Bhasha Annual Report 1999-2000

The Trust, Legal Status and our Colleagues

Bhasha, a term that was used by Panini (3^{rd} century B.C.) to describe regional varieties and speech forms, is used in modern Indian Languages to signify 'language', 'speech', language-variety' and 'dialect'. In the Geeta the term 'Bhasha' is used to mean as in standard Sanskrit, 'definition'. We use the term 'Bhasha' to represent the 'voice' of tribals and the articulation of their selfhood.

Bhasha Research & Publication Centre was set up as a Trust in April 1996 (Registration number: E/4969/ Vadodara). The Trust has secured the necessary permission for exemption on donations to the Trust under the provisions of Income-Tax Act, Article 80 (G). **Bhasha** is registered under Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 1979 for accepting foreign donations and funds (Permission number: 041960098)

Among the main objectives of the Trust are:

To undertake documentation of linguistic, literacy and artistic heritage of tribal communities in India and to publish documented materials.

To collaborate with national academies of art and literature and research institutes engaged in tribal art and related imaginative activity for the purpose of undertaking or encouraging research in tribal art and literature.

To establish a campus for creating an institute for the promotion of tribal languages, literature, arts and culture with a view to initiating formal education in the area of conservation of tribal imagination.

Bhasha works with the help of three groups of persons: the Trustees, the Staff, volunteers and the community of academic colleagues associated with its various activities. All close associates of **Bhasha** are teachers, folklorists, artists or thinkers. None of has affiliation with any political party.

TRUSTEES

Shri Bhupen Khakhar, Settler of the Trust Prof. G. N. Devy, Chairman & Managing Trustee Smt. Sandhya Gajjar, Secretary Dr. Ravikant Joshi, Treasurer Smt. Nisha Grover Prof. Surekha Devi Shri Virendranath Chauhan, Maharaja of Chhota Udepur Prof. Jyoti Bhatt Shri Bhagubhai Patel Smt. Mahasweta Devi

STAFF

Smt. Aruna Joshi, M.A. (English Literature), M.P.A. (Dramatics) Ms. Nima Gandhi, M.A. (Literature) Smt. Sonal Baxi, M.A., M. Phil (English Literature) Smt. Chaiti Salunke, M.A. (Literature) Ms. Aparna Sule, M.A. (Economics) Ms. Bina Sengar, M.A. (History) Shri Vipul Kapadia, B.Com, M.C.S. Shri Neeraj Kenge, B.Com Shri Rakesh Jadhav, S.S.C Smt. Manisha Varia, M.A. (Gujarat Literature) Shri Vinod Mistry, B.Com Shri Nagin Rathwa, B.A. (Sanskrit) Shri Naran Rathwa, B.A. (Gujarati) Shri Hari Rathwa, Artist Shri Varsan Rathwa, Artist Shri Ramsing Rathwa, Community Work Shri Tansing Rathwa, Community Work Smt. Champa Rathwa, Social Worker Shri Kamlesh Prajapati, Social Work Shri Karsanbhai Rathwa, Gardener

CLOSE ASSOCIATES

Shri Chamulal Rathwa, Khandbara Shri Dahyabhai Vadhu, Ahwa Shri Subhash Pawra, Dhulia Shri Dhirubhai Patel, Jambusar Shri Subhash Ishai, Chhotaudepur Dr. Sudhir Deore, Satana Shri Rajesh Gumane, Ahmedabad Dr. Ajay Dandekar, Pune Shri Atmaram Rathod, Yavatmai Dr. Bhagwandas Patel, Khedbrahma Shri Kanji Patel, Lunawada Ms. Jignasa Patel, Khedbrahma Shri Avinash Rathod, Beed Shri Sahebrao Rathod, Beed Shri Vikram Chaudhari, Bardoli Shri Surmal Vahonia, Santrampur Smt. Gita Chauhan, Baroda Shri Ratan Kodekar, Ahmedabad Shri Tridip Suhrud, Ahmedabad

ACTIVITIES

The activities undertake by Bhasha are primarily academic, However, we believe that it is also necessary make certain social and economic interventions in the communities that we study. Such interventions include defending the human rights of tribal communities, particularly the nomadic and denotified communities, Besides, Bhasha is primarily not an activist organisation; we attach a great importance to publishing the results of research and field work. As such the attention of Bhasha is focused at once towards institution building, publishing as well as defending human rights and empowering for the year 1999-2000 contained in the following pages is divided in three sections:

- a. Academic activity
- b. Publications
- c. Community work

ACADEMIC ACTIVITY

TRIBAL ACADEMY

It has been a long term plan of the Centre to establish a national-level Tribal Academy in a tribal village in order to give a new direction to tribal studies and research in India.

The Government of Gujarat had given us a Ten-acre piece of land in Tejgadh, ninety kms. East of Baroda for the proposed Tribal Academy. The Foundation Stone for the Tribal Academy was laid at the hands of Shri Sundersinh Bhandari, the Governor of Gujarat in a ceremony attended by more than five thousand tribals. The Board of Trustees have drawn the Constitution of the Academy and have formed the Board of Advisors comprising Smt. Mallika Sarabhai, Dr. Chandrashekhar Kambar and Dr. Jyotindra Jain.

Shri Karan Grover, the architect for the Academy has prepared the plans for the campus. These plans were presented before the Board of Trustees and Smt. Mallika Sarabhai. The plans have already been approved by the Town Planner and the Distric Collector. Meanwhile, we have been negotiating with the State and the Central Government for getting national recognition for the Academy.

We first sought a recommendation from Shri Keshubhai Patel, Chief Minister of Gujarat, who forwarded our proposal to Shri Jual Oram, Union Minister for Tribal Affairs, In this connection, Dr. G. N. Devy had a meeting with Shri Jual Oram. Subsequently, Shri Bhupen Khakhar, Smt. Mahasweta Devi, Smt. Sonal Mansing and Dr. G. N. Devy had a meeting with the Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpeyi to discuss the possibility of the Adacemy getting national recognition and financial support.

The scope of the Academy will be national and the subject of study chosen by it will be tribal culture, communication and their development.

The first Diploma Programme in Tribal Studies (D.T.S.) is scheduled to commence from August 2000.

BUILDING A LIBRARY

The Tribal Academy is in the process of developing a library of international standard. It will have reading material on indigenous people, culture, arts and languages. The library will be used not only for references by the trainees and staff but also as a study place for students from the nearby communities and as a public library used by anybody interested in its resources. The Gordhanbhai Hathibhai Patel Trust has given during the year an initial grant of Rs. 2,00,000/- for the books and infrastructure. We have already purchased books worth Rs. 1,58,000/-, More Substantial grants have been committed, which will enable us to make a modest beginning with at least 20,000 volumes by December 2000.

RESEARCH

Due to Bhasha's initiative in the field of tribal studies, many academies from various Indian and overseas universities have begun to take up research themes related to tribal culture for M. Phil, and Ph. D dissertations.

Renowned linguist Dr. David Dalby, Linguasphere Observatory, Wales who had visited the Centre in 1998, published the Linguasphere Register which includes data on endangered languages of India, provided by Bhasha.

ARCHEOLOGICAL SITE

Dr. Ajay Dandekar the K.T.M. Hegde fellow(1998-99), undertook the survey of the medieval archeological site discovered near Tejgadh. The site comprises a 3 km long fortification and ancient rock paintings at the foot of the Koraj Hill in the close vicinity of the Tribal Academy campus. Following the pilot survey dine by Dr. Dandekar and his team of archeologists from the Deccan Callege, Pune, their report on the site has been published in the Archeological Survey of India (A.S.I) Journal. The excavation will begin as soon as permission is received from the A.S.I.

In this connection we have also written to the Defence Minister, Shri

Photo

George Fernandes to send the team of Lt. Col. Umesh Prasad of the 23rd Infantry Division which discovered similar rock shelters in the Kaimur Hills of Bihar, to explore the Tejgadh site which may provide evidences of the historical and archeological continuity of the tribal belt.

WORKSHOPS

During the year Bhasha orgainsed the following workshops:

- 1. A two-day workshop on Tribal Music and performing Arts at Tejgadh in which many tribal artists from Baroda, Sabarkantha, Dang, Ahmedabad, Godhra and Dahod participated. Renowned dance criric Dr. Sunil Kothori and musicologist Dr. Alaknanda Patel chaired the sessions.
- 2. A workshop in collaboration with Gujarati on Documenting Tribal Culture & Knowledge Systems at Tejgadh for providing orientation to a documentation team of the Surabhi Foundation for Research & Cultural Exchange, Bombay.
- 3. A National Seminar in collaboration with the Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya (IGRMS), Bhopal on Social Indentity of Denotified & Nomadic Communities.
- 4. After our modest beginnings in the field of publishing in tribal dialects, we found it desirable to launch **Bhasha Publications for Social Transformation.** As a brainstorming exercise we conducted a workshop on publication with well known scholars in the field of tribal literature, arts and culture as well as with leading publishing houses such as Orient Longman and National Book Trust.
- 5. An in house meeting of all staff and associates of Bhasha to take a review of the work done during the last four years was organised in Baroda.
- 6. We organised a day long event in collaboration with the National Institute of Design at Ahmedabad which included lectures, a slide show, discussions, screening of the film Hazar Chaurasi ki Maa and an exhibition of tribal arts and crafts. The event titled Tribals: *An Inward Eye* was well-attended by scholars, students and the tribals themselves. The lectures were delivered on varied topics by Shri K.P. Rao, Dr. Meena Radhakrishna, Dr. Ajay Dandekar and Dr. K. K. Charkavarty.
- 7. As a part of the Social Awareness and Environmental Exposure Programme, a group of 56 students of the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad visited Choota Udepur from 7 to 17 February 2000.

VERRIER ELWIN MEMORIAL LECTURE

The IVth Verrier Elwin Memorial Lecture was delivered by eminent crafts activist Smt. Jaya Jaitly on Tribal Identities through Craft in Baroda on 4th February 2000. The dias was shared by the Chancellor of the University of Baroda Smt. Mrinalinidevi Puar and eminent artists Shri Bhupen Khakhar, Shri Sankho Chaudhari and Smt. Sonal Mansingh. The next of the Lecture has been published.

VISITORS AND FELLOWS

During 1999-2000 eminent writer Smt. Mahasweta Devi, Dr. Makarand Paranjape, Dr. Mohan Agashe, Smt. Mallika Sarabhi, Dr. K.P. Rao, Joint M.D., Trifed, French

Documentary maker Mr. Alain Dussort, BBC correspondent Ms. Lucy Williamson who has already broadcast a programme on Dhol magazine and Chharanagar settlement on the World Service, Smt. Sangeeta Mahindra of Trifed, Delhi, Shri Ramsing Rathwa, M.P. visited Bhasha.

Ms. Susanne Baer, Germany and Ms. Nikki Galea, Malta worked with Bhasha as Research Fellows in the field of Tribal Studies as a part of the AIESEC exchange programme. Ms. Dana Bohlender, Germany also visited the Centre to study Tribal Arts and Culture.

PUBLICATION

The following publications were brought out during the year: *Zhaman Zanariyun* Re, is a collection of songs related to the *Haleni* and *Kudaniyun* dances of the Tadvis of the Vadodara district of Gujarat. Smt. Revaben Tadvi, who has spent more than 40 years in research with the Tadvi artists has complied the book. The book has been published with the help of Gujarati Sahitya Akademi, Gandhinagar. This is the first collection which gives a description of t he dances and dance songs of the tribals of Central Gujarat. *Helani* and *Kudaniyum* dances are performed at the time of marriage and the songs with the simplicity of language form a significant part of the oral folk tradition. The script used in the book is Gujarati. The songs are in Tadvi dialect with Gujarati notes. The book also facilitates the readers with a glossary of Tadvi words.

Telaavne Mele, the first (Rathwi) Bhili novel is written by Shri Shankarbhai Tadvi. The author has spent more than 30 years among the tribal artists from Chhota Udepur, Beginning with the joy and merriment of a *mela*, the novel gradually builds upon the historical, social and cultural facets of the Rathwa community.

The IVth Verrier Elwin Memorial Lecture Tribal Identity Through Craft was delivered by renowned crafts expert Smt. Jaya Jaitly on 4th February 2000 in Baroda. The next of the lecture is published by the Centre.

Dhol, a magazine published in as many as 8 tribal languages has been one of the publications of Bhasha. Dhol was founded in 1997 as platform for voicing of the perceptions and concerns of tribal thinkers and activists. The unique feature of the magazine is its exclusive use of dialectics as they are spoken by tribal communities in different tribal regions of western India. Initially, the magazine was brought out on experimental basis; however, the response to it was so overwhelming that it was decided to make it a regular periodical.

By now, Dhol has come to acquire a central place in the cultural transactions of tribals in western India. The significant role played by it in bringing to light the tribal dialectics has received a wide recognition in media.

All editors of Dhol are tribals themselves. The Chief Editor of Dhol is Smt. Aruna Joshi who coordinates with Shri Dahyabhai Vadhu (Kukna language), Shri Subhash Pawra (Pawri language), Shri Chamulal Rathwa (Dehwali language), Ms. Jignasa Patel (Dungri

Bhili language), Shri Surmal Vahonia (Panchmahali Bhili language) and Shri Rajesh Gumane (Bhantu language). We are in the process of adding two more tribal languages. Chaudhari (ed. Shri Vikram Chaudhari) and Gor Banjara (ed. Shri Avinash Rathod and Shri Sahebrao Rathod) to this movement of documenting the oral tradition of tribals. All first issues of Dhol for the year 2000 are published as a special Bhil issue in Ahirani, Rathwi, Pawri and Kukna languages. Considering the interest of Gujarati and Marathi speakers who do not know tribal languages but are keen to know more about tribal literature and culture, we will shortly be publishing Dhol in Gujarati and Marathi languages. Budhan, which began as a newsletter for the Denotified & Nomadic Tribes -Right Action Group has now turned in to a regular quarterly journal. Three issues of Budhan were brought out during the year. Edited by Dr. G.N. Devy this English newsletter covers the social and cultural aspects of the stigma attached to them. Budhan has helped us to form a nerwork of activities, lawyers, legal authorities, thinkers and young researchers who are now making conscious efforts in the direction of study, intervention and helping these communities. We are now planning to bring out a similar newsletter for the communities themselves in languages like Bengali, Marathi, Hindi and Gujarati.

Community work

FAIR PRICE FOR TRIBAL PRODUCTS

With Trifed it was possible for the tribal farmers of Chhota Udepur region to get reasonable value for their agricultural produce with no intermediary involved in the transaction. This enabled the farmers to be free of the exploitative market situation.

A considerable amount of progress was made in the direction of collaborating with Trifed in setting up an outlet for the craftworks produced by tribals in Chhota Udepur. Some of this artwork was earlier purchased by the Tribes shop in Delhi, While the proposal is being considered at Trifed, Delhi, the District Collector (Baroda) has agreed to lease a suitable piece of land for the shop in Baroda. This outlet will be developed as a tribal haat which will also have performances and demonstration of tribal art apart from the sale of every tribal commodites.

MICRO - CREDIT

We started forming Self-help Groups in the Chhotaudepur, Kawant and pavi-Jetpur talukas of Baroda District with a view to encourage saving and providing small loan facilities to the tribals. The aim was to bring economic empowerment to tribals. At present, they have been borrowing from private money lenders at the interest rate of 80 % p.a. This situation needs to be changed as the first priority in tribal upliftment. The first SHG was formed in July 1999. So far one hundred SHGs in about twentyfive villages have been participating in the scheme, the members of which are more than 1200 in number. The process of internal lending has already begun. Thanks to the active interest of Shri Sunil Vakil and Shri Manoj Desai of the Rotary Club of Vadodara Metro, the Raopura branch of the Punjab National Bank has agreed to offer substantial credit facilities to the SHGs.

TRAINNING COURSES

With the help of the Tribal Sub-plan, Chhota Udepur we have started a Computer Centre at Tejgadh for school and college students of nearby villages. Majority of these students are tribals. 120 students have completed their basic training. We now offer both basic and advanced courses for the students. The Sub-plan had also given a grant with which we conducted two-month training classes for *pithora* painting and sculpture.

PROTECTION FROM THEFT

We held a workshop at Tejgadh in collaboration with the Department of Police (Baroda Rural) on Self-Defence, More than 4000 tribals from various villages participated in the same.

Shri Vivek Shrivastava, DSP, Baroda Rural and other local Police Officers appeared to the tribals living on the borders of Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh to fight against the attacks of dacoits with courage without endangering the lives of people. The involvement of the police increased the self confidence of the tribals in fighting these attacks. The aim of the exercise was to see how the morale of the tribals could be boosted and the use of arms could be reduced.

ARCHERY COMTEPETITION

An Archery Competition was held between the tribals and the Police Department (Rural) at Tejgadh. 120 tribals and 25 police officers took part in the competition. The winners were given the Eklavya trophy and medals. All participants were given certificates. Among the dignitaries present on this occasion were Shri K.I.N. Rao, DSP, Dahod, Shri Arun Sutaria, Smt. Jaya Jaitly, Smt. Sonal Mansing, Dr. K. K. Chakravarty, and Shri K.P. Rao.

FAMILY PLANNING PROGRAMME

We facilitated a workshop organised by the District Development Office on family planning for newly wed couples in the Chhota Udepur region, Due to the use of innovative methods developed by Smt. Anju Sharma, D.D.O, the workshop became an enjoyable experience for the participants.

SPORTS

The Children of Tejgadh village, most of whom are studying in the Tejgadh Primary School have been regular readers of the library set up by Bhasha. This year's certificates for achievement in studies and sports at the annual sports-meet of the region were prepared and given away by **Bhasha**

TOWARDS AN ARTISTS' CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETY

Last year the Centre had organised a workshop for tribal artists. Everything produced was entirely according to the desires of those who participated. The result of this workshop was a unique collection of wooden sculptures, pithora paintings, beadwork, pottery and textile material, all related to tribal ritual and myths. At the end of the workshop it was resolved to register an Artists' Co-operative Society. After a series of meetings with these artists we have now formed the Society and application for the same has been submitted to the Office of Registration of Co-operative Societies. The core group of the society includes the following well-known tribal artists from the Chhoa Udepur region:

Kocharbhai Thawarbhai Rathwa
Gulsingbhai Badgabhai Rathwa
Balubhai Kaliyabhai Rathwa
Balubhai Kaliyabhai Rathwa
Mansingbhai Dhanjibhai Rathwa
Chiliyabhai Hamirbhai Rathwa
Chiliyabhai Jamsingbhai Rathwa
Savitaben Narsingbhai Rathwa
Jankiben Parsingbhai Rathwa
Pariben Chhaganbhai Rathwa
Radatiyabhai Hatubhai Rathwa
Nanjibhai Fatubhai Rathwa
Bhikabhai Bhagdabhai Rathwa
Dhulesingbhai Khimjibhai Rathwa

During the year four exhibitions of tribal artwork were organised in Baroda city for the Tribal Artists Co-operative at Yuvraj Fatehsinh Gymkhana, Fatehgunj; Air Force Mela, Makarpura; Jagdish Hall, Alkapuri and Tejas Vidyalaya, Subhanpura. A team of young artists who are members of the Co-operative Society participated in the exhibition in Delhi, Ahmedabad, Mumbai and Bhopal.

NINTH DAY OF NAVARATRI – FAIR

Dusshera, the finale of Navratri, the nine-day festival, is one of the main festivals of tribals. The day before Dassehra is usually the beginning of the celebrations. Tribals gather in haats on this day in large numbers to prepare for the next day. Bhasha decided to the Ninth day of Navratri Fair (Navma Nortano Melo) at Tejgadh every year. This year this *mela* coincided with artisans from *Gujarati* also participated in it.

THE CYCLIST CRUSADORS

One may think that a mobile van is a typical NGO feature. However Bhasha has not acquired it so far. But this does not deter our dedicated colleagues from moving on by cycles in tribal villages for their work in remote areas even in adverse conditions. In fact, a cycle is much more desirable than four-wheeler. May it be mobile library, conducting surveys and collecting statistics, holding micro-credit meetings, helping the community in developmental work, these young enthusiasts are an important two-way channel between **Bhasha** and the tribals.

A THOUGHT FOR MIGRATING TRIBALS

This year we began Chotaro – a programme for migrating tribals in Baroda to help them get facilities of education, medical aid, shelter and low-priced ration. An extensive survey of migrant tribals in Baroda carried out by **Bhasha** facilitated the idea of helping these tribals who come here from the districts of Baroda, Dahod, Godhra, Bharuch, etc. and also from nearby states like Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. Their number is at least

60,000 per year. In this connection we have been holding meetings with these tribals on every new moon day (their usual fortnightly off from work) to discuss the various problems faced by them in Baroda. More than 1500 migrant tribals from as many as 10 areas of the city where they usually gather in search of everyday labour, participated in these meetings. Officers from the District Supply Department of the State Government also participated in the same. As promised by these officers, the process for issuing temporary ration cards (valid for three months) has already begun.

As a part of this programme we held several street meetings at Limkheda, Wankol and Bandibar in Dahod district to discuss the exorbitant bride-price rates prevailing in this area. The aim of this campaign was to sensitise the tribal youth.

WORK WITH DENOTIFIED AND NOMADIC TRIBES

After Smt. Mahasweta Devi's moving lecture on Denotified Tribes delivered in Baroda in 1998, we formed the *Denotified & Nomadic Tribes – Rights Action Group*.

As a result of the DNT-RAG's continuous dialogue with the National Human Rights Commission, Honorable Justice J.S. Verma called a meeting of the Chief Secretaries of Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Rajasthan and Karnataka. Smt. Mahasweta Devi, President, DNT-RAG and Dr. G. N. Devy, Secretary, DNT-RAG participated in the meeting.

The most significant decision taken was to repeal the Habitual Offender's Act. Also, the DNT-RAG has been asked to take up a survey of the socio-economic conditions of the denotified communities in these states, on the basis of which these communities may be provided education and employment. It was decided to appoint a retired senior police officer in each of these states to identify atrocity cases against the denotified communities and to report them to the NHRC. Moreover, the syllabi of institutions such as the National Police Academy will be revised in order to sensitise the trainees towards the denotified communities.

In order to enliven and sustain the cultural practices of the denotified and nomadic communities of Gujarat the DNT-RAG holds a Cultural Convention every year at Kaleshwari Naal in Panchmahals. This year the *mela* was held in collaboration with Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalya, Bhopal. Artists, acrobats, performers belonging to various communities like Bajanias, Nats, Turi, Wadi, Chharas, Madari, Waghri, etc, participate in this *mela* in large numbers. Shri Kanjibhai Patel co-ordinated the entire event.

MEDIA COVERAGE

Artists on issues related to tribals and special features on various activities of **Bhasha** were published in *Indian Express. The Times of India, The week, India Today, The Hindu, The Maharashtra Times, Sandesh, Guajrat Samachar, Mumbai Samachar, Loksatta and Library.* Special audio-visual programmes on our work were also broadcasted on the Voice of America, Star News, BBC and Akashwani. We hope that

due to this awareness in media, partly initiated by **Bhasha**, there will be a growing interest in tribal culture.

BHASHA GOES ON INTERNET

From a modest beginning of one donated computer machine in the year 1996, we now have 8 computer units with us, which are mainly used for computer training and publication.

To help **Bhasha** in availing the internet facilities, Dr. Henry Schwarz of Georgetown University, US has designed and hosted a website for **Bhasha**. The Web Address is www.georgetown .edu/departments/pjp/dnt-rag. A close associate of **Bhasha** Dr. Schwarz has also been regularly updating worldwide and getting associated internationally. A similar website for the Tribal Academy is being designed by Shri C. C. Choksi & Co.

Annual Income and Expenditure

Income: Rs. 17,00,000 Expenditure: Rs. 15,50,000

During the period April 1999 and May 2000, Bhasha received funds from the following organisations:

Action Aid, Bangalore: Rs. 5,64,000 Shri Gordhanbhai Hathibhai Patel Trust, Baroda: Rs. 2,00,000 Building fund: 3,50,000 United Way of Baroda, Baroda: Rs. 31,500 Tribal Sub-plan, Chhotaudepur: Rs. 1,53,350 Trifed, Delhi: Rs. 50,000 Oxfam India Ltd.: Rs. 1,08,208 Occasional donations: Rs. 49,400 Sale of Art work: Rs. 1,37,333 Sale of Subscription of Publication: Rs. 12,200 Bank Interest and Fixed Deposit Interest: Rs. 44,000