

NOAM CHOMSKY INTERVIEWED BY PERVEZ HOODBHOY

Transcript (from video)

27 Nov 2001

(Pakistan Television, which recorded the interview, did not broadcast it. No reason was ever provided.)

Pervez Hoodbhoy: We have in the studio today a person of especial distinction: professor of linguistics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Professor Chomsky is the author of seventy books and a thousands articles which have been written and read widely all over the globe. Professor Chomsky is the recipient of the 1988 Kyoto Prize in Linguistics and in that work-the work that he had done in the seventies and the sixties-he had redefined the field of linguistics. More important than even that, Professor Chomsky has been a very vocal critic of the foreign policy of United States. Professor Chomsky, welcome.

Noam Chomsky: Glad to be here.

Pervez Hoodbhoy: You have been a very - how should I say - a very fierce critic also of the American media, and you have described it as a means of building consensus. Yet, in the New York Times, you have been described perhaps as the most articulate and the most important intellectual alive today. How do you reconcile this with the allegation that you make of its bias?

Noam Chomsky: Well, that sentence which is widely quoted does exist, but the sentence that followed it is rarely quoted. The sentence that follows it is something like "How can he say such things about the United States and its foreign policy" (in a way of criticism)-saying--"How can he say such outlandish things even though he is (supposedly) a distinguished intellectual." It's rather the way that the media - the New York Times in particular-- treated Bertrand Russell. They despised Bertrand Russell for his anti-nuclear activities, his condemnation of the Vietnam War and so on. On the other hand, they recognized him to be a distinguished philosopher.

Pervez Hoodbhoy: So there is a certain level of objectivity over there and therefore this media is a means of getting valid and correct information. Would you agree with that?

Noam Chomsky: No, I don't. I am not going to talk about myself, but let's talk about Bertrand Russell. When they described Bertrand Russell as a great philosopher-that is accurate-and contributed to mathematical logic and so on, when they bitterly and harshly condemned him for opposing the U.S. war in Indo-China or for warning

against the dangers of nuclear war and nuclear armaments, they didn't deal with his arguments, that was simply denunciation and condemnation and slander. That's not providing information.

Pervez Hoodbhoy: So what you are saying is that in matters of politics and power objectivity is perhaps an impossibility and that it may not be not even be objectively possible to have a true depiction of events.

Noam Chomsky: I don't think the problem of objectivity in human affairs is fundamentally different from science. I mean, no one working in the sciences has any confidence that what they are saying is correct. You can't. It's their empirical domains. You are drawing the best conclusions you can from scattered and limited evidence and finding the best theories you can--understanding that they are partially [unclear]...That's what science is. That's what rational activity is. With regard to objectivity every scientist knows--is aware--that he or she starts from a certain perspective. And you try to be critical of your own perspective. But you recognize that you can't [unclear]. I mean, you are approaching the problems you are dealing with from the point of view that you reached on the basis of earlier work--sometimes prejudiced--sometimes you think you have forgotten. You constantly try to challenge it. And that's the search for objectivity. And it's fundamentally no different when you are looking at international affairs or economic policy or social issues. Yes, of course, you are always starting from a point of view. You always want to recognize that point of view. You want to allow others to hear you, to understand your point of view and want to challenge it.

Pervez Hoodbhoy: But in science a much higher of objectivity is possible because there is the possibility of observation and experiment and prediction. There is no prediction that one can make in political affairs and therefore the level of objectivity is much lower.

Noam Chomsky: Let me come to this. I put it little differently. If science were to try to study the events of the world--what you see outside the window when you look out the window--science couldn't do anything either. Science succeeds in achieving a higher level of objectivity by restricting its sight. If you restrict your sight to the-if the evidence you are concerned with is result of carefully constructed experiments designed to answer specific questions--usually simple questions--yes, with those restrictions you can achieve a higher level of confidence in your results, including confidence in your objectivity. You are right. We can't do that in

human affairs. It's like looking out the window and trying to figure out the laws of physics by watching the leaves float by.

Pervez Hoodbhoy: Now let's come back to the issue of the media. There was a particular representation of the event of September 11th in the media and we in Pakistan watched the horrific events of the Twin Towers. You have been critical of the way in which those representations were made and yet there was something very objective about airplanes flying to Twin Towers. What precisely is your objection?

Noam Chomsky: I have no objection to the way those events were portrayed. It was quite correct to describe, portray them, send the pictures over, and condemn them as horrendous terrorist acts. That's all correct. In fact, I don't know anyone who disagrees with it. However, that's not the end of the story. These were presented as if this was somehow a unique event in world history--there have never been such atrocities before. Unfortunately, there have been plenty of such atrocities before. What was different about this one was that it was an atrocity carried out against the rich and the powerful. Atrocities of this kind are carried out constantly against the poor and weak by the rich and the powerful. Now that's a big change. And that's the way it should be represented. Furthermore, a few days later the atrocities on September 11 were very soon outweighed by worse atrocities, namely the ones perpetrated against the perfectly innocent civilians in Afghanistan.

Pervez Hoodbhoy: What do you propose the U.S. should have done?

Noam Chomsky: Should have done? Should have followed the precedent of war by stages. There is no such precedent. If a crime takes place--no matter what it is--it can be a robbery in a house or a crime against humanity like this one, there is a way to proceed. What you do is try to find those who are responsible for the crime, collect evidence against them, present the evidence to some appropriate authority and if you can make your case, get authorization to take action to bring the perpetrators to justice. That's the way it's done and that's the way, in fact, case after case is done.

Pervez Hoodbhoy: Give us an example.

Noam Chomsky: For example--and the most obvious example-- and it takes real dedication for the media not to bring this one up because it is such an obvious example. The most obvious example is the (and I mention it only because this is uncontroversial) U.S. attack against Nicaragua in the 1980s. I recall that was called the war against

terrorism, but, in fact, it was a massive terrorist war. The U.S. set off a mercenary army to attack Nicaragua from foreign bases, gave it massive supply, had total control of the air, and ordered the army to attack undefended civilian targets that were called "soft targets." And that was a serious atrocity. It ended up killing tens of thousands of people and practically destroying the country. That's even worse than September 11. How did Nicaragua respond? They went to the International Court of Justice-World Court-- presented a case, which in this case wasn't very difficult because it was obvious who the perpetrators were and what was happening. The World Court considered their case, accepted it, and presented a long judgment, several hundred pages of careful legal and factual analysis that condemned the United States for what it called "unlawful use of force"--which is the judicial way of saying "international terrorism"--ordered the United States to terminate the crime and to pay substantial reparations, many billions of dollars, to the victim. The United States dismissed the court judgment with complete contempt. Nicaragua then went to the Security Council. Security Council debated a resolution which called upon all states to observe international law-didn't mention anyone but it was understood it meant the United States. United States vetoed the resolution. Nicaragua then went to the General Assembly which passed similar resolutions several years in a row. Only the United States and one or two client states voted against. At that point there was nothing more that Nicaragua could do. But if the United State would have pursued a legal course nobody would stop it. Everyone would applaud.

Pervez Hoodbhoy: Yes, but as you say, Nicaragua got a moral victory out of it. In fact, it did not change anything. They just simply shrugged it off.

Noam Chomsky: But that's, of course, because Nicaragua was trying to bring a case against the most powerful and violent state in the world. That's not a problem for the United States. It's true that if the world is ruled just by force, as the West prefers, then, yes, there is nothing to do except violence. That, incidentally, justifies the September 11 atrocities, too. There is nothing to do except violence-use of violence. If you think the world should not be governed by the rules of force, there are ways to proceed. Incidentally, this is by no means the only example. Let's take one inside the United States. Few years ago there was a bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City; truck bombs went off; killed a couple of hundred people. The original-the initial-reaction was: this is got to be connected with the Middle East. Let's bomb Lebanon or something like that. If there had been a Middle East connection, you can be quite confident that the U.S. air force would have been

bombing somebody-in Lebanon or, you know, West Bank or Syria or whatever-they don't really need to have evidence; just bomb whoever they feel like. Well, it turned out there was no Middle East connection. It turned out that the perpetrators were connected with right-wing militia in the United States-ultra-right militarized groups that are found around the country. There are several others. For example, one in Texas called the Republic of Texas, which has declared independence. It refuses to accept the jurisdiction of the United States. It calls itself the independent state. They are heavily armed and so on. And there are several in Idaho, in Montana and many other places. Well, once they had determined that was the source, did they go ahead and bomb Texas? Did they bomb Idaho? No. They tried to find the person who was responsible. In fact, they did find him, brought him to trial, sentenced him, and since the U.S. has a death sentence, killed him.

Pervez Hoodbhoy: Well, the Oklahoma and the World Trade Center events are distinguished by the magnitude of the crime. In a sense, the September 11 event was unique. It really shook the United States.

Noam Chomsky: It shook the United States. First of all, the scale was not unique. The attack on Nicaragua, for example, was much worse.

Pervez Hoodbhoy: I mean, within the United States.

Noam Chomsky: "Within the United States" may be correct. Within the United States and Europe, too. Europe and United States have been immune to serious violence. They have perpetrated it against others. That's modern history. A leading theme of modern history-maybe, the leading theme-is the violence that Europe and its offshoots have conducted against others. [It's] going on constantly. And this was different. It's the first time in hundreds of years that the guns have been directed in the other direction. That's new. And if the media were presenting it honestly, that's what they would say.

Pervez Hoodbhoy: Now, do you think there is self-reflection, introspection, as to the causes of why this happened? We hear President Bush asking, "Why do they hate us so much?" So, in terms of the changes that this has caused to come about in the United States, do you feel that the United States is now looking at a different kind of foreign policy? Do you see positive changes emerging from this?

Noam Chomsky: I would discount Bush's statement. That was a rhetorical question, not a real question, if what he was saying was: "We are so marvelous and wonderful. How can anybody hate us?" And then the official answer that comes across from New York Times and

other commentators is, "Well, they hate us because we are so wonderful. That must be why they hate us." Incidentally a long theme in the history of imperialism-go back to British imperialism, French imperialism in its worst days-that's the kind of theme that is projected by intellectuals. "We are marvelous, we are angelic, we are wonderful, we are trying to do things for the these poor people. If they hate us it's because they are backward." For example, just to take one case, when the U.S., hundred years ago, invaded the Philippines, the goal was, as the President put it, to "uplift and Christianize" them. Within a year or two they killed a couple of hundred thousand people with horrifying crimes. It was so bad that [unclear]Š. The press realized that this was not nice. We are killing a lot of people. The reaction was, to quote from one of the press source: "We have to slaughter the natives in English style until the misguided creatures who resist us at least come to respect their arms and then we will recognize that we want nothing for them but happiness and freedom." That's the history of imperialism. If you can find an exception to that I would like to find it. Now that's Bush: "We are so wonderful. How they hate us!" On the other hand, putting Bush aside, there has been some reflection on what it all means. And incidentally, the best work on this [topic] in the United States came from the major right-wing business journal: the Wall Street Journal. Within a few days after the bombing--I think it must have been September 14--it began to publish serious articles with serious review and analysis about the Muslim world--what are their grievances against the United States? They didn't sample the people in the streets. They sampled the people they care about--bankers, professionals, lawyers and people in the multinational corporations, in fact, people who had reconciled to the U.S. system. Those are the people they sampled, what they called moneyed Muslims. That's what counts. And they gave the right answers. They reviewed why these people are antagonistic to the United States. They are antagonistic to the United States because it's opposed to democracy, it supports authoritarian and repressive regimes, it blocks democratic tendencies, it prevent economic development by supporting suppressive regimes. In foreign policy areas, the U.S. and Britain are devastating the civilian society in Iraq while strengthening Saddam Hussain. And they know--the West prefers to forget--that that the U.S. and Britain and France and Russia and others supported Saddam Hussain right through his worst atrocities. It is not because of their atrocities that they are destroying Iraq. And on the other hand, the US in particular is giving the decisive support for the Israeli military occupation, which is harsh and brutal and oppressive, and this is going in to its 35th year. These are the grievances; they recognize those grievances. Now, there haven't been articles like that before and there some have been some others since.

One of the best international journals in the United States, not well known outside, is the Christian Science Monitor. It's--you will be surprised--is a good journal. And they did some in-depth studies of this and then there is a little bit that seeps around the rest of the media--the New York Times, very little.

Pervez Hoodbhoy: Professor Chomsky, minorities in every society are threatened. So when Indira Gandhi's Sikh bodyguards killed her, 2000 Sikhs were slaughtered in Delhi and when the Babri Masjid was destroyed in India, 35 Hindu temples-mandirs-were leveled over here, in Pakistan. In the United States, after the September the 11th, there has been discrimination against Muslims and Pakistanis and certainly people over here are very worried that there might be a new age of McCarthyism, of repression, which is unleashed upon Muslims, particularly Pakistanis. Do you believe that this fear has any real cause to it?

Noam Chomsky: I don't think it can be discounted, but I wouldn't exaggerate it either. I think it will be marginal. I mean, there will undoubtedly be, and there have been, examples of bad treatment of people considered to be Muslims and that's it. It can be an Indian physicist walking down the street in New York who happens to be Muslim. So, yes, there is this kind of immediate reaction since the crime was attributed--probably people who carried out the crime were indeed mostly Saudi Arabians. So that was an instinctive reaction, but it has died now. And there were quite considerable attempts to distinguish, to separate, the perpetrators of the crime from the Muslim community, which is, in a way, targeted by the crime. How successful that will be, I do not know, but I don't expect that there will be much harsh repression.

Pervez Hoodbhoy: Yes, but people there are being tried by military courts.

Noam Chomsky: This is not unprecedented--Not yet. The Bush administration has called for military tribunals to try foreign terrorists, not domestic population. That's a very bad move and it has been harshly attacked by civil libertarians, by Congress, by people in the legal profession, by popular forces. But where it will go, we don't know. I agree. That's a very bad move, a terrible move, but it has not yet been implemented and it may not be, and it's not yet--If it isn't, there is a very little chance that it will effect the domestic civil libertarian situation for citizens. We should remember that the U.S. has a very bad record with regard to civil liberties whenever there is a moment of crises. During the Second World War, during the First World War, it was worse. And this is true even though the United States have never been under any threat.

Nevertheless, it's a highly repressive apparatus. It moves into operation under conditions of crisis, less so now than in the past, because the population is much more resistant to it than in the past. The way we evaluate these things are: Are they going to tolerate repression or they are going to struggle against repression? That's what makes a difference, not what the words say. And now people are much more resistant to repression. That's partly the result of the 1960s.

Pervez Hoodbhoy: You were very recently in India--and this is after September 11--and this is after Pakistan's change of direction. What kind of mood did you find amongst the peoples over there? Do you feel that there is now some greater hope of rapprochement, of solving our problems together, or did you find a hardening of attitude in the opposite direction?

Noam Chomsky: Both. Just like here. I mean--if you read the newspapers--what they concentrate on is hatred for Pakistan and fear that now Pakistan will become the favorite of United States and United States will support Pakistan on Kashmir and so on. I mean, I was asked questions by Indian journalists in press conferences--serious Indian journalists--asking me to explain why the United States is supporting Pakistani terrorism in Kashmir, which is, of course, perfect nonsense, but a reflection of the kind of belief that is spread and focused on. There is meticulous focus on what Bush said to Musharraf. "Does that mean that Pakistan is going to be accepted as an ally and India will be marginalized." I mean, these are various issues right in the public domain. On the other hand, when you talk to people, it's quite different, like in every country. Peoples' attitude and understandings are always more nuanced and complex and open and you find concern for reconciliation as well as the kinds of attitudes that make it to the elite presentation. I think it is a lot different here.

Pervez Hoodbhoy: Yes, but we seem to be locked in to a stalemate--no movement backward or forward--and Kashmir remains as the most important single issue between the two countries. How do we ever break out of this stalemate?

Noam Chomsky: Well, as you know much better than I, there have been moves at the grass roots level for interaction, discussion, and reconciliation. Delegations have gone up and back between Pakistan and India to try to sort out these issues. Eqbal was involved. In fact, there was among students of Delhi great respect for Eqbal Ahmed as a result of a visit that he made there--which, apparently, was very successful--in discussing these issues and bridging gaps. Student

from there had come here. There are other meetings in which you have been involved. Establishment of relationships at grass roots level where people can interact with one another as human beings, not as symbols of their state authority, can take a long step in preparing the ground for dealing with the situation in a humane and civilized fashion. I think everyone agrees on what has to be done. At least there is a preliminary. Now the fact is that official grievances that Pakistan has against India--and India against Pakistan--are more or less accurate. I mean--each side's propaganda is probably exaggerated, but essentially correct. The trouble is that each is only half the story. And what has to happen is for each side to recognize the legitimacy of the grievances of the other. It's a very hard step to take. I mean, even in personal life, like in a family quarrel, it is a hard step to take. But it has to be done. There has to be something other than an escalating cycle of violence, which, in fact, is dooming both of these societies--Pakistan in particular. Pakistan cannot survive a constant on-going military confrontation with India. It is harmful enough to India, but it is devastating for Pakistan, just for reasons of scale.

Pervez Hoodbhoy: I will come to something which is almost as hard--perhaps not quite as hard, but still very hard--and that is the issue of globalization. You have been very critical, perhaps rightly, that globalization has led to great inequities in the distribution of wealth between nations and within nations. And yet globalization seem like a logical necessity as the world shrinks and as communication becomes easier and in consequence of which capital flows. So your criticism is perhaps perfectly valid, but what is the alternative?

Noam Chomsky: Well, first of all, the way you have presented [the argument] is the usual way, but it is internal to a system of doctrinal fanaticism. Globalism--no one is opposed to globalization. I mean, I am not opposed to the fact that I am sitting here with you in Pakistan instead of sitting in my office in New York. Okay, that is globalization. Integration of international society, of which we are now an illustration--that's fine, I think. I have never heard anyone opposed to it. The question is: What form shall international integration take? Now, what's called globalization is a specific form of international integration designed by the powerful for their interest. It is a specific form of international integration that is oriented towards the interests of investors, financial capital, multinational corporations and few powerful states. And what happens to the people is incidental. And, in fact, it is true that these elements are so powerful that they have succeeded in imposing even their own terminology on people. So what they--the specific form of integration--call globalization, not the kind of international

integration that, say, you and I might be interested in could be quite different. We should accept that. They are not pro-globalization, I am not anti-globalization. In fact, the more honest journals like, again, the Wall Street journal--they don't talk about free trade agreements, they talk about free investment agreements--which is correct. This is what they are: free investment agreements. Now the period that is called globalization, roughly the last twenty-five years, is quite different from the early post-war period--twenty-five years after the First World War. In fact, it is not simply that the last period has led to a greater inequality; it has also led to much slower growth. The period of so-called globalization has been harmful to the international economy. Just about every macro-economic measure--so much so that economists commonly refer to the first twenty-five years as the golden age of post-war capitalism and--and the next twenty-five years, so called globalization period, as the leaden age. There is a lot of concentration on the inequality, which is real, but it fails to notice that that inequality overlays a decline. In fact, even the growth of trade has declined in the last twenty-five years. The same is true of per capita economic growth of investment and growth of productivity. By just about every measure it's been a poor period of economic performance. There are exceptions. The exceptions are primarily the East Asian countries. And they are exceptions because they didn't accept the rules. They violated the neo-liberal rules and they indeed went through a period of rapid expansion. But in so far as the rules have been followed it's been harmful. It's well-known and this is not controversial. I mean, the head of the economic of Latin America-U.N. Commission of Latin America--which is strongly supportive of the neo-liberal reforms--he just gave a talk at the International Economic Association a few months ago in which he pointed out that the period of so-called reforms of the globalization period had been extremely harmful for Latin America. It has caused sharp deterioration. Latin America is the region which has followed the rules most religiously and it's the region that has been harmed the most. Comparative with East Asia which did not follow the rules and has benefited.

Pervez Hoodbhoy: But let us try and imagine a better world where the distribution of wealth is more equitable.

Noam Chomsky: Not just that, but where growth is better, the economic progress is better.

Pervez Hoodbhoy: My question is, what should be unit of economic power? Should it be the corporation or should it be the nation state? And, do you think that the nation state is today a viable entity--something that should still exist and something that is necessary for the world of ours?

Noam Chomsky: First, I don't think it should be either--the corporation or the nation state--but let's come back to that. The strongest advocates of powerful states are the corporations. They want powerful states and they need them. The national corporations are heavily dependent on the power of nation state, but for insuring a global environment in which they can function, but also simply for subsidy--straight subsidy. In fact, there was a technical review few years ago of the top hundred corporations in the Fortune list of the corporation by assets. The "Top Hundred Multi-national Corporations" is a technical study. But the European economists found that every single one of them had benefited crucially from state subsidy and that more than twenty of them had been saved from destruction by massive state intervention. And that understates the point, because it does not take account of the constant state subsidy. So take the United States. It is not a free market society-- nothing like it. The whole "new economy" as it is called-- computers, electronics, generallyŠlasers, automation aerospace, information technology, biotechnology--just run through the list--comes out of the state sector--overwhelmingly.

Pervez Hoodbhoy: Professor Chomsky, I want to know of your dream. How should economic power be distributed among people?

Noam Chomsky: Corporation are tyrannical organizations. They are totalitarian institutions. In fact, if you look at themŠthat what is a corporationŠit is an unaccountable private tyranny in which power comes from above, from the owners and the managers, orders are transferred down below and inserted inside the system. You take your orders below and above and you transmit them below. At the very bottom people have the right to rent themselves to this tyrannical system. It is essentially unaccountable to the public except by weak regular career apparatus. In fact, it is a totalitarian institution. And if you look at their intellectual roots, it happens that they come out of the same neo-Hegelian conceptions of the rights of organic entities that led to bolshevism and fascism. We have three forms of twentieth century totalitarianism: bolshevism, fascism and corporation. Two of them, fortunately, were dissolved, disappeared mostly. The third remains. It shouldn't. Power should be in the hand of populations.

Pervez Hoodbhoy: That's very beautiful, but it's abstract!

Noam Chomsky: No, it is not abstract!

Pervez Hoodbhoy: How do we make it into an actuality?

Noam Chomsky: Same way, look, 200 years ago, talking about parliamentary democracy sounded abstract. We had feudalism and kings and princes and slavery. How did parliamentary democracy come about? By years and years of popular struggle. I mean, it wasn't until the early twentieth century that the franchise was even extended--the right to vote--to most of the populations in the democratic countries--was never a gift. Now, this came from long popular struggle. Same is true here. For economic democracy to be realized, for corporate entities to dissolve and for decisions to be transferred to the hands of the population--meaning workers in the factories, people in communities and so on--that's a further step towards the realization of democracy. It's not going to be handed as a gift any more than it was in the past!

Pervez Hoodbhoy: Professor Chomsky, there so many questions I want to ask you, but I want to move on to the fact that above and beyond all else you are a linguist. And you know so much about language. Now tell us: In a multi-lingual society such as Pakistan, should one aim for one language or should one allow a multitude of languages, all to exist at the same time? And tell us, is there something like intrinsic superiority of one language over the other?

Noam Chomsky: The only intrinsic superiority of one language over another is that if one of them has more guns than the other. If Australian aboriginals were to conquer the world, [unclear] would be the international language. I mean, essentially, there is no technical difference. Humans are basically identical-genetically quiet alike--and in their language capacities if there are any differences they are beyond their capacities to detect. So the idea of superior language just doesn't make any sense. In fact, take, say, English. I mean English is now the world's dominant language. Go back a couple of hundred years back. English was the language of a group of barbarians--

Pervez Hoodbhoy: Yes, but the fact that you and I can communicate owes to the fact that we all speak English. If we didn't, there's no way that I could know what you think, and it would make communication impossible. This suggests that if we want to make the world a better place, that there should be one universal language and then many local languages?

Noam Chomsky: That's a possibility, but I don't think it's a necessity. One reason why we're all speaking English is because of the power of the English-speaking world; England, and primarily now the United States. Their power is so overwhelming that people in these countries are extremely insular. The United States is one of the few countries where people see it no necessity to learn a second language. In most of Europe people know several languages. In fact, in most of the world people grow up knowing many different languages. I just came back from India, and if you talk to the taxi driver, he may know up to five different languages. That's the way it is. If you speak this language to your grandmother, and that one in the streets, and so on, people easily grow up knowing many languages. They're very cultured people as compared with Americans, who are very uncultured in this respect. They know one language and nothing else. But I don't think that's a healthy situation. I think it would be a much healthier situation if the English-speaking world was more civilized, and in tune to other languages and cultures.

Pervez Hoodbhoy: So to be multilingual is best?

Noam Chomsky: I'm sure you can see it yourself; being part of a multicultural, multilingual environment is enriching.

Pervez Hoodbhoy: To move to something slightly more abstract, you often speak of languages as being the mirror of the mind. How do you feel that your research into language has helped us understand human nature, and is human nature something that is definable?

Noam Chomsky: Well, human nature is as real as the nature of bees. We are a specific kind of organism; we have our capacities, our limitations, our modes of cognition, our modes of perception, our moral values...all of this comes out of some fixed genetic endowment. Most of these areas are extremely hard to study. There are a few that you can study closely, and language happens to be one of them. It's an important one because it's at the core of our nature. Anything we do, language is somehow related to it. It's furthermore the one clearly identifiable human characteristic that is biologically unique, so we're completely different from any other organism in this respect.

Pervez Hoodbhoy: We're almost out of time, and I can't let you go without asking you this question: what keeps you going after forty years of struggle, where do you see hope for this world? What do you see as the agents of change?

Noam Chomsky: Well, you know, there's the ancient Indian epics in which the ideal sage believes in hope and resignation, meaning recognize that things are difficult but hop that they'll get better. You'll find the same in the Confucian analects; the master, the greatest person continues to struggle though he knows there is no hope. Well, it's a little too strong - we know there is hope; things are difficult, but they're better. If you look over time, even over the last forty years, there has been very considerable progress. In many respects, things are much better now than they were forty years ago.

Pervez Hoodboy: On this optimistic note, we'll conclude this discussion with Professor Noam Chomsky. Thank you for coming to Pakistan.