and not developmental or teleological. The film here is not just an experience because it is irreducible to any pre-existing ‘we’. When Deleuze marks a clear difference of cinema from a film-making, the idea is to isolate the cinema from a certain history of film and film-making – one that is self-dependent and too conscious of itself (like development). Cinema then is this other act of thinking, of creating, of becoming – what he call as transcendental empiricism. The

immersion in Turibasa, the making of the cinema (and not film), this writing and what got made was not just experiential from this logic of multiplicity but rather empirical – and not is , not being but becoming – preceding a form of self and pre-ordained ‘we’ – a life of common and not the life of Turibasa. Deleuze calls this a need for a radical empiricism on that “... begins from the moment it defines the subject, a habitus, a habit, nothing more than a habit, nothing more than a field of habit of immanence, the habit of saying I” (2001).

The idea of progress and development then in its current form seeks to sanitize ‘otherness’, (romanticize, patronize or simply ostracized) wished away to another time and space altogether and thus, needs to be brought back - almost aggressively to the ‘new’ time - to the ‘contemporary’ singularity. Time becomes important because the time in which Ho community and Turibasa functions is not as if the ‘real’ time and needs to be reconstituted into a chronology - a point where the ‘past’ and ‘present’ - the urban and the rural - cannot coexist simultaneously. In this time the logic of one prevails - where only one can exist and others, with other histories - memories and pasts can no longer appear as themselves in the global-world history and disrupt the teleological script; and by virtue of being chronologically past, they have to be represented. For the purpose of this work - this is the defining trait of development (and modernity) - it is a temporal regime in which the systems of living, the life-world and culture of the non-modern inevitably becomes ‘backward’, ‘third-world’ and primitive that even to engage with the modern subject of history (state and development) they need to be non-present and yet re-presentable and thus politics of representation takes centre stage. What is sought for then is to make un-developed subject agents of different histories and converted to objects of representation knowledge systems in all its entirety - where both translation and exchange appear as the temporal act of representing the non-present.

To theorize immersion or action research then is to this form of empiricism - one that is not played between the “self” and the “we” or I and the “other” because this idea of self or we is not given is not (and will never be) an a-priori. The sensations of living in Turibasa, or saying with the community, or making this film are question of creativity of human nature of intersection and not of composability (one plus one plus one). This cinema might not be consistent with the uniformity of every Ho’s life, it might be at end of it a representation, a fiction, an imagination but what is important is a community of imagination is then a living

of stagnation – where past is written and future is decided and creativity is out of one’s grasp. This project is an attempt to mark a shift towards a pre-individual singularity in our lives and our relation to others – at which moments writing becomes a question of practice and cinema becomes a question of creation and aesthetics becomes a question of politics (of becoming). While watching this cinema then one needs to be aware that there are no lives in this but there is living (a figment of it), one that is always yet in the making – *“aisi aur fim banayenge, ismein kaafi kuch nahin aaya”* (we will make a lot of such film in the future, a lot has not come in this one). It will always be in the process of becoming an incomplete project and yet complete in what it becomes. What is common in the work is a singular picture of Ho and what is individual is the impersonal picture of people.

Film becomes a powerful project, not in what it is but what it did and what it does while one makes it – it leads to powerful feelings, emotions, mourning, loss, celebration, amazement, and confusion. They are contested over, because they matter, what is shown matters, what is filmed matters, who films it matters – because these are contests from which serious consequences can flow. They define what is normal and thus what is normal and what is excluded – the primitive is never the normal, abnormality is a preordained condition of Adivasi – and thus deeply ingrained in relations of power. It engages with fears and fantasies where are material interests and bodies are taken into account and differently implicated at each juncture, with sentiments of revulsion of ambivalence, hope and utopia most importantly loss. The film is then a practice of (re)presentation. It will, philosophically, always be represented but here it first needs to be presented and created and subjects itself to the conditions, whims and fancies of the one who uses it as a medium for their story. These ‘practices of representation’ flow with culture, with a community and it will not, it cannot be considered complete if it is not received, interpreted and intelligibly (not our intelligibility) decoded by the one it ‘belongs’ to at the other point in the chain. The spectator, the audience is important when it is first screened in the village because they approve, they decide if they approve the passage of representation. The film has then become in this sense a shared cultural space in which the production of meaning took place and got projected. What a film provides is a dialogic medium of representation, what sustains this dialogues is the shared codes of existence which cannot guarantee it will remain stable forever- though importantly the desire to fix meaning is why power enters

into discourse – whose power one may ask – the power of the primitive in Turibasa or the power of the other? Power of the primitive becomes important because meaning (if and when produced, needs to have some shared code for it to make the translation between speakers possible). Developmental world in its project has inevitably become lost in translation; because the speakers are different from the receivers - with unequal power and rarely similar codes of living. The problem generated by this work is precisely towards this domination that lies in scholarship in the post-colonial practice which remains an impossible struggle for the politics of difference and different kind of creative politics capable of resisting the terrible but alluring promise of eventually homogeneity (sameness) offered by the agenda of development and modernization.

For the purposes of this work then, it is in this terrain - in the contingent impossibility of articulation - that I am placing this film. The creativity that emerges from the everyday acts of living is both resistant as well as contesting the domains of developmental imagination of time - as which where thought ends and one which is negotiated in practice and solely in practice. This film is neither just a philosophical category nor a cultural concept - it is both at moments and neither in others - because it traverses a new path and yet captures the mundane and the dead. It thus tries to emerge with time and creativity as a bodily practice beyond the realms of theoria and representations of knowledge. At multiple instances in the film the acts of remembering and doing, how we have been doing it in the past, interrupts and exits chronology and seizing the right time to act and thus the act itself (of death ceremony, celebration and mourning) spills beyond the present and subverting experiences of continuity.

The realms of practice are admitting experiences of pure and unrelenting contingency that we wish to reintroduce into our experiences of a life-world through the act of this film - by the way of invoking both aesthetics and politics. For it is the recognition of contingent emergent experiences like the one in the film that development can appear inessential and therefore provisional and submersible. This sense of the contingent emergent - that surprises both our prior developmental knowledge as well as anticipation - is very much part of the everyday practical life. What the state developmental schema does is that the contingent is suppress at the moment when practice is theorized and stops the practice to be political. This work invokes the idea of practical contingency into the notion of the political.

This act of making is from this lens is also the act of communication, for it was this idea of communication in the films that Deleuze came to think of philosophy (from cinema) when he said that “abstract doesn’t explain, but must itself be explained” (Deleuze, 1991, quoting Hume). In the contemporary world , this question of communication and with it the question of technology needs to be revisited because this art of cinema, fundamentally speaking is an art of imagination – imagination to connect and create (since the time it was introduced). Action research in this way is an act of imagination and thinking connected with the everyday, repetitive materiality of life – a life that wants to become – a Ho life that can become.

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