

HINDU COLLEGE
UNIVERSITY OF DELHI
BEYOND ANONYMITY

A Conference on

The Untold Sagas of the Freedom Struggle

In Collaboration with

Indian Council of Historical Research

17th March, 2023

INTRODUCTION

A National Seminar titled “Beyond Anonymity: The Untold Sagas of the Freedom Struggle” was organised by the *Hindu College, University of Delhi* in academic collaboration with *Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR)* on 15th March, 2023 at the Sushila Devi Auditorium (Relaxo Research Centre), on the premises of the college.

The One-Day National Seminar organised by the Hindu College, in line with the commendable initiative of ‘*Azadi Ka Amrut Mahotsav*’, was a small attempt to pay tribute to unsung freedom fighters of India and bring forth the lesser-known stories from the faded memories of India’s past to serve as a medium of encouragement and inspiration. *Azadi Ka Amrut Mahotsav*, an initiative of the Government of India celebrating 75 years of India’s independence, is aimed to instil cultural pride and a high regard for the rich history of our country, especially among the young generation. It has materialised as a massive outreach programme across India and the world.

The fight against the British colonial rule in India constitutes a unique narrative, full of variegated stories of valour, bravery, dedication and sacrifice across the length and breadth of the country. The Hindu College National Seminar is an attempt to recall and remember the forgotten, unsung heroes, of our freedom struggle who may generally have been defined as the lesser known, or even unknown freedom fighters but their ideals too delineate the Indian value system.

The National Seminar was a brainchild of Prof. Umesh Ashok Kadam (Member Secretary, ICHR), Dr. Archana Verma (Associate Professor, History, Hindu College and Coordinator of the Seminar) and Dr. Maneesha Pandey (Associate Professor, Political Science, and the Nodal Officer of *Azadi Ka Amrut Mahotsav*, Hindu College). The Organising Committee also included students of all years from the Department of History and the Department of Political Science.

The Guest of Honour for the National Seminar, Dr. Bal Mukund Pandey, and the Chief Guest, Prof. Umesh Ashok Kadam arrived at the college at 10:40 a.m. and were escorted to the rendezvous by Kanishka Sunda, President of the History Department, and her team. Soon, the Resource Person and Key Speaker for Session I of the Conference, Prof. Yuthika Mishra, joined the dignitaries at the Sushila Devi Auditorium, and the audience comprising an intellectually oriented spectrum of students and professors was seated at the venue. Unfortunately, however, due to unforeseen circumstances, Prof. Anju Srivastava, Principal of the Hindu College, was unable to accompany the audience with her esteemed presence. Besides, arrangements were also made by the Technical Team to conduct a live streaming of the Seminar via a G-Meet link available at the official website of ICHR as well as through the official Instagram handle of the Department of History and the History Society, *Sakshya* (@sakshya_hindu).

The event officially commenced at 11:20 a.m. with the auspicious lighting of the ceremonial lamp as our host for Session I, Sayandeep Das, invited on the stage Dr. Bal Mukund Pandey, Prof. Umesh Ashok Kadam, Dr. Archana Verma, Dr. Maneesha Pandey and Prof. Yuthika Mishra. The lighting of the lamp was also accompanied by a melodious rendition of the Saraswati Vandana by Satyam, an alumni of the Hindu college, and his team of instrumentalists including Hariom Singh and Ishaan Sharma. Following this, the Guest of Honour, Chief Guest and the keynote speaker for the session were felicitated with traditional Assamese Gamosas by Dr. Verma and Dr. Pandey.

Dr. Maneesha Pandey, Nodal Officer of AKAM at the Hindu College, then took over the dais at 11:30 a.m. to apprise the audience of the purpose and aims of the National Seminar on “Beyond Anonymity: The Untold Sagas of the Freedom Struggle”. She highlighted the significance of the seminar, which was being organised in line with the government initiative



Dr. Maneesha Pandey, Nodal Officer of ‘*azadi ka amrut mahotsav*’,
Hindu College addressing the gathering

of Azadi Ka Amrut Mahotsav amongst a series of other programmes the college had been conducting since August 2022, to pay tribute to forgotten heroes of the national struggle for India's independence.

At 11:33 a.m. Dr. Archana Verma was invited on the stage to present the concept note for the event. Dr. Verma began her address by announcing that the National Seminar held at the Sushila Devi Auditorium on 15th March, was, in fact, the first programme that was being organised as part of the celebrations on the 125th anniversary of the Hindu College. She called attention to the need to cherish the selfless sacrifices of these brave-hearts in the face of brutal colonial suppression and to incorporate their ideals in the Indian value system.



Dr. Archana Verma, the co-ordinator of the seminar addressing the gathering

Following Dr. Verma's address, the seminar was kick-started at 11:40 a.m. with the keynote address delivered by Prof. Yuthika Mishra, professor of History at Vivekananda College, University of Delhi, on the topic "Freedom Struggle: Women from the North-East". She began her presentation by emphasising the immense significance that the topic holds in the present scenario, stating that the North-eastern belt of India, for long, had been dissociated from the popular discourse on history concerning the freedom struggle of India. It is only recently that the deserving exposure is being provided to the study of contribution of states in the North-east. Women freedom fighters from these states had, in particular, a pivotal role in not only rising for the cause of India's freedom but also to alleviate women across the length and breadth of the nation from their vulnerable and disempowered status— Assam being the first among the north-eastern states where the fight for independence began parallel to women's social rights and reform movements (through the *Asom Pradeshik Mahila Samiti*) in

the first half of the nineteenth century and continued upto the Quit India Movement with many women sacrificing their lives being shot by the British forces.

Prof. Mishra then went on to enlighten the audience through case studies with the invaluable sacrifices made by women leaders from the North-east, which have survived oblivion and continue to inspire millions of young women, and men alike. This included many unheard of names like- Joymati, the young Ahom princess still perceived as the vanguard of her people and highly regarded for her administrative qualities; Kanaklata Baruah ‘Birbala’ who was martyred at a young age of seventeen; Chandraprabha Saikiani, an educationist and a Padmashree recipient known for her programmes for gender equality; Ka Phan Nonglait, considered to be the first woman freedom fighter from the Khasi hills; Lila Neogoni, Malati Mem, Silverine Swer, Rani Gaidinliu, Helen Lepcha, among others.



Professor Yuthika Mishra delivering the keynote address on the topic
“Freedom Struggle: Women from the North-East”

Dr. Bal Mukund Pandey, the Guest of Honour for the National Seminar and National Organising Secretary, Akhil Bharatiya Itihas Sankalan Yojana (ABISY), was then invited upon the stage at 12:15 p.m. to illuminate the attendees through his address enriched with a deep understanding of Indian culture, archaeology, and history as a part of holistic discipline. Dr. Pandey started off with a strong assertion that India has attained 'Swaraj', but is not yet 'Swatantra' because the 'tantra' is still governed by a complex set of values rooted in colonialism. The history of Bharata is characterised by a lack of the essence of Bharata itself. He further focussed on the need to dig the stories of forgotten valour of our freedom fighters in order to rid India of this colonial mindset. Dr. Pandey stressed on the importance of armed resistance alongside a legacy of non-violent movements, led by freedom fighters like Khudiram Bose and V. D. Savarkar, and eulogised the freedom struggle as the fight for the rise of 'swaha' (self). He also gave the exemplary of one Hazari from Calcutta, who fulfilled his dream of killing a colonial official by throwing a bag full of bombs in an assembly of officers, in the aftermath of which his own boy was blasted off into a thousand pieces, hence, the name. He provided a valedictory to his speech by emphasising on this inexorable tradition of sacrifice of Indians that ought to act as a constant source of inspiration for the youth as well as the posterity; and the urgent requirement to foster this spirit by unearthing the untold sagas of innumerable such forgotten heroes.

At 12:40 p.m. the host invited Prof. Umesh Ashok Kadam, the Member Secretary, Indian Council of Historical Research, to share the dias to address the gathering. Prof. Kadam initiated his articulation with a very critical analysis of the episteme (theory of knowledge) and hermeneutics (science of interpretation) involved in Indian history writing, which produces a hiatus in the grassroots level understanding of the subject. He pointed to the biasness of selecting and deselecting evidence in persuasion of ideological standards- a process that is intrinsic to the cult of archives and libraries. As an instance, he acknowledged aspects of history that our textbooks are bereft of- formation of Patit Pawan Mandir by Veer Savarkar for the upliftment of the most downtrodden sections in Maharashtra, poverty stricken conditions that the soldiers of the Azad Hind Fauj were subjected to after its dismemberment, qutut-I Shivaji and the missing link between Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj and Sufis and the Persian literary tradition. The Azadi Ka Amrut Mahotsav, as Prof. Kadam remarked, is an endeavour to put forth a challenge to these nuances and bring into the limelight stories of forgotten heroes of the freedom struggle, in particular, and create a sense of inquisitiveness in the public milieu to view all subtleties of our mainstream knowledge with a pinch of salt. Therefore, a need to demolish the "cloned" education system was highlighted along with the necessity to shift to a scrupulous assessment of Indian history through primary sources, local wisdoms and vernaculars. Finally, he urged the students to 'Review, Redo and Rediscover' the lost pride of the country as well as the intellectually immense and rich history of the country that was Bharat.



Dr. Bal Mukund Pandey, the Guest of Honour for the National Seminar and National Organising Secretary, Akhil Bharatiya Itihas Sankalan Yojana (ABISY) addressing the gathering



Prof. Umesh Ashok Kadam, the Member Secretary, Indian Council of Historical Research, addressing the gathering

With this began the Question and Answer round of the session at 1:10 p.m. where students and luminaries seated in the auditorium interjected with thought provoking questions to which the speakers provided valuable insights. This was followed by a Vote of Thanks by Vikas Panwar, he thanked Prof. Yuthika Mishra, Dr. Bal Mukund Pandey, and Prof. Umesh Ashok Kadam for enlightening the young minds present in the audience with their unfathomable knowledge and for creating an environment of questioning guised normative colonial constructs.

Thereafter, the dignitaries and members of the Organising Committee for the Session dispersed to the pantry at the Research Centre for lunch, while the same was arranged for the audience at the sports complex of the college. In the meanwhile, the resource persons for Session II of the National Seminar- Prof. Himanshu Roy, Prof. Bhuwan Jha and Prof. Kapil Kumar, joined us at lunch.

As the gathering met again at 2:30 p.m. the newly arrived guests for the evening were felicitated by Dr. Archana Verma and Dr. Maneesha Pandey with the Traditional Assamese robes, Gamosas, and our host for Session II, Ronit, introduced the next keynote speaker Prof. Himanshu Roy, currently a professor of political science at Deen Dayal College, University of Delhi. The topic chosen by Prof. Roy for the conference, “Deconstructing the Colonial: Saga of Unsung Heroes”, was divided into three broad, yet coherent, themes, these included: i) British historiography- before and during the colonial rule; ii) Lacunae in the leftist historiographical trends and; iii) A case study of the Chauri Chaura incident of February 1922. In order to exemplify the changing notions of history and British attitudes towards Indians, Prof. Roy gave quoted the writings of Hegel before and after colonial consolidation of power in India. The German philosopher from went on to eulogise India as “a land of desires, wealth and famed Indian wisdom”. But post-colonisation his views ran antithetical the Hindus came to be associated with cunningness, bearing “cheap and murderous” characteristics with the people from lower castes society losing all power. This aptly states the rise of the Anglicisation of European perspectives of India from the eighteenth century onwards. The Chauri Chaura records retrieved by Prof. Roy from Lucknow library proved through statistical data the participation of people of lower caste and class- like *Churiharas*, *Naviks*, *Chamaras*, *Telis*, *Pathans*, and *Pasis*, who increasingly participated in the struggle to free the nation. The problem with left historiography is, as professor highlighted, that in pursuit of its agenda of castigation it only focusses on the role of Brahmins and Banias. He further shattered the colonial construct of projecting India as a poor socio-cultural state, by giving instances of its rich educational tradition (Campbell’s Bellamy Report) and female participation (role of women lingayats).

Following this insightful discussion, the fifth keynote speaker, Prof. Bhuwan Jha, professor of History at Satyavati College, University of Delhi was welcomed on the stage at 3:00 p.m. His topic for the day was ‘Revisiting Mahamana: Malviya’s Role in the Freedom Struggle’ which highlighted focussed on the issues faced by the Indian historiography. The core problem with the biases in history, according to Prof. Jha, was the narratives that freely circulate in popular history and selectively abrogate names that do not fit this narrative. One such person in India who had been a victim of this selective historiography Madan Mohan Malviya ‘Mahamana’- four time President of the Indian National Congress, the founder of the Akhil Bharatiya Hindu Mahasabha and, later, also of the Independent Congress Party. Besides, the towering personality also spoke for weaver communities, stood for Gokhale’s elementary education bill, played a pivotal role in ending indentured labour contracts,

appealed against Hunter Commission and the Montford Reforms, and can be deemed responsible for the foundation of the Banaras Hindu University (BHU). The Professor also outlined his role in consolidating funds during the initial years of the Hindu College. Despite these innumerable contributions, Mahamana's role is overshadowed by the Indian historiographical schools as being merely a communal Hindu.

At 3:40 p.m., the audience was introduced to the last keynote speaker for the event, and an extremely renowned historian and illustrious scholar, Prof. Kapil Kumar, who enlightened the audience on the crucial topic 'The Unrecognised Braves of Azad Hind Sarkar and the INA'. Prof. Kumar firstly began his vocal attack on the forces ascertaining the death of Netaji in an airplane crash, as well as those questioning his chastity in personal life. The professor went on to argue the persistence of an attitude of servitude among members of the congress on the eve of independence and quoted a letter sent by Jawaharlal Nehru to the King George VI of England for "*the proposal of Your Majesty's Ministers in the Dominion of India that Sri Chakravarty Rajagopalachari... be appointed to be the Governor General of India*". A negative propaganda was promulgated by the political circles in India against the Azad Hind Fauj that it wanted to replace the British in India by the Japanese- another criticism of the Nehruvian politics. Raja Mahendra Pratap, Anand Mohan Sahay and Rash Behari Bose, are some of the forgotten names who formed the INA with other Gadar revolutionaries like Sardar Amrik Singh, Sardar Vikram Singh, with General Mool Singh Roopi made the commander of the INA. He also highlighted the role of valorous women like- Sati Sahay in Japanese Thailand, Joya Thaosen, and all the members of which were brutally shot dead by the British on their march to Moirang to join INA's Rani of Jhansi Regiment. An unwavering tide of enthusiasm ran across Burma, Thailand, Singapore, Philippines, Indonesia and Cambodia, that inspired youngsters who had never seen India to join the Azad Hind Fauj, contribute in smallest ways possible to help Netaji, and sacrifice their lives for the freedom of a motherland that was only known to them through stories narrated by their parents and grandparents. But the irony of our times is that not only were they excluded from the list of freedom fighters by the Indian government, but also none of their names were added into the historical records. At last, Prof. Kumar urged the students to take the onus of digging the archives, and based on evidence bring out the names of such forgotten heroes whose legacy has been unjustly erased from the memories of Indians.

At 4:20 p.m. Prof. Kumar gave a pause to his hear-wrenching speech, which was followed by a short Question and Answer round from the inquisitive minds among the audience. A formal end to the National Seminar with a Vote of Thanks and, at the same time, expressing his innermost urge to remember the names of the forgotten brave-hearts who placed their soul at the altar of India's anti-imperial movement and the need to galvanise the memory of their legacy to cherish their invaluable contributions. He also expressed his gratitude to Prof. Himanshu Roy, Prof. Bhuwan Jha and Prof. Kapil Kumar in taking out time from their hectic schedules to address the gathering with their insightful words. Vikas also payed his thanks to

Dr. Archana Verma and Dr. Maneesha Pandey, two visionaries and stalwarts of Hindu College, and Dr. Sunil Joshi, who had a profound role in making the National Seminar a success. The Organising Team was also thanked for their constant support and the audience for listening keenly and patiently to all the listeners. With this, the dignitaries departed for High Tea, along with the organising professors, and the seminar came to its conclusion by 4:40 p.m..



Professor Kapil Kumar delivering the key note address on 'The Unrecognised Braves of Azad Hind Sarkar and the INA'.

CONCLUSION

The common theme highlighted by the Guest of Honour, the Chief Guest and the resource persons for the day's event was an unrelenting stress on the need to overcome the biasness we experience in history writing, an anathema that has persistently infested the minds of millions of Indians over decades with the cancer of a colonial historiography. As such, the Seminar aimed to serve as a medium of inspiration to unfold the contributions of the forgotten heroes in order to place them in the popular discourse of India's National Movement. Unfortunately, the contributions of many brave-hearts remain ignored. The proposed National Seminar is an

endeavour to reminisce the sacrifice of the forgotten braves and to establish how they acted as the face of resistance against the British Raj.

The responsibility, therefore rests rests on the shoulders of the younger generation to draw inspiration from our culture and develop a value system reminiscing the struggle of our freedom fighters. We ought to channelise our beliefs and energies so as to serve as an exemplary for the rest of the world and contribute to the national progress.