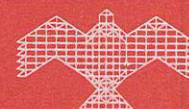


**LITERATURES IN INDIA**

U R Ananthamurthy

NIAS Lecture



**NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ADVANCED STUDIES**

Indian Institute of Science Campus  
Bangalore - 560 012 India.



*Literatures in India* copy

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I want to begin my talk with a simple observation about languages in India: we live in an ambience of languages. And this situation is unique to India. It is very likely that a less literate person will know more languages and vice versa. If a person becomes literate in English then he may not know any other language. A typical example of a less literate person knowing several languages would be a coolie in the Mysore bus stand. More often than not he would be able to speak Urdu, Telugu, Tamil and Kannada, as well as English to a certain extent. Even in the past, I presume Shankaracharya must have spoken Malayalam on the streets and Sanskrit to his equals. Madhvacharya must have spoken Tulu in Shivalli village, Kannada outside his village and Sanskrit to his equals. It is evident that people could do their work in Sanskrit in spite of living in small places such as Melkote and Udupi because they had an access to libraries which does not exist anymore.

Today, Prof. Narasimha has asked me to talk about Indian writers. We find that some of the best Indian writers like Salman Rushdie write in English. Rushdie's writings have a value in the western world because they contain the spirit of Bombay Hindi. Likewise the celebrated Malayalam writer, Arundhati Roy,



writes in English which emerges from a Malayalam context. Therefore, regardless of the language of Indian works, some sensibility which is inherent in one language gets into another language. This is not true of many other countries in the world.

A.K.Ramanujan, who has been my translator, has a very interesting short poem in which he says that he spoke Tamil in the kitchen, Kannada on the streets and English upstairs. He spoke in English upstairs because his father, who was a mathematics professor, had a room upstairs and insisted on speaking to his son in English, which he thought would help him get around the world. A hundred or hundred and fifty years ago his father would have spoken to him in Sanskrit or Persian, but now it is English. In the kitchen the language is Tamil because if he is very hungry he uses the house language. I don't use the word mother tongue anymore because there is nothing like a mother tongue in India as there is for Europeans. Occasionally, in Europe, there are writers such as Conrad, who wrote in English although his mother tongue was Polish. But it is not so in India. Some of our best writers in Kannada have been Tamil and Marathi speakers. Masti was a Tamil speaker, while Bendre, perhaps the greatest among our poets, spoke Marathi. Bendre's rhythms and images are so

fascinating that it would have been probably even beyond him to explain how he got them into his poetry. I had once asked Bendre about this question of being a Marathi speaker and writing such great poetry in Kannada. Then he told me that he was not aware of the fact that he was speaking two languages until he was 12 or 13 years old. While he was saying this to me, his daughter-in-law, who was perhaps from Maharashtra, had whispered something to him and then he talked to her in Marathi without knowing that he was talking in Kannada to me and Marathi to her. He would shift from one language to another easily. So, while he was talking to his daughter-in-law, I got confirmation of what he had said a moment earlier.

Therefore we have a house language, a street language and a language for communication. The street language here is the language of Karnataka, that is Kannada. The language at home could be Marathi, Urdu, etc. And there are many reasons for keeping our home languages or so called mother tongues alive. One reason would be to facilitate relationships based on language; for instance, an Iyengar girl knowing Tamil can get married to somebody in Tamilnadu while a Muslim girl can get married to someone in Hyderabad. Ramanujan has done excellent work in

three languages i.e. Tamil, Kannada and English. He is a marvellous poet in English. He has done translations into English of Tamil classics, and these have become so important that Harvard University has recognised Tamil as a classical language. Sanskrit India was known to the rest of the world through Schopenhauer and others. In recent times Ramanujan has been one of the great interpreters of non-Sanskritic India. He has written a fascinating book *Folk tales from India*. This was again possible because he lived in an ambience of languages in Mysore. Such an ambience has nurtured creativity in India. I therefore believe that we should not politicise and emotionalise the language issue.

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When Prof. S. Radhakrishnan was the President of the Sahitya Akademi, he said, "Indian literature is one although written in many languages". I once mischievously changed this sentence into "Indian literature is one *because* it is written in many languages". I would say this because the civilisation and culture of India are unique in many ways. I shall explain this by taking the example of the concept "Unity in Diversity" which is often used to describe India. If we think that India is essentially one and only

one, then India will assert its diversities. States like Assam, Tamilnadu and Punjab have asserted themselves because our rulers in Delhi wanted to impose on us a certain concept of the Centre. But when all the diversities begin to assert themselves too strongly, we begin to assert that there is only one reality in India: the 'one' gets importance. Unity gets importance when too much emphasis is laid on diversity, and diversity becomes important when too much emphasis is laid on unity.

This is so in civilisational questions as well. If somebody were to say that Kannada literature is born out of Sanskrit and does not have a distinction of its own, I would say "No, Kannada literature is like Italian or French or Spanish literature with a strength of its own". To explain this we can take the example of *Kavirajamarga* which was written in the 10th century. This is a work delineating the art of writing poetry and creating literature. The writer, who was a Kannada theoretician, has said, "*Dhwani embudu alankara*", which means *dhwani* is also another *alankara*. *Dhwani* means suggestion and *alankara* means rhetorics. In poetry, the literal meaning of *dhwani* is not suggestion but the meaning that comes through when words are put together. So the writer is of the opinion that *dhwani* is not a new theory and it need not be given



any special status. This reveals that in the 10th century a Kannada writer had debated with a Sanskrit writer.

Another example is that of Pampa Mahakavi of the 10th century who wrote the *Mahabharata* in Kannada, in a work called *Vikramarjuna Vijaya*. Pampa was a Jain, the conversion having taken place in his grandfather's time. While on one hand he was proud of the fact that his grandfather was a well-known brahmin, known for having conducted big yagnas, on the other he had a problem with making Krishna the hero in his *Mahabharatha* because it went against his religious principle and ideological position. So instead he made Arjuna the hero and equated Arjuna with his own Hindu king Ari Kesari. This shows that *dharma-nirapekshata* was practised in India all the time. Pampa practised it by writing a poem without making Krishna the hero and shifting the centre stage to Arjuna, and at the same time extolling his own king. Pampa also introduced into his work an *alankara* which is absent in Sanskrit and called it *samasalankara*. Using this *alankara* he made parallel comparisons between the achievements of his own king with achievements in the *Mahabharatha*. The *samasalankara* has not been appreciated by

English educated critics like T.N.Srikantaiah, who was influenced by western literary notions like many of us. But there are many interesting indigenous critics without any education in English. One such critic of Pampa in Udupi considers the *samasalankara* as his major contribution because with this *alankara* he could make the *Mahabharata* contemporary. In other words, it means that there was somebody in the 10th century who had the courage and was not frightened to intervene into a mega-text like the *Mahabharata* and make his king Arikesari a hero, like some English novelists of today who are putting Indira Gandhi and others as characters in the *Mahabharatha* and making parallels. But Pampa did it in his own way.

Therefore, if one were to assert that there is only one truth in India, i.e Sanskritic India, then I would disagree because Kannada has its own truth. Neither is it true that Kannada and Tamil are mutually exclusive, or that they are incomparable with languages of the rest of India. If this is argued then I will take up the other position. This is the essence of intellectual cultural debates in India. That is why unity in diversity is a meaningful thing.

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The next point I would like to make about Indian languages is that there is a hunger of the soul like hunger of the body and mind, and this also brings about creativity in languages. In any society, the ruling classes achieve a certain amount of knowledge and a sense of well-being. But then they begin to be very contented, and sometimes so ignorant of life beyond them. This happens to all of us in India, which is why we say there are two Indias. One is that India to which the upper classes (like the scientists) belong, and the other is Bharat to which the lower classes belong. This is one of the criticisms against the intellectual classes in general and not scientists alone, but I mention 'scientists' because of the presence of so many of them here in the audience! This has been true throughout Indian history. One can become a great logician and get lost in the intricacies of vedic interpretation; such a person will forget the "soul-hunger" which sometimes manifests itself in the poorer classes. This happened in the 12th century in Karnataka when there was that soul-hunger in shudras and other lower classes. There were some people who belonged to the upper classes but - as it happens in every age - they committed themselves not to their own class but to the lower class. They felt

a need for an immediate sharing of the urges of the soul. Thus began the Veerashaiva or Lingayat movement. Basava who was a brahmin gave up his pride and talked to the very poor. When Pampa wrote his epics, perhaps those who could read was a limited class and those who could read Kannada could perhaps also read Sanskrit. This happened in western society as well; for example, before Shakespeare's time, the literate in England could read English as well as Latin. Thus, Mulcaster wrote very scholarly topics that can be written only in Latin. He says in his introduction that it was easier for him to write in Latin because it has correct grammatical rules, while English has no rules and proper spelling. But he says, " Why should I write in English? Those who can read English can also read Latin. Yet, I write in English". I think civilisational creativity belongs to people like Mulcaster. Though it would have been easier for him to write in Latin, he chose to write in English, thereby beginning a great Renaissance. Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Shelly and Keats came later on, bringing in a richness to the language which it did not have earlier. English had to triumph over the language of the ruling classes. Similarly Pampa wrote in Kannada with an overall Sanskrit model though he had made some changes in the model like the introduction of *samasalankara*. This was because the frame of



expectations of the reader is unconsciously present before a writer who is aware that the reader has read Sanskrit and hence will expect some of the qualities that he admires in Sanskrit works to be present in Kannada. Similarly, in the present day, a person reading Kannada or Tamil may also have read English and therefore may expect some qualities of one language to be present in the other. But this is not the case with the *vachanas* and Kumaravyasa.

The Marxists of today talk about the concept of mass audience and Soviet writers had an abstract concept of mass audience and mass needs which was given to them through the cultural secretary of the government. A lot of foolish things can happen when one has this abstract concept of mass audience. I don't believe in a mass audience although there is a mass audience for commercial purposes like popular cinema and the popular novel.

The hunger of the soul led to movements like that in the 12th century which attracted an immediate audience cutting across both the lower and higher classes. The movement drew an immediate audience because great values, such as *Kayakave*

*kailasa* (which means manual work is holy), were asserted by people working close to nature. Mahatma Gandhi could do it during the freedom movement by drawing ordinary farmers as well as intellectuals into a movement devoid of caste and class. The Bhakti movement also did it with poets like Tukaram in Maharashtra, Meera in Rajasthan and Krishna Chaitanya in Bengal. Therefore we find that the medieval period in India was not the dark ages that it was in Europe. It was the time when the shudras and women were empowered. During the Veerashaiva movement women were told that menstruation is not polluting. This was a great act for change in one's concept of pollution, because unless the concept of pollution is changed one cannot change the caste system. The Veerashaiva movement did it and hence it was a purposeful movement. Also, since there was an immediate and remarkable response, there was no expectation of a Sanskrit model which had become essential for the old classical writers like Pampa, Ranna, Janna and others.

The book *Speaking of Shiva* is a translation of *vachana* poetry by A.K.Ramanujan. This book has influenced poets



world over. It contains Basava's *vachanas* which can be taught anywhere in the world without much cultural explanation. Allamma, who was one of the *vachana* poets, reads very much like a modern French poet. The poetry is very sharp and words are not wasted. There is no descriptive indulgence at all. It is immediate, and has the brevity of *sutras*. A *sutra* is considered to be an *alpakhshara*: i.e. it does not have too many *aksharas*. So *alpakhshara* was the aim of *vachana* poetry. I think the modern mind is unable to do it.

All kinds of people wrote *vachanas*. There is even a prostitute who has left some *vachanas* but unfortunately we do not have all the *vachanas* she has written. Her name is Sangavva; and she says, "I am Sulay Sangavva", which means "I am a sex worker". Basava preached that one should not be ashamed of one's occupation. So she is not ashamed of being a prostitute.

All these poets have a signature line. Basava calls himself *Kudala Sangama Deva*, which means "the lord of the meeting of two rivers". Allama is a very abstract poet. His signature line is *Guheshwara*, which means "the lord of the

caves". Akkamahadevi is another poet who is in love with Shiva. Her signature line is *Chennamallikarjuna*, which means "the lord white as jasmine". There are only two *vachanas* of Sangavva, with the signature line *Nirlajjeshwara*, which means "the lord of the shameless."

This is the profound creativity which entered into a language like Kannada. It also entered into Marathi, Hindi, Bengali, and in medieval times we find that what was exclusively Sanskritic, like the knowledge of the Upanishads, also entered into our languages. In some of my writings, I use the word *jeernagni* for our languages. This is a concept of *dwaita* philosophy, it is said that there is a *jeernagni* - a little fire - inside us. So the Indian languages are like this little *agni* which digested Sanskrit. Now these languages are digesting English. Basava and Allama were great *jeernagnis*. They got everything from the Upanishadic lore into Kannada. It became *dhyana* of a very deep kind.

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The *dasas* were another group of poets who came later on. Purandaradasa lived at the time of the Vijayanagar empire. There is nothing in the world that he does not write about. Like Whitman, Purandara has written on almost everything. Hegel in his great philosophical work said that a great dialectic will be born in India, but its growth into maturity and completion can happen only in Europe and that too in Germany. And then he has said, "In my king's time it has reached its peak". But Purandara, who lived in the Vijayanagar empire, when it is said that there was *swarnavrishti* (which means a raining of gold), has an amazing poem describing supreme rule. This poem has the line *Uttamma prabhutva lolalotte*. *Uttama* is a Sanskrit word which means excellence, and *prabhutva* is also a Sanskrit word and means rule; *lolalotte* is a nonsense word which means some thing that is empty, trivial - a word that children may use. Purandara is greater than Hegel to me. He says "In the Vijayanagara empire you may say it is *uttama prabhutva* (excellent rule) but it is *lolalotte* (there is nothing in it)". He may mean two things. One would be to think that *prabhutva* can become *uttama* because this is an adjective; the other is that to think that any *prabhutva* can become *uttama* and find solutions for all our problems is *lolalotte*. It is an answer

to all the Marxists, because Marxists dream that when there is a good *prabhutva*, all our problems will be solved. According to Karl Marx a time will come when there will be no conflict and we can sit on the bank of a river and go on fishing eternally. All these antimonies are solved. So *prabhutva* can become *uttama*. And then also, it is like a flower when it becomes seed, the petals - the state will wither away. But all the good communists withered away in Soviet land, not the state. So Purandara says that to think *prabhutva* can do *uttama* is *lolalotte*. Also, even if *prabhutva* is *uttama* then *uttama prabhutva lolalotte*. And then I think it goes on *chhatra chamara lolalotte* . . All the insignia of power are meaningless. Basava also has a tremendous *vachana* which says "When a rabbit is killed and this dead rabbit is taken on the street, people hanker after it. They want to buy and eat it. But when a dead king's body is taken out, it is worse than the dead body of a rabbit".

So the Bhakti movement at the level of revolutionary thought was profound. I think we can go on even with a bad government in the Centre or anywhere only because we also have another tradition like the Bhakti tradition. Despite many political upheavals, India has sustained itself because there is a



certain contempt for that kind of glory. This is not so in the best of Sanskrit literature. Kalidasa was a great admirer of the state. The idea of the state was important for the classical poets, whereas it was not important for the Bhakti poets. That is why they say that even Tukaram refused to go and see Shivaji. I sometimes think that it is better to take the idea of the state more seriously, particularly because one can never ignore the modern state as it is much more powerful than it was at the time of Basava, when it could be ignored.

Therefore we know that the Indian languages have asserted themselves whenever there was a need to change the audience and speak to other classes. When languages cannot be read and understood by an audience then mnemonic devices have become important. Works like those by Kumaravyasa are wonderful because when they are sung one may even learn them by heart and carry them in one's memory. The *vachanas* also have mnemonic devices. During the emergency when we could publish nothing, some of my friends wanted to go back to these mnemonic devices. Oral literature therefore has tremendous power and can work against any dictatorship, whereas when a novelist writes a book, it has to be published for people to buy

and read it. It can also be banned. One does not face these problems in the case of mnemonic devices like *vachanas*, because they are carried from person to person. Some civilisations develop the capacity to fight against evil forces through devices of this kind. And all the Indian languages, including Sanskrit, of course, have this capacity which developed over a period of time.

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I would like now to finish my lecture by putting before you another metaphor which I used a few months ago when I had to speak at the Nehru Centre in London. This very arrogant person who wrote *Midnight's Children* had said that Indian literatures have produced nothing worthwhile. I think he can hardly read Urdu. The arrogant statement was published in some American journal; I was unaware of it because I never get the journal in Mysore. But some people in Delhi had read it and began to worry about it. Apparently, he had said that despite people like me, literature in Indian languages is poor compared to the Indian literature in English. So I had to speak.

A metaphor then occurred to me and I would like to share it with you. I drew that metaphor from my own father's house in a village in Malnad. The house has two prominent places. One is the back yard and the other is the front yard. The middle and upper class people came to the front yard to consult my father about good days according to the *panchanga*. Sometimes, Kumaravyasa was read there and people listened. Since my father knew English he would read and translate Gandhi's weekly, *Harijan*. So the *vyavahara* world and the political world dominated the front yard. Inside the house, there is a cool inner yard where women even of lower castes can come and sit on the mats. Farther inside is a kitchen which even Father could not enter if he was wearing a shirt. It was Mother's domain. And then there is the back yard. I have become a writer because I frequented the back yard much more than the front yard. In the front yard I heard all things connected with the state. My father was a great admirer of Goldsmith, and would talk about him in Kannada. I got my education in the back yard because women talked about their aches, menstrual pains, the love affairs of other women and so on. I got to know that this little village was a very complex world. Caste never mattered here. Women from all castes came and confided in my mother, and

my mother confided in them. They came there to draw water, and the well was like a club. Mother would make a gift of something cooked at home to somebody's child. The backyard was also the place where herbs were grown. My grandfather, who was an Ayurvedic pandit, knew some of these herbs which he always gave to other villagers. He would tell me that when I grew up he would teach me about them. It was a great secret. Unfortunately I got educated in English and did not learn anything about these herbs from him.

In my speech at the Nehru Centre, I said the following. Indian languages have a frontyard and a vast backyard. Many of our folk stories originate from the backyard. Some of Girish Karnad's plays are based on these folk tales. There used to be a joke that whenever A.K.Ramanujan came from Chicago to Bangalore, he brought all the Kannada folk tales from there and two writers got pregnant from his tales when he came here. They were Kambar and Girish. These folk tales are very rich in oral tradition. Also, whenever a new writer emerged in these languages, for instance, a dalit writer, he would bring a vast experience of dalit life into the language. A village Muslim writer would bring a vast experience of the village life of his



people. When women began to write, they brought a vast experience which male attitudes would never pay much attention to. I don't think this will happen in English because Indian English writers do not have much of a backyard. They have a vast frontyard and they are very conscious of it. The *New York Times* is in their frontyard; they write to satisfy the *New York Times*. Salman Rushdie is condemned to be clever forever because he has to sell his ware to the West. But I don't have to be clever. In England some of the best writers came from Ireland: Ireland was their backyard. Yeats and Joyce were Irish who brought a lot of Irish rhythm into English literature. London did not produce many great writers. The only great Londoner was Dr. Johnson. Even for America, the South has been its backyard with writers like Faulkner.

In order to be a writer it is important to live a life in a community, because with too much individualism creativity disappears in literature. There has to be a sense of a fertile community. English had it in all those countries that the British ruled. Although Sanskrit did not have its own backyard, it got enriched through the other languages. Today many of the noble things written in Sanskrit are cherished through the other Indian

languages. So Rushdie was being silly when he said that nothing happens in these languages. Many things that happen here can't be sold in the west. A very sensitive British writer who had come to the Nehru Centre meeting said, "I don't want to read clever Indians who write to satisfy our curiosity about their own people. But I would like to read a writer who writes about his own people, for instance, about how the tribals live, their dreams and what they think about". Unfortunately Indian writing in English is written mainly for export. One can make iron implements or clothes for export but not literature. Unconsciously literature has become export material. This is not the case with writers like R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao or Mulk Raj Anand. Narayan wrote for an Indian audience in English. Later on, he became famous in the West. We find that Raja Rao's great novel *Kanthapura* could have been written in Kannada easily because it has all the rhythms of the Kannada language. In recent times huge investments are made by publishers to promote a work with advertisements. Therefore when one becomes aware that somebody has made such a huge investment, it raises curiosity and the novel is read. But for the great writers of the past it took years for people to read them; and the recognition came after a while. It always took time. But now even before the novel is published, people are

looking for it, because I think modern marketing has come into it. Fortunately it cannot come into our languages, because it takes years to sell 2000 copies of a novel. This is a disadvantage, but at the same time it can't get corrupted as easily as Indian literature in English

There is a lot of talent in English and the best of it comes from an ambience of languages. But unfortunately, a writer like Salman Rushdie living in London cannot write a novel with London as its backdrop because it will not be well received. He becomes like a Korean restaurant in America where you have to perpetually bring Korean food to satisfy the taste of the American boys and girls. So Salman Rushdie is like an Indian restaurant in London. He is expected to supply Bombay stuff by writing about Indian corruption and the dark things in India marvellously. Then the writer loses his freedom. No writer should lose his freedom. The market makes a writer the constant supplier of 'ethnic material'. Ethnic material is a horrible word. I dislike that word ethnic when it is used for our languages. Our languages are called *bhasha* and have a history of thousands of years. Tamil is a great language with a history of two thousand years. Kannada has a history of a thousand years, and Marathi has

had such giants like Gynanadev who is one of the great minds of the world. So one should never use such terms like ethnic material for our languages. I can write a novel about London in Kannada or about my village. But the poor successful English writer has to write about India and live in the west. It is a very odd kind of a combination that is created by the capitalist west, purely for commercial purposes.

But I am of the opinion that English is one of the languages of India like Sanskrit and Persian. It is a language among other languages. The Eighth schedule of our constitution has recognised some languages. When I was the President of the Sahitya Akademi, I took the stand that the Eighth schedule should be scrapped. All that happens with this schedule is that some languages begin to agitate for inclusion. The only outcome of inclusion of a particular language is that the constitution gets translated into that language; nothing else happens. And the Eighth schedule is used by politicians to create conflict and to get votes. Now that Konkani has been included there will be an agitation for the inclusion of Tulu. When this is done, Tulu votes are guaranteed. So the Schedule gets exploited for political purposes. Gandhiji wanted Hindi to develop, making use of



elements from every other Indian language. So the Eighth schedule was meant as a list of languages from which Hindi will grow. That has not happened. Hindi is a language of a particular province and it will grow only there. Since that has not happened, there is no use in the Eighth schedule. As President of the Akademi I had said that we are not here to recognise languages but we are here to recognise literature, because great literature may occur in a language which may not even be a written language. We know that quite a few tribal languages are rich in oral literature. So we began to honour literatures produced in tribal languages.

I would like to make a humble submission to the people in the field of science here, that there is no connection between progress and quality as far as literature is concerned. When Homer wrote his great epic, his language was like Tulu. When Shakespeare wrote his great plays, English was not a respected language and Latin was being used for many purposes. So progress and great literature are not necessarily connected. Nineteenth century Russia, which was backward, struggling and furious, produced Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy who are giants, greater than the European writers of the time. A great

combination which produces great literatures is pride and backwardness. Latin American literature is much superior to European literature today. After Sartre died, there are no great names in Europe, but there are great names in Latin America. And hence there is nothing which will prevent a great Tamil writer or Marathi writer or Kannada writer to emerge.

In the past India was never considered as having one centre. Although Kashi was a holy place, there were holy places everywhere. If one goes to a village in Karnataka, some lingayat saint or the other will be buried there. That is a holy place where people go on pilgrimage. Similarly the *dasas* have made certain other parts holy. Ramanuja has made Melkote holy, Madhvacharya has made Udupi holy, Shankaracharya has made several other places all over India holy. India is multi-centered. So imposition of the concept of centre will make all of us rise in revolt. When I got the Jnanapith Award, I quoted the poem that we all grew up with, *Govina Hadu*. My father was a stern man, and the only time I saw tears in his eyes was when he read *Govina Hadu* to me. In this poem the cow wins over the tiger. This is the first Gandhian poem in any language, narrating the triumph of non-violence over violence. It

is an extraordinary poem. *Dharani mandala madhyadolage Meriyutiha Karnatadeshadolu Iruva Kalinganemba gollana Paria nanentu pelvenu*. The description is almost like a camera from above which narrows down from the whole globe and focusses on one cowherd in Karnataka. On a globe any place can be the centre. Culturally it is so; politically it may not be true. Tumkur may become the centre, Mysore may become the centre. Dharwad was the centre of giants when Bendre lived there. So Indian languages never lost their belief that they can embody a central experience. Any Indian language, big or small, can embody a central experience. That again made for unity in diversity.

Let me explain this. In the Soviet Union, it was always claimed that all the languages were honoured. But that was not true: only the Russian language was honoured. When Kazakhstan became independent, the Minister for Culture came to Delhi. My book has been translated into Russian with an introduction by a very great novelist from there. The minister told me that my novel gave them confidence because I had written about a small community, in a small language and not the national language, and yet it had made a name. So he felt Kazakhstan

could also do that. I agreed. But under Russia they were told that the universal will happen in Russian, and the ethnic or local will happen in the smaller languages. Capitalist America is also trying to give the same idea through this talk about Indian writing in English, emphasising that anything great will happen only in the language of the ruling classes. And some interesting ethnic things will happen in Tamil, Telugu, Marathi etc.

Our belief is that any language of the world, anywhere, even if it is spoken by a small group of people, may produce Homer's *Iliad*. That is how Homer's *Iliad* was produced. I will tell you what it cannot produce. A language like Tulu may have a great epic poem, but a Bertrand Russell can't write in it. Prose is artificial and can only grow with civilisation and thought. Poetry is not. So perhaps a small essay with great intellectual ideas and rational thought is possible in Sanskrit. A language takes a long time to develop that kind of capacity in prose, to write like Bertrand Russell. A British poet once told me when I was a student there, "Unfortunately, I can't write like Blake because there are too many people like Bertrand Russell who have abused my language". Once a language develops great intellectual vigour and rational thought, some metaphoric



energy that it had is lost. Blake can express the most subtle metaphysical thoughts in a line. Purandara could also do that with the line *Uttama prabutva lolalotte*; it is difficult to say this politically. But modern times also require the other use of the languages in the development of various sciences and so on. That is the difficulty that Indian languages have. But the plus point is that they are still close to experience. So I told the Kazhak writer that it is not possible to translate *Das Kapital* because *Das Kapital* has first to be translated into good German! That is what Gandhi said when he read *Das Kapital*. He asked " Why doesn't he say these things in simpler language?". This is said also of Kant and others who write in very abstruse languages. Our quarrel with intellectuals has been that there is nothing which cannot be put in simpler language. Some intellectual will agree and try to talk in a very simple way. Some people hide in very abstruse thought. There is a vast amount of literary criticism today which cannot be understood by anyone. I wonder sometimes if there is anything worth understanding either, because languages can become very abstract and abstruse. Indian languages are not like that.

That is the way I see literatures in India as they stand in modern times.