

Dear Applicant (to the MPhil programme in Development Practice),

You must be wondering ‘what is Development Practice’. You know ‘Development Studies’. You know ‘Development Economics’. But not Development Practice perhaps.

In Development Practice we take *transformation* in rural communities as an area of *research* as also an area of *work/intervention*. The second – i.e. work, practice, engagement – is also important for us. We do not wish to *just do* research, say just research *on* poverty, *on* gender, *on* caste. We wish to alleviate poverty as well, transform gender and caste relations as well, in a small way at least, through, even if, baby steps. We wish to transform; and we have intense debates among us as to what is ‘desirable’ transformation, what is a ‘just’ transformation; as also, what would be the *ethic* of transformation. In other words, on the one hand, while we try to make sense of, understand and analyze macro and micro-processes of rural transformation, we also, on the other hand, try to engender/facilitate/catalyze through sustained community participation and collective action processes of desirable (we, hence reflect on and remains reflexive as to ‘what is desirable’) transformation in rural spaces in Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Chattisgarh, Odisha and South Bihar. We see rural transformation as not a top-down and State/government driven affair but a community-driven affair, through a kind of “non-coercive reorganization of community desire”. This is also important because bottom-up or grassroots level developmental work in the community is not just about knowing or getting the *numbers* right, but has much to do with feeling-states; feeling for the Other, as also feeling into one’s own Self; including one’s nascent identification with the (suffering, and why not, the hope, joy, despair of the) rural poor women. *Knowing, relating* with community and collective *doing* thus come to a productive dialogue in our work with rural communities. The idea is to see what the community/group ‘need’ is and relate ‘my need to know’ with the ‘community/group need to transform’, bringing the two needs to a productive dialogue and a dialectic, to reach a middle ground. In this work ‘poor rural women’ are not our *objects* of knowledge, but our co-researchers. They are not just ‘native tribal/Dalit informants’ but ‘co-producers of knowledge’. The ‘gendered subaltern’ thus becomes a colleague, albeit with much difficulty, in our community level research and community guided action.

The MPhil Programme in Development Practice hence critically re-examines established idioms of 'research' and equally established idioms of 'practice'. It questions the given methodologies of both; and tries to work towards what we call for want of a better phrase 'Action Research'.

Action Research is for us a shorthand for 'action-ing research' as also 'research-ing action'. In other words, it is about taking research towards practice and taking practice towards research. Thus bridging the historical hyper-separation between research and action (hence Action Research) as also theory and practice. It is to find a third - a third beyond conventional research and conventional (developmental) practice - a third beyond given frameworks of theory and given frameworks of practice.

Put telegraphically action research is *reflective writing on the reflexive process of righting wrongs* (righting wrongs primarily in rural and community contexts). But how does one right wrongs? One needs to know, first, what is wrong? Or perhaps, it is not about a first step (i.e. first knowing what is wrong) followed by a second step (i.e. then righting wrongs). The first and second steps work in mutual constitutivity. The process of knowing generates an understanding of righting, the process of righting deepens knowing. In other words, action research is both about knowing and righting, as also righting and writing. It is about knowing what is wrong, but knowing collaboratively. It is about making efforts at righting wrongs, but righting not in a top-down manner, righting with the community as foreground and the researcher as background. It is also about writing on the actual or lived process of righting wrongs, a process lived and experienced by both researcher and community, which is why action research in the MPhil programme in Development Practice is not research *on* the community, rather research *with* the community.

The 10 month Rural Immersion in the MPhil Programme in Development Practice has been designed so as to

- (i) experience, engage, and relate to with intensely and in a psychoanalytically sensitive manner with 'adivasi life worlds' (as also dalit contexts)
- (ii) co-research rigorously with the 'community', questions, issues, problems relevant to the community (including attention to psycho-biographs of hope, despair and desire)
- (iii) arrive at an action research problematic collaboratively with the community
- (iv) develop a framework of action-ing the co-researched finding(s), and finally
- (v) research in a theoretically rigorous manner the action-ing process.

This MPhil programme takes 'transformation' (or 'transformative social action') as its object of enquiry - transformation along the mutually constitutive axes of class, caste, gender, ethnicity, poverty, violence, governance, livelihoods, education, health ... to name a few ...

In the MPhil programme we thus try to

- Engender a small process of transformation in parts of rural India, a process owned by communities in which the transformation process is being initiated through some kind of catalytic activity by the researcher, who is in turn making an attempt to know in-depth what is wrong, knowing with the community as co-researcher.
- Documenting the process in its infinite complexity and contradiction.
- Generating somewhat abstract learnings and explanatory frameworks on transformation out of the experience of transformation for the development sector and the social at large.
- This process leads to the writing to the MPhil Dissertation.

Action research, as we have said earlier, is thus about first actioning research findings and then researching processes of action, in and with the community.