

Saptak



Reflections of a dreamer

Ganesh Devy

Reflections of a Dreamer

Why did I think of taking up any work at all with the adivasis? Was it a romantic fascination for the unknown and the inscrutable? Was it an ideologically charged move into a social sector? Was it a pure academic project of intellectual adventure? Or was it a turning away from the tired urban social-scape?

The answer is, honestly, I do not know. It all happened to me like a current happens to a stream, restlessness to the waves and greening to a tree. If they do not know how or why, why should I?

In 1984 I had planned to set up a school in an adivasi village; but I could not. In 1987-88 I took up relief work in drought hit Savli-villages, but had to give it up. In 1992, I thought I would start travelling through the adivasi villages collecting their songs and stories; but I did not. At last in 1996 my body, mind, family and financial condition together gave a go ahead.

I was never alone in the work from the very beginning. Everybody helped me. Former students from the Baroda University came as unpaid volunteers. Others started bringing in monetary contributions. Yet others came forward to own up the ideas and execute them. Many brought new ideas. Of all, my Adivasi Academy students! I have never ceased to learn from them.



I have not been good at inventing names and so I always chose simple words : Bhasha for the Trust, Adivasi Academy for the institute of experimental learning, Dhol for the magazine of tribal concerns, Vacha for the museum of voice, Samveg for the learning cottage, Vikas for the development-projects-complex, Samas for the forum of likeminded literary persons and simply Tribals First for the first adivasi-managed tribal craft and cultural centre. I thought fewer the words the better.

In 1996, I went to Saputara looking for tribal stories. Then some adivasis came forward to share their songs and stories based in their profound memory. They then wanted to try their hand at the print medium. Now they write books, publish them through Bhasha, edit magazines, write plays, direct and perform them, organise adivasi literary meets. They have now become a powerful movement. Our time together has been short, but their waiting in the past had been long. They decided to speak. Bhasha facilitated this adivasi voice.



Though everyday of the last seven years has been a new learning experience, the days have not been all joy and excitement. When one works with the adivasis one just cannot escape the pain and misery surrounding their existence. There is, for instance, the incurable genetic mutation causing the sickle cell anaemia, the land alienation due to the stringent forest act, the forced migration to the construction labour market since employment opportunities as well as agricultural irrigation are not sufficiently available; and, of all, the plight of the nomads mistakenly branded as criminals, a moving story of a grave social injustice.



Had Bhasha not turned its attention to these issues we would have suffered from a sense of ethical inadequacy. A purely academic study of an adivasi language or a merely aesthetic appreciation of the adivasi art may have been attempted in the past; but in our time, if these interests do not go firmly together with the concern for the economic empowerment and the human rights protection, the project ought to be seen as a deeply flawed one. Bhasha naturally decided to weld together the aesthetic and the socio-economic concerns. May that be seen in the long term as Bhasha's positive contribution by the rest of the world. The adivasis themselves have come to realise the need for a comprehensive approach to their life and future, and have come to recognise Bhasha as their friend.



The trust that the adivasis have put in Bhasha is phenomenal. The Gram Vikas Kendras in seven locations are now working with nearly two hundred ten villages, bringing to them micro-credit self help groups, food grain banks, water harvesting cooperatives, non-formal schools, craft training and healthcare. All this work is managed by the adivasi men and women trained at the Tribal Academy of Tejgadh. They know that development does not mean becoming clones of the urban population. They have decided to become self-reliant. In their hearts, the days of subsidy and of a mere subsistent agricultural economy are over. The pride in their own ability to handle their developmental concerns that the adivasis working with the Gram Vikas Kendras have is the kind of new energy that will inspire them to create new ideas and imaginative expression. Real life concerns cross over into aesthetics in Bhasha, as in all truly great aesthetic experiments.

When I started the work, I did not know where from the funds would come. Our ideas were somewhat unusual and we did not know how to market them smartly. Somehow, and quite often miraculously, funding support kept coming to us, though never in tune with the requirements and never with any regularity. The precarious existence of Bhasha has now been a habit for everybody associated with it. However, for such ventures and experiments, this is but as expected.

The work during the last seven years has been mainly an exploration. It has brought setbacks and disappointments but also great friendships and unexpected gains. For instance, to find that a very ancient rock painting and other relics of a forgotten royal settlement had been lying hidden in time on the border of the Tribal Academy's campus was an unbelievable stroke of good luck. Then there were the life stories of those wrongly implicated in crime or had been actually leading a lunar life. These stories, heard day after day, and the characters one met in real time have taught me to look at life with a wet gaze.



Visitors and friends keep coming to Bhasha and Tejgadh from different villages, towns, states and continents. They invariably ask me about the future plans of Bhasha. Usually, ngos, vos and npos like to stake a claim to the future. In Bhasha's case, however, we don't know if it will survive, if the Tribal Academy will achieve any greatness as an institution of excellence. I do not know if Bhasha's fame will go far and wide. I do not know if this modest experiment will count in a future social history. All that I know is that those who joined the Bhasha experiment are now changed beyond recognition. I know that the adivasis have come to recognise the importance of self-reliance. Bhasha is happy to be an organisation of small print rather than bold headlines. The graphics of those small prints are exactly as what I had dreamt they would be.

After the first seven years of Bhasha I can say, "Well, here we are !"



Bhasha

Many persons have asked us what 'bhasha' stands for. It is not an acronym.
It is itself. 'Bhasha' means language, expression, voice.

Research

Bhasha is a collective attempt of a large group of adivasi and other scholars to
understand the culture, history, society and arts of the adivasis and
the nomadic communities.



Publication

Bhasha has brought several adivasi languages to the print medium. It offers adivasi thought and imagination a platform to voice itself.



Who?

G. N. Devy, Ravikant Joshi, Nisha Grover, Surekha Devi, Sandhya Gajjar founded Bhasha Trust.
The late Bhupen Khakhar became its settler.

When?

Bhasha was conceptualised by G. N. Devy in 1994.
Bhasha Trust was established in 1996.
Dhol magazine was launched in 1997.
Budhan magazine was launched in 1998.
Adivasi Academy was founded in 1999.
Bhasha Publications and **Samas** took a concrete form in 2000.
Developmental Services were created in 2002.
Tribals First and **Budhan Theatre Group** came up in 2003.

Where?

Bhasha Trust, Bhasha Publications, Samas
at 6, United Avenue, Near Dinesh Mills, Baroda.
Adivasi Academy at Mandar, Tejgadh, Chhota Udepur.
Development Services Centres
at Chhota Udepur, Panvad, Kawant, Moti Amrol, Khatiawant, Selamba, Zoz, Kantar,
in Baroda, Panchmahal and Narmada districts.
Budhan Theatre Group
at Chhara Nagar, Ahmedabad.
Denotified & Nomadic Tribes Rights Action Group
at 111 B, Pocket K, Sheikh Sarai Phase II, New Delhi 17.



Objectives

To establish a national level Tribal Academy for the promotion of tribal languages, literature, arts and culture with a view to initiate formal education in the area of conservation of tribal imagination.

To undertake study and documentation of linguistic, literary and artistic heritage of Tribal communities in India.

To stimulate and create an awareness among citizens for the preservation of tribal languages, art and imaginative life of tribal communities.

To collaborate with National Academies of Art and Literature as well as with Research Institutes for the purpose of undertaking and encouraging research in tribal art and literature.

Trustees

Smt Mahasveta Devi, Chairperson

Prof Surekha Devi, Managing Trustee

Smt Nisha Grover, Secretary

Smt Sandhya Gajjar, Treasurer

Dr G N Devy

Shri Arjun Rathwa

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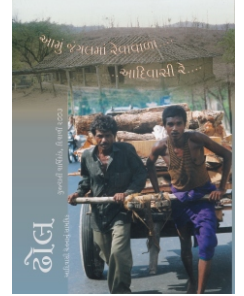
Shri Lalit Mehta

Bhasha Publications for Social Transformation



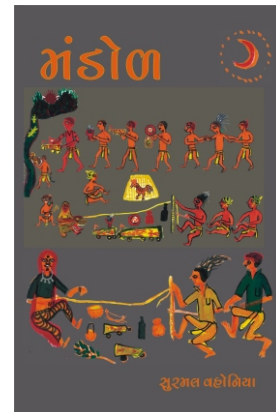
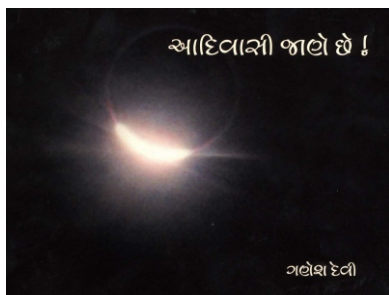
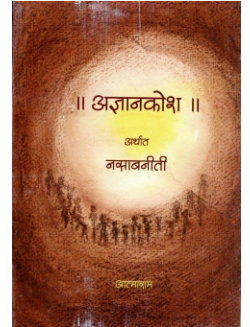
***Dhol* : the magazine of the tribal concerns -**

in Rathvi, Kunkana, Paavri, Dehwali, Ahirani, Panchmahali Bhili, Dungri Bhili, Bhaantu, Choudhari, Gor-Banjara, as well as in Marathi and Gujarati; 43 issues in all.



Books Published To Date

1. ***Paavra Samaj Va Sanskruti*** by D. G. Patil
2. ***Tejgad na Geeto*** ed. Manisha Varia & Nagin Rathwa
3. ***Jhamma Jhanjariyu Re*** by Revaben Tadvi
4. ***Telaav ne Mele*** by Shankerbhai Tadvi
5. ***Haatpudaan Saaniddhyamaay Adivasi Paavra Sanskruti*** by Subhash Pawra
6. ***Adivasi Communities and Languages of India*** ed. Nima Gadhia
7. ***Adim Taalna Sangeet*** by Sudhir Devre
8. ***Adnyaankosh arthaat nasaabniti*** by Atmaram Rathod
9. ***The Ao-Naga Oral Tradition*** by Temsula Ao
10. ***Dhola Maaruni*** ed. Bhagwandas Patel
11. ***Adivasi Jaane Chhe !*** by Ganesh Devy
12. ***Bhil Bhajan Varta : Hapiyade Honkhali*** ed. Bhagwandas Patel
13. ***Mandol*** by Surmal Vahonia
14. ***Warso*** ed. Arjunsinh Pargi
15. ***Comparative Study of Bagdavat Devnarayan and Gujarano Arelo*** by Jignasa Patel
16. ***Atmaram Kaniram Rathod Yanchya Kavita*** by Atmaram Rathod
17. ***Vikas Vichar*** by Ganesh Devy
18. ***Majhi Sanad Kuthe Aahe ?*** by Chamulal Rathwa



Development Services Centres

Students trained under the Post Graduate Diploma in Tribal Studies Programme have set up seven Development Services Centres

in three districts of Gujarat for establishing a model of integrated tribal development.

They have made several social interventions for fighting indebtedness, providing livelihood, spread of literacy and improving health care.

The work is spread over 150 villages covering 8000 families.



DSC - Projects

1. Micro-Credit Programme with 260 Self Help Groups
2. Food Grain Banks with 2800 woman members
3. Water Bank Collectives in 64 Self Help Groups
4. Single-window Food Security System
5. *Prakriti* Healthcare Clinic to address sickle cell anaemia and provide medical aid
6. Non-formal Education Centres in 42 villages for more than 1300 children
7. Horticulture in present 52 acres
8. Honey Cultivation
9. Artists' SHGs and Craft Cooperative
10. Legal Aid to Migrant Tribal Labourers
11. Nomadic Artists' *Melas*



With the establishment of the Development Services Centre at Delhi, Bhasha is poised to enter the realm of social development in urban areas.



Tribal Academy

The Adivasi Academy is established to create a unique educational environment for the study of tribal communities.

The Academy is aimed to become an institute for the study of tribal history, folklore, cultural geography, social dynamics, economy, development studies, medicine, music, arts and theatre.

With its multidisciplinary approach and related interventional measures, the Academy is striving to create a new approach of academic activism.



Objectives

To initiate higher education and research in the field of tribal history, literature, languages, economy, gender studies, human rights so as to create academic awareness about tribal society.

To translate study and research undertaken at the Academy into action oriented interventions for empowerment of marginalised communities.

To take up training and sensitisation programmes for policy makers, voluntary agencies and government officials responsible for tribal development.

To create a community of thinkers, especially from within tribal communities to create new thought processes to facilitate social and cultural change.

Board of Advisors

Prof. Ramkrishna Reddy, Former Registrar, Dravidian University, Kuppam

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Prof. Shiv Vishwanathan, Sr. Research Fellow, CSDS, New Delhi

Prof. G. N. Devy, Founder Director, AA, ; Faculty, DA-IICT, Gandhinagar

Hon. Director : Dr. Bhagwandas Patel

Elwin Memorial Lecture Series

Dr. Verrier Elwin is memorised by Bhasha for his significant contribution to documenting adivasi cultural heritage and to defining India's official policy of tribal development. Seven annual Elwin Memorial Lectures have been delivered so far:



1997 : Prof K. G. Subramanian, ***Discovering Each Other***

1998 : Smt. Mahasweta Devi, ***Denotified & Nomadic Tribes***

1999 : Dr. Ramachandra Guha, ***The Nine Lives of Verrier Elwin***

2000 : Smt. Jaya Jaitly, ***Tribal Identity Through Craft***



2001 : Justice M. N. Venkatachaliah, ***Tribals : The Present and The Future***

2002 : Shri Rajmohan Gandhi, ***Beyond Religion***

2003 : Dr. Gail Omvedt, ***Notes Toward A History of Bhills***



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NEG

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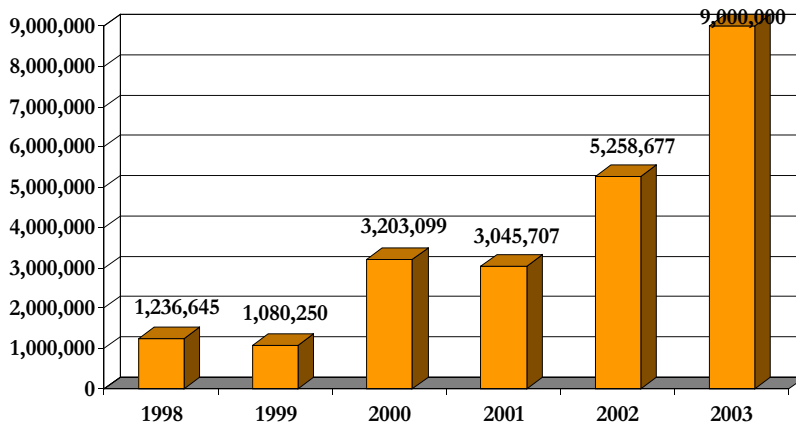
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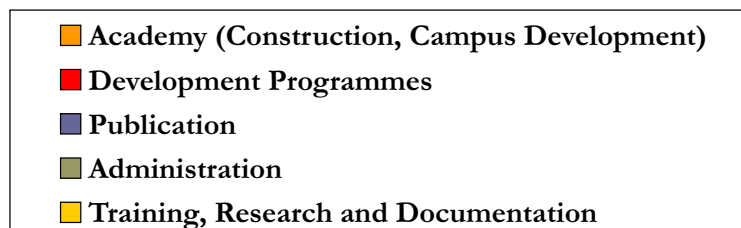
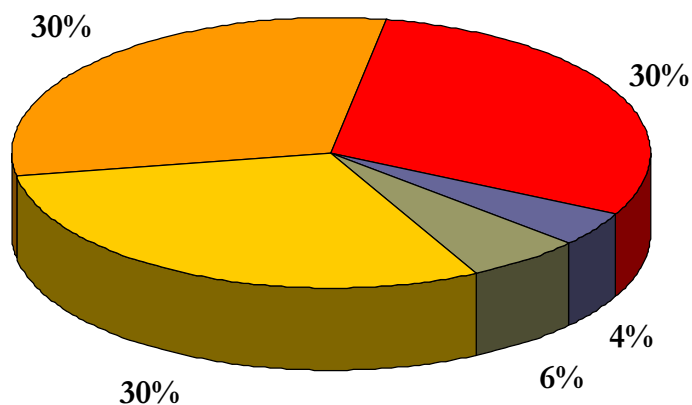
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Central Institute of Indian Languages

The National Book Trust

Trifed

DA-IICT

NID





A group of singers
from the Rathwa Indigenous community
of Gujarat in Western India

*Development
is
Self-Reliance*

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