

Conversation

Ashok Vajpeyi with Madan Soni and Deependra Baghel

Ashok Vajpeyi, eminent Hindi poet and critic and vice-chancellor of Mahatma Gandhi International Hindi University, is also known for his promotion of the arts and literature. In a career spanning nearly thirty years he has helped transform the arts and literary scene in the country through institutions such as the controversial Bharat Bhavan at Bhopal. He is, certainly, among the most sophisticated literary connoisseurs around, and it is on this aspect of his personality that we chose to focus in this conversation.

Soni: How would you define literature?

Vajpeyi: Literature can be defined in many ways....It's a phenomenon that takes place in time. It is not the only thing that takes place in time. Literature is not the only thing that happens. There are many things. I mean, in a manner of speaking, there is nothing that can be said to be happening and hasn't happened with literature. There are other forms of articulation or reflection—philosophy, history, science, journalism....All these other forms of writing, as it were, these other forms of language, impinge upon the phenomenon of literature, and there could be interesting overtones sandwiching undertones. There could be tension, sometimes overbearing on literature as language. Now, a lot of things have happened which seem to suggest that literature does not matter; what matters is what the language, so-called, conveys, what it expresses, etc. This is where, of course, one can see the ideological or philosophical or moral reduction of literature. On the other extreme of the spectrum language is about language itself, it has nothing to do with anything else, it is a self-referential phenomenon. Both of these extremities seem to have dominated the scene one way or the other. Sometimes one has a reaction to the other. There has been, one would imagine, an interesting combat between the two because both tend to exaggerate certain components which in their view are being undermined or sidelined and need to be asserted. Of course both the positions can argue that the other is an ideological reduction. Literature can be made to argue that no, we are not undermining language, we are

only saying that after all language is meant to convey something, and that something is beyond language, and then we come to know that it is beyond language through language itself; in this way we are not undermining language.

On the other hand people may say that literature is language itself. When we say that language is about language, it does not mean that language is not a very human phenomenon, that it is not full of human mannerisms. In fact, language is a storehouse of memories, emotions, etc. So when we say that language is about language and that literature is about itself, we are not saying that literature has nothing to do with life or the world, etc. We are saying that both of them are contained in the fact of language and that they cannot exist, cannot meaningfully exist without the linguistic dimension. Both of these positions can be argued. But both of these positions have been seen as contrary to each other and in a kind of constant combat with each other. It can also possibly be argued that these positions have an overlap of validity, which is that both can be used as modes of creation—as modes of constituting literature, and as modes of reading literature. That they are not, therefore, despite their extremity, exactly unproductive.

One can argue that there have been any number of writings very ideologically inspired, and there have been nonideological writings linguistically provoked.

The problem with reading is that conventionally we have thought of reading, either, as recreating a work. As Sartre had said, 'Reading is recreation, reconstruction.' Therefore it is a kind of 'punar-rachana'.

Second is that while you do so, you also accentuate, you mark out, you designate points, etc., of the work, and, of course, this is one way of doing it. These two completely contrary procedures can possibly be combined in reading. They have, in fact, been combined many a time, which means take the work as a linguistic construct and reach out through the linguistic exploration itself. At times, the sights need not be exactly linguistic, and you can read a work ideologically and yet reach out in shoes of its linguistic structure. Because, after all, there is a truth in a work of art, and if there is a truth in the work of art, it is embedded in the body of the work. The body of the work is the truth of the work. If you take away the body, you take away the truth well. So a poem has a particular linguistic structure, and therefore has a configuration of meaning, and it can enact or carry that meaning only in that structure. If you change the structure, you will find that the meaning has changed. Of course a poem can offer alternative meanings. It can offer alternatives in terms of truth may be. The interesting thing about literature is that whereas it can offer alternative truths, it cannot offer alternative structures. The structure as the body of the work is a fixed thing. If you have started writing a novel, you will have to tell a story, that story will have to be a story. It has to be told in that manner. You may say that this story will run in such and such manner, the second story runs in this manner, and the third story has this structure. In this way you yourself provide alternatives to your structure. Unless you do it deliberately, as a part of your design, the structure cannot be played with. The body may yield a particular truth with a particular insight. If you approach it with a certain prejudice, a certain truth may be revealed. If you approach the same structure with a different kind of prejudice, may be a different truth will be revealed. Although even these truths cannot be very different from each other. I mean the difference cannot offer itself beyond a point. But, in any case, there can be

alternative truths that may come out of the body of a work. However, the body cannot be made an alternative in itself while offering the same meaning or truth.

Soni: You seem to agree with Jacques Derrida that literature is an institution which allows you to say any number of things in any possible way. If this is so, if the freedom is so infinite, then perhaps none of the ways of reading can be disqualified. Then there should not be a question like ideological reduction of the work....

Vajpeyi: No, no. The point is that unlike other forms of participation, literature is a form which offers freedom at all levels. If you are free to write anything, any time about anything, you are equally free to read anything in the body of a work. So you can encompass in your reading those ideological, etc., positions you have already decided upon as a limitation on your reading, or which enter into your reading may be because of your background, your station in life, your environment, or your commitment, etc.

In a similar manner when a writer has decided to write in a particular way, using a particular structure, then he has already decided to limit that freedom. In other words, the ultimate freedom is a possibility to enact in language. The limitations are there but these are chosen limitations, not imposed by anybody else.

Baghel: A little while ago you talked about literary work as a linguistic construct. In a similar fashion one could talk of a philosophical construct or even a socio-scientific construct. But what is it in a literary kind of construct that it not only represents knowledge but also has the potential to break the boundaries of language, that it can break conventions of language?

Vajpeyi: Let's say in the first place that literature is more than the philosophical construct or the socio-scientific construct. Literature makes the largest use of the resources of language. In other words, it has

access to intonations and rhythms, memories and resonances, etc., in a far deeper sense than the other two have. It is almost certain that literature is more language-dependent than philosophy and social sciences, where language is not just a medium, just a vehicle but is itself a part of experience....There are occasions when philosophical writing in the hands of a philosopher like Wittgenstein or social-scientific writing in the hands of a Marx reaches out to areas which are more easily accessible to literary language. But in literature, all of a sudden, language becomes much more illuminating, more interesting, engrossing, ruminating, etc. The limits of language can here be superseded in language itself. In a manner of speaking, the limits of reality can be superseded in reality itself. You cannot walk out of a reality—I mean, you can, if you want to—only with an aim to create a hyperreality, because ultimately these are all extensions of reality: they are extensions, transmutations, or whatever. In the same manner, in literature, because language is a part of its experience, language is also a part of its vision. In philosophy you might say what logic is doing, what reflective processes are doing, what ideational articulations, etc., are doing. But you seldom come across the question what language is doing there: for philosophy, language is not a zone of its extension. (And we are not talking of the philosophy of language here because that is a different phenomenon altogether.) But in a novel or in a short story or in a poem, a part of your experience is language itself. The way the words are arranged, the way they are spoken, the way they approximate each other, etc. So it creates an experience which is entirely different. I am not saying that it is better. People who are looking for truth, so to speak, might find it more easily available in some other discipline. And they might like to go to those disciplines which yield truth more easily than literature. In literature truth is not so easily accessible.

Soni: Literary criticism or literary theory which used to have a place of an afterword in literary activity now seems to be enjoying a central place in it. It has now become a most crowded, most eventful and most event-prone field of the institution of literature: a counter overloaded with transaction. One can view it as a radical event in the field of literature.

However, this critical, theoretical writing continues to be, in its nature,

closer to reading than to writing: it is a reading-oriented writing. Essentially, it is a manifestation of a reader's consciousness. In this sense, what I have called the radical event can also be said to be an event of the reader occupying a central place in the institution of literature. And this centrality of the reader is not merely in respect of his *position*, but also in terms of that hyperactivity in which he is questioning all things including the foundation itself of the institution of literature, its space-division, its laws, its ethics, its normatology, along with its relationship with other institutions. It is now a popular belief that in the process of creation the reader/critic/interpreter plays an equal role, and it is this reader/critic/interpreter whose action makes any writing a literary writing.

Would you recognize such a centrality of the reader or of reading in literary activity, and, if so, with what consequences?

Vajpeyi: To me it appears that there are two factors that have come to take root. One, in a world of ideas, which has been impinging upon literature all this while—through ideology, through various other avenues—literature seems to have decided to assert its own ideational existence. All literature, at one time or the other, has had a space that could be called its ideational space. If literature is not written with ideas, as Mallarmé has said, 'it is not merely written in words either.' Literature has ideational implications. Now that space seems to have decided to become more aggressive. Partly, I think, because of the pressure that has been exerted upon literature by ideology. The second point seems to be that over a period of time, the activity of critical articulation in literature cannot possibly remain satisfied with either indulging in some kind of a conceptual work, or, alternatively, doing, what was called, a practical criticism. This remained too simplistic for too long. Though it appeared to be all right while it worked. Just as now novel has become a more complex form than an 18th century or a 19th century novel, or than a merely realistic novel, or as poetry has become more complex than the earlier poetry, so has criticism assumed a performing function. It cannot possibly be performing those conventional functions which have been self-satisfying for one point of time and could no longer satisfy the inner dynamics of a well developed, eager, active, participative critical mind.

The third aspect which must be noted, perhaps, is that this phenomenon of literary theory is, so to say, a very academic phenomenon. It is in the academia that literary theory has become a more dominant mode. I mean never before in the western civilization were there so many universities, so many departments of literary studies, and so many people professing literature, and so there has been an autoerotic functionality in it. There has been a large academic camaraderie which has been brought about by literary theory. It could be argued perhaps that literary theory itself is a product of this camaraderie because there are these people, a group of people who are furiously specialists—the kind of liberal, common-reader-approach of yesteryears no longer seems to be adequate. They are people who have developed a language, terminology and concepts which are entirely their own, and these are highly complex. They can be understood by a few kindred souls at one level. At another level, I think, they have tried to deepen and enlarge the liberal notion that literature is a discipline which is larger than other disciplines. After all, what literary theory is saying is that literature is too important an activity to be left to conventional criticism to take care of. Just as in the making of literature all kinds of intellectual, emotional, valuational resources are engaged, so also in its reading. Writing has become an extremely complex phenomenon; so has reading. You cannot simplistically read a complex piece of writing. Complexity of creativity must be matched by complexity of criticism.

I forgot to mention that there has been a critical antecedent in the west and here as well that no work is complete in its meaning unless it has been communicated in full and received in full by a recipient, by someone like a *sahridaya*.

In our tradition a *sahridaya* was supposed to have thirty-six qualities. He is not an ordinary human being. He is a very complex reader. Someone like a modern-day literary theorist. He must have all these qualities; then alone is he fit to receive the work of art. So there has always been this element. When the current climate of literary theory did not dominate the scene, even then it was very difficult to read a work of art without importing meanings to it by critics. A layer of the reader's perceptive values has to be there. When you read Shakespeare you already know what Bradley has said about him and what theories Tillyard has formed

about him. A well informed reader would read Tulsidas with the layer of meaning of what Acharya Ramchandra Shukla has to say about him, and with the layer of meaning of what Hazariprasad Dwivedi has to say about him.

Soni: If we think about the centrality of reader, it can be said to be an expression of the self-consciousness of literature. In this sense, we can perceive this centrality at another, deeper level: although the reader himself is not formally or physically present, writing itself is so conscious of itself that it is realized or manifested in the process of its self-reading. We are familiar with the proposition that literature is a writing about itself instead of being about anything else.

Would you accept this increasing stress on self-consciousness in creative writing? Do you regard it as a healthy sign for literature?

Vajpeyi: Two or three things. It is no doubt an expression, a manifestation of a heightened level of self-consciousness. It has been brought about by two factors—a reduction of literature into a mere instrumentality of revolution, of social change or of sexual liberation, etc., and its use as a kind of entertainment. If you want to exist in the world of ideas, the world of dynamism and all that, you have to become an instrument of something. And if you want a place in the popular mind, you have no alternative but to become something like a cheap pulp novel. Now, I think, literature, by being self-conscious, by questioning its own existence, is trying to respond to these two challenges. This kind of self-consciousness was always buried in all great works of art over the ancient times. But to heighten it and to make it so much a part of a critical or a creative expression—this is a phenomenon which has become very large, very expansive, very wide in our times.

Self-consciousness, to a certain extent, is desirable, is very human, but beyond that point it becomes obsessive, it can be self-defeating. The self is embedded in the world. Literature cannot or should not cease to be about the world. I do not mean that it should cease to be about itself, but it has to engage itself in many self-conscious ways with the world. A paradox of literature arises out of the fact that a part of this world, which it is supposed to engage with, is its own creation. In that sense the world does not exist out there. The very act of literature partly creates

the world and tension comes between creating the world and yet grappling with what one creates. Literary theory does not seem to have made such an impact on the creative practice itself. In a manner, it has become truly autonomous. The two have achieved freedom from each other. They seem to have become so autonomous that they are verging on irrelevance to each other. A part of the phenomenon of criticism was always that it was relevant to literature, that both shared a kind of common concern. Now there seems to be a lack of concern for each other. For instance, people like Derrida have been engaged with the questions of power, lies, and truths, etc., and there are novels and poems which also engage with these questions. But when Derrida and others look at these questions, of course in a very meaningful and provocative way, they look at them in a rather independent way: they don't mediate their insight through literature, through artefacts.

Soni: This is not true so far as Derrida is concerned. It is rather contrary to his practice. Many of the questions he has dealt with were shaped through his marvellous encounters with literary texts, or his literary reading of texts. His literary approach or his engagement with literature is so deep that he has been called, in a somewhat derogatory fashion, a literary critic, rather than a philosopher.

Vajpeyi: I am not referring to Derrida only. I am referring to the overall scene. There are exceptions and they are important. The other question is that literary theory has also opened up the whole area of discussions and deliberations on larger cultural issues. You have already mentioned some of these issues raised by Derrida, like law, institutionality, counterfeit money, the lie, etc. To that extent they have, ironically, punctured the self-consciousness of literature, its autoerotic and narcissistic tendencies. Now, there was a tradition in which larger cultural issues did impinge upon literary thinking and literary criticism. But now, I think, literary theory has made a central enterprise of cultural criticism. In fact, the justification for autonomy could also be found in this notion, that the job of theory is to look at the entire cultural enterprise of which literature is a very important aspect.

Soni: In the great works of literature we experience phenomena like

suspension of consciousness, its dark, obscure, unarticulated levels, dreams and trances, etc. We expect literature to take us from our conscious world to domains which exist in these states of (un)consciousness. In this perspective, is the expanding space of self-consciousness in literature not a kind of threat to its unique world? Or do you see any new prospect in this risk taken by literature?

Vajpeyi: Just as writing is a phenomenon of language, it is also a phenomenon of memory. Writing is a way of recalling. Now, reading is also a way of participation in this memory. Memory is made of many things. There can be a way of writing which, in spite of this heightened self-consciousness, still creates, still evokes memory. I don't know how to describe it. Just as a self-conscious writer is not barred from the arena of memory, a self-conscious reader should not be expected to be excluded from this arena as well. The question is how he engages, how he provokes or evokes, how he brings that memory into the act of reading. A highly self-conscious reading of a work means that it is totally contained in itself, whereas the work evokes other things as well which we should take into account.

Soni: In other words, instead of focusing on the consciousness of the work, a hyper-self-conscious reading would rather focus on itself.

Vajpeyi: Therefore, beyond a point a heightened self-consciousness is self-defeating, as far as literature is concerned. I have no problem with people who are engaged in self-consciousness, in the industry of self-consciousness.... But literature is consciousness of the world, consciousness of the thing, consciousness of many things, and not just consciousness of self. Literature is not a *brahma sadhana* where you are seeking liberation by withdrawal, by exclusion, by giving up, etc. In literature you are doing just the opposite. The more you are in it, the more you liberate yourself—rather than the other way round. Literature seeks liberation through engagement, through participation. The ultimate metaphysical defence of it is that it wants not only this but also that; it does not choose between this and that. And the self-consciousness of literature would consist in that it shall not desert its vocation.

Soni: But wouldn't this make literary institution more transparent, which one would perhaps not like it to be,

as one desires, for instance, in respect of a political institution? The words or ideas like deconstruction, demystification, demythicization, etc., in contemporary theory, are creating an atmosphere that would destroy the very magic for which we perhaps go to literature....

Vajpeyi: Of course, I would say, perhaps time has come when we must restore to literature its mystery. What has happened in the 20th century world.... Two great calamities, according to me—death of wonder and death of the sense of mystery. Now, literature is not merely a phenomenon of language; it is not only a happening in the field of ideas. Literature is also a genre par excellence of wonder and mystery. Now that that wonder is withdrawn from the world, now that the sense of mystery has been more or less eroded, literature must assume this essential humanizing function. A certain restoration of innocence is in order.

Soni: Do you believe in concepts like 'nonreader' and 'anti-reader'?

Vajpeyi: Most people in the world are nonreaders in the sense that they don't read at all, unless you call newspaper reading, a reading. The world consists largely of nonreaders. Anti-reader would be one who wilfully reads, knowingly reads a particular work in a manner which is contrary to the purposes or declared intentions of the work itself. A reader, of course, is one who reads carefully and sensitively with a degree of attention. Not that all readers necessarily agree with one another on what is discovered in the work. Also there are cultural differences. Someone who is entrenched in the tradition of response and articulation may still respond quite differently to a work created in another culture. All these are within the gamut of being an intelligent and sensitive reader. The readers will differ with each other in their responses, in their estimations, even in their apprehension of the value involved. For example, Milton's *Paradise Lost* is read by many people not as a Christian poem but as a poem which goes against the Christian God. It can also be read as a political poem. There are many ways of looking at it. These will all retain the overall legitimacy of readerhood. But an anti-reader would put a work or his reading of that work to a use which is not warranted by that work in a legitimate way. In many ways, anti-reader is a successful reader, that is,

if he is able to make out a convincing account of his reading. He could be an extremely innovative person. I would say that as compared to readers, anti-readers are few and far between. I don't think they can be thought of as a category.

Soni: What about people like Khomeini who read, rather hyper-read, literary works on the basis of their ideology, religion, beliefs, dogmas, etc.?

Vajpeyi: If you are thinking of Khomeini or Bal Thakre or people like that who wilfully and deliberately prevent normal reading of a work.... most of them are not readers at all, because they don't read. I am absolutely sure that Bal Thakre or his types or Shiv Sainiks who tore off and burnt paintings of Husain or who took objection to his Saraswati.... they have not seen these paintings, like they didn't see the film *Fire*. Here is an interpretation, a reading being imposed on a work without reading it. Now, that is not merely an anti-reading; it is anti-art. You are not taking the trouble of going through a work. Khomeini, I am sure, didn't read the novel by Salman Rushdie....

Soni: But he had read *Quran*, which he thought was misread by Rushdie?

Vajpeyi: Yes. But Salman Rushdie is not making another reading of *Quran*; he is making use of certain aspects of the narrative; he is not saying that this is another interpretation of *Quran*. The difficulty with these kinds of formulations is that you would think that art should not overstep into spaces which are thought to legitimately belong to a religious text—the *Quran*, the *Bible*, or even the Vedas perhaps—that you should not overstep into spaces which, in their view, belong to religion. The problem with art is that art cannot and does not agree to this demarcation of spaces.... Literature is a trespasser. Literature trespasses into all kind of spaces by creating a geography which contains these spaces, overlaps them, exceeds them, supersedes them, allows conflict and interplay, a playful coexistence if you like, an interactive coexistence, hostile coexistence if you like—all these can be contained within the geography of literature. Therefore, in a manner of speaking, literature is an unceasing battle and unstoppable combat against exclusion of whatever kind. In the domain of literature gods are made fun of, philosophical and religious concepts and notions could be played with....

Soni: If literature is so inclusive, then it must incorporate into itself its misreadings and anti-readings as well.

Vajpeyi: What I am saying is that it would allow readings and mis-readings. Literature allows that by the sheer fact of its innate morality. The innate morality being a capacity and the courage to doubt itself, as Italo Calvino said, the courage to question itself. You don't have to go outside the so-called geography of literature to question it. Literature allows the space to question it within that geography. And therefore an anti-reader is really half the time a nonreader who has not actually read the work, and he is trying to accentuate perhaps an element which may not be even central to the work. That they have a right to express their opinion is all right by literature. Literature is even willing to give you a right to condemn it, if you so wish. Even without reading it. But it cannot possibly concede you the right to pass a *fatwa* which will endanger the life of a man. So the question is that you have a right to disagree, to condemn, to denigrate, but you have no right to destroy. Ultimately, literature does not allow you a right to destroy.

Soni: What about those people who not only force certain readings on texts, but also prevent other readings by calling them immoral or anti-people? Although their reaction might not have fatal consequences, but don't you think that in their own way they also impose a kind of moral prohibition on reading? A kind of moral *fatwa*....

Vajpeyi: I don't know whether to call it an anti-reading, but it is certainly an aspect of literary culture in India that there are people who try to prevent certain voices from being heard or certain readings from being made, in the name of some current sense of morality, or their socio-political commitment, or any other commitment. This is a phenomenon which has been there in the arena of literature for ages. Except that the phenomenon has become more aggressive and dominant now because of the emergence of some institutional frameworks—academic bodies, journals, magazines, forms of the media, electronic media. It has become a trifle more aggressive, a trifle more expansive, but it has always been there.... Whatever may be the claims made on behalf of literature—for carrying a democratic spirit, for allowing a democratic

space—it has worked with great inadequacies, with great infirmities over the years. It has not always succeeded in asserting and bringing into practice its own essential qualities. There has always been that....

Soni: What would you say about the readership in general?

Vajpeyi: One thing must be said about those who have given reading such a serious status: one may question their reading, but it cannot be denied that they have turned reading into an important and critical act, an almost inevitable expansion of creativity itself. In a situation where the general readership has been conventionally seen to be on the decline, they have imparted to the practice of reading a high degree of sensitivity and attention, thereby compensating in part the general decline in readership. I mean, if there is a highly intelligent, let's say, misreading of your work, you still, as a writer, feel somewhat more satisfied than you would if there were a general but undifferentiated, indifferent reading of your work. A writer has to always bear in his mind that the number of people who are likely to read his work would be less than the number of people who wouldn't read him at all. So a writer, whatever his quality as a writer might be—his structural precision, his imaginative skills, the level of his creative abilities, his control over language, his manipulative skills, etc.—is ultimately writing for a small number of people. In some cases, this has driven the writers to this extreme thinking that although they write, yet it must be destroyed. Kafka, before he died, wanted to destroy every thing that he had written. There is a deep sense of irony related with the writer in such situations: a writer writes as if he is addressing the world and yet it is a very small fragment of the world which really cares for and which really needs his writing. Therefore the importance of the kind of reading which is extremely attentive and sensitive.

Soni: These days categories like 'reading' and 'writing' are supposed to refer not only to the practices of literature and of the arts in general; they cover, in their conceptual ambit, the practices of some other discourses as well. For example, we now like to refer to history as a kind of mode of *writing*, which is as much subject to reading forces as a literary

text is. Today a psychoanalyst *reads* a dream as if it were a script. Categories like reading, misreading, overreading, etc., are now in common usage in extra-linguistic fields of action.

Would you think that the use of these categories in these other fields is imparting a new dimension to the notion of action itself?

Vajpeyi: For a long time, language, words, writing—although they involved a lot of action—were never thought to be action, and so there has always been this dichotomy between action and thought, between action and words, etc. What seems to have happened is that there is a growing realization that the words are also a version of action, that words are action, that reading and writing both are actions. They are not merely an aid to action, a provocation to action or an inspiration to action: these are actions sufficient unto themselves. Now, if this realization grows, then reading and writing become aspects of action, versions of action. Therefore, they travel into areas which were hitherto closed to them.

It appears to me that as you come to the end of the 20th century, the obsession with big action, the belief that action can bring about large changes in a country's politics, in human consciousness, etc.,—all these big projects of change today seem to have failed. So the forms of action which never claimed such large-scale transmutation and change, but which are capable of changing apparently small territories of sensitivity, of imagination, of consciousness, seem to have started catching the eye. Earlier you were engaged, or you thought you were engaged, in the service of great causes. Now those great causes seem to have crumbled. So you have come down to the court of small causes, and, I think, the attention to what words can do, what literature can do, what a literary sensibility can do, should be seen in that context.

Soni: Language, as an element of writing/reading, has long enjoyed a central status. However, it is believed now that the whole display of the world itself is linguistic. It reminds me of Bhartrihari who saw this world as a manifestation (*vivarta*) of the *shabda-brahma*: the *vaikhari* state of *shabda-brahma*. That is, this material world makes its appearance due to the play between word and meaning. One can say perhaps that in Bhartrihari's view, too, this world is a linguistic construct.

What correspondence or difference do you see between these two views?

Vajpeyi: The direction may be different but it is interesting to see the whole world as a linguistic construct. That the world is a text, and that it has to be deciphered or read or decoded, etc., this idea is not entirely new to the Indian traditions—of philosophy, of linguistics, or even of literary theory. The notion that the text is significant and that it has an alternative existence is also very much a part of the Indian traditions. There are many elements in our traditions which in our amnesia we are now receiving through another route. There are still many who may not be able to recall all this because they have not looked at our own traditions. As Dr. Daya Krishna has said, all of a sudden in the 19th and the 20th centuries we started translating a lot of Sanskrit texts into English. It is as if you started looking at your own concepts, your own works through the eyes of the west; as if you alienated yourself from your own intellectual traditions and became a wilful outsider, thinking that being outside will perhaps give you a better view. This might very well happen: no one is a permanent insider and a permanent outsider as we keep on shifting from inside to outside. That is the dialectics of existence. You thought that the intellectual traditions of India had come to an end about a thousand years ago. But the intellectual enterprise continued without your knowing it, without your becoming a part of it, without your becoming aware of it; this is now a very well documented fact. This, however, does not entitle you to say that all the aspects which are now emerging in the west in literary theory were present in the Indian traditions. It is very important to disengage yourself from the Jagatguru complex which says that every thing was already here, etc. This is all rubbish. But the fact remains that there has been a long and large intellectual tradition where these issues were sought to be raised and certain answers were found, certain solutions were found. It would be very interesting if a postmodernist in India tried to carefully look at this tradition. The person who I think can do this is Wagish Shukla; the mainstream performers of postmodernistic practice in India don't seem to think that there was any significant intellectual tradition here.