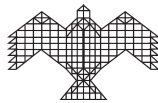


PUBLIC LECTURE SERIES

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION
A View of Higher Education in India

PROF. GANESH N. DEVY



NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ADVANCED STUDIES

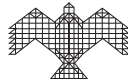
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Delivered on September 26th, 2010

EDUCATION PORTFOLIO

This lecture was delivered by Prof. Ganesh N. Devy as part of a national consultation on 'Education among Adivasis/Tribals' held at NIAS (September 26-28th, 2010) under the 'Education Portfolio'. The 'Education Portfolio' is supported by the Dorabji Tata Trust, Mumbai and its activities focus on conducting research related to issues of education at all levels. Research under the 'Platform for Education Policy' focuses on reviewing and assessing various policies at the central and state levels, while the 'Curriculum Exchange Network' focuses on developing and fostering debates and sharing of curricula for various subjects and disciplines.

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

A View of Higher Education in India

GANESH. N. DEVY

[1]

*D*espite achievements of half a century of affirmative action in higher education, legacies of discrimination, marginalisation and denial are still enmeshed in Indian social composition.

Equality as a fundamental right is guaranteed in India's Constitution. Accordingly, successive governments have tried to cope with educational and social inequalities. All of the approximately 350 state-funded universities and 16,000 colleges have been trying to provide education at a relatively low cost, not entirely unaffordable to students from the poorer classes. In several states, education to all

female students is made almost cost-free. Yet, it cannot be said that the state has succeeded in providing access to higher education for the marginalised in India. The scale of the problem is huge, and the states' resources inadequate. The reasons for the denial of access to quality education, however, cannot be ascribed merely to the enormous size of India's population or lack of adequate resources. The deprivation caused by these factors is compounded by the long history of caste hatred and the socially divisive legacy of colonialism. It is not surprising, then, that the nation has to surpass its own great achievements over the last quarter century and continue in future the process of discovering for itself the challenges in defining denial and capturing nuances of marginalisation. These nuances often go unnoticed when a simple matrix of class and caste is employed to describe Indian society which is fragmented over two thousand castes, six hundred tribes and more than a thousand mother tongues.

[2]

APHASIA

*T*he reorganisation of Indian states after Independence was carried out along linguistic lines. The languages that had scripts were counted. The ones that had not acquired scripts, and therefore did not have printed literature, did not get their own states. Schools and colleges were established only for the official languages. The ones without scripts, even if they had a great stock of wisdom carried forward orally, were not fortunate enough to get educational institutions for them.

The history of these marginalised communities during the last few decades is filled with stories of forced displacement, land alienation, eruption of violence and counter-violence. Going by any parameters of development, these communities always figure at the tail end. The situation of the communities that have been pastoral or nomadic has been even worse. Considering the immense odds against which these communities have had to survive, it is not short of a miracle that they have preserved their languages and continue to contribute to the astonishing linguistic diversity of the world. However,

if the present situation persists, the languages of the marginalised stand the risk of extinction. Aphasia, a loss of speech, seems to be their fate.

It is a daunting task to determine which languages have come closest to the condition of aphasia, which ones are decidedly moving in that direction and which ones are merely going through the natural linguistic process of transmigration. It may not be inappropriate to say that the linguistic data available to us is not fully adequate for the purpose. In India, Sir George Grierson's *Linguistic Survey of India* (1903-1923)—material for which was collected in the last decade of the 19th century—had identified 179 languages and 544 dialects. The 1921 census reports showed 188 languages and 49 dialects. The 1961 census reports mentioned a total of 1652 'mother tongues,' out of which 184 'mother tongues' had more than 10,000 speakers, and of these 400 'mother tongues' had not been mentioned in Grierson's Survey, while 527 were listed as 'unclassified'. Considering how complicated the census operations are in countries that have large migratory populations, and particularly how much the accuracy in census operations is dependent on literacy levels, it is not surprising that the data collected remains insufficiently definitive. What is surprising, however, is

that as many as 310 languages, including all those 263 claimed by less than 5 speakers, and 47 others claimed by less than a 1000 speakers, had started becoming extinct within half a century since Grierson collected language data. In other words, a fifth part of India's linguistic heritage was lost within just half a century. To appreciate the magnitude of this issue, consider the fact that at present apart from the main twenty-two languages included in the Schedule, there are nearly eighty languages with more than 10,000 speakers, and nearly 360 other languages with fewer than 10,000 speakers. Thus during the last fifty years, we seem to have lost another one third of our language diversity.

Language loss is experienced in India not just by the 'minor' languages and 'unclassified dialects', but also by 'major' languages that have long literary traditions and a rich heritage of imaginative and philosophical writings. In speech communities that claim major literary languages such as Telugu, Marathi, Gujarati, Kannada and Oriya as their 'mother tongues', the younger generations have little or no contact with the written heritage of those languages, while they are able to 'speak' the languages as 'native speakers'. It may not be inappropriate to assume that people all over the world

are paying a heavy cost for a globalised development in terms of their language heritage. This linguistic condition may be described as the condition of ‘partial language acquisition’ in which a fully literate person, with a relatively high degree of education, is able to read, write and speak a language other than her or his mother tongue, but is able to only speak but not write the language she or he claims as the mother tongue.

On the eve of Independence, a serious debate arose regarding the place of the English in Indian administration. It was decided to continue the use of English for a period of ten years until, as hoped, it would be replaced by Hindi. An official “Schedule of Languages” was included in the Constitution, listing 14 languages (in order of the number of speakers): Hindi, Telugu, Bengali, Marathi, Tamil, Urdu, Gujarati, Kannada, Malayalam, Oriya, Punjabi, Kashmiri, Assamese, and Sanskrit. There have been three amendments to this Schedule during the last 55 years, resulting in the addition of Sindhi, Konkani, Manipuri, Nepali/Gorkhali, Maithili, Santali, Bodo and Dogri.

English, nonetheless, continues to be not just the language of the judiciary and administration but also the main

medium of instruction in higher education. At present, English is moving into secondary and primary education, replacing Indian languages. Beyond this, it has also been a passport to lucrative careers. Students whose mother tongues are marginalised must battle with the language disadvantage while competing with “linguistically affluent” students.

When a speech community comes to believe that education in the other language alone is the way ahead, it decides to adapt to the new language situation. It would be pertinent therefore to consider if there is something inherent in the dominant development discourse in the contemporary world that requires diminishing of the world’s language heritage, a kind of a ‘phonocide.’ The communities that are already marginalised within their local or national context, the ones that are already a minority within their cultural contexts, the ones that have already been dispossessed of their ability to voice their concerns, are obviously placed at the frontline of the ‘phonocide.’

The issue of inequality arising out of the location of a person within a regional or national language in the Indian context is not quite analogous to the language

tension in bilingual or multilingual countries such as Canada or Spain. The remoteness from formal higher education, and therefore from economic opportunities, is acute in the innumerable linguistic hinterlands in India. The speakers of these languages have first to learn another dominant language, as well as Hindi and English, if they desire to pursue a college-level course.

Between the collective consciousness of a given community, and the language it uses to articulate the consciousness, is situated what is described as the “world view” of that community. Preservation of a language involves, therefore, respecting the world-view of the given speech-community. In such a situation, the community will have only two options: it can either reject the utopia that asserts that it is the human right to exploit the natural resources and turn them into exclusively commercial commodities, or it can reject its own world view and step out of the language system that binds it with the ecologically sensitive world view.

3

AMNESIA

Though cultivation of higher knowledge has always remained a part of Indian culture, and even if Indian thinkers in ancient and medieval times have made significant contribution to the fields of mathematics, material sciences, medicine, astronomy, architecture, arts, philosophy and literature, it was not until the colonial times that public institutions of higher learning meant for cultivation of knowledge came to be established in India. The three universities established by the colonial government in 1857 were primarily meant as regulatory bodies supervising the conduct of high-school examinations. During the first five or six decades of their existence, the courses offered by them remained restricted solely to what was then known as 'liberal arts'. It was only in the early years of the twentieth century that a few 'nationalist' centers of learning were founded and it was after First World War that a few technology schools were opened in India. Thus through the entire period of High Colonialism, from Macaulay's Minutes of 1835 to the emergence of nationalism, the main objective of higher education in India was to imbibe

colonial learning. Colonialism was not only an economic enterprise, though that was at its heart. Forms of knowledge too were profoundly influenced during the colonial experience. That is why it was often described as a 'mission to civilize India'. The influence was on both sides engaged in the encounter. Colonialism encourages the dominating culture to perceive itself in a larger than life self-image, thus turning relatively minor thinkers, poets, and scientists as having universal relevance. On the other hand, even the valuable thinking and reflection generated by the colonised culture, in its past or present, comes to be seen as diminutive and minor. Gradually, the colonised culture learns to internalise the cultural imagery and induces a cultural amnesia in its self-perception. The cultural amnesia affects the colonised culture's reading of its own history, turning it into an episodic narrative of decline rather than a causally linked story of evolution. The institutions of higher learning, together with other intellectual expressions such as the law, literature and forms of social exchange, work towards inducing this kind of cultural amnesia. The courses offered in Indian universities when India gained independence, without exception carried the burden of cultural amnesia internalised during the colonial period. Though the infra-structure of higher education has

witnessed an exponential growth during the last six decades in particular during the last twenty years, we still have not got over the amnesia affecting the course-contents. I hasten to add that I am not proposing here that we should return to some arcane and obscure scientific theories drawn from ancient or medieval Indian past, or promote forms of knowledge cultivated in our past in any anachronistic manner. What I am pointing to is the need to reconcile the ecological, sociological and intellectual requirements of Indian society with the forms of knowledge cultivated in public institutions of higher learning. Unless we learn to make this the most essential feature of all our higher educational transactions, we are not likely to produce any first rate research and really world class models of learning. On the other hand, if we do not accomplish this, we may continue to be merely vendors of knowledge developed elsewhere for meeting the social and cultural challenges in those cultures.

4

LAYERED INEQUALITIES

I have so far argued that in India higher education has managed to lose touch with languages spoken by Indian communities and, therefore, it is not able to fully access the idiom through which life is perceived outside our campuses. I have also argued that amnesiac cultures have a difficult date with intellectual activity. The loss of language and the loss of cultural memory are probably subtler factors in denial of access to higher learning. The more easily noticeable factors need to be located in the social structures and in discriminations embedded in them.

In discussions of affirmative action or social equality, two important factors distinguish India from most other countries. The first of these is the caste system, which presents a radically different dynamic from agents of marginalisation and inequality in other societies. The second is the enormous backlog resulting from at least two thousand years of social discrimination. For twenty centuries, women in India were not allowed to cast their eyes on sacred books or manuscripts, and more than two

thirds of India's population – men as well as women – were not allowed to go in the proximity of Brahmins, or those engaged in the generation of knowledge.

The marginalised, by the very logic of the term, are presumably smaller in number than the more dominant social groups. In India, however, the 'marginalised' far outnumber the dominant sectors of the society. The 'mainstream' in Indian society is an aggregate of its margins rather than being a well defined 'other' and adversary of those margins. Typically, among every 100 Indians, 6 belong to 'Denotified' or criminalised communities, 8 are tribals, 21 can be classified as religious minority, 22 form the dalit oppressed groups, and 38 persons represent the aggregate of linguistic minorities. A simple addition of these figures, however, leads to the absurd conclusion that only five percent of Indians constitute the dominant 'mainstream'. The intertwining of the patterns of domination and victimisation of various marginal groups by other marginal groups is typical of Indian society. Layering, not segmentation, is the principle that explains these complexities more adequately. Age-old tensions between one caste and another, between castes and tribes, between one tribe and other tribes, as well as frequent migrations of linguistic,

racial, or religious groups create social sedimentations of these 'marginal layers'. Thus, a dominant social group in one part of India can easily count for marginal in another part, or a group empowered at one time can easily slide back to the status of marginality soon afterwards.

One major cause of marginalisation throughout the country has been forced migration arising out of man made or natural disasters. The refugees from Bangladesh, the riot-hit Sikhs, the people of Kashmir affected by social strife, small tribal communities in the north-east at the receiving end of inter-tribal conflicts, projects-affected people uprooted and forced to migrate, families of small land-holding farmers vulnerable to crop failures and market fluctuations and victims of natural disasters such as quakes, floods and cyclones have to face rather abruptly the situation of denial of access to quality education. The internal displacement due to man-made disasters, habitat uprooting caused by natural disasters and inconsistencies in patterns of livelihood and food security, all render the map of disadvantage in India infinitely complex. Feudal attitudes and repressive moral codes that result in gender discrimination cut across urban and rural areas, as well as across linguistic, religious, caste and tribal boundaries. Moreover, the

social categories such as the disadvantaged castes (about 1200), almost all of the Adivasi communities (about 650), the 'Denotified' and nomadic groups (about 190), whose numbers and populations are by no count small, and whose relations with one another do not fit into the definition of a homogenous 'class' add considerably to the perplexing complexity involved in mapping denial in our country. Add to this infinitely complicated social wave, the religious minority groups. Organizing a reasonably defined hierarchy of disadvantage, or creating a code for measuring lack of access, is thus a daunting task, in a country saddled with legacies of fractured histories, divided society, incomparable linguistic, religious, ethnic and regional diversity, and an ever bursting population that has crossed the mark of a billion. The statement of this complexity does not, however, imply that we stop worrying about the marginalised sections at the present juncture of our march towards becoming a knowledge society. If we consider how badly these groups have lacked resources and opportunities, or how little they have benefited by the impressive infrastructure of higher education in the country, it will need no further convincing that these groups must be made the central focus of growth in higher education in India. I need not speak about the DNTs and Adivasis whose

representation in colleges and universities has not crossed a single digit percentage in correspondence with their population size. But think of the Muslim community in India. According to the 2001 Census, Muslims constitute 16.4% of the population, or a total of 174 million, but their representation in various professions is dismal. In 2001, in public sector industries and public institutions there were only 4.9% Muslims, in Central Administrative Services, 3.2%, and in the teaching profession only 6.5%. These statistics belie the claim of a democratic state that provides equal access to social goods and services. The corresponding figures for Adivasis are much worse, and those for the Denotified and nomadic communities are so pathetic that any self-respecting Indian should hang one's head in shame.

Cutting across lines of caste, tribe, religion, or gender, a person born in an Indian village is likely to be deprived of any reasonably decent education – this includes nearly fifty percent of India's population, living in 650,000 villages. The modern Indian education system has its roots in colonial history, and in colonial production systems in which Indian villages were low-priority economic entities. Leaving aside some Agricultural Universities, fewer than 10 of India's (approximately) 350

universities are in rural locations. The dramatically adverse ratio between India's rural population and the institutions of higher education relegates the entire rural population to the category of 'educationally disadvantaged'.

During the last fifty-seven years, the Constitution was amended a number of times in order to improve people's access to the means of empowerment. These amendments have resulted in creation of powerful statutory bodies, with semi-judicial and supervisory authority, such as the National Women's Commission, National Scheduled Castes Commission, National Scheduled Tribes Commission, the National Human Rights Commission and the National Minorities Commission. One would have hoped that the Constitutional guarantees and the protection mechanisms accomplish the goals for which they were created. It seems however that one must yet continue to hope.

In democracies all over the world, electoral politics inevitably envelopes public institutions, and the social or ethical imperatives quickly get subsumed within the political dynamics. The policy of reservations for marginalised sections in institutions of higher education

in India has faced this hazard far too often in the recent past. There have been violent demonstrations and inter-group clashes round the question of positive discrimination for the marginalised. Even if there has been no civil war in India on the question of the quota system in education and employment, the intensity of popular sentiment on both sides of the social divide continues to keep Indian society in a perpetual war-like mood on this issue. The number of 'seats' in the 'quota' system in institutions of medicine and engineering continues to be at the heart of the acrimonious debate. There have been numerous instances of statewide or national strikes by the entire medical fraternity just to oppose an increase in the 'quota' by even one or two seats at the super specialisation level. Against this, there have also been instances of misuse of the constitutional guarantee by political parties by raising the protection given to the marginalised classes to an unrealistic level causing harm to the interests of meritorious students. The fact is that after half a century of independence, Indian society continues to be deeply divided over the question of affirmative action in education; and it is virtually impossible to arrive at definitions of denial that will satisfy all social classes in India.

5

THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

*D*uring the first half of the twentieth century, the infrastructure of higher education grew slowly. When India became a Republic, the government began to build universities, colleges, national research laboratories, and other research on institutions. The second half of the twentieth century saw unprecedented growth in technical and higher education, from three central universities in 1951 to 18 in 2005; and from 24 to 205 state-run universities. Other institutions were also established during this period, including 95 degree-granting accredited institutions, 18 officially designated ‘Institutes of National Importance’, and seven privately-funded universities, bringing the number of universities from 27 in 1951 to 343 in 2005. Over the last five decades, then, on average six new universities were commissioned every year; and the growth has been sharper in recent years, according to data from the Indian government’s Department of Secondary and Higher Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development. During just two funding years, 2003-4 and 2004-5, the number of degree-granting colleges rose from 15,343 to 17,625.

The University Grants Commission was created as a single authority to coordinate and promote non-technical higher education in the country. Similarly, several other Research Councils were created for promoting research in various disciplines such as Medicine, Engineering, Sciences, and Social Science. The figures for student population receiving instruction in institutes of higher education show that educational institutions increased their absorption capacity between 1986 (59,82,709 students) and 2004 (100,09,137 students) to accommodate nearly five million more students. During the same period, the number of institutions offering technical Diploma, Degree, and post-graduate courses moved from 962 to 38,800, a remarkably steep increase. The budgetary allocations for higher education are made primarily by the Higher Education Department of the Human Resources Development Ministry. In addition there are special purpose allocations in the nature of affirmative action from the budgets of various other ministries, such as the Ministry of Tribal Affairs and the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. Additional funds are made available by various state governments, since education is included in the 'concurrent list' of constitutional obligations.

Do these provisions benefit every young woman or man aspiring to seek degree level or graduate education in India? More pertinently, are these infrastructure and funding provisions adequate to meeting the huge backlog of social justice needs? The answers to these questions are not heartening. For example, the disparity between educated girls and educated boys has been increasing at an alarming rate. The statistics for 2001-2002 show that nearly five million fewer girls received higher education than boys in the same age bracket. The gap in some states is substantial, as is evident from the examples of Karnataka (11 females: 48 males) and Orissa (11 females: 74 males). This is generally the story, though there are a few states in which the number of females receiving education is substantially higher than the number of males: in Pondicherry, for example, the ratio of females to males is 13 to 10, and in Chandigarh, 40 to 27. The enrollment of students of both genders has increased by seven million over the last sixty years, but the percentage of girls to boys has moved up from one-tenth to merely two-tenths of this newly educated class. In other words, there are nearly a few million girls less than there should have been in college enrollment, for a variety of cultural, social and economic reasons.

A similar disparity exists between students from rural areas who can avail themselves of higher education and those in the urban areas. The picture of higher education varies from state to state, with economically poorer states having a lower percentage of students enrolled in higher education. Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh have not done as well in the area of higher education as some other smaller states, or the Union Territories such as Goa and Chandigarh. The more recently created tribal states of Chattisgarh and Jharkhand show a far bleaker picture. The percentage of students who manage to obtain bachelor's degrees in relation to the overall population of the same age group has remained confined to a single digit. The proportion of students from disadvantaged social classes enrolling for degree programmes is, predictably, much smaller; and the proportion of such students to students from other classes does not conform to the ideas of affirmative action conceptualised in India's Constitution and educational policy.

Over the last quarter of a century it has been the lot of regional universities meant for distance education and continuing education and the Indira Gandhi National Open University to grapple with the legacies of multi-

layered denials in the Indian society. The achievements of these have been impressive, particularly in that they have accomplished so much in an area and in a manner that have been unprecedented in our history. But the challenge is vast in its scope as well as in its complexity.

It is a wide-spread feeling, and to an extent a genuine concern, that quality of learning and research suffers in the process of providing the marginalised access to higher education on what are seen as considerations that are extraneous to academic activity. One needs to revisit this argument for a careful scrutiny. It is of course true that students coming from villages will fare poorly if the medium of instruction is kept confined to the English language alone. It is similarly true that an Adivasi student, who has not even handled simple gadgets at home, will feel completely lost if asked to face an online computerised session of instruction. It is the same if some urban students were to be asked to appear for a viva examination standing knee deep in mud in a farm. These superficial descriptions of difficulties posed and faced, however, tell us nothing about how knowledge is produced, transmitted and acquired. I would like to have a slightly different take on this issue.

Historians of ideas tell us that ideas, and indeed even paradigms, constituting what comes to be recognised as knowledge often undergo radical changes. If the change is merely topical or minor in significance, it acquires at the most the label of 'a new theory'. If the shift is really profound, it takes the form of an 'epistemic slide'. In history, one notices such radical epistemic shifts taking place once in a few centuries. And when an epistemic shift occurs, all theories resting upon the established episteme start undergoing corresponding changes. We know, for instance, that Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and other Greek philosophers were profound thinkers; but when their idea of the universe as a box-shaped space gave way to the Ptolemaic notion of the universe as a moral symmetry, the sciences and philosophy produced by the ancient Greek philosophers were replaced by other sciences and philosophies. Later, Galileo and Copernicus made these 'new sciences' look like idiotic conceits. This has happened in Indian tradition of knowledge as well. Behind all the major epistemic shifts lies a new vision of the cosmos, in its dimensions of Space and Time or matter and energy, or in terms of its geometry or calculus. Today, faced with the impending spectre of climate change and irreversible environmental depletion, the life of earth has started looking decidedly finite with the end of the species

and all forms of life close in sight. Consequently, in the field of learning and sciences a major epistemic shift has been taking place. The French Canadian philosopher Lyotard described, in his *Report on Knowledge*, this paradigm shift with the phrase 'The Post-modern condition.' According to him, for us there is no possibility of a single universal knowledge, rather, we have to learn to live with many 'knowledges', each of which is no longer an analogy to the 'phenomenal world' but rather a 'paralogy', 'a narrative' of our perceptions of that world. In our country, the communities that we have so far seen as 'marginal' communities, the Adivasis and the DNTs, the coastal people and the hill people, have with them as yet the collective memories of coping with the environment and sustaining it. They still have with them, stored in those languages that our developmental logic is unwittingly destroying, paralogies of the universe which can be of immense help in averting the feared end in sight. Of course, if we continue to insist that they must learn what we have to teach to them, they will not fare well. But, is it not likely that we try to *learn* from them?

Is it not possible that the entire society is seen as a vast university, every community in it an open treasury of knowledge, as if they were collectively a vast reference

library, and the institution of learning a co-curator, a co-supervisor of that knowledge? It is possible that if we think along those lines, howsoever impractical that may appear to one's mind shaped within the institutional confines and disciplinary boundaries, we will perhaps manage to tune in with the emergent knowledge paradigm on our own terms. This will help us not only to get beyond the amnesia induced by colonialism in our thought, but also to provide solutions to ecological disasters that the disciplines developed over the last few centuries have posed before the world. In other words, the question of 'inclusion of the excluded' should no longer be seen as a question of 'grudgingly giving something because it is politically correct' but rather as an opportunity before us for shaping new fields of knowledge, novel pedagogies, and genuinely relevant curricula.

PROF. GANESH DEVY'S PUBLIC LECTURE
HELD AT NIAS LECTURE HALL
ON SEPTEMBER 27, 2010
TRANSCRIPT OF POST-LECTURE DISCUSSION

AUDIENCE RESPONSE AND DISCUSSION

Question - I:

Ganesh *bhai*, first of all I would like to take 2½% of the credit for your wonderful presentation; 2½% goes to Ram Dayalji. I think your talk was profoundly moving, inspiring, educative and enlightening. Reading from the text would have been rather boring—the same arguments, but with less passion, less directness. So thank you for this wonderful presentation. I just have a thought, not a question: you mentioned that the communities that have been historically excluded are the DNTs, Adivasis and the Muslims. At one stage you talked about how many PhDs there were, how many doctors there were from these communities. Interestingly, you didn't mention the Dalits. I want to make a suggestion—apart from a series of compelling reasons you mentioned why these communities have been excluded, there are historical reasons of British colonialism which delegitimised their knowledge systems and stigmatised them. There is also the legacy of

state policy, post-Independence, which either through ignorance or by design, continued that kind of policy of exclusion. But there is a counter example in the case of Dalits and I want to suggest to you that Ambedkar is very important. What the Muslims and the DNTs and the Adivasis have not had is an Ambedkar-like figure. There is a wonderful story told by the Kannada writer, Devanur Mahadeva, as to why Ambedkar wears a suit. He is not expected to wear a suit. If Ambedkar wears a dhoti you say "*akhir woh Harijan hai, to aur kya karen?*" Ambedkar was a symbol of energy, enterprise, initiative and an entry into the citadels of higher education. A Dalit was not expected to be having a degree from Columbia or from London or to be principal of a government law college in Mumbai; or draft the constitution and so on... Now I want to touch one aspect of the question. Of course, you know, if one is a thoroughgoing anti-modernist one would say Ambedkar has been destructive to the Dalits. Because his example, which in a sense consolidates the desire to embrace only the modern education system, also leaves the indigenous knowledge in a kind of marginal and inferior way. I don't think you are a thoroughgoing anti-modernist. I think you believe in the pluralism of knowledge. Do you think that the unavailability of the Ambedkar-like legacy is also part of the problem?

GANESH DEVY:

Perhaps we need to remind ourselves that Ambedkar was the most highly educated among 20th century Indians. He

had more degrees than any other public figure in India that time. It is also true that he did set up colleges in Bombay and his most widely known slogan was 'Educate, Organize and Agitate'. On the other hand, none among the Adivasis has said, 'Educate and Agitate'. The story of Muslim communities is a bit different because their history is different. But it is true that their leaders have historically propagated education for Muslims. Though the Dalit communities have not been receiving quality education as they should have, they are educationally a little better off than the Adivasis. Now the question: If the Adivasis had a leader who could have unified all the tribes and steered them towards the path of education, would the state of Adivasis have been different? The only answer to the question is that there has not been such a phenomenon. There have been many distinguished individuals among Adivasis. Ram Dayalji (Ram Dayal Munda), who is present here, himself is a great inspiration for the communities. I did not mention the Dalits because I work closely with Adivasis and De-notified Tribes, and being in Gujarat I have been more sensitive to the question of Muslim marginalisation.

The question about Adivasi political leaders was raised earlier by you (Dr. Ramachandra Guha) in 2001 in a workshop at Tejgadh. The answer of the Adivasis at that time was that there have been inter-tribe tensions and identity differences. That is a fact. But what I would like to suggest is that it is not necessary to have an Ambedkar for every category of social

class. For instance, there is Akka Mahadevi and other saints for the Lingayats, but there may not be an Akka Mahadevi for every sect. On the other hand, a Gandhi may come up for Gujarat or India but may not belong to any particular community.

QUESTION - II:

Sir, I have two questions: the first question touches upon the earlier comments. There is the question about the aspirations of the groups of people you are talking about (which has to play a significant role in whatever you think is a desirable system of education). So one way of putting the question is, who wants the higher education that you have in mind? I think that question has to be addressed. I mean among the Adivasis and the denotified tribes and the Muslims and the Dalits, who is really interested in the education that you have in mind, and secondly, in terms of inclusion, is university education the right place to be thinking about these issues? Because it would seem to me that if one just steps back a little bit and thinks about inclusion in society as a goal of policy, than this would happen at different levels. On the other hand, as a first approximation, the inclusion of specialised knowledge that some may argue is already happening in the current university system.

GANESH DEVY:

I am convinced that the time has come for us to change the nature of the university altogether. We no longer should

just continue the process of having more students. In some universities the numbers of students is unmanageable. The universities like Madras or Bombay or Delhi have several hundred affiliated colleges; this over-burdened system is taking us nowhere. But, does that mean that we leave out the economically disadvantage sections from higher education? Rather, I think the idea of university has to change. For example, think of this place as some kind of a nucleus for the entire 'Bangalore as the university'. The entire Bangalore city is a university, in my opinion, and the 'institutions of higher learning' are there for the wider transactions of knowledge. In that transaction, somebody may wish to give, somebody may wish to receive. We used to have very good postal service in the country. The university should be a post office of knowledge now. The entire city has to be seen as the university. That's the only way to include everybody. That's what I'm saying. Of course, what I propose will sound crazy because the entire idea of disciplines will collapse. The entire idea of degree will collapse; the idea of class will collapse.

Everybody possesses some kind of knowledge. That knowledge needs to be recognised, to be assimilated in the process of social change as a social good to be used for social well being. There's a man, or woman, for instance, quietly watering some 500 trees on the fringe of the city. That person should be given a B.Sc in Botany without his or her having to apply. Yes, we are giving unique identity-cards to everybody now. But we know that everybody possesses some

kind of unique knowledge. Let us recognise that. And let us dismiss this idea of the university which we inherited from the West. I'm not saying everything that has come from the West to us has been harmful. I have learnt a lot many good things from Western thinkers and writers. But I think we need to question the idea of university as we have inherited it. That idea has prevented so many 'others' from being recognised as knowledge holding citizens, even when they have knowledge. That's what I'm trying to point out. Now somebody might ask me "Are you thinking of the open university/distance education?" I'm saying, no, please, let's put all that in the skeleton-board of the 20th century and move forward. Please remember, ladies and gentlemen, that at the beginning of the 19th century we had no university. Citizens of India were actually thinking about what kind of university we required. They were actively debating "do we need eastern knowledge or western knowledge" and they came to a conclusion— whether that was right or not, I will pass no judgment on history. If they could carry out a debate at that time, why can't we debate now? Why do we think that moving from 367 universities to 467 universities alone is progress? That's no progress. That's multiplication. Progress is to think of an university in new terms. And do we not have centres for thinking newly about the idea of universities? Here we have the Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, the National Institute of Advanced Studies. These are centres to think of the new idea of university and to put it in practice. And there are practitioners of this idea. I won't talk about Tejgadh here

because that is where I work and my mentioning Tejgadh can be misunderstood as a subjective reference. But think about Heggodu in Shimoga district. Fifty kilometers from Bangalore I saw Janpada Loka. It has brought villagers together, taught them to be museum experts. They are excellent folklorists. And the institute is giving its own certificate of degree because those people know the local culture. I think that's the idea of university I have. Now this of course will not pass with all those who have got benefits of the Sixth Pay Commission or whatever. But we have to persist in thinking. If someone says, maybe, "this idea is not good enough," I don't mind. But let us at least start the debate.

QUESTION - III:

Ganesh *bhai*, I must say, with all my learning, this concept of inclusion and recognition of the knowledge in people, instead of fixing quotas, ignites a variety of questions. There are two basic questions in my mind. One is, you know, when Gandhi talked of *Nai Talim*. He devoted enormous energy and time, in saying that we should promote the concept based on education in relation to local communities... Now when you just talked today of 300... 400 million people below poverty line, I'm not specifically talking about them. This is a debatable point. But there are a very large number of people because their knowledge has been totally excluded. To give you a small example, about 50 km or 40 km away from here, on the border of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, we started a place, an institution called Nav Darshanam. We engaged

some of the young volunteers who came forward and they started developing knowledge in health care, education, cultivation.... This knowledge is not existent in concrete forms, and yet those communities were surviving and prospering. The moment this modern knowledge came in, then those people were sidestepped and they became paupers and beggars.

Another example—Kanhaiyanathji Seth was trying to promote the Marwari community. They have a language. But two generations later, they just don't know the language. Forget about talking...through language, they had knowledge ... like my grandmother, or mother. It is now totally extinct. So I think this is a very very revolutionary concept, I would say. ..

GANESH DEVY:

Thank you. I don't think it is a revolutionary concept but I believe it is a timely concept. Some time ago, I was looking at languages of the Himalayas for the people's linguistic survey of India. During my work I noticed that for in the Himalayan states, put together, they have 124 different terms for glaciers. Even just a dictionary of terminology on glaciers in India might actually add a lot to the knowledge. But these 'scholars' are all without formal degrees. I know Narayan bhai Desai has been a living example, the best example alive for Gandhi's idea of education. The idea basic education became a travesty when it was implemented by the

government. School children were made to stay a few extra hours in schools, planting vegetables which never got proper care. The teachers had to buy vegetables from the mandi to present to the school inspector. So, basically, we are on the same wave-length and I think we are in agreement with each other.

QUESTION IV:

You know, I agree with Devy a lot. But I have some problems. And I also don't do things like you. Why do you want these people mentioned, who have preserved this knowledge, to come to the universities at all, because they may lose it. Actually this education, can make you lose it. A lot of it is preserved through illiteracy. I'm not advocating illiteracy. But, my grandchildren don't speak Kannada any longer because they go to school. So there seems to be conflict between education and knowledge. If there had been so many PhDs among Adivasis, there would have been so much less knowledge. Do you see this when you speak that there is some contradiction within you, when you say there are not enough PhDs and advocate for other forms of knowledge.

With formal education, they would have forgotten their knowledge systems, way of thinking and so on. Because Macaulay's idea of education is what we teach. Being a Kannada writer, in order to preserve my Kannada, I had to struggle a lot to keep English out of my system. There's a way of making what you dislike a part of you and to change

it. So, ... I don't know how to ask the question... but do you ask the question yourself, that's what I want to know when you speak like the way you spoke.

GANESH DEVY:

Thank you for the question. Sixty-four percent literacy or, alternately, thirty six percent illiteracy—these are official figures. I was speaking to Dr. Ram Dayal Munda earlier in the day about the need to recognize knowledge existing in the community for which there has to be a mechanism of certification of such knowledge so that the livelihoods of those who hold such knowledge are secured. I gave him the example of Mallikarjun Mansoor, who was given a degree by Dharwad University. I don't think he had gone to any college or university of music. But he knew his music like, Gods know their music. This had to be recognised. Mansoor was a great artist and he received formal recognition. But the livelihoods of a simple mason, a carpenter, a tinker, a tailor are not ensured if there is no certification. Once, I tried out one experiment in Gujarat. We certified certain Adivasis who were in the masonry work. These were mainly migrant labourers and the certification enhanced their chances of getting 300 rupees a day, instead of Rs.180, as that was what they were paid before. And they definitely did as good a work as the experts do. Perhaps, the experts tell you only what you already know and what you do not actually need to know. So if illiteracy forces people into economic deprivation, there has to be a mechanism to bring them

out by respecting what they know. This is the state's responsibility.

QUESTION - IV: CONTD.

But their knowledge systems also preserve because they have not come into what we think is the mainstream...

GANESH DEVY:

Actually, what you are saying clearly reflects the tragic historical phase we have passed through. It goes to show that whatever we accepted as formal knowledge has been destructive. It has destroyed a lot that has been valuable. And this is not a call for reviving some arcane, esoteric traditions...but skills have gone, intimate knowledge of things has disappeared. You mentioned language... today mother tongue is that language which one can speak, and occasionally read but not write at all. That has come to be the definition of mother tongue!

I chose to speak about this today because when the Knowledge Commission is talking of 1000 universities, India is poised to open to a knowledge explosion. It is a fabulous numerical growth, but the academe itself has not raised a debate about the 'content of education'. I have not come across any really serious debate on what kind of university we want in India. So I thought this would be the right place to kick off a new kind of debate.

QUESTION - V:

My question is linked to the previous question and I too think there was a contradiction. But I found an answer in your own talk which was this.... I thought it was very significant that you are actually talking of the inclusion of these groups that many people are talking. Policies are talking. But you are also talking of inclusion of knowledge systems and at the level of higher education. See what we are witnessing, many of these things at a small level, are happening at primary level but as a strategy to get children to go through a uniform system of knowledge. So I think there lies the answer. Perhaps to some extent it answers the contradiction— if you have diverse and multiple systems of knowledge at higher education level, many of the things, can perhaps be reformed.

But I have one other question. I have been thinking that the intellectual pursuit that has gone into the issue of Dalits in India has perhaps not been matched by the intellectual pursuit say for the issues of Adivasis or also Muslims. And in the context of Adivasis, I have a proposition: the fact that you don't have a unified identity actually is because of the very nature of tribal identity. The very nature of Adivasi identity thrives on distinctness. The question is whether this is so because of the fact that there are large number of castes Hindus. A large number of intellectual pursuits that mainly emanated from people belonging to caste Hindu structure delved into those issues whereas the issues of Adivasis didn't enter into their conscience as much as the issues of Dalits. I would like a response.

GANESH DEVY:

As I said, rather not so clearly, the issues are different. Adivasis confronted the British. They fought the British. They resisted the Raj in every possible way, did not accept the British Raj at all. Adivasis chose to remain outside the colonial economy and social discourse. Even when the universities came up in the 1850s, the Adivasis did not join the Bombay colleges or the Chennai (Madras) colleges at all. They kept fighting for their land. They rejected the British knowledge. However, Indians did not look at Adivasis as part of the freedom struggle. Dalits were subjugated and freed together with the rest of India. The Adivasi freedom has not been synchronous with the rest. The two stories are different and that's why the leadership patterns are different.

QUESTION - VI:

There's no question that something has to be done to make sure that education is inclusive and it is diversified. But I'm not very sure that we really have a valid answer to these questions. But what bothers me is our attitude to knowledge. And I think we need to look at this carefully. The basic idea was that it was simply practice or norm. So whether someone was doing history or English literature or anything was not that much of consequence. In fact it provided the context for training the mind. You looked very critically at whatever was taken. What we are concerned is, how that process actually puts into operation so that it is possible to validate. Knowledge that cannot remain in the mind, the process

whereby whatever the knowledge is formed helps understanding, but I'm not sure if this will be a very useful piece of knowledge. How simply by giving education to the knowledge systems of the people who are excluded we can publish this knowledge as proof?

GANESH DEVY:

Sir, very briefly, thank you. Validation turns an observation into knowledge. Validation will turn several related observations into a system of knowledge. For some of the finest thinking on this through epistemology, hermeneutics and phenomenology we have to be grateful to the West, and of course, to some of our own philosophers like Kundakunda in Jain philosophy or Shankara or Bhratahari. There is absolutely no doubt that knowledge is important and that knowledge needs validation of a certain kind. But it is also true as some western philosophers have told us that knowledge is power. Michael Foucault would take that stand. In all ages, knowledge is used to retain power. Knowledge in itself is power. In India, our experience historically has been that a segment of society made knowledge a means of power and excluded the others in order to retain that power. That history cannot be denied. Knowledge in a neutral space and time is the most admirable of the human mental transactions, but knowledge in social and historical operations can lead to fatal exclusions such as caste exclusions, women's exclusion in our traditions, and the class exclusion on the European side. My concern, at this juncture in Indian

history, is placed in the context of contemporary India where there is some kind of growth, I've heard, and some kind of expansion in education. The plans for expansion on the anvil appear to be quite concrete plans for a massive expansion of education infrastructure.

For me as a thinker—as one who belongs to the university community—I have to decide whether to go for a mall of knowledge or a *mandi* of knowledge. And you know, somehow the self-organised *mandis* have remained quite relevant, quite useful in this country. The small vegetable vendor's perspective of the mall economy needs to be taken into consideration. That question is not raised from within the universities in the recent times. I mean somebody has to say, "The emperor has no clothes." Of course, one will point out that what we are saying is to be tempered, is to be qualified, but a debate needs to be created. I think we owe it to the people who are excluded. If in the last 100 years, and particularly in the last 60 years, our universities have not managed to incorporate, to include, to provide access to these people even through distance means of education, even through community radios, whatever means, whatever technology, whatever sociological extension work, if we have not done it, then there is some urgent responsibility that rests with us. That's why I mentioned Gandhi who said that "This is the moment for repentance." Of course, knowledge is sacred in all times, in all societies and I do not want to deny that. I do not want to denigrate knowledge as such. I'm not

suggesting that we go for a 'barefoot graduates' programme like barefoot doctors in China. But something more imaginative is possible. And that challenge our academia has not taken up.

There is the national university for educational planning and administration (NUEPA). One expects it comes out with a programme as to how this can be achieved. At one time, National Book Trust and the Sahitya Akademi were created for the major literary languages. Then, they started inducting literature of Dalits and literature of Tribals in the canon. This made Indian Literature rich. The same will happen to sociology, history and other social sciences. History in this country will become rich if the history of tribals is included in the history of India. At present, History has excluded the history of the Adivasis. I am sure all those transformations can happen. In the case of science and technology, the question will be of a slightly different nature. The methods used with respect to them will have to be different. Since Nehru's time, our university system has remained heavily biased towards producing engineers. And even now the expansion of technical education with about 45000 institutes as against just 360 traditional universities shows that the bias continues to govern the field. The departments of humanities and education must produce a new dream for our universities. Our universities are without a dream today. As Tagore says to the mysterious Power, "My boat is being dragged to you. But where is the dream there?"

QUESTION - VII:

I have two questions, but they are also related. One is, when you say that we should have knowledges, it is true, but can they co-exist? The kind of knowledge creation and dissemination that we have in the universities and the kind of dream that we all have—can they co-exist? Is it possible that within the same system, the same university validates this kind of a knowledge? Should we be looking up for the same universities to validate this? Or should we have a different system altogether for validation? And the second thing is, when we have this kind of talk wherein the universities that give graduation to persons who are qualified and so on and so forth, there is a kind of appropriation that has been done all through, wherein the knowledge is taken but not the person who gives the knowledge. And this has actually affected a number of communities.

You know, we have in fact misused this kind of a knowledge. For example, the accretion of honey. So many Adivasi communities knew the difference between one kind of honey and the other kind of honey, and honey from different flowers and so on— but when today we have Dabur or someone else who prepares honey. We don't make out the difference at all in that. And so, on the one hand, this question of validation and the appropriation, and the entire social, and the way we produce things, the way we have to live. If it is only a degree which will give, which will make

a person fit for a job within the so-called mainstream, then I think it is again robbing the very system to which she/he belongs.

GANESH DEVY:

The first question: can two types of knowledge co-exist? I will not answer that as if I'm a legislator, as if I'm choosing one student for the award of a scholarship as against another student. I'll simply say this: when we have already entered cyberspace in the field of knowledge, we have to think differently about knowledge. It is, I believe, *Kybernetes*, after whom cybernetics is named. He was the mythical sailor who could stay steady amidst tossing waves, could steer clear the ship through storms. Samuel T. Coleridge had drawn upon him in one of his famous poems and actually had seen a painting in his father's home with a tossing sea and a steady ship there. Knowledge has become like that today, all over, in all fields. There are mega stories and there are micro stories that together constitute knowledge. Within a given field of knowledge, the two need not be consistent. The two will be related but need not concur in their logical weave. I will take the example of history, which is a little easier for me to understand. There might be a nationalist history of India and there could be a subaltern history of India. The two are not exactly the same, but the two can coexist in a relationship of tension, both as histories. With regard to the sciences, the hardcore sciences like physics dispelled the myth of logically and mutually consistent theories almost eighty years ago.

And chemistry is doing it over the last thirty years. Nanotechnology is the next.

I think we have to think of knowledge not as if there is only one standard form of knowledge and the all other forms of knowledge as its competitor. And if that is the case, and if other forms of knowledge do exist, what right does the university knowledge have to subjugate the others? You see, that is the power relationship between the two and therefore we have reason to side with the other rather than with this one. However, I will not take sides. What I am saying is, coexistence of various knowledges at the same time in the same space is the new law of knowledge which is in for us in the times of cyberspace. That is also our opportunity, the opportunity for us to change the university system and the idea of university which we have inherited, without sacrificing the sanctity and respect for ideas.

QUESTION - VIII:

There's one good example of Narayan Desai... He built a new kind of structure... By including both the systems of knowledge that Kerala people used to read. It was Gandhi who sent him to build this. So there was an integration of the type of knowledge. Applying it locally to local needs and learning from local people because Gandhi asked him to try to build something within five or ten acres and find all the material within that. If what you say is to happen in technology of different kinds, then there is a lot to absorb. Because technology

is still something with which our people in our country, who are still not well educated, thrive. But there is a knowledge system of an abstract kind: science. It's a bit difficult there. Technology, yes, sociology, yes, social sciences, literature, yes—these have enriched us. It has been possible in this country's circumstances for the marginalised to enter in the mainstream. In the US the blacks have come into the mainstream, here, the Dalits have come into the mainstream. It is the Adivasis everywhere who are left out. Very strange thing. Is it possible to subvert this very concept of a mainstream?

GANESH DEVY:

It is definitely possible in the field of agriculture. Millions of Indian farmers know it well. And universities promoting an abstract knowledge have not done any good to them. At another place I made an unscientific statement— but a responsible statement—that we have a translating consciousness. In this country, we live in many languages at the same time. We live quite comfortably amidst many calendars as well. Perhaps most of you believe in a *Chaitra* and a January at the same time as the 'first' month of the year. Because we have the ability to live among several universes of significance without allowing them to clash, we may be able to envision a university system which allows abstract knowledge, universal knowledge, local knowledge and many such. A composite of these will be skill-based higher knowledge. A composite of that will become the knowledge system which will include everybody and that

will provide a lead to the rest of the world at this juncture. In another fifteen years time, India will be in institutional terms a knowledge leader in the world. That's what I'm saying. It's *our* moment, actually.

QUESTION - IX:

Regarding the Scheduled languages and non-scheduled languages, you seemed to suggest that the scheduled languages are actually faring better. Most of the languages, whether it is Kannada or Bengali, have been reduced to short story writing, poem writing and journalistic pieces writing. Is there actual commentary upon the world happening? So how huge is the difference between orality and these scheduled languages? They are in the same boat in some sense. Secondly, the whole question about quality, quantity, the imagination of the university and the expansion of the current system. I completely sympathise with what you are saying, but one also has to take into account, for example, the Dalit championing of English. Similarly, there is a huge, subaltern desire for degrees: for getting an IIT degree or getting a JNU degree. So, the question of inclusion doesn't go away. There has to be some way of addressing it, right? At the same time we need to take into account this demand that is cropping up from below.

GANESH DEVY:

There are two things. One is the state of Indian languages—the *bhashas*. Prof. Ananthamurthy has often argued that the

bhashas have been drawing conditionally from many other *bhasha* systems, the subsets of *bhashas*. I'm only reporting what he has said—there's a system of *bhasha* that is developed in the kitchen and the backyard, a language system that you call dialects. I never call them dialects, I call all of them *bhashas*. The Adivasi languages in a state have always strayed into the larger language of that state. The contact with Persian, Arabic, which was active at one time too has weakened now. The market needs have brought the *bhashas* closer to English, and there's too much of intimacy with English. So languages keep changing all the time. And so long as human beings are there, interacting with the phenomenal world, languages will be there. They need greater attention, but it cannot happen through legislation. Languages should not be legislated. When there was no legislation, languages were safer. With legislation, they start going down. That is the experience all over the world. In Russia, Spain and China it has been so, in India it has been so.

The second question that you asked me was about the aspiration of the Dalit or Adivasi student to get an IIT degree. The aspiration is not for the IIT degree, but what happens beyond the degree, and that is getting a job, getting a livelihood option which is highly respectable. The cost of acquiring that livelihood option is also enormous. And students in India are now studying by borrowing from banks. In most cases, no longer are parents able to support the

expensive degree education. I'm not suggesting that the excluded ones should not be encouraged to go into IITs and all that. But the pressure could be eased a little bit. That is one. Of course, we cannot create 10,000 IITs. But if IIT starts looking at the manufacturing practices of the people, how they transform materials, manage natural materials, if IITs start looking at the current production practices, and if they manage to establish an organic relationship with those practices, the people who follow those practices will think that their practices are important. There is, for example, traditional water management. People in the villages know how to keep water at lower temperature. They do not have air conditioners. They manage without fans for the most parts of a year. Their understanding of temperatures and their methods of air-conditioning are technologies too. IITs can link to those practices rather than our creating some scholarships or loans for a student to compete AIEEE or engineering entrance exam for which something like 60 lakh students apply in a year and then 200 get beyond the threshold. A thousand years from now cultural historians will write about us that 'this society was so cruel that it made its youngest and liveliest people, its charming people, go through a grueling competition with thirty lakh others, like in the days of Spartacus when people had to get into the ring and face animals in order to justify their right to love.'

Ganesh N. Devy, formerly professor of English at the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, and a renowned literary critic and activist, is founder and director of the Tribal Academy at Tejgadh, Gujarat, and director of the Sahitya Akademi's Project on Literature in Tribal Languages and Oral Traditions. He was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award for 'After Amnesia' (1992), and the SAARC Writers' Foundation Award for his work with denotified tribes. He has also won the reputed Prince Claus Award (2003) for his work on the conservation of the history, languages and views of oppressed communities in the Indian state of Gujarat. His Marathi book *Vanaprasth* has received six awards including the Durga Bhagwat memorial Award and the Maharashtra Foundation Award. Along with Laxman Gaikwad and Mahashweta Devi, he is one of the founders of The Denotified and Nomadic Tribes Rights Action Group (DNT-RAG).