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BEYOND DEVELOPMENT

Postcapitalist and feminist praxis in *adivasi* contexts

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A postdevelopmental dream in practice

Amidst the perils of an ongoing developmental dream, ‘*sabka sath, sabka vikas*’ (collective efforts, inclusive development) that has been haunting the Indian political scenario for quite some time, another dream or a dream of a subaltern Other (who remains excluded from the inclusive model of development) was envisioned in 2016 in the far-away *Kondh adivasi* (tribal)-dominated village named Emaliguda in the Rayagada district of Odisha.¹ It was a dream co-created (not individually dreamt) by the *Eka Nari Sanghathan* (ENS), a collective of *adivasi* single women farmers as a hope to live, labour and love in harmony. Arnalu Miniaka (member, ENS, 2016), sharing the dream shyly, said,

we [the single women in the *Sanghathan*] wish to live on a land surrounded by the forest and a river where we would labour together to produce and share the food, look after each other, sing and dance in harmony and where we shall be free of all our pain and misery.

Contrary to the national developmental dream, which as usual made false promises to ‘enhance the profitability in agriculture, by ensuring a 50% profit over the cost of production’ for 49% of the total workforce engaged in agriculture (NSSO 2011–2012; as cited in Kumar 2017), the subaltern dream of 35 single women in Emaliguda village was driven by a desire to collectively work towards making agriculture a liveable condition rather than a profitable economic system. In the mainstream developmental discourse and practice in India, agriculture is considered an income-generating livelihood activity that can be made profitable with the help of capitalist interventions and modern techniques of farming. Perceived as an economic procedure alone, its cultural, environmental and socio-political aspects are

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overlooked with a singular focus on enhanced production and global market linkages that can ensure profitability. Thus, agriculture in developmental imagination remains merely a form of livelihood that is necessary to feed the nation(s); detached from its cultural, social, political context and diverse life forms, it becomes a 'commodity' understood in terms of exchange value generating surplus for the global market.

Can this kind of developmental thinking make sense out of the subaltern imagination that claims that 'the land is (her) womb and the crop is like (her) growing child' (Mami Pedenti, member, ENS)? Can this relationship to nature and agriculture be understood by the developmental processes subordinated to the logic of profit and income enhancement? The answer, perhaps, is a simple 'no'. For the women farmers in Rayagada, agriculture is intimately tied to their life; it is not only a primary source of livelihood, rather the *adivasi* existence, their food, culture, festivals, their relationship to nature, forms of labouring and living life in general depend upon this significant process of agriculture. Agriculture is considered a *form of life* dependent upon an ethical relationship with more-than-human entities and ecosystems that together make it more than an economic process. De la Cadena (2015) in the South American indigenous context argues for a rethinking of reality and modernist notions to be able to understand the indigenous-environment relationship that she refers to as 'earth beings'. In the same light, this work argues for an alternative understanding of agriculture that remains embedded in the larger *adivasi* culture, history and context.

Thus, unlike *sabka sath, sabka vikas*, an electoral strategy premised upon promises of inclusive development through capitalist growth, the postdevelopmental attempt in the *Sanghathan* has been towards building a collective life through engaging in collective farming. In so-called modern and developing times, when farmers are being encouraged to produce and appropriate on an individual basis, keeping self-interest in mind, when they are being lured into cash crop production serving as input for big industries and in times of increasing reliance on capitalist markets for inorganic and chemical farming emphasising the use of marketed fertilizers, pesticides and hybrid/high-yielding seeds, this attempt at collective cultivation an experiment exploring alternative ways of farming involving indigenous seed varieties and ecologically sensitive methods and techniques. In its efforts towards a 'transformed' practice of agriculture that goes beyond capitalist and developmentalist approaches, the *Sanghathan* engages in farming processes that build upon logic of nurturance, sharing, co-labouring and co-dependence along more-than-human life forms. Thus, collective farming in Emaliguda is an initiative towards cultivating a common life of well-being not just with other women in the *Sanghathan* but also along what Roelvink and Gibson-Graham (2009) call 'earth others'.

My engagement with Emaliguda village and the single women in the *Kondh* community began in 2013 as part of the MPhil Development Practice programme (cdp.res.in/) housed at the Centre for Development Practice, Ambedkar University, Delhi (AUD). As an MPhil action researcher, I was immersed in Emaliguda village for a period of one year. I lived with a separated single woman, Arnalu Miniaka

(Aiya), who mothered me like her own daughter. She had no family and I was far away from mine; our loneliness brought us together. As Aiya slowly introduced me to her life full of suffering and pain, she also taught me her language and how to live and relate in the village setting. I would spend most of my time labouring with her and other women in the fields and inside-outside the household. As we worked together, bathed in the same stream of river and slept in close proximity in the dead of night, my relationship with other single women in Emaliguda also strengthened over time. We often engaged in the affective exchange of our memories and life stories and instances of the lived experience of singleness surfaced and connected us. Finding resonance in each other's stories and drawing strength from each other's experiences, women in Emaliguda, for the first time, according to Barkini Pedenti (member, ENS), 'began making time for themselves'. They delved deeper into their lives and articulated and analysed their condition of singleness as they came together every night after a long tiring day of hard work and toil. Eventually, the collective creation of a new 'time-space' in the gendered lives marked by singleness led to the forging of the *Eka Nari Sanghathan*, a single women's collective, in 2013.

Singleness in our work has been understood: (a) as a condition of loneliness and alone-ness, including economic, political and cultural othering and exclusion, perpetual states of financial and emotional insecurity, life devoid largely of relationships and care, a huge work burden residing entirely on a woman's shoulders, and the everyday life of a woman subjected to varied forms of socio-political discriminations and violence; and, (b) as also a condition that has enabled women to lead at least a negotiated gendered existence in comparison to women under strict control of the hetero-patriarchal institution of marriage. In other words, singleness is as much about negotiating, and coping with, as also resisting patriarchal structures, as it is about everyday pain and suffering.

This process of conceptualising singleness enabled the *Sanghathan* members and me to disaggregate the *adivasi* gendered reality. When singleness is read as both a site of oppression and resistance and affirmation, it shows that all of the socio-cultural reality in the *Kondh* society is not patriarchal in nature. Moreover, this understanding of singleness was tied to a discursive shift we made from singlehood (as a particular social identity resulting from the absence of a husband, such as the identity of a widowed, separated, abandoned, deserted, divorced, never-married woman), to singleness (as a condition; as an experience of living and feeling singleness in the absence or even in the presence of a husband – more as a 'contingent emergent subject position'). The meaning of singleness thus extended itself to also involve women who are married and have husbands yet face conditions that are similar to those faced by women who do not have or live without a male sexual partner (see Chitranshi 2016; Chitranshi & Dhar 2016).

The meaning of singleness in our work has been evolving with the meaning of the *Sanghathan* and vice-versa. Keeping these two central ideas as contingent-emergent, the work in Rayagada has been exploring several directions and inter-connections. As a result of singleness due to familial/social othering, the *Sanghathan* was forged as a space of companionship and sense of security for

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women who have been either abandoned by their families or are treated as burdens and liabilities. In the words of Debi Pedenti (member, ENS, 2016),

attending to each other's pain, providing each other emotional and financial support and looking after one another in times of difficulty, despair and illness, we also laugh, sing and work together creating moments of joy and happiness every time we meet.

Thus, along with sheltering women's varied experiences, the *Sanghathan* has been emerging as a support group hosting and re-creating relationalities.

Moreover, reimagined beyond repressive structures of family, the *Sanghathan* has also been evolving as a space for transformative thinking and practice. Caught in the clutches of capitalist development, the lives of *adivasi* single women farmers are also marked by economic exploitation, primitive accumulation, foreclosure of their subjective being, third-worldisation (Chakrabarti & Dhar 2009) and victimisation. The *Sanghathan*, through its critique of development, has been grappling with critical questions around gender, sexuality, modernity, capitalism, rights-based and/or representative forms of politics (discussed later).

In the process, the imagination of a postcapitalist (Gibson-Graham 2006) and feminist practice of agriculture was born *in* the *Sanghathan*; or perhaps I should say it was born *with* the *Sanghathan*. This alternative practice has been a movement beyond the illusory woman-centric² and orientalist-capitalocentric³ frameworks of development (Gibson-Graham 1996; Gibson-Graham & Ruccio 2001; Chakrabarti & Dhar 2009) marking an ontological and epistemological shift. Rethought beyond dominant frameworks of development, this postcapitalist-feminist engagement takes us to postdevelopmental imagination and practice (Escobar 2005).

This chapter tries to engage with the relationship between the *Sanghathan* as an *adivasi* single women's group and the *Sanghathan* enacting postcapitalist (St. Martin, Roelvink & Gibson-Graham 2015) being/becoming-in-common in the 'world of the third' (Chakrabarti, Dhar & Cullenberg 2016) context.⁴ In doing so, I ask, does postdevelopment practice with the *adivasi* life-world enable us to understand how gender work and economic transformation overdetermine each other? Can the *Sanghathan*, although embedded in the hegemony of developmental context, resist the capitalist and hetero-patriarchal order through cultivating alternative commons, variegated practices and diverse realities?

Hitherto, certain feminist works focussed upon socio-political concerns have offered us a way towards resisting hetero-patriarchal systems, raising feminist consciousness and building solidarities. Similarly, postcapitalist politics through diverse economic transformations have taken us to cultivating commons and ethical economic relationalities. The work of the *Sanghathan* aims to combine the two. What does it mean to 'conceptualize economic difference through the prism of gender as a social construction (rather than through the lens of capitalist reproduction)', building not only upon women's unpaid labour processes within the family (as argued by Gibson-Graham, Erdem & Özselçuk 2013b: 280) and

in the larger community context but also upon the condition of singleness and gendered roles and relationships? How do gendered realities and relationalities transform through transforming economic processes?

In its postcapitalist-feminist praxis, the *Sanghathan* simultaneously attempts to build ethical interpersonal relationalities between women (by acknowledging the differences among them and moving beyond regressive frameworks of a woman-man binary) and work through ethical economic ties that shape collective subjectivities. Can non-economic affective exchanges and shared economic subjectivities combine to work towards a common future? Can processes of common becomings be accompanied by processes of 'becoming-woman'? Becoming-woman, for Deleuze and Guattari, is not to imitate or imbibe womanliness but to defy dominant molar forms and relations in order to conceive 'molecular woman' and a 'molecular political movement' (Deleuze & Guattari 2005: 276). It is through (remaining in) practice that one searches for epistemological and philosophical reflections.

Towards a postcapitalist-feminist practice

In June 2016, Aiya and Mami Pedenti, members of the ENS, joined me for a visit to Basudha. Basudha, a 2.3-acre demonstration farmland founded by Dr. Debal Deb and Mr. Debdulal Bhattacharjee, is in the deep forests of Bissumcuttack, Odisha. Over 1200 folk rice varieties and 30 other crops are grown and preserved on this farm every year, as a model of ecological agriculture combining 'traditional' and 'scientific' ways of multiple cropping. The forest, agriculture and humans come to co-exist in Basudha.⁵ As we spent the whole day understanding the work in Basudha, Mami and Aiya were surprised to see how traditional methods of farming that over the years had been lost to modern techniques and chemical farming could still be useful and productive. Moreover, this farm had all the variety produce that once used to be part of their diet before transgenic Bt cotton and other cash crops were brought in to the area.

Mami and Aiya gathered a few rooted stems and leaves, a handful of seeds and plenty of memories from Basudha. They returned quite fascinated, though almost in disbelief. How was agriculture without chemical fertiliser and pesticides possible in today's time? Why were some people preserving what the *adivasi* communities were leaving behind as a sign of backwardness? They were quiet on the way back. I could sense that their morning excitement of seeing their past alive had by evening turned into a mournful nostalgia. A sad realisation of all they have lost over time had set in. When we reached Emaliguda, Aiya asked me hesitatingly if it was possible for us to build our own Basudha. I smiled; I had no immediate answer for her. But her hope had made me hopeful.

So far, the single women in Emaliguda had collectivised themselves around the issue of singleness and had been engaging in various collective endeavours like claiming pensions and financial assistance to build houses from the state, opening bank accounts and organising/mobilising women in different villages (see Chitranshi

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2018). However, Aiya's dream of building our own Basudha initially seemed impossible to many. The women in the *Sanghathan* had laughed at her suggestion; however, not dismissively. I could sense the dream had somewhere touched each one of us. Perhaps the laughter symbolised co-existence of an initiated hope and its limits.

I was apprehensive of how 35 women from the *Sanghathan* would do agriculture together. Was it possible for so many women to work together? That the *Sanghathan* may fall apart in the process was my biggest fear. But over time the enthusiasm for collective farming in the *Sanghathan* built in intensity. The desire for a new beginning had come to life; it was breathing. The *Sanghathan* was looking forward to building something new, a new that was ingrained in the old; a future was being imagined through a recovery of the 'past'.

With this inspiration filling me up, I decided to discuss the Mondragon Corporation model with the *Sanghathan* members.⁶ The intention behind this discussion was not to simply narrate an account of a successful cooperative but to also plant a seed of hope that could make us think about collective and ethical practices that we could engender. Women in the *Sanghathan* could relate to the idea of working together and collectively appropriating the surplus. For them, this was not something new.

Collective labouring and community participation on different occasions is a part of *adivasi* life in Rayagada. Sharing labour, helping each other and voluntary involvement in labouring activities is part of cultural life among the *Kondh*. Women work in each other's fields, co-perform household chores, look after each other's children, share the produce whenever need be and undertake roles and responsibilities on behalf of each other. Most of these exchanges and collective work remain outside monetary accounting. Over time these community value systems are slowly fading away. However, there are still many instances of collaborative processes of labouring, appropriation and exchange that are in place. In other words, alongside several capitalist class processes, *adivasi* life-worlds are also organised around an assemblage of noncapitalist class processes, non-monetary and non-market exchanges and non-commodity production.

Some of these range from single women farmers engaging in what Resnick and Wolff (1987) call 'independent' or 'self-appropriative' class processes: individual performance of surplus labour with individual appropriation of surplus generated from a common piece of land; local market trading and local credit systems; non-monetary exchanges like barter, labour exchange and sharing, cooperative exchange, gift economy; shared household labour, social reproductive work and care work undertaken mainly by women.

With collective farming in the *Sanghathan*, three significant postcapitalist (Gibson-Graham, Cameron & Healy 2013a; St. Martin, Roelvink & Gibson-Graham 2015) possibilities and shifts could be explored through: (1) engagement in ecologically sensitive ways of farming ensuring ethical relationship between human and other-than-human forms, as opposed to chemical farming methods and techniques that rely on a capitalist market and lead to environmental

degradation, including impacts on human body and health; (2) understanding and exploring collective forms of labouring, appropriation and distribution in order to re-create new processes and practices. In other words, through collective farming we could generate learnings from already existing non-exploitative and noncapitalist class processes and could work towards strengthening postcapitalist practices; (3) reorienting from individualised/self-interested subjectivities in capitalism (that are slowly overtaking *adivasi* life) towards cultivation of common and ethical subject positions through collective action, creation, exchange and sharing. In other words, through an exploration and enactment of diverse economies and cultivation of collective processes and ethics, a postdevelopmental affirmation beyond mere opposition was possible.

Development organisations have overtime mobilised ‘poor-third-world-women’ into micro-credit-based self-help groups (SHGs) to work on developmental issues such as livelihood, health, education etc. These agendas claiming to ‘empower’ women and developing rural spaces through them continue to leave behind issues of women’s subjective being and their nodal experiences. It comes as no surprise that in spite of a large number of single women in the *Kondh* society, singleness as an issue has always remained absent in the developmental work in Rayagada over the years. Regardless, these women are exposed to income-generating opportunities, cash crop cultivation, use of marketed seeds and chemicals and as a token are trained in lessons on patriarchy and gender that have little or no connection to their socio-cultural context.⁷

In the process, *adivasi* reality is rendered backward, pre-capitalist and underdeveloped; *adivasi* women are perceived as helpless victims in need of external guidance and support. Tearing them away from their culture, history and knowledge, developmental interventions assert to pull *adivasi* women out of their misery of economic poverty through connecting them to circuits of global capital. Thus, all other-than-capitalist or noncapitalist class processes in the *adivasi* context are marked as the lacking Other – the pre-capital of modern European industrial capitalism. What are ‘not capitalist’ spaces are represented as what are ‘not yet capitalist’ spaces; as third world-ish, and in need of integration into the logic-language-ethos of the developed first world; as signposts of economic backwardness. The noncapitalist class processes are thus left with only two possible futures – mutation into capitalist class processes or outright annihilation (through state-sponsored primitive accumulation).

As a result of conceiving the economy as a binary between capitalist and pre-capitalist forces rather than as a heterogeneous radical space marked by overdetermination and contradiction of capitalist and noncapitalist constellations of surplus (Resnick & Wolff 1987), there is a foreclosing of diverse economic processes and noncapitalist modes of being, operational in what Chakrabarti, Dhar & Cullenberg (2012, 2016) have called the ‘world of the third’. In turn, development discourse, as it foregrounds the woman farmer as a lacking/lagging subject of capitalism, i.e., as a pre-capitalist (as a not-yet-capitalist) subject,

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simultaneously forecloses resisting subject positions and possible futures that could emanate from a noncapitalist outside the expanding circuits of global capital and affirmative/alternative politics.

Opposed to this kind of developmental thinking and practice, our work in Rayagada attempts to learn from the *adivasi* life-world and women's subjective experiences in order to cultivate transformative practices. The women from the *Sanghathan* in Emaliguda have been working as my co-action-researchers exploring and understanding the experiences of women in different contexts, the condition of singleness, their everyday lived reality and the nature of gender(ed) relationships. About 130 women from other villages have come together to be part of the *Sanghathan* and despite contextual and experiential differences, women have been engaging with each other on several issues and instances. Issues related to different forms of gender discrimination, sexual division of labour, devaluation and invisibilisation of women's unpaid and paid work, women's health, alcoholism leading to abuse, marital/sexual violence, masculinity, body and sexuality have been surfacing and women have been sensitively engaging, reflecting and acting towards co-creating mechanisms of negotiation, resistance and affirmation that can take us to non-violent ways of doing transformative gender work.

These engagements drawing upon the *adivasi* context at large, however, do not romanticise the *adivasi* history and culture; they also do not render women's experience as sacrosanct. Nevertheless, the attempt has been to arrive at collaborative thinking and practices that along with theoretical insights place value in what *adivasi* knowledge and way of life has to offer. The work relies heavily on *adivasi* culture, the spiritual and ethical value systems, different forms of knowledge and practices. It regards *adivasi* women as 'capable' subjects creating possibilities for a collective (transformed) future rather than training them in Western perspectives on gender or motivating them to become equal to men or more like men through inculcating masculine characteristics. The *adivasi* context thus plays a crucial role in historically situating the understanding of gender (Lugones 2016; Icaza & Vázquez 2016) and economy and towards redrawing ethical and transformed relationalities.

The inherent antagonisms, conflicts, discriminations and marginalisations that are part of *adivasi* culture and life are often encountered, acknowledged and negotiated within the process of our efforts at collectivising and building socio-political and economic ties. These are efforts geared towards reorienting processes of subject-power-desire that can take us to contingent-emergent 'ethical becomings' rather than seeking ultimate reconciliation of inevitable antagonisms. Moreover, this work revisits the familiar idiom of 'representation' and 'leadership' that are accorded consistent value in developmental and mainstream feminist interventions. We resist the formation of 'woman leaders' as the very idea of 'leadership' (privileging and placing power in the hands of a few) comes across as patriarchal. The *Sanghathan* thus has no elected/selected 'leaders'. All the members of the collective form the core of decision making and facilitation among themselves. Different roles and responsibilities are fulfilled by taking turns that are decided through consensus.

Collective farming for us was a next step towards re-imagining the ethic of the social by cultivating 'what are not capitalist' class existences in the world-of-the-third context; the world of the third for us harboured a possibility. As we explored ways in which we could engage in collective and ethical processes of labouring, production, appropriation and distribution in agriculture, we realised it was important to take things in our own hands rather than depend upon external aid, development organisations and agencies. As we prepared ourselves for the agriculture season (2017–2018), we decided to engage in a collective endeavour of producing pickle with mangoes gathered from the forest. Every year, women prepare this pickle individually for family consumption; this time the women got together, distributed the work amongst each other, took responsibility at each step and enjoyed the whole process. This initiative was not simply to create a business venture but to come together as labouring-creating subjects and experience the joy of it. The pickle was kept for self-consumption and the rest was sold to generate surplus that could be collectively appropriated and used for the agriculture process. It was also to generate surplus for women in the *Sanghathan* who are old and unable to self-sustain themselves. This was our first attempt at a postcapitalist practice in the *Sanghathan*, which we plan to continue each year.

Alongside, we leased a three-acre plot of land using our savings, surplus from the sale of mango pickle and a little contribution from some of my friends. By this time, my friend Ashutosh had also joined us in Rayagada and, given his interest in alternative agricultural practices, we felt more confident about this initiative. Ashutosh was easily accepted in the *Sanghathan* given his polite and accommodating nature. As he laboured with the women, a relationship began to develop between him and the *Sanghathan* members. In the meantime, we invited Mr. Dulaldeb from Basudha to survey the land and conduct workshops with us that helped us understand the problems of chemical farming and ways in which we could engage in ecologically sensitive methods. Dulaldeb also offered the *Sanghathan* indigenous seed varieties from Basudha for the first year on the trust that with our production next year we shall return him double the amount of seeds. This is one of the ways in which Basudha engages in ethical exchange of seeds, knowledge and agricultural practice with the farmers in the area.

As women listened, they questioned. For them, using chemical fertilisers and pesticides was a given now. It was hard for them to believe agriculture was possible without chemical inputs from the market. Even though the women were convinced about planting indigenous seeds, to do agriculture without the use of chemical inputs was a huge risk. They were aware that the excessive use of chemical fertilisers, pesticides and herbicides for agriculture in general and cotton production in particular had been responsible for environmental degradation and adverse effects on body and health over time, but they were also sure that in the present times there was no way out of it. Chemical fertilisers and pesticides seemed necessary now given the soil had lost its fertility and health over the years.

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Finally, Ashutosh and I had to enter into a negotiation where women from the *Sanghathan* decided to use chemical fertilisers and pesticides in regulated amounts during the early stage of plant growth. Slowly, as we progressed, the women agreed to substitute chemical inputs with natural substances (like cow dung manure and *neem* residue) and their openness towards trying alternatives increased. The blind belief in marketed inputs was slowly shaken, as we shifted to more natural and organic inputs, methods and techniques. In the first year, in order to experiment, we sowed both indigenous seed varieties and high-yielding seed varieties. With the indigenous seed varieties offering a good yield on the same area of land, some faith in the traditional methods of farming got restored. Post the harvest, looking at the production and the health of the seed, women were convinced that the indigenous seed variety did not require chemical inputs. Ashutosh and I were happy to witness women from the *Sanghathan* discussing benefits of ecologically sensitive farming with other neighbouring farmers. They insisted if the other farmers were interested in cultivating these seed varieties they could share the seeds with them but on the condition that they would not engage in chemical farming.

With respect to collective labouring, beginning from the work of preparing the land, cutting and building the boundary, treading and sowing the seeds, transplanting the crop, regulating water in the field, harvesting of paddy, thrashing and separating paddy from hay, straw and husk, packaging of the harvest, loading, unloading, distributing paddy to the members, drying paddy, preserving seeds for the next year, milling it into rice, storing of rice for sale and handling the finances throughout, all the work was done collectively. The work was mostly distributed among the members according to age, with younger women taking up more laborious tasks and older women engaging in less strenuous tasks. However, each and every one, irrespective of their age (varying from 35 to 80 years), participated and contributed to the labouring process, except Daima Pedenti (member, ENS), who unfortunately had met with an accident a few days before sowing of seeds and hence could not participate in the process.

There were many hurdles and challenges that we faced in the process. The unpredictability and delay in monsoon led to lack of irrigation in the initial days followed by delay in ploughing and sowing. The bridge that connected Emaliguda and Pujariguda (the village where the land we were cultivating is) got washed away in the flash flood that hit us just before the sowing process began. As a result, the women had to walk for about eight or ten kilometres to reach the field. They also performed all the heavy work that men usually do in the agricultural lands. Except ploughing, which was done with the use of a tractor, all other 'masculine' jobs, from breaking and building the boundary of the land, spraying organic pesticides, carrying loads of harvested paddy over their heads and thrashing the entire produce, were done by women. Women also stayed up till late at night in the fields in order to regulate the amount of water on the land.

There were also times when the *Sanghathan* members broke into heated arguments and disagreements with regards to sharing labouring activities⁸. As some women were occupied with the cultivation of family lands, the responsibility of looking after the land and the crop fell on the shoulders of a few. However, soon such crisis situations would be brought to notice in the weekly meetings and solutions would be arrived at. For example, given the former problem, it was finally decided that all the women would pair up to pay regular visits rather than just a few. In spite of these momentary disagreements and conflict, the collective spirit of the *Sanghathan* kept us going and we managed to work through all kinds of constraints, ranging from financial to physical, psychological and environmental.

The women walked long distances to reach the land, lifted heavy weights, performed back-breaking work all day, stood without shade whether it rained down or the sun scorched above and still they sang in harmony as they worked, laughed their hearts out during the small *pika* (local rolled tobacco) break, ate together under the mangrove and walked back home in joy after completing the work day after day. Their bond strengthened as they laboured, walked, sang, smoked and ate together. Their happiness was beyond measure on the days all of them would come and finish day-long work in just a couple of hours. They would often say, 'when we work together, the work feels so easy. It becomes difficult both physically and psychologically when we have no one to share it with'.

The first day when all the 34 women gathered for sowing of seeds, it was a sight to see. I was told that 'one earns the right to eat only when one sows the seed'. The story behind the food that easily reaches my plate every day was as if unfolding before me. I wondered if I had the right to eat the food I had never produced. As I struggled to find my ground in the wet muddy fields with half my legs submerged and back continuously bent, I sowed the seeds with the women and my body felt the pain that goes into producing the food we eat. The ease with which women performed the work and finished it was surprising to me. I was half their age, and I was less than half as capable of what they could do. Throughout this agricultural cycle, I engaged in each and every labouring activity to make my body aware of the efforts that go behind cultivating food. At the same time, I was also becoming aware of my body and its limits as it had never known labouring in this manner before.

As we finished harvesting, it was time for distribution. Not only the performance of labour, even appropriation of produce was a collective process. Everyone, including Daima (who could not participate this year given health reasons), was allotted the same share of produce as was distributed to those who had laboured through the process. In the enactment of a postcapitalist practice, the *Sanghathan* witnessed a shared collectivity. The appropriation took place on a shared/communitic basis rather than women's individual ability to perform labour. Apart from distribution for self-consumption, the rice was sold to generate surplus for the *Sanghathan*. A part of this surplus has been used for the production process this year (2018–2019) and the rest will be collectively appropriated to cater to social needs of the

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Sanghathan members in the future. The remuneration, hence, has been in the form of appropriation of the produce and the common surplus rather than individual wages to women. With respect to exchange, the rice was sold locally in the village and to urban consumers who were put in direct contact with the *Sanghathan* members. Most of the urban consumers who have been part of the process and have continued to support this work have been willing to pay much more than the set price for the rice.

To celebrate this collective journey, the women from the *Sanghathan* organised a *bhoji* (feast) on 2 January 2018. Next to the river under the mangrove we (including people from outside who have been supporting the work and are our loyal customers) met, cooked amazing food, sang, danced, played and ate together the rice we had cultivated. This year (2018–2019) the process of collective farming has begun in full swing again with the use of preserved indigenous seeds from last year. No high-yielding seed varieties have been planted and no chemical inputs have been used. However, this year also represents an experiment in our method of farming. At what distance the seeds should be sown and whether it will be line sowing or random sowing is the debate this year. Both random sowing as part of the traditional method and line sowing as part of the scientific method have been done this year to explore which method works best for us. Moreover, many farmers in the nearby villages have taken the indigenous seeds and agreed to experiment on small portions of their land; seeds have been distributed on the same logic of non-monetary seed exchange. Keeping these experiments, questions, explorations and experiences alive, we hope to continue to learn, labour, live and love for times to come. Like Gibson-Graham, we too 'are excited to be living in these terrible times' (Gibson-Graham 2016: 307).

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Notes

- 1 *Sabka Sath, Sabka Vikas*, inclusive development along with unity, is a national plan used in the form of a slogan by the current prime minister of India, Narendra Modi. This slogan supposedly aims to focus on the growth and progress of the country (mostly based upon capitalist development) alongside ensuring participation of all groups and interests.

- 2 When development institutions and international aid agencies began to take account of gender, as they did under feminist pressure in the 1970s, their understanding of the concept was minimal. In the usual policy model, there were two categories of people, the men here and the women there, and the reform needed was to add the women into the development programme. But the dichotomy of men versus women was a radically simplified idea of gender, and the simplification had important consequences. It homogenized each of the two categories, ignoring the vast variations within them. 'Gender' in policy language usually meant women (Connell in Harcourt 2016: xii).
- 3 'In a capitalocentric field, capitalism is the norm and noncapitalist economic relations or entities are understood with respect to capitalism, as either the same as, complements to, opposites of or contained within capitalism' (Gibson-Graham 2016: 291).
- 4 Through marking *difference* with the capital-logic, remaining outside the expanding and marauding circuits of global capital, the world of the third as the harbinger of a noncapitalist language-logic-experience-ethic outside of and beyond the circuits of (global) capitalist modernity puts under erasure capitalist ethic and language.
- 5 <http://cintdis.org/basudha/>.
- 6 Mondragon Corporation is the embodiment of the cooperative movement that began in 1956. The values that mark this model are cooperation, participation, social responsibility and innovation. The corporation's mission combines the core goals of a business organisation competing on international markets with the use of democratic methods in its business organisation, the creation of jobs, the human and professional development of its workers and a pledge to development with its social environment.
- 7 Maria Lugones discusses the concept of 'coloniality of gender' as a modern system that was violently imposed on the non-Western Other through the process of colonisation in order to overshadow diverse social forms and experiences and control territories, capital, subjectivities and lives (Lugones 2016). This coloniality continues to exist in the orientalist framework of development that leaves behind the socio-historical context of the woman thereby drawing her into homogeneous and universalised understandings of gender.
- 8 Cameron (2015) discusses two community-supported agriculture initiatives in Australia in order to highlight how communities are not pre-existing entities but are rather constructed in the process of negotiations, struggles and uncertainties that unfold as concerns of survival, production, consumption, appropriation, distribution and market relations etc. are encountered.

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