

Conference

OF HOME, FIRE AND DEATH A conversation of two Poets

Tuesday June 26th 2012

At 6 :00 pm

Amphitheater SIMONE WEIL
5 allée Jacques Berque, Nantes

By

Ashok VAJPEYI

Director's guest
Fellow 2011/2012

Poet, literary critic in New Delhi

Biographical elements

Ashok Vajpeyi, a Hindi poet-critic, translator, editor and culture-activist, is a major cultural figure of India. With more than 13 books of poetry, 7 of criticism in Hindi and 4 books on art and music in English to his credit, he is widely recognized as an outstanding promoter of culture and an innovative institution-builder. Over the years he has worked tirelessly to enhance the mutual awareness and interaction between Indian and foreign cultures. A frequent presence at some of the major conferences, seminars and poetry-festivals, he has raised his voice for the autonomy of literature and arts as against contemporary tyrannies of ideologies, markets and fundamentalism. As editor of many prestigious journals he has done much to promote critical awareness of contemporary and classical arts and young talent in poetry and criticism. As an organizer he has more than a thousand events to his credit relating to literature, music, dances, theatre, visual arts, folk and tribal arts, cinema etc. He has been awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award, the Dayawati Kavi Shekhar Samman and the Kabir Samman.

He has written two large books on the Paris-based Indian master Sayed Haider Raza and also one on 7 contemporary Indian abstract painters. He set up the renowned multi-arts center Bharat Bhavan in Bhopal; has been the first Vice-Chancellor of Mahatma Gandhi International Hindi University (set up by Govt. of India). For more than a year he doubled up as the Director General of the National Museum, New Delhi and as the Vice-Chairman National Museum of Man, Bhopal.

A prominent public intellectual of India, he has been a creative global-trotter and visited Europe many times to attend conferences, deliver lectures and give readings. Has been a writer-in-residence at Jamia Millia Islamia University and a fellow of KK Birla Foundation. He lives in Delhi after retiring from civil service. He has been decorated by the President of Republic of Poland by the outstanding national award "The Officer's Cross of Merit of the Republic of Poland", by the French Govt. by the award of "Officier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres" and by the Embassy of Romania to India by the award "Best Promoter of Indo-Romanian Relations". He has been awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award, the Dayawati Kavi Shekhar Samman and the Kabir Samman.

Theme of the conference

“All poetry, at some level, is conversation:

With self, nature, others, God, the world, and the words themselves. Poets across ages and continents also engage in quiet conversations. Kabir of XVIth century and Ghalib of XIXth century seem to be in deep conversation which a modern poet happens to eavesdrop. It is done through some of the major and related themes of the two poets : home, fire and death.

Kabir insists that you have to burn your home if you wish to accompany him. Ghalib home is already in ruins. For Kabir the whole world is ablaze, each burning in his/her own fire. Ghalib warns that nobody should touch him; he is so full of fire that he could bruise anybody. Kabir reminds us that we are constantly under the shadow of death: we are all cookies that death has, some of them in its mouth, some in the lap. Ghalib avers that there is no respite from angst of being until death comes: the lamp burns in all hues until the morning!

Time permitting, a few poems written by Ashok Vajpeyi in Nantes could also be presented.”

Ashok Vajpeyi