



IOS NEWSLETTER

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Thought for the Month

O ye who believe!
When ye go out
In the cause of Allah,
Investigate carefully,
And say not to any one
Who offers you a salutation:
"Thou art none of a Believer!"
Coveting the perishable goods
Of this life: with Allah
Are profits and spoils abundant.
Even thus were ye yourselves
Before, till Allah conferred
On you His favours: therefore
Carefully investigate
For Allah is well aware
Of all that ye do.

Al-Qur'an-4:94

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FOCUS

India is a diverse country with one of the oldest civilisations of the world. With its rich cultural heritage, it has traversed a long distance during the last sixty-one years of its independence. Though it accounts for 2.4 per cent of the world's surface area, it supports 16.7 per cent of its population. India with its mammoth population, 1.28 billion, lives in 28 States and 7 Union Territories. The uniqueness of Indian society is 'Unity in Diversity', which is visible in its religions, languages, cultures and castes. India is a multi-religious country, with Hindus accounting for 80.5 per cent, Muslims 13.43 per cent, Christians 2.3 per cent, and others, constituting an important part of Indian diversity, accounting for the rest. Hindi in the 'devanagari' script is the official language of the country, but both Hindi and English are collectively used by the Union Government for certain specified administrative purposes. Besides, the eighth schedule of the Indian Constitution recognises as many as 22 scheduled languages. By some count, there are over 200 languages and almost 1,600 dialects that are spoken in the country.

The education system of a country does not function in isolation from the society of which it is a part. Hierarchies of caste, economic status, gender relations and cultural diversities as well as uneven economic development also deeply influence issues relating to access and equity in education. Our society has been characterised by deeply entrenched social inequalities between various social groups and castes since ancient times. Though India was widely acclaimed as a land of knowledge and wisdom during ancient times, access to education was limited to select strata of society. Its marginalised groups were subjected to social and economic oppression. These centuries-old social prejudices and inequalities, based on caste at birth, continue to dog modern India. Extending educational opportunities to the marginalised groups was considered an antidote to this longstanding discrimination. Attempts have been made by social reformers and others to make education accessible to these groups with varying degrees of success.....

The Indian Constitution framed in 1949 and adopted in 1950 enshrines equality and social justice as the cardinal principles of the democratic system. The unique feature of the Constitution is that, while it upholds the principle of equality before the law, it provides for affirmative action to uplift the social, economic and educational well-being of the disadvantaged groups. The Constitution recognises the Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs) and educationally other Backward Classes (OBCs), Minorities and Women as such groups. The ultimate objective of the Constitution framers was to establish a casteless society within the framework of a welfare state by gradually eliminating caste hierarchy, caste distinction and caste stigma to ensure the dignity of the individual and equality of status among all citizens of India. The Preamble to the Constitution assures justice—social, economic, and political, as well as equality of status among all the fraternities; the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the nation.

From *The Making of India: A Journey Through Eight Centuries*
by Prof. Syed Jamaluddin (ed.), pp. 351-352

Activities of the IOS Headquarters

IOS Symposium on "Ceasefire and Exchange of Prisoners in Gaza: Implication for Peace in West Asia"

A symposium on "Ceasefire and Exchange of Prisoners in Gaza: Implication for Peace in West Asia" was organised by the Institute of Objective Studies (IOS) on January 28, 2025 in hybrid mode.

In this symposium various experts participated, like Prof. Aftab Kamal Pasha, Prof. Sukumar Muralidharan, Mr. Amaresh Misra, Prof. Arshi Khan and Prof. M. Afzal Wani. The symposium was attended by a large number of people both online as well as offline.

In his introductory remarks, the Chairman of the IOS, Prof. M. Afzal Wani, said that the Institute was engaged in following the issues rigorously and working on them. He referred to the death of thousands of people and destruction of huge property in the wake of First World War. Then came the Second World War which caused more destruction and the death toll reached in lakhs. A lot of bloodshed shook the West Asia as well. This ultimately led to the ceasefire and the emergence of peace with certain things for West Asia. He observed that the Institute had specialised panelists to discuss the issue of the ceasefire.

Ex-associate Dean, Director and Chairman, Gulf Studies, School of International Studies, JNU, New Delhi, Prof. Aftab Kamal Pasha said that a large number of people in the West

Bank and Gaza were arrested and killed. Supply of water, food and essential commodities was stopped, leading to great miseries faced by the people of Palestine. Describing Israeli attack on Gaza as genocidal war on the innocent people in the garb of military action against Hamas, he noted that in the US elections, America hoodwinked the world by propaganda that peace talks were being held in Cairo. It went to the credit of President Donald Trump that ceasefire was called. He called it violative of the international law to force the displacement of Palestinians to other countries. Palestinians were well-educated and a large number of them were Ph.D. holders. Many of them were killed by Israeli forces. Fear in the

In order to bolster his position, Netanyahu was planning to call elections to the Israeli parliament. He said that on October 17, 2023 Netanyahu personally supervised the military action. They killed the people, destroyed structures of mosques, hospitals and killed zoo functionaries. This was a genocide in which America was complicit. The purpose of this was to defeat Hamas and then bring peace. Netanyahu committed most brutal crimes. Both Turkey and Syria extended support to Palestinians.

Associate Professor and Associate Dean (Research), O. P. Jindal Global University, Sonapat (Haryana), Prof. Sukumar Muralidharan, spoke on the

future prospects for peace in the West Asia. He said that there was no guarantee for permanent ceasefire in the region. Israel continued to get arms supplies from the US. Though efforts were underway to negotiate peace, but the ground reality of geo-political situation was very complex. So, there were big challenges ahead.

Since the terms and

conditions of the ceasefire were laid down, there was need for a follow up to them. There was also a need to ensure peace and justice in the area. He focused on ceasefire itself and what the hopes and future prospects of peace were. US assertions were to cover up all crimes pretending to negotiate peace in association with Qatar and Egypt. Major countries of the alliance certified that Israel was not violating the provisions. In July 2024 came the ruling of the International Court of Justice on the reference from the UN General Assembly in which it ruled that the occupation of Gaza and the West Bank was illegal. US administration bowed to certain sanctions against Israel, like



INSTITUTE OF OBJECTIVE STUDIES, NEW DELHI

Symposium
on
Ceasefire and Exchange of Prisoners in GAZA:
Implication for peace in West Asia

Tuesday, January 28, 2025

Venue: IOS Auditorium, Institute Building, 162, Jogabal Main Road, Jamia Nagar, New Delhi-110025

civilian population disturbed their life. Israeli strikes on the civilian population violated the provisions of Geneva Conventions to honour human rights. He said that Gaza and the West Bank were being grabbed by Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu. Jewish lobby in the United States was active to derail peace process in Gaza. In US administration too, the pro-Jewish lobby was very active. Despite wanton killings, Israeli military could not defeat Hamas and its cadres. In the 15-month long conflict, many Israeli soldiers were killed in Gaza. He held that difficult times were ahead in the West Bank and the Golan Heights even after ceasefire. Zionists wanted to realise their dream of a Greater Israel.

visa restrictions against its citizens if they set their foot on the American soil. Several European countries also committed that they would arrest if Netanyahu visited their countries. He questioned the credibility of a State which was arming and equipping Israel on one side of the war unconditionally and portraying itself as a peace negotiator on the other side.

Prof. Muralidharan pointed out that there was no guarantee of good faith from the side of Israel because of the turmoil the area was undergoing. There was also a question how the World outside the Western World would deal with the situation. It was not just genocide but war crimes committed by Israel in Gaza. If the US archives were declassified then it would be known what the role did Qatar and Egypt played and the actual position taken by them. While one minister of the Netanyahu cabinet quit, some extremist groups within Israel put him on notice to secure release of Israeli hostages and resume war against Palestine. Except for Ireland, most of the Western States were supporting Israel. Netanyahu was still unclear if he would do something to secure political support for his survival. Israel managed to get support from most of the European countries except Ireland and to some extent Belgium and Spain.

He said that during the past 15-months and in the last 75 years, Israel did not make any commitment to withdraw from Palestine. U.S. State department overruled the fact-finding mission's report of the USAID that Israel was violating its commitments. Enumerating the gains from the accord, he said that according to the ruling of International Court of Justice, Palestinians were a group of distinct

population. Documentation of Israeli crimes in Gaza by international voluntary organisations, like Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch was very significant. He urged the Israeli civil society to intervene and debate the issue.

Prof. Muralidharan held that Israeli actions showed the harsh reality of its crimes in Gaza. He referred to the prospects of salvaging something like rule-based international order and upholding the concept of law and justice. Israel was willing to accept the partition of Palestinian territory, but unwilling to end its occupation.

Israel abandoned the commitment to justice and continued atrocities against



Speakers from top to bottom (L-R) Row 1: Prof. Aftab Kamal Pasha and Prof. Sukumar Muralidharan; Row 2: Mr. Amaresh Misra and Prof. Arshi Khan; Row 3: Prof. M. Afzal Wani and Prof. (Dr.) Haseena Hashia

Palestinians. Israel was clearly a racist/apartheid State. Wherever the talks for peace took place, Israel always dominated them.

The UN Partition Plan for Palestine was a gross injustice to Palestinians. It was something that the people of Palestine did not want. The need of the hour was to see that the provisions of the accord were followed. He also said that there should be significant efforts from our side to maintain people to people contact.

In this context, the Raza Foundation at New Delhi was doing an important work. "Nothing is gained from pessimism. Let us hope for peace and justice", he noted.

Historian, author, journalist and a political analyst from Lucknow, Mr. Amaresh Misra observed, "We are at a juncture, not only in Palestine, but also at the global level". He said that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, USA became more powerful because of the absence of power balance. "We now have a new World Order". Referring to Palestine, he noted that it had limited governance under the supervision of Israel in Gaza and the West Bank. There was no restriction on American hegemony and Israeli jingoism. America and Israel wanted to impose their will on the world. Both of them had established their supremacy over the world. But, as the 15-months long conflict had shown, the Palestinian

warriors brought Israel to its feet. The US also aided and abetted Ukrainian war with Russia. During the period of hostilities, Israel committed grave crimes of genocide of Palestinians. He said that India was also following the Israeli parallel. In defence history, the scale on which the resistance was found among Hamas young boys who were joining

army with zeal, was not seen before. He suggested that India should organise seminars and start mass movement in favour of Palestinians that had been done earlier.

Prof. Arshi Khan from the Department of Political Science, Aligarh Muslim University, referred to Article 51 of the Indian Constitution which states that "the State shall strive to promote international peace and security by maintaining just and honourable relations between nations, respecting international law, and encouraging the settlement of international disputes through arbitration; essentially highlighting the country's commitment to peaceful

resolutions and cooperation on the global stage". There had been genocide in Gaza by the Israeli forces. So many agreements had been signed to restore peace in the area. In 1957, it was said that Palestine would become a land for peace. But nothing happened. If the agreements reached by that time had been given effect to, Palestine would have come into existence as an independent State by 1991. Referring to Lebanon, he said that Hezbollah had its 60 members in Lebanese Parliament. In 2006-07, Hamas had its government in Gaza. Hamas did not kill civilians but caught Israelis. He said that the actual killing in Gaza was around 40 percent. About 90 cemeteries were unearthed to recover bodies. On its killing spree, Israeli army did not spare even schools, colleges, cultural centres and the hospitals.

Prof. Khan held that Israel bombed those areas where captors of Israeli citizens were based. About 500 shipments of arms were sent to Israel by the US. Palestinian territory had shrunk. Religion and identity of Palestinians were not safe during those 15-m

He said that peace was not possible due to Israeli occupation of Palestine. Britain facilitated illegal entry of Jews in 1946 because Palestine was a British mandated territory. Those who came after 1919 purchased long tracts of land and property.

He suggested that a federal autonomous area must be created to ensure permanent peace in the region. More concessions to the Palestinians would mean they would face more violence. "Everybody knows who is behind Syrian violence and ISIS. The world should look into the practical solution, otherwise Palestinians will continue to sacrifice their lives". There

were several organisations engaged in the struggle of liberating Palestine.

The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine is one such organisation which is composed of Marxists and socialists. Both Marxists and socialists were supporting resistance in Gaza. Russia was supporting Palestinians, but China and Vietnam were supporting them but diplomatically, in order to keep both parties of the conflict happy.

Prof. Khan pointed out that Iran was directly helping Hamas. Venezuela and South Africa were also among the countries which supported the Palestinian cause. "Unless they support, peace will not be there. People of Gaza

organisations like United Nations and other institutions. Other questions were—how to get out of Gaza war, how economy of the world be put on a sound footing and how to generate more resources. Other questions facing the world were exploitation, imposition of hegemony over other nations, power of business and commerce, and increase of supply chain. This would require a lot of work for this world. There was an urgent need to work between total anarchy and peace. He added that confrontational attitude should not be continued.

The symposium ended with the Vice-Chairperson of the Institute, Prof. (Dr.) Haseena Hashia extending a vote of thanks.



On the dais (L-R): Prof. (Ms.) Haseena Hashia, Prof. M. Afzal Wani, Mr. A. U. Asif, Dr. Syed Qasim Rasool Ilyas and Dr. Muzaffar Husain Ghazali

IOS organises memorial programme on late Prof. Sanghasen Singh

A memorial programme on late Prof. Sanghasen Singh was organised by the Institute of Objective Studies at its auditorium on January 18, 2025 in hybrid mode.

Prof. Sanghasen Singh was a renowned scholar of Buddhist Studies in Delhi University and former Secretary General and G.A. member of the IOS.

The programme began with the recitation of few verses from the Holy Qur'an by Mr. Mansoor Ahmad, in-charge of the technical section, Institute of Objective Studies.

Vice-Chairperson of the Institute, Prof. (Ms.) Haseena Hashia described Prof. Sanghasen Singh as a man who believed in secular values. During his lengthy association with the Institute, Prof. Singh also held the position of Secretary General. He held a number of positions at several universities,

forcible occupation of their land". The US supported Israel though the Jewish State was illegal. One need not go outside to understand the reality in Gaza which had 900 check-points. He concluded saying "The US sends out message—We are fighting against terrorism; We are launching counter-terrorism operations".

In his concluding remarks, Prof. M. Afzal Wani, reminded of the 20th century prediction that there would be a third world war. He hoped that good sense would prevail over the lobbies to work together. The question was how, after the Second World War, peace was possible and efficacy of the

including the University of Delhi. He excelled in Buddhist Studies and the Pali language. At various universities, a number of his students held senior positions. She stated that Prof. Singh was completely enamoured with the IOS.

Patron of the IOS, Prof. Z. M. Khan, noted that he had been associated with Prof. Sanghasen Singh for 25 years. He was calm, quiet, serious, and sober. He really was the soil's son. He was a well-balanced individual. He was very honest to the motherland. He exemplified decency, humility, and a demeanour that avoided offending anyone. He had a high regard for himself. He was a student of comparative religions. In fact, all facets of society held him in high regard. Everyone knew him for his manners. He claimed that Prof. Singh used to discuss about his family matters with him. He had a strong bond with his family. He assured that the Institute would continue his legacy and spread the values he stood for.

Chief Patron of the Institute, Dr. Mohammad Manzoor Alam, sent a message condoling the death of Prof. Sanghasen Singh, which was read by Prof. (Ms.) Haseena Hashia. Dr. Alam remembered his close relationship with him, which lasted till his death. According to him, Prof. Singh was a reputable scholar who firmly believed in interfaith discussion to comprehend the fundamental ideas and teachings of many religions. He mentioned about Prof. Singh's contribution to the IOS and stated that his insightful recommendations were included into a number of the Institute's projects. He pointed out that there was absolutely no iota of doubt about his qualifications as a distinguished scholar.

Prof. Sanghasen Singh was her teacher, according to Prof. Subhra Pavagadhi, a former Professor of Buddhist Studies at Delhi University. He was a friend and mentor. He was an expert on Sanskrit and Pali languages. He introduced the world to Buddhist knowledge. He made contributions to

the literature of Buddhism. The ancient literature was brought forth by him. Under his supervision, almost forty-five research scholars completed their Ph.D. Regarding his academic prowess, she mentioned that Prof. Singh authored/edited twenty-five books.

Prof. Rajesh Ranjan, a fellow student of Prof. Singh who is currently employed at the University of Ladakh's Buddhist Studies department, claimed that Prof. Singh was his mentor and Guru. In 2001, Prof. Singh received the President's Medal for his outstanding teaching contributions. He spent two years in learning and mastering in Pali and Prakrit languages, necessary for researching in Buddhist Studies. He suffered a personal loss by the death of Prof. Singh. He recommended that an endowment should be established in Nalanda in which the IOS should make a contribution. Prof. Singh started his career in Nalanda, therefore this would be an appropriate tribute to him. He wanted some of the books of his library be donated to a Central University.

Prof. Arvind Rituraj of the Centre for Comparative Religions and Civilizations, Central University of Jammu, held that he met Prof. Singh in 1993 after moving from Nalanda. A long association he had with Prof. Singh ended with his passing. He remembered that Prof. Singh had pointed out certain errors in his doctoral thesis when he had given it to him. He had been advised by Prof. Singh to work on the ancient Indian communication system. He worked fearlessly and without favour. He liked to visit people and give them an explanation of the social awakening movement.

According to Prof. C. S. Paswan, a former Professor of Buddhist Studies at Gautam Buddha University in Noida, he studied under Prof. Singh from 1993 to 1994. He was a rigorous administrator who followed the law. His mentor during the M.Phil. programme was Prof. Singh. He said that he was working on *Dalit Chetna* (awakening). He studied

the *Jatakas* of Mithila for his doctorate. He had a close relationship with Prof. Singh.

Dr. Syed Qasim Rasool Ilyas, a journalist and social activist, believed that Prof. Singh was among those who had been associated with the IOS since its inception. He also acknowledged the work of the late Abdur Rasheed Agwan, one of the IOS's former Secretary Generals. He mentioned that the IOS brought scholars together. He was an expert on comparative religions and a patient listener. He studied Islam as well. He worked on Sanskrit and Pali languages. He had a friendly relationship with Prof. Singh personally.

Prof. Priyasan Singh, the son of Prof. Sanghasen Singh, stated that he has been involved with the IOS for the past 28 years. He spent a lot of time away from home. He was well-versed in India's ancient history and culture. He never stopped researching and educating. He said that he had family relations with Dr. Mohammad Manzoor Alam.

Mr. A. U. Asif, a senior journalist, noted that Prof. Singh's pupils themselves became expert in their fields. He would greet guests at his house with warmth and hospitality. He did exhaustive work on Buddhism. He was multilingual and knew thirty languages, and the younger generation would eventually cite him. He claimed that unless people mastered the language, they would not be able to completely comprehend religion and culture. He continued the Buddhist writings of renowned author, writer, historian, and traveller Rahul Sankrityayan. He was credited with conducting Prof. Singh's interview a few years ago. Many academics, including Prof. Sanghasen Singh, were drawn to the IOS. Mr. Asif mentioned that he studied Islam as well and got extremely close to it.

Prof. Hamidullah Marazi, a former Professor of Islamic Studies at the Central University of Kashmir, claimed

to have collaborated with Prof. Singh on the book *Assam: From Agitation to Accord* (1988). He was acquainted with Prof. Singh during his time at JNU. To improve mutual understanding between the two religions, he advocated for interfaith discussions between Muslims and Hindus. The IOS Forum for Interfaith Dialogue was established in 2015 with this goal in mind. In the past, Prof. Singh would urge the forum members to continue their work. Additionally, he urged greater comprehension and collaboration with Buddhism and Jainism. He pointed out that Prof. Singh organised a number of programmes centred on interfaith discussion.

Dr. Muzaffar Husain Ghazali, a writer and journalist, recalled his meeting with Prof. Singh at Delhi University while he was pursuing his M.Phil. However, the meeting was formalised at IOS. He claimed that Buddhist sermons were delivered in Pali, which is an older language than Sanskrit. Buddhism was therefore, unable to endure due to Sanskrit language. He stated that Prof. Singh was a supporter of interfaith dialogue.

Prof. M. Afzal Wani, Chairman of the IOS, characterised Prof. Singh as a bearer of great Indian traits, such as behaviour and culture, in his presidential remarks. He was the epitome of scholarship and knowledge. The IOS would sign Memorandums of Understanding with the Departments of Buddhist studies at various universities to advance such concepts. According to him, Prof. Singh knew a number of religions, including Islam. He was aware of the nation's social and cultural structure. He stated that interfaith discussions should go on. He further

promised that Prof. Singh's legacy would be continued by the IOS.

At the end of the programme, Prof. (Ms.) Haseena Hashia extended a vote of thanks to the attendees.

Mujaddid IOS Centre for Arts and Literature organises Discussion on "Issues before the Teaching of Urdu Language"

A discussion on "Issues before the teaching of Urdu Language" was organised by the Mujaddid IOS Centre for Arts and Literature on December 28, 2024 at the auditorium of the Institute of Objective Studies.

The programme began with the recitation of some Qur'anic verses by

he mentioned the parents' lack of enthusiasm in encouraging their children to take Urdu as a subject.

Prof. Mohammad Kazim noted that Urdu, owing to its sweetness and simplicity, has demonstrated its significance globally and managed to survive even in challenging conditions. Addressing the challenges in teaching the language, he expressed concern over the declining interest among Muslims, calling it a serious issue.

He emphasised the need for proper training programmes for Urdu teachers and the integration of modern technology in Urdu education. He cautioned against despair, describing it as a destructive force that drains one's energy.

While acknowledging the existing challenges, he stressed the importance of persistent efforts rather than inaction. Additionally, he raised concerns about the lack of seriousness in curriculum development and questioned the direction and implementation of the new education policy.



On the dais (L-R): Dr. Shuaib Raza Khan, Prof. Mohammad Kazim, Mr. Azim Akhtar, Prof. Shahzad Anjum and Dr. Mohd. Tazeem

Mr. Nasim Ahsan of the Institute.

Senior Urdu journalist and writer Mr. Ahmed Javed introduced the topic before the discussion, which was chaired by renowned Urdu writer Mr. Azim Akhtar. He gave a brief explanation of the causes of the current situation in Urdu language as a medium of instruction. He claimed that the government's apathy was one of the contributing factors. There were no new hires for the Urdu teaching positions. The situation has become so bad that positions for Urdu instructors are being eliminated and vacancies are not being filled. Furthermore, no appropriate plans had been put in place for the training of Urdu teachers. Additionally,

Prof. Shahzad Anjum from the Department of Urdu, JMI, New Delhi, emphasised that the issue was extensive, spanning across primary, secondary, and university education. He noted that challenges existed at every level and needed to be tackled with a practical approach. Meanwhile, Prof. (Ms.) Haseena Hashia, Vice-Chairperson of the IOS, highlighted the gradual decline of Urdu's vibrancy. She underscored the importance of updating the Urdu dictionary and creating alternative words. Additionally, she advocated for a structured system to publish supplementary books that could enhance Urdu textbooks.

Dr. Shuaib Raza Khan stated that all textbooks were now available in Urdu. Both NCERT and NIOS have developed high-quality Urdu textbooks. He noted that NIOS had even taken an additional step by introducing law syllabus for senior secondary students. However, he pointed out that the main issue was the extremely low number of students choosing the subject.

All the speakers at the discussion shared their insights on the challenges of teaching Urdu based on their experiences. They thoroughly examined the existing shortcomings and weaknesses in the education system. To address these issues, they stressed the importance of encouraging the Muslim community to speak Urdu at home. Additionally, they emphasised that Urdu should not only be used for conversation but also for writing signboards in shops, homes, and business transactions. They further suggested promoting the habit of reading Urdu newspapers to strengthen the language's presence.

Earlier, Mr. Anjum Naim, Convenor of the Mujaddid IOS Centre for Arts and Literature, welcomed the guests and provided an overview of the Centre's activities. He mentioned that the Centre actively organises discussions, seminars, and talks on various issues related to arts and literature, with a special focus on Urdu. He also assured that such events would continue to be held regularly.

Presiding over the discussion, Mr. Azim Akhtar acknowledged the significant progress made by the IOS under the leadership of Dr. Mohammad Manzoor Alam. Speaking on the condition of Urdu, he remarked that the language suffered due to official neglect and the community's indifference. He pointed out that many Muslim families did not encourage their children to take Urdu as a subject at the secondary level, and the lack of interest in speaking Urdu at home further contributed to its decline. Additionally, he noted that the circulation of Urdu

newspapers was not growing because readership was decreasing. He stressed the importance of revitalising the language by encouraging people to read newspapers, magazines, and books in Urdu.

The programme was attended by several distinguished guests, including Mr. Mansoor Ahmad, Mr. Kalam Arshad, Mr. Firoz Hashmi, Mr. Abdul Mannan, Mr. Siraj Makki, Mr. Suhail Anjum, Mr. Safi Akhtar, Dr. Ishrat Zahir, Dr. Naushad Alam, along numerous Urdu teachers and students.

At the end, Mr. Anjum Naim expressed his gratitude to all attendees by proposing a vote of thanks.

Book Review

The Role of Communication in Political Empowerment of Women Panchayati Raj Functionaries: A Field Study of Baramullah District in Kashmir by Afsana Rashid, published by Institute of Objective Studies, 2022.

Political and social empowerment of women is a key area where all societies fail to some extent, more so in our Indian society which remains patriarchal. Kashmiri society, being traditional and rural, suffers more than other Indian areas.

In India, despite all the progressive policies adopted by successive governments since Independence, the representation of women in Lok Sabha during 1952 to 2014 has been only 6.91% while in Rajya Sabha for the same period it has reached only 9.62%. In other walks of life, too, women are lacking, more so in Kashmir. Political roles of a few women from aristocratic families and dynasties are deceptive and do not offer the real picture on the ground.

An attempt was made to empower women at various levels by reserving seats and constituencies for women. Here too, either aristocratic women

grab the opportunities or their males rule through the façade of these women.

Panchayati Raj is a good route for women empowerment at the grassroots level. Panchayati Raj came to Kashmir during the Maharaja's time in 1936. Later, in free India, legislations were made in 1951 and 1958 for village and block level Panchayati Raj. This was replaced by another legislation in 1989, but these did not provide for any provision to ensure women's participation. Only in 1996, reservation for women was introduced in the Panchayati Raj legislation of Jammu & Kashmir on the lines of the Central Act.

This study shows that the presence of women at the grassroots level has been negligible in Kashmir. The author says that reasons for this include the secondary status of women in the Kashmiri social hierarchy and the political unrest in Kashmir for the last three decades. Moreover, the Panchayati Raj remained defunct in the state for several years. However, since 2011, there is a 33 percent reservation for women in Panchayati Raj structures. As a result, women's representation in these structures has gone up considerably.

The role of communication and media as well as education is very important in achieving these results. This field study focuses on the status of Kashmiri women in Baramulla district in the Valley of Kashmir. This is an important contribution. Only through such field studies will we be able to get an idea of the real situation of development in our society on the ground.

I must add here that the Kashmiri society woke up to the importance of media quite early since early 1990s to be precise. This led thousands of young Kashmiri students to join media departments in Kashmir universities and elsewhere and today they are present in many local, national and international media organisations giving a voice to the Kashmiri people.

This was a good and positive response to the media blackout of the Kashmir stories. The author of this study, Afsana Rashid, is one of these young men and women. More importantly, she is a woman who positively wants to empower Kashmiri women.

Reviewed by Zafarul Islam Khan

Activities of the IOS Chapters

KOLKATA CHAPTER

Discussion on "Future of Indian Muslim Women: Challenges and Opportunities"

A lecture-cum-discussion on "Future of Indian Muslim Women: Challenges and Opportunities" was organised by the Kolkata Chapter of the IOS on Monday, February 3, 2025, at its Conference Room in Kolkata. It was attended by a good number of educated women and young girls. The discussion was aimed at exploring the multifaceted challenges and opportunities faced by Indian Muslim women, with a special emphasis on education, employment, and legal rights.

The keynote speaker, Prof. (Dr.) Haseena Hashia, Vice-Chairperson of the IOS, said, "Empowering women is

empowering the nation". She highlighted the importance of education and healthcare for the empowerment of Muslim women. She cited facts from national reports, emphasising that while Muslim female literacy has improved to 68% (NSSO 2017-18), the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education remains the lowest among all communities (AISHE 2021-22). She highlighted the

on the topic, sharing her perspectives and expressing her gratitude to IOS for organising such an important discussion.

The event was moderated by Mr. Md. Shahjahan, Vice Principal of Jibreel International School, Kolkata, who highlighted the significance of the topic and the need for organising similar discussions on the rights and progress of Muslim women in India.

In his concluding remarks, Mr. Abdul Basit Ismail, Coordinator, IOS Kolkata Chapter, thanked the speakers and attendees. He expressed optimism about the outcomes of the session and stressed the need to work further on gender studies, conducting of a survey on the status of Muslim women in West Bengal, and organising a national



On the dais (L-R) Mr. Abdul Basit Ismail, Mr. Md. Shahjahan, Mrs. Fatima Zehra, Prof. (Dr.) Haseena Hashia (delivering her lecture) and Mrs. Majda Amolya

economic marginalisation of Muslim women, pointing out that only 14% participate in the formal workforce of India (PLFS 2021-22). She stressed the need for increased scholarships, better infrastructure, and career-oriented training programmes to bridge this gap.

Mrs. Fatema Zehra, Lecturer at the Department of Islamic Theology, Aliah University, Kolkata also spoke

seminar on education, employment, and legal rights of Muslim women in India.

The event successfully reinforced the need for policy reforms, educational access, and community-driven initiatives to ensure a brighter future for Indian Muslim women.

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