

**G. N. DEVY'S *THE BEING OF BHASHA*: CRITICAL APPRAISAL**

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**Abstract:**

*G. N. Devy is one of the influential Indian English critics, social activists and philosophers. He has been working for the betterment of Adivasis living in Western India. His books include 'After Amnesia: Tradition and Change in Indian Literary Criticism', 'Of Many Heroes: An Indian Essay in Violence' etc. He is fascinated by a fairly fashionable area of study. His contribution to Indian Literary Criticism is unique. His latest work entitled 'The Being of Bhasha' published in 2008, can be read as a single comment on the nature of knowledge consumed in India and the violence arising in our society because of the mismatch between knowledge and existence. The present essay or the notes as described by G. N. Devy undertakes cultural and intellectual engagements neglected in our society that is the oral traditions of Adivasis living in Western India.*

**Key Words:** Adivasi, cultural and intellectual engagements, folklore.

Ganesh Devy's essay *The Being of Bhasha* is divided into eight parts having separate titles. The first part entitled 'The Substance of Language' takes us deep within the universe of India's oral literature in Adivasi languages. G. N. Devy has studied the languages for which 'no script existed'. He argues that 'no scholarship in the field of Indian literature or literary aesthetics would ever be complete unless the peculiarities of Adivasi literary traditions were taken into account'. Aizaz Ahmad pleads for the translation of Indian literatures and comparative study of Indian literatures in regional languages in order to label it as Indian literature and neglects oral traditions that are rich in India. However, G. N. Devy for the first time includes oral traditions of Western India in Indian literature and pleads for the study of the same.

G. N. Devy's study of the languages and literature of India's *Adivasis* initially depends on the existing framework of folklores studies and anthropology. According to him, with the decline of oral traditions and deforestation of the country, human languages will also decline and disappear. And if the *Adivasi* languages and their oral literature decline, the study of Indian aesthetics would be incomplete and imperfect. Hence, it is essential to juxtapose the known sources of literary theory in India with the samples of literary creativity in *Adivasi* languages. Indian literary aesthetics ranges from the ancient Prakrit and Sanskrit, mediaeval Persian and Arabic, the bhashas and English, to the yet unscripted languages of the *Adivasis* and the code languages of the nomadic communities. The term 'literary' in Indian literary tradition includes the written as well as the oral and the two can be separated at the cost of either or both of them. Speech is the primary domain of a language and not script. Scripts though not indispensable for linguistic creativity, can easily cause 'internal displacement' of linguistic creativity in a given language. Dialects have importance in the survival and growth of the bhashas. In many ways, the being of the bhashas has been dependent on the dialects that sign their emergence.

G. N. Devy gives us the origin and clear sequence in the formation of language. Origin of languages in the evolution of the human civilization is a secret. Some believe that language is a social institution. G. N. Devy raises a number of questions regarding the existence of universe and attendant sounds, *anaahat*

*dhwani* (eternal sound) and sound coined by the human beings, sound transmitting the message while other means like gestures, body movements do the same thing etc. He asks the question whether meaning exists prior to language, why breath is used to transmit meaning while human eye and gesture do the same? Since other forms like gestures, eyes, body movements are enough to transmit meaning, why only sound is cultivated? There is a well-established view that culture has no other expression but language, that the two are one and the same. It is also maintained that cognition would be impossible without language. A similar view is also held as far as meaning is considered. For every transaction of knowledge, language has been used as an alternative that determines the other boundaries of each transaction of the intellect. Meaning can't exist entirely in the absence of language. No doubt, sometimes humans can share experience without use of language. For instance, love, fear, anxiety etc are communicated without use of language. But all experiences cannot be shared without use of languages. Human languages may at best be seen as dialects of the uninterrupted *dhwani*. Though images and symbolic means are capable of conveying total range of meanings, the soundsymbol based language will have to be counted as a dialect of the total range of meaning. And the totality of the human languages stabilized through words and scripts will have to be seen as a dialect of the totality of all experiences, all meanings and all sounds. Hence, it is essential to study dialect which forms the language. That is the language is defined by its dialects. It is through them that language keeps its ceaseless contact with the universe outside it, and therefore manages to belong to it.

In second part of essay entitled 'Writing and Aphasia', G. N. Devy proceeds to speak of forms of writing which he came across while working on oral tradition. He cites the speech-syndicate of Gondhali community from Maharashtra, a community which uses not a language of signs, images or pictographs, but their speech or gesture has characters belonging to different kinds of 'script'. There are other many forms of writing in our society like practices of carving on ships and boats in Lakshadweep, paintings on walls in the Rathwa tribals in Gujarat all are examples of numerous manuscript traditions of India. Though the written form of language does not exist in some part of India's *Adivasi* and tribal communities, their paintings, carvings etc. also have the same potentiality in communicating meanings as has the language. Hence it is essential to study these unknown languages.

In India's literary past, most of the linguistic creativity has been in the oral tradition. Though people knew writing, it was not used as a means of educating the next generation in remembering these compositions. Most part of literature and knowledge were handed down not through writing but through speech and oral media. Hence, it is essential to study such speeches and oral literature in order to understand what is meant by Indian literary aesthetic. Most of the *Adivasi* languages do not have their own scripts. They have a very rich tradition of songs, stories, history and memory. They form a body of documents, which were not written by hand but conveyed by tongue. Such oral traditions and the language used for conveying such rich traditions are not included in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution. Mainstream languages become obstacles in the development of *Adivasi* languages. Hence, it is necessary to respect the great linguistic variety which our historical and human experiences have bestowed upon us.

In the third section of essay entitled 'Silence, Insanity and Language', G. N. Devy argues that silence and insanity are essential for the production of aesthetic experience. Before colonialism in India, both these things existed. That is why Abhinavagupta considers *Ramayana* as unique for its *Karunayasa* whereas *Mahabharata* for its *shantarasa*. But due to the British/Western education, Western psychology and psychiatry in colonial period, Indians lost patience for insanity. Before colonialism in India, there was a space for silence and insanity in our family and society. But under the influence of British teaching, we start to eliminate the space for insanity. Indians lose capacity to experience silence or respect it, also lost capacity to cope with insanity as an essential part of our being. In fact, silence communicates more than language. Intense emotional experiences are expressed through silence and not in languages. However, human languages have developed to a level of complexity which can accommodate euphoria, hysteria, insanity and silence as patterns of significance. The interiors of the bhashas, shored in the past by silences

and abnormalities are desolating with a speed.

G. N. Devy proceeds to discuss the birth of story-telling and fiction and the evolution of script in the next part of essay entitled 'The story of telling'. Languages enable us to understand the world external to us. Languages allow human consciousness to come to terms with the world. The human consciousness comes to terms with space and time with the help of the two mental capacities: memory and imagination. Memory allows us to come to terms with time, whereas imagination allows us to come to terms with space. Memory helps us to interpret images and imagination helps us to negotiate the human defeat at the hands of space. Thus, space is controlled by imagination and time by memory.

Language, memory and imagination come together and allow the consciousness to function so that it can create a fantasy of the world and this is the beginning of fiction. However, only writing a fiction is not enough. More factor is essential for fiction to emerge is that it must be told. Sense of otherness which is unique to human being makes him or her to distance herself from the other. Human mind needs to tell the story to other and this otherness is the fourth element in the composition of fiction. The first three - memory, imagination and language create fiction and the fourth otherness forces to tell the story. Human mind recognizes the significance of otherness and animal mind lacks this capacity. Thus, language, memory, imagination and otherness when come together allow human consciousness to function, to create fantasy of the world and there lies the beginning of fiction.

G. N. Devy discusses truth, fiction and cyberspace and shows how all are important for the creation of fiction. Human consciousness is capable for fantasy of the world. The phenomenal world is a virtual representation of human consciousness. Human mind constructs new dictionary of objects to describe their significance in terms of images perceived. It is human being which turns real into virtual and virtual into real. Reality is different from truth. Truth is perceived differently by different religions. The meaning of truth changes from time to time and from one community to other. For ancient Indians, truth could not be described in words. In ancient India, we have "a theory of truth which maintains that the substratum of every object is one and the same" (p. 26). It is indescribable, intractable. 'It is you'. Therefore, the purpose of learning should be nothing more than to be able to appreciate that the distinction is a falsehood and the unity and the oneness of all things and beings alone is Truth. However, Buddhist version of truth refuses this concept and maintains that sufferings and pains are truth. It can be experienced and expressed. However, these are just the notions of truth and not truth itself. There is no correspondence between the notions of truth and reality. Truth and reality are two different planes of sensory experiences, conceptual exercises and intellectual understandings. What is common to these two planes is the 'is-ness' of things, the phenomenal presence of the world that the human consciousness may have created as a fantasy. It is in order to effectively describe the presence of the present that the human mind has to build thought structures in the order of the truth. Fictional narratives acquire their truth value by their ability to convince the subject that the events narrated in them have taken place in some kind of real or imaginary past. Truth refers to that which fiction does not apparently refer to this world, though this world becomes material for use in a fictional creation. Thus, fiction refers not to this world in existence; rather it refuses to the world within, or to the flux of existence that the human imagination creates.

Memory is of essence to any conceptualization of truth. Imagination is of essence of fiction. Fiction calls for an exercise in imagination, a construction of images drawn from a world that is known to have existed as well as the worlds that have not come into existence. "Truth" claims to refer to the world that is, fiction to the world that spills over the 'is-ness' of existence. Different versions of truth are being existed in the world. For Chinese truth acquires its truth value by being visible whereas Indian school believed that it truth becomes visible and if it is represented in a work of art, it ceases to be truth. Thus what is truth for one school may be quite different and also opposite for another school. Even within a single school, truth changes from age to age. Sensory experience acquires truth. Fiction deals with imagination. Fictional narrative acquire their truth value by their ability to convince the subject that the events narrated

in them have taken place in some kind of real or imaginary past. Fiction does not necessarily refer to the world of existence. Rather it refers to the world within or the flux of existence that the human imagination creates. Fiction at once deals with imagination and the past. Fiction becomes possible only when through the medium of the past tense the human consciousness learns to invent a virtual existence. Human language brings us from truth to fiction and from fiction to the cyber space, from real to the imaginary and from the imaginary to the predominantly virtual. All memory, truth, imagination go in making language of human being. The creator works with the help of these faculties of human being in order to form language of creativity. The four apparatus of human understanding like sensation, intellect, imagination and memory work in their own way in the creative process. Ideology is another possibility of thinking offered by human beings. The natural thing in world is narrated in the form of culture using ideology. Ideologies allow an individual to look at life experience with a sense of consistency. Ideologies focus their attention excessively on the political sphere of the human existence. The other spheres of human existence like aesthetic and the ethical are also useful in the creation process.

Freedom and knowledge are the other essential part of creative process which human being possess. Knowledge acquires its meaning from sensation, life experience, imagination and memory. Knowledge leads human beings towards freedom and enlightenment. However, the same knowledge can be used to perpetuate slavery as it happens in India. So it is better to pursue path of freedom instead of acquiring knowledge. Ganesh Devi argues that it is freedom which brings knowledge to people and not the other way round. The freedom suggested by Devi is not the freedom of *moksha* or freedom of scientific progress; it is freedom of experiencing reality.

Thus, Ganesh Devi appeals the scholar to undertake cultural and intellectual engagements that are being ignored. He has studied various factors which are responsible for the creative process. Ganesh Devi is cultural hero who represents very important and useful information about the formation of culture and language both useful for the creative process.

### Reference:

1. Devy, Ganesh. "The Being of Bhasha", *After Amnesia*, Hyderabad, India: Orient Blackswan, 2015. (All references are taken from the above book)