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- Contact :* The Editor,  
**Indian Philosophical Quarterly**,  
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## AN OBITUARY : PROF. N. K. DEVARAJA

With the passing away of Prof. Devaraja (11th January, 1999), we have lost one of the very few original and creative thinkers of India, born and brought up in 20th century. Today when consumerism has permeated in all walks of life, a need for an alternative vision in tune with scientific age and free from the blind acceptance of the past, but still rooted in Indian culture, is strongly felt. Dr. Devaraja was one of those who took the challenge and through various works of his, both in philosophy and literature, contributed successfully to the development of philosophy relevant to the modern age. On the one hand, in *'The Mind and Spirit of India'* (1967), *'Hinduism and Modern Age'* (1975) and more mature *'Humanism in Indian Thought'* (1988) he put traditional Indian thought to humanistic interpretation, on the other, in *'Philosophy of Culture'* (1963) he tried to develop a new humanistic philosophy of *'Creative Humanism'*. Dr. Devaraja believed, like Phenomenologists, that man and his life-world constitute the subject matter of philosophy and a purely logical exercise was unequal to the task of exploring the multifaceted richness of the life-world. One may or may not believe in the existence of soul, rebirth or *mokṣa*, but a philosopher cannot avoid the questions of the purpose and meaning of life. To him, man is a free and creative being, his creativity is expressed in various forms; man can attain meaningfulness by selecting any one of these forms of culture for the qualitative development of his own self; that may be called man's self-made destiny. Philosophy, then, is the self awareness of culture conceived as the pursuit of higher and higher qualitative values.

Dr. Devaraja was born on 3rd June 1917 in Rampur (U.P.) He took his B.A. (Hons) with distinction from Banaras Hindu University. He completed his post-graduation from Allahabad University, also with distinction. Alongwith, he also passed examinations of Vyakarana Madhyama and Vedanta Śāstrī which enabled him to study classical Indian literature in original. In 1942, he received his Ph.D. on Sankara's Theory of Knowledge. But

his inquisitive mind could not accept the boundaries of Indian philosophy alone and delved deep in the study of Western philosophy too. The result was, on the one hand, he accepted the critical role of philosophy towards cultural tradition, and on the other, advocated an increasing indifference towards competitive values of modern world for realising ideals of human life. Neither could he agree with Marxism, nor could he accept spiritualism.

Starting his career as a lecturer in Arrah (Bihar), he taught at Lucknow University (1948-1960) as Associate Professor before being selected as Sayaji Rao Gaekwad Professor of Indian Civilization and Culture, in B.H.U. and was In-charge of the Department of Philosophy and Religion there. He also remained Director of Higher Study Centre of Philosophy in B.H.U. (1967-72). University of Hawai invited him as a Visiting Professor in 1983-84. Many of his philosophical and literary works received awards and prizes. In fifties, he edited, along with others, a distinguished literary journal '*Yug Chetna*' published from Lucknow and again launched '*Yug Sakshi*' at the fag end of his career with his own hard earned savings. In 1972, he was honoured as the general president of Indian Philosophical Congress. Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla had awarded him fellowship. He was also a recipient of senior fellowship of I.C.P.R., a few years before his death.

While preparing for his M.A. examination, a chance reading of Westermarck's '*Ethical Relativity*', came as a shock to young Devaraja and afterwards, shaped his career as a thinker. Through his writings, he searched for a positive solution to the problem of relativity of values. In '*Philosophy of Culture*' he tried to establish that our value consciousness and value choices have an objective basis, whereas in '*Freedom, Creativity and Value*' (1988), he propounded that what we characterize as facts are not more objective than values. For this purpose, he accepted subjective element as part of all facts and their gradation in objectivity and gave a new definition of facts, in tune with newly emerging trends in hermeneutics. This led him to differentiate between the methodologies of natural sciences, social sciences and humanities.

Being a non-believer in super-natural order, for Devaraj, human needs

and creativity are sufficient to account for creation of values. But, unlike Kant and Sartre, freedom, for him, is not an ultimate value, but only an instrumental value. To the question, are values relative to historical time and culture, his answer was that some moral postulates are definitely relative but beyond that there are some norms of moral behaviour such as, 'Do unto others what you desire them to do for you', can be termed as universal. He emphasized that moral consciousness is universal because it is the inner necessity of human being; tendency of unselfish behaviour towards others finds its highest embodiment in saint's character. How to understand and harmonize the differences of opinions due to relativity of values between different cultures so that humanity live in peace, was the key issue discussed in his last major philosophical work. '*Limits of Disagreements*' (1993). His conclusion was that no course of action could be taken to be absolutely right or wrong.

Dr. Devaraja was not only a philosopher of repute, but also an established writer, poet and critic of Hindi literature. His novels '*Ajai ki Diary*' and '*Path ki Khoj*' and collection of poems. '*Itihasa Purusha*' and '*Upalamhba Patrika*' are considered to be of very high standard by noted critics. His critical work '*Chhayavad ka Patan*' made him almost a celebrity in the field of Hindi criticism. His style of literary criticism was closer to that of T.S. Eliot.

What amazed people was the tireless intellectual activity of Prof. Devaraja even in his old age when he was facing economic hardships along with some tragedies in the family. He was a rare combination of a razor-sharp wit with an innocent heart. Always open and ready to discuss and help a budding scholar with his insights and rare collection of books, he inspired a full generation of scholars. Even with such a vast range of learning, he was always modest in acknowledging readily the contribution of others. Indeed a gentleman. One feels that, he could never get the due recognition he deserved, in literary and philosophical circles. I.C.P.R. did organize a national seminar - 'Meet the Philosopher N.K. Devaraja' in his honour at Pune in 1994. Though travelled far and wide, intellectually he remained a critical insider throughout. His legacy of 'creative humanism' is

still relevant to enlighten our path in the darkness of cultural crisis of skeptical times we live in.

ALOK TANDON.

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