

Writing as transformative: *Dehaati*¹ scripting

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A reflective writing on a process of writing, the paper follows the flow of the pen in the hands of a group of *adivasi*² women in a village called Rukrum located in the Gumla district of Jharkhand. By exploring new ways of becoming; the paper marks a questioning the normalcy and the complacency that a certain discourse and ideology has lulled us all into. How does writing, and for the purposes of this paper, the writing of a theatre script, challenge the common-sensical understanding of a space, *dehaat*³, that has been deemed as backward and lacking by the standard structures of capitalism and development and how can it pave the way for the (re)covering and crafting of a new concept, *their* concept, that will engender the contingent and emergent work of transformative praxis and be indicative of new becomings.

This writing weaves together three interconnected and mutually constitutive threads – first, at its very core, what is it to write a work that tries to craft a concept through a process of re-imagining and recovering of an understanding, a /meaning; one that has been hitherto foregrounded in our imagination as that half of the circle that is always trying to catch up to the other half; second, what is it to write a work of transformative praxis that is itself a writing, a writing undertaken by the creators of this work who through their writing have constantly tried to critically engage with their anguish through a creative process; and third, what is it to write a work that engages with a turn in self-representation, shifting subject positions and as a consequence of that engagement pave the way for the question of subalternity in writing, acting and directing.

The paper asks the question – can the process of script writing help a *dehaati* problematize the way with which she interacts with the world, thereby effectively destroying the controls and rules that are imposed on it in terms of definition, what it *is* and what it *should* be. Would this then help us deterritorialize the structures and become cognizant of the vast multitude and infinitude of intensities that are ever flowing, every changing, getting rejected and projected in

¹ The word *dehaati* is used to describe anyone who lives in a space that is delegated as *dehaat*. It is used mostly as an adjective in common parlance, more so as a comment on the abject backwardness and inferiority of someone.

² This is a term that has been used to homogeneously denote the tribal population in India.

³ The word *dehaat* has its roots in Hindi and it roughly translates into 'countryside'. However, over the years it has come to refer to the village. The word is usually used to denote something that is very backward and underdeveloped and almost always has a negative connotation attached to it.

dehaat? Can the writing of the theatre script provide us *a* way (not *the* way) of disrupting the common-sensical, a way of ‘doing philosophy’?

By bringing together the plurality of experiences of a group of *adivasi* women, the script is essentially a travel through experiences of darkness – of the self, the empirical and the epistemic and it tries to reach (if at all) at a possibility for collective dreaming, where the community could find a possibility to self-transform in both the product and the process. The journey of the script reflects those multiple personal journeys, their shared anguish, a collective dream to co-define, co-constitute, co-imagine, co-express and co-create, to engender critical thinking on a word – *dehaat*.

Development has always pictured a gradual transition from the rural to the urban, village to town and for the creators of this work, from *dehaat* to *sheher*. The description of the rural has always been of one that is perennially trying to catch up to the urban, is there but not so there, yet. In other words, there is no possibility of its self-description, what is ‘urban’ is today, dictates what is ‘not-urban’ today, thereby leading us to the rural. This goes a step further when it dictates not just what the rural *is* but what it *should* be; where the capitalist-development agenda wants to do away with this pre-capital, pre-modern space and usher in a transition to the modern society that the urban is symbolic of. The discourse of development tells a story, one that is told and re-told, thereby creating a consciousness that is forever constructed for them by the ones who control and write on it and certainly not by those whose it is in the first place.

Writing of the script then became about the highly personal experiences of each one of us in Rukrum who were a part of this project – experiences that touch each and every life there is, and yet remain secret. It is about a woman, who confided in me about the abuse she faced and the humiliation she felt, an abuse that makes her question herself and doubt her own self. It is about me, trying to understand her experience in its entirety and absoluteness, and bemoaning myself when I fail to understand it in its complexity; a failure that weighs on too strongly on the delicate spider’s web of transformation that is being made. It is about a young woman, just out of school, admitting to have done something wrong which she never thought before because it seemed like the ‘way things happen in the world’. It is about my own experiences of self-doubt and a constant nagging question at the back of then mind which asks – am I good enough? It is about us trying to weave these threads into a story, a creation, where my role shifts from a scribe, a friend, a facilitator, a participant, an observer.

A shared space was slowly taking shape, becoming a repository to stories born out of the experiences of being a *dehaati aurat*. We did not realise when these experiences surpassed those that came from one's being of a *dehaati* and became about a sense of loss; a sense of inferiority of looking a certain way, dressing a certain way and speaking in a certain language; a sense of loss emanating from a loss of a concept and what it means to those who can no longer perhaps use it. This shared space would often remind me of what the Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie would caution us against – “the danger of a single story”.

This shared space and the words that were being weaved in it were asking the world - what if there could be another way to understand *dehaat*, what if we offer a way to come out of the meanings attached the *dehaat* that has hitherto been foregrounded in discourse, literature, cinema, theatre and most importantly, in the way the women in Rukrum think and feel about themselves; what if we offer a reverse gaze.

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

Would the process of writing by a group of *adivasi* woman then perhaps deterritorialize the standard discourse of development and unleash desire, desire understood as a creative and productive energy, an energy that can disrupt common sense and everyday life (Colebrook, 2002)? For us, the process of writing the script was where the disruption happened – it was not one moment, or event; but the flow of the pen capturing the essence of *dehaat*, the feeling of *dehaat* and the intensities and multiplicities that that are forever getting (re)produced. The script was a movement from a representational structure of *dehaat* to ushering in a process of immanent thinking and living, whose target was split between challenging and disrupting common sense and everyday ways of life and on the other producing newer, divergent and differentiated forms of thinking and living that were rooted in the everyday life of a *dehaati*.

When the body in *dehaat*, goes to the agricultural field and labors under the sun; she engenders a knowledge rooted in practice, an-other form of knowledge. She might appear uneducated as she does not have the mandatory years of schooling, but she asks us to reverse the gaze – does working on the field, planting and harvesting of crops, cutting the trees in the jungle, collecting dry leaves to make a fire – not qualify as knowledge, a knowledge that makes her educated in a different way?

The words that were created captured the essence of *dehaat*, the feeling of *dehaat* and the intensities and multiplicities that that are forever getting (re)produced. Writing of the script here, gave us a way to move beyond the representational structure, to transform life, to inaugurate non-representational relations that are indicative of becoming.

Can we take out writing from the spaces of academia and consider the writing that might happen say perhaps in an *adivasi* setting? Our existing research methodologies are like an elaborate, pre-decided performance – we decide upon a question, a hypothesis that *we* want to probe; the choice of the stage and the actors becomes simplified after the first step; we *go* to the chosen stage, our methodology pre-determined, conduct as many in-depth interviews that we can, all directed at our pre-decided question using our pre-determined methodology; rejoicing when our chosen sample responds in a manner that bats for the script that has already been scripted. It becomes an exercise in validating or disproving a hypothesis to satisfy an academic curiosity born in a university space and tested in a space that has been labelled third world, rural, tribal, undeveloped, poor, backward to name a few; a reality that has been conveniently made to fit into our binaries and is largely unknown outside of these dominant paradigms.

Perhaps in writing with the *adivasi*, and not on her; will allow one to give up the power and the complacency that has engulfed academia for centuries. It might allow for the opening up of the countless radical possibilities, interpretations and meaning making processes that were hitherto, foreclosed in our imagination. The movement from how research has largely been practiced to a co-researched, co-constitutive and co-creative exercise where the ones who have always been the objects of the process become the researchers themselves; sharing the reins; would allow for the voices that have been historically and violently muted; would create a space where we all learn to unlearn our privilege, become vulnerable and learn to listen to those multiple voices that might take us to other realms, say truth.

References:

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