The Question of Silence

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A Para-biography

G. N. Devy

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THE QUESTION OF SILENCE: A PARA-BIOGRAPHY

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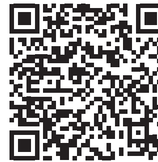

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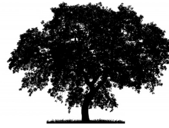

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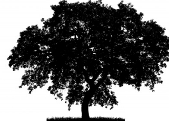

9 Beyond Cultural Aphasia

A Conversation with **Rossella Ciocca***

The sudden outburst of anguish from so many writers and artists over the last two weeks has taken the country by complete surprise. It has occupied substantial media space and engaged the curiosity of citizens. Various political parties have commented on it by placing themselves as allies or adversaries. The Union Minister for Culture, too, has responded by way of dealing with what he thinks is 'culture'. Over the weekend various magazines and literary supplements will have devoted their precious space to this 'rather strange phenomenon', analysing the whys and hows of the eruption. A week from now, the meeting of the Sahitya Akademi Council will have already joined the ranks

* Author's note: A version of this conversation, conducted over e-mails in 2015 as part of 'Dakshinayan: The Writers' Resistance Movement', was first published as 'Beyond Cultural Aphasia: A Conversation with Ganesh Devy on Indian Adivasis', in *Anglistica AION* 19.1 (2015), 25–35. It is reproduced here, with modifications, with the kind permission of *Anglistica AION* and Professor Rossella Ciocca, University of Naples 'L'Orientale', Naples.

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of events past, generating responses and counter-responses. But will the winter of Indian Writers' Discontent (IWD) be remembered a few months or a few years from now? I would like to place my observations here in the mode of a future historian of the present.

The most important element of the IWD is that it is not an organised movement or a conspiracy. One of the politicians commented that this is an engineered disaffection for the State with backing from a political party. This view has the fatal flaw in understanding the IWD as a social or a political movement. It is neither engineered nor is it planned by any political party, outfit, social organisation or funding agency.

The poet Keki N. Daruwalla made it a point to stress in his open letter (14 October 2015) to the President of the Sahitya Akademi that he is not prompted by any political ideology: 'I wish to make it clear that I have no party leanings. I was no lover of the corrupt UPA 2. People like the late [Narendra] Dhabolkar were murdered during the previous dispensation.'[1] This has been more or less the strain in all of the statements issued by writers who returned their honours.

The writers who responded to the suddenly manifest cultural impulse are not from any single political background or affiliation. The question of political affiliation does not even matter in this unique phenomenon. What matters is their emphasis on the increased intolerance in social life. In my statement sent to the Sahitya Akademi I have described them as 'writers and thinkers who have come forward to rescue sense, good-will, values, tolerance and mutual respect. Had this not been so, why would we be remembering the great saint poets who made our modern Indian languages what they are today? The great idea of India is based on a profound tolerance for diversity and difference. They far surpass everything else in importance.'

In Daruwalla's words, 'The landscape that confronts the writer today is bleak ... Faces will continue to be blackened with paint and painters like M. F. Hussein will be forced into exile. A writer like Taslima Nasreen will have to leave Kolkata under a Leftist regime. Statesmen will continue to be praised for their nationalism "despite" the fact they are Muslims. Mob murders will continue to be described as accidents'.[2]

What is at stake in this movement is much larger than a given political party, a ministry or a single institution. It is an expression of the need to re-imagine India, to humanise it, to sensitise it to the core of not just democracy but civilisation itself. At the heart of our great democracy is the idea of diversity and respect for that diversity. Respect for those who are not like oneself requires an ability to listen to different voices, a high level of tolerance. Democracy can be deepened by tolerance, and conversely it can be weakened by intolerance. Civilisation can be enriched by respect for life and other ways of looking at life. Writers today have stood up to remind the country that weakening the foundations of democracy will be at our own peril.

The phenomenon is reminiscent of the great work that the medieval saint poets did in so many *bhasha*s, the thinkers and social reformers such as Namdev, Tukaram, Mira, Kabir, Surdas, Jaydev, Akka Mahadevi, Tyagaraja and so on who created the great Bhakti movement. And it is their contribution to literature and languages that shaped and nurtured our modern Indian languages since the eleventh century.

The twenty-first-century IWD should be read in terms of the Bhakti movement and not as political agitation. So pervasive is the discontent and so large the scale of its manifestation that perhaps it will one day come to be seen as a turning point in Indian literary history and one may have to speak of the pre-IWD literature and post-IWD literature. It is too soon to surmise this, but in time we will know if this is so.

Colonial/Postcolonial/Neocolonial: Historical Precedents, Post-millennial Indian Politics

RC: The first question I'd like to discuss with you is about a possible ongoing colonial legacy on the system of inequities still suffered by Indian Adivasis. I mean, starting from the objective observation that the most part of India's eighty million Adivasis, after 68 years of Independence, still live below the poverty line, lacking education, economic support from the State and access to healthcare, do you see a sort of historical continuity in the passage from the colonial archive where tribals figured both as rebellious or even 'habitual offenders' to the postcolonial scene in which they are presented usually as 'backward' and not rarely as threatening actors in insurgent movements against national security?

GND: Though humans are gifted with the twin power to remember as well as to forget, memory as well as amnesia, histories invariably continue to stick to our everyday existence. The way we walk, eat, exchange opinions, form thoughts, create what we call beauty—all of these carry invisible but multiple layers of history, many pasts that the mind may forget but life does not. The colonial experience in India was protracted and pervasive. It affected most aspects of how we know ourselves and how we conduct ourselves. Our idea of justice and our perception of injustice, too, were deeply affected by the colonial notions of law and order, fairness and impropriety. Besides, after Independence, it was not as if India started on a blank page. Neither the colonial process nor the experience of de-colonisation in India can really be compared—except superficially—with those processes and experience in Australia or Canada.

For civilisations that have long-standing legacies, these things work differently. In India, there already was a surplus of inequality prior to the colonial rule. The colonial rule compounded inequality by bringing in agents of change not known before. These included a notion of regulated citizenship that worked less through affection and more through economic norms. Those who could pay taxes, or had land-related occupations, were more easily acceptable to the colonial imagination of citizenship (as subject). The nomads and the Adivasis fell out of that framework and came to be seen as distant from the State.

During the post-Independence period, this distance was sought to be reduced (not entirely eliminated!) by creating a 'Schedule of Tribes' and a 'Schedule of Castes' for receiving positive discrimination. But, the mindset of the people did not change in tune with the spirit of equality enshrined in the Constitution. Besides, India's transition to a technological and industrial economic power required an unopposed access to areas in the tribal forests for mining. The scale of this operation has been really massive. A lot of displacement and disempowerment arise out of the post-Independence industrial activities. But, carrying out those activities remained easy as the Adivasi had come to be seen as 'a distant citizen' during the colonial times. One can therefore say that the alienation of Adivasis from the Indian State, and the vast inequality with which they are saddled have roots in the colonial structures, but these have seen a rapid increase in the last half-century.

In every age and every society, those who are most deprived of the economic means and access to improved life conditions come to be seen as the potentially

'dangerous' section of the society. Think of the Gypsies in Europe. The 'denotified' communities in India have faced a similar challenge. It combines social stigma with economic deprivation.

RC: Considering your peculiar historical knowledge, is there a shared logic in the various 'Criminal Tribes Act(s)' (1871, 1921), 'Land Acquisition Act' (1894) and 'Indian Forest Act' (1927) of the colonial period and a sort of internal neocolonial present in which, however 'denotified', tribals are still deeply affected by an unfriendly legislation? I'm thinking for example of the Special Economic Zones Act (2005) or, for different reasons and cases of enforcement, of the various Armed Forces Special Powers Acts (1958, 1983, 1990).

GND: It needs be understood that the basis of the 'Criminal Tribes Act(s)' was not moral. These Acts, beginning with the 1871 CTA, were not made in order to rescue humanity out of degradation. They were a cumulative result of various steps towards suppression of perceived/potential risks to the 'society' that had accepted the normative framework of the British Raj. Thus, the primary interest was to keep the social order safe, for the colonial rule was justified as a 'giver of law and order' to India. The Forest Act had to be brought in not because the Indian forests were dwindling. Had they really been facing the risk of depletion, sports like *shikar* and tiger-hunting would have found no support in the colonial notion of leisure. The primary aim was to bring under the government's command a valuable source for ship-building, timber. Hence, a special forest authority and code had to be created and the concept of forests as 'productive sites' had to be popularised. This was a big shift from the idea of forest as 'sacred zones'—under

divine control rather than the regal order—that Indians had traditionally valued. Land, forest and the subject population—all of them—were for the colonial rulers a single spectrum of a larger economic activity which brought wealth to England. And the laws regulating Nature and Man were conceived to serve that single goal. The more recent special economic zone (SEZ) activity, and the 'simplification of law' to support that activity, are of a slightly different nature. In the previous lot of Acts, law was worked to consolidate the authority of the State. In the legal network supporting SEZs, the primary idea appears to be effecting a transition from the authority of the State to the authority of Capital (or call it the Corporate).

RC: In the recent past, activists and political parties have made multiple attempts to address the predicament of Adivasis through mass protests and political activism. In some cases this has also led to armed insurgency struggles. At a certain moment it seemed that a way out of injustice and a possibility of freedom from feudal bondage was to be found only in the Naxalite movement, or in other similar guerrilla factions; but in the end, do you agree that this produced only a long series of brutalities and in certain areas the creation of a sort of perennial 'state of exception'[3] with the systematic violation of human rights?

GND: Naxalism is the name given to a mood of 'disaffection towards the State', particularly the one that promotes violence as the means of communication. Since violence is involved in it, it is not surprising that it meets with counter-violence from the State. On both sides, this has unleashed a protracted process of brutalisation, dehumanisation and an absurd lack of any desire for

dialogue. This gives rise to numerous cases of affective victimisation and violation of human rights. On the other hand, it also gives rise to a destructive tendency, hampering the development of tribal villages, and to an exploitative leadership that is incapable of working the existing democracy to the people's advantage. It is a sad situation, and I hope it comes to an end through consultation, dialogue and respect for Adivasi dignity as well as respect for human life and civilisation.

The Long Agenda of Social Issues

RC: **As you said, both before and after Independence, Adivasis have also been the object of a well-meant affirmative action through a set of legislative acts aimed at protecting their cultural heritage and at promoting their inclusion in the social body (via, for example, the policy of special reservations for the Scheduled Tribes in education and government jobs). At the same time the general sensation is that the post-Independence narration of universal citizenship finds in the condition of the Adivasis its most acute and sour disavowal. What's your opinion on the quota politics and its application?**

GND: Affirmative action is a good idea, but its address has remained somewhat vague. For example, successive governments have been trying to cut down positions (vacancies) in category III and category IV services. Thus, 8 per cent positions are reserved for Adivasis; but precisely those positions where they would typically join are curtailed. It is the same with the field of education.

In Gujarat, where I have spent time with Adivasis for the last 20 years, there are seven million of them. But, for these seven million, there is not a single dedicated

university. There are very few pre-college high schools for science subjects. Obviously, Adivasis do not get into engineering or medical colleges (in larger cities). So, we have favourable laws for reservation of seats in education and employment. But, the provisions remain inadequately used (or are used by the creamiest layers). But this 'quota' tends to become a volatile and emotional issue. The poorer sections among those that do not have the benefit of quota have a legitimate grouse against the quota system. This gets translated into a blatant stereotyping of tribals and contempt towards them. It is the same with the Scheduled Castes.

RC: **In *A Nomad Called Thief*[4], you state that the upward mobility registered in recent years in Hindu-caste society has left a vacuum at the very base of the social pyramid and that the tribals are pushed, willingly or unwillingly, to fill that gap. Do you confirm this is still going on? And what do you make of the increasing application of caste paradigms to the social fabric of tribal communities? On more than one occasion, like in [the riots] in Gujarat in 2002, Adivasi people were even involved in communal atrocities, fomented by caste or religious extremism, traditionally alien to tribal social culture. What do you make of these episodes? And, in relation to this, how do you consider the coming to power of the BJP? Has this effected a change of political climate towards the tribals?**

GND: Sociologists use the term 'Sanskritisation' for a commonly shared social process of ascension to a higher economic status. Adivasi communities close to urban (or urbanised) centres of economic activities are now widely affected by the tendency to 'Sanskritise' themselves. In my initial years of work with Adivasis,

I used to get deeply disturbed whenever I heard from them any indication or statement of desire for a lifestyle that was at par with the 'modern, urban, middle-class' style of life. I was keen that they preserve their unique social structures, their famed innate sense of equality, etc. Slowly, I started seeing the element of unfairness to Adivasis in my own response. I have now come to accept that it is by no means wrong for Adivasis to expect to get benefits of modern medicine, education, well-protected habitat, drinking water and leisure. But, this is not to say that either the Adivasis become like the others or the others become like Adivasis—and that is the only solution for removing the inequalities. I now believe that 'essentially Adivasi' is more of a mental frame—a matter of values and beliefs—rather than an 'ethnic' identity. So, I imagine some of the non-Adivasis may like to move closer to nature as Adivasis in remote villages are, while some of them will move into urban middle class. There is no harm if the borders slacken.

The induction of Adivasis in the riots in Gujarat was a political advantage drawn upon the newly emergent desire to Sanskritise. But far more important is the fact that at the root of their unfortunate involvement in riots was their being lured by the moneylenders to whom they were indebted. Much of the 'involvement' was under coercion and not as a clear acceptance of the politics of hatred and violence. Soon after the riots, in the Assembly elections, the percentage of the Adivasi vote to the rightwing party was way below what it won in the urban centres.

RC: And what about the very delicate religious question, both with regard to Hinduisation and Christianisation

of Adivasis and their episodic involvement in religious fundamentalism?

GND: The worst loss for the Adivasis, due to the transition through which they are passing, is the erosion of their idea of the sacred. They have not known organised religion. They have not known patterns of worship with a godhead or where a god's representative is cased within a man-made building, a temple or a church. For them, being with nature in itself has been a form of worship. When they shift to faiths with a different idea of prayerfulness, the most inspiring notions of sanctity and divinity preserved in their practice, memory and word stand the risk of being wiped out. But as affiliation to various other religions in the country imply political affiliation too, by and large, the Adivasis who lose their own moorings tend to freewheel and gravitate close to those religious groups that have a political ascendancy. Alas!

RC: **Gender is another topic which seems relevant with regard to the social pressures which the Adivasis are experiencing nowadays. Is it true that the regime of relative freedom and social dignity that, at least in some groups, the Adivasi women were able to enjoy is increasingly threatened by new forms of gender discrimination deriving, at least in part, from caste politics and the fact that women are easily targeted by police repression or political organisations trying to make electoral inroads among the tribals by every possible means, intimidation and rape not excluded?**

GND: The most conspicuous is the fact that Adivasis whose land is reduced (every passing generation) due to indebtedness, unfair practices of external agents, multiplication of claims on land within the family, tends

to treat the woman's body as a replacement of land. I have known hundreds of young Adivasi women who were asked to shift to nearby cities just a day after their weddings, and get working on construction sites. This is done, apparently, to recover the sum of dowry paid by the bridegroom to the girl's family. But, in effect, the girl becomes a construction labourer and has to work in harsh conditions till the sum is gained from her wages. The body has now replaced land as a means of production. This situation has come to a boiling point and may soon explode in the form of a movement for women's rights. I hope it does and changes the situation of the Adivasi women. I have spoken to a large number of Adivasi men to pay attention to this issue; but normally I have met with a cold reception from them, even those who I have known as friends and colleagues for two decades. Perhaps, an external feminist leadership is required.

Between Development and 'Slow Violence': Economic/Ecologic Issues

RC: In post-liberalisation India, the traditional areas of tribal settlements have increasingly become key sites of economic development and infrastructural modernisation. To make way for industrial corridors, mega-dams, attractive installations or parks that essentially benefit transnational corporations and the metropolitan elites, tribal communities are continuously displaced and, without a serious relocation policy, very often left completely deprived of their livelihoods. Bonded labour, begging, pilfering, and prostitution are common ensuing phenomena. Besides, another effect of 'development' is the kind of delayed destruction which

contaminates habitats and affects the very possibility of survival, defined by Nixon as 'slow violence'[5]: a violence that occurs gradually and usually out of sight because it is perpetrated in rural areas and without media coverage. In all this, do you think that the role of the forest tribes is only that of casualties, or do you believe that, defending themselves and their lands, they could possibly become active actors of a new conception of sustainable progress, respectful of environment but at the same time also of their economic needs? I mean, don't you think that to fight against the exploitation of natural resources without being able to provide new schemes of ecological development is too weak a position, liable to be easily defeated? Don't you think that in the future of Adivasis there should be a key role for technology? On the other hand, is it true that sometimes Adivasi people have found themselves in the position to compete with protected species and protected areas for their livelihood? What's your position in relation to this sort of apparent contradiction?

GND: I am acutely aware of how severely marginalised and cornered the Adivasis feel in the context of a market driven and globalised economy that has multiplied inequalities of all kinds. I have seen at close quarters the devastation caused by the sheer incompatibility between the tribal ethics and the modern economics. In the case of tribals (as in the case of Scheduled Castes and farmers), the intolerance is embedded in the economic outlook. But despite several thousand farmer suicides, the long-standing rural distress does not attract sufficient attention, and any movement of tribals is labeled 'anti-national' and at once caricatured as 'Naxalite' and dealt with brutally.

However, I do not think that violent opposition is the only means of opposition with the tribals. I firmly believe—and I have put this belief at the centre of all my work with the Adivasis—that violence can generate only a counter-violence and one that is far more destructive. On the other hand, aping 'caste India' can lead Adivasis to a complete destruction of their own culture(s). Therefore, it would be best to start (re-)building the Adivasi communities from within, to make them self-reliant, not dependent on government patronage or NGO alms. The ability of the Adivasis for deciding for themselves has to be enhanced. Let them decide what is good for them and what is not good. Then they will be able to cope *on their own terms* with the challenges and stress created by the market-led modernity. Sooner or later, this must happen. Sooner the better as they are rapidly running out of time.

Beyond Cultural Aphasia. Performing Indigeneity: Opportunities and Dangers

RC: In the *People's Linguistic Survey of India*, the first comprehensive survey of Indian languages you supervised, you declared that, among other things, language is a marker of the welfare of a community. Bringing attention to Indian languages with small numbers of speakers, you said, is a way of bringing attention to the societies that speak them, along with the wellbeing of their people. With reference to the nomadic communities, what could you say in particular about the status of health of their languages and of their cultural identities?

GND: The languages of the nomadic communities in India are among the most affected by the identity issues of these communities. Imagine any stigmatised community. The first thing that the community likes to do in order to secure its survival is to try and conceal its identity. Language is an identity marker for any community, but for nomadic communities it works as an identity marker far more pervasively. When these communities try to conceal their identity in order to escape the stigma attached them as 'criminal communities', one of the most obvious steps they take is to avoid using their language in the presence of an outsider. Thus they use a state language (other than their own) for all activities in which anyone from outside the community is involved, as in the market place, school, public places, etc., and they use their own language only among themselves, as a kind of a 'code language'. The natural consequence is that their own languages are getting skeletal by the day. In some languages of the nomads, the speakers no longer mention names of all seven days of the week or name more than two or three colour terms. Linguists will describe this condition of language as 'severe endangerment'. Recently, as I was preparing the People's Linguistic Survey in Maharashtra, I came across nearly a dozen DNTs (Denotified and Nomadic Tribes) that had great difficulty in recalling even a single song from their oral tradition. Maybe, about half a century ago, they had numerous songs and stories used on all occasions and social functions. This is so sad. This imposition of silence on those communities—forced because the stigma is not by their own choice—I call 'aphasia'.

Alas, so many languages are facing this threat. When the languages of communities are treated as a liability,

the communities, too, tend to become economically further disempowered. One marginalisation adds upon another, cumulatively turning such people into 'the scum of the world' whose life is worse than that of beasts. This is a 'lived experience' of the communities and far more worrisome than a 'painful' theoretical position.

RC: **The predominance of orality in Adivasi culture and the lack of official institutions adopting tribal idioms for their activities seem to condemn the tribes to a condition of growing cultural aphasia. On the other hand, since Independence, tribal cultural heritage has repeatedly been paraded in State rituals such as the Republic Day celebrations or exhibited in State-sponsored institutions such as tribal arts museums or festivals. The existence of specific forms of knowledge and the relevance accorded to the arts are usually seen as the distinct mark of tribal contribution to the cultural mosaic of the nation. But, while for long Adivasi culture has been the passive object of ethno-anthropological inquest, more recently it has also become the privileged object of narration of artists who are also political activists, like Mahasweta Devi, Arundhati Roy, Laxman Gaikwad and many others, interested in defending the Adivasi way of life.**

What is more interesting is that nowadays it seems that many Adivasi artists are increasingly taking upon themselves the task of representing their worldview and asking, more than in the past, for a specific artistic recognition. I am referring to a whole range of experimentations with video-making and art cinema, or the output of a new literacy emerging from orality generated, for instance, after the textualisation of tribal societies in the wake of Christianity, like in the North

East.[6] But above all I am thinking of the performing and dramatic arts and the visual arts in which the tribals seem to find their favoured form of expression. See, for example, the great success of Warli art at a global level. Could you explain why? And tell us something about the role of the arts in your work with the Adivasis? And finally, what do you think about those who see in the national and sometimes international success of Adivasi artists, mostly painters, the danger of an evisceration of their cultural authenticity under the threat of commodification and desecration?[7]

GND: In 1998, I went to the Chhara ghetto (Chharas are a DNT community). Mahasweta Devi was with me. This locality is situated on the outskirts of Ahmedabad (not too far from the Sabarmati Ashram where Mahatma Gandhi lived from 1917 to 1930). No one from the city of Ahmedabad was willing to accompany me as the Chhara locality (Chharanagar) was seen as a den of crime. That was the stereotype. With great difficulty, we could enter the ghetto. On repeated visits, I could manage to make a few friends there. These were young men and women. When I asked them if they required anything as a gift from me, they responded asking for a library. We managed to create a small library in one of the houses there. At that time we were fighting for compensation for the widow of a tribal killed in police custody. The Chharas created a play (in the street theatre genre). It became a new sensation in the theatre world. As they performed again and again, the group of actors widened. The Budhan Theatre took birth.

Over the last 18 years, this theatre has performed regularly and a wide range of plays, including by the Italian Dario Fo and the French Jean Genet. Hundreds

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of small groups spread over many cities throughout India have gone to them to learn theatre from them. A few of their actors have graduated from the National School of Drama; some have gone to England to train (and returned to their own theatre); some have taken to film production. Dakxin Bajrange, the lead person of Budhan Theatre, won the National Human Rights Commission's National Award for his autobiographical book (*Budhan Bolta Hai*, 2010) last year. Today, the world looks at Chharas as artists and not as criminals. Several research dissertations and books and articles have been written on the Budhan Theatre. For me, to be the cause for creation of the Budhan Theatre has been a source of immense satisfaction and a continued inspiration.

So, indeed, theatre, performance, cinema—these are the means by which the expression of pain of the DNTs can be turned into a creative energy that can challenge and change the society (without taking recourse to the violent ways of the Naxalites).

RC: Could you tell us something about the 'Adivasi Academy' experience?

GND: Over the last two decades, the Adivasi Academy has carried out several experiments in the area of Adivasi development. It has initiated major policy debates in relation to the economic, social and cultural rights of the DNTs and Adivasis. However, the vision inscribed in these experiments has always been that of the communities themselves. The campaigns and the enterprises were more oriented towards generating the process of self-reliance rather than achieving quantitative success. There has been a conscious attempt at recovering the cultural memory of the nomadic and Adivasi communities, and

investing it into economic and social dynamics in such a way that culture could be 'monetised'. These experiments have, from time to time, faced the orthodoxy of funding agencies in that the 'projects' that could not promise a direct economic output were rarely supported by them. This has, however, been seen by the Adivasi Academy as an opportunity to become self-reliant rather than as a stumbling block in 'development'. It is therefore that the Adivasi Academy has not stopped functioning even for a day despite long spells of having no external funding support. Irrespective of the nature of the interventions, each and every intervention has been fully owned by the Adivasi and the DNT community for which it was conceptualised. This is probably the most significant and 'valuable' feature of the Academy's experimentation. It can therefore be replicated in the context of any community in the world which faces lack of access and marginalisation. Similar experiments elsewhere, taken together with the learning at the Adivasi Academy, will help us in developing the precise method of working out the conversion between economic capital and social capital.

RC: **In your letter to the Sahitya Akademi returning the 1993 Award given to your book, *After Amnesia*[8], you write '... I do this as an expression of my solidarity with several eminent writers who have recently returned their awards to highlight their concern and anxiety over the shrinking space for free expression and growing intolerance towards difference of opinion'. To what particular conditions of 'shrinking space for free expression' were you referring to?**

GND: Writers like Perumal Murugan had to publicly declare that he would cease writing. Thinkers like Narendra

Dabholkar and M. M. Kalburgi were shot dead. Activist Govind Pansare was killed similarly. Those who protested were hackled or humiliated in a variety of ways. Any public statement in favour of tolerance and inclusiveness of diversity at once generates massive ridicule in social media, with trolls forcing many to withdraw from Facebook or Twitter, faces of speakers are blackened publicly to silence them and to terrify their audiences, artists are told to march off to another country if they even murmur a protest—all these together led me to say that free expression has become difficult, a dispassionate and rational view of events in the country is under attack and any dissenting view is an invitation to getting ridiculed.

Notes

[1] '"Akademi has not stood up for beleaguered writers": Poet Keki Daruwalla returns his award', *Scroll*, 14 October 2015.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*. Translated by Kevin Attell (University of Chicago Press, 2005).

[4] G. N. Devy, *A Nomad Called Thief: Reflections on Adivasi Silence* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2006).

[5] Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).

[6] Margaret Ch. Zama, ed., *Emerging Literatures from Northeast India: The Dynamics of Culture, Society and Identity* (New Delhi: Sage, 2013).

[7] Rashmi Varma, 'Primitive Accumulation: The Political Economy of Indigenous Art in Postcolonial India', *Third Text* 27(6): 748–761, 2013.

[8] G. N. Devy, *After Amnesia: Tradition and Change in Indian Literary Criticism* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1992; third edition Orient BlackSwan, 2017).

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