

International conference on 'Retrieving the Voices from the Margins: Thinkers of Modern India' at Banaras (11-13 August 2017)

Concept Note:

The Seminar aimed at critically examining the multiple dimensions and continuing relevance of the visions and voices of those modern Indian thinkers whose world-views and the critical examination of their continuing continue to remain neglected and occluded in contemporary Bharat/India because of overtly hegemonic and dogmatic character of certain ideological discourses that continue to colonize the domains of higher education, print and electronic media. These hitherto marginalized voices and visions of some of the eminent thinkers/ practitioners who made seminal contributions to Indian wisdom-traditions manifest in such diverse fields as politics, social work, nationalism/nation-building, national integration, development from below (or sustainable / green development), women-empowerment, dalit-consciousness, caste/class/ gender/religion-oriented radical activism and reforms, transformative poetics, cultural studies, creative writing, issues related to constructions, conflicts and co-existence of identities-ethnic, linguistic, national/transnational, ecological/environmental awareness, spiritual world-views and practices, new forms of bhakti and their dissemination among the masses etc. are to be collected, collated and critically analyzed in the contemporary contexts. In brief, this process, that requires sincere 'chintana, manana and vishleshana' (thinking, contemplation, and critical examination) characterizes the core of the project of this Seminar which is also intended to be published subsequently in a series of volumes. It is important to emphasize here that the seminal contributions of such eminent modern Indian thinkers as Rabindranath Tagore, Gandhi, Sri Aurobindo, Swami Vivekananda, Dr B.R. Ambedkar and others have already attracted, and still continue to attract a lot of national and international critical attention. Needless to say, the 33 Seminar focuses on the critical analysis of the voices and world-views of those Indian thinkers who, notwithstanding their selfless dedication to the cause of the nation-building in different fields, were, as stated above, relegated to the margins of Indian academia.

It is worthwhile to mention that in the post-independence era in India, the different and differing narratives/discourses of great significance were not disseminated as dialogically interrelated forming a continuum of India's protean polycentric and plural parampara but, instead, were compartmentalized in mutually warring or conflicting categories because of overt Euro-Americocentric influences. Hence, the urgent need to de-centre the hegemonic model of socio-cultural discourses at present in order to retrieve and re-centre the voices and visions of the hitherto neglected Indian Thinkers. The seminar will focus on the works of such important thinkers, to give a few examples only, as Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya, Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya, Pandita Ramabai, Jotiba Phule, M.G. Ranade, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya, Lala Lajpat Rai, Sardar Patel, Abul Kalam Azad, Narayan Guru, V.D. Savarkar, Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, Deen Dayal Upadhyaya, U.R. Ananthamurthy, Ananda Coomarswami, Gopinath Kaviraj, Vidyaniwas Mishra, Yashadev Shalya, G.C. Pandey, and others.

It is worth mentioning here that, in order to thoroughly discuss and scrutinize the continuing relevance of these thinkers. it was proposed that, at least, two chapters of the Seminar on this theme be held, first at Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, and the second at IIAS, Shimla.

An International conference on 'Retrieving the Voices from the Margins: Thinkers of Modern India' was organised in collaboration with Banaras Hindu University at Banaras during 11-13 August 2017. Professor Chandrakala Padia, Chairperson, IAS and Dr. Sudhir Kumar, Professor of English, DES-Multidisciplinary Research Centre, Panjab University, Chandigarh were the Conveners of the seminar. The welcome address was given by Professor Chandrakala Padia, Chairperson, IAS. Dr. Sudhir Kumar, Convener of the seminar gave introductory remarks. Professor Kapil Kapoor, Chancellor, Mahatma Gandhi Antar-Rashtriya University, Wardha Maharashtra and Former Rector and Professor of English and Sanskrit, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi delivered the inaugural address. Shri Zafar Sareshwala, Chancellor, Maulana Azad National Urdu University delivered the valedictory address. Professor Grirish Chandra Tripathi, Vice Chancellor, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi gave the presidential remarks. Professor Chandrakala Padia, Chairperson, IAS gave the vote of thanks.

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