I think real life is full of uncertainty and the German efficiency or the First World’s bus coming at 3.07 pm every time is aspirational because we all desire certainty. It’s a human trait. And that is the weakness big science is really exploiting.

I want mango every season or I want to have strawberry juice at 35,000 feet. I mean, these are certainties led by desire, and Big Science is offering it. Look at the drugs we have invented. They enable us to do anything: go on drunken binges if we want, but we have a pill to fix the liver to take more.

We are no longer a risk society; we are a desire society.

Through our Public Health edition, we also seem to sit with the feeling that science is not serving rural areas, not serving the poor. In turn, there is also a lower expectation of science from the rural communities. Do you feel this is true?

Yes, I think that is true to a large extent. But it’s not to do with rural. You see, for example, if you look at western Maharashtra—the Pune-Nashik belt—some of the cleverest people live there. They are basically producing vegetables for the urban big markets; in Satara, Sangli, that entire irrigated area. And in fact, you will see that they are very careful about their future, and understand their place in society and the role of the state. And they expect many things from the state or the government; they want things to work, hospitals to work, have oxygen, etc. And so, it is really about the basic understanding of cause and effect of citizenship. They understand what is needed to make buses work, or hospitals function; they understand how the state works. This is not very different from knowing how gadgets work.

So, understanding how citizenship works is also the agenda of science. Once that happens, rural people will demand better service and they will get it.

The hard task of a famer involves him being a chemical engineer, an irrigation engineer, and an economist. So what he’s expecting from science are ideas to make his daily work life better. Most people who are working hard are not buddhu. But they still need to understand how the state works.

But one thing which is very peculiar to India, if you look at IITs, or if you look at higher education from the British times, it was about exiting the current world. So if you you’re in a village, and you did well in school, you go to the taluka place, then you go to Bombay, do well there, and you go to New York, right?

So, it’s not really about has he really improved the village or the town, or he was the chief engineer who really designed the Nanded highway system or Nanded city… and that really made a difference. It’s about where did this bright scientist leave and go to!

So, our science is really an exit science and not about how things work or do not work, or why are buses late and can that be improved where I am…

IITs are really, mainly, lifeboats or escape hatches into the global economy.