

Report of Seminar on

The Making of Modern Punjab: Education, Science and Social Change in Punjab c.1850- c.2000

The seminar organized from 24-26 October 2013, in the background of 150 years of Higher Education in Punjab was a great success. Eminent educationists, policy makers, celebrities, young scholars from various universities including Lahore (Pakistan) participated in the seminar and presented papers, held panel discussions and deliberated on how Higher Education in Punjab has evolved over the last over 150 years and what are some of the challenges faced by scholars, teachers, administrators and policy makers, in the present context. The seminar proved to be an excellent forum for the brainstorming sessions that were held during the three days. The role and relevance of science in the development of any nation, and what can be done to popularize science, scientific knowledge and scientific temper was discussed as also was the issue of the role of teachers and the responsibilities of the government in meeting the aspirations of the scholars and the teaching community.

The seminar also commemorated 150th Birth Anniversary Year of Prof. Ruchi Ram Sahni, Panjab University alumnus, who was India's first meteorologist, first nuclear physicist, first Indian Professor of Science in Government College Lahore, entrepreneur, social and religious reformer, and also witness to the making of the great history of India and Punjab. A postal stamp on Prof. Ruchi Ram Sahni was released during the inaugural session of the seminar on 24th October by S. Sikandar Singh Maluka, Education Minister Punjab, in the presence of the chief post master, Mr. Kuldip Singh and other esteemed guests and dignitaries. Sh. Pawan Bansal, M.P and Fellow, Panjab University congratulated the Vice Chancellor Prof. A. K. Grover for his vision and pragmatism and also complimented the organizers for holding the seminar and bringing to light the life, achievements and contribution of Prof. Ruchi Ram Sahni. After the release of the stamp, Prof. Yash Pal, Former Chairman, UGC, emphasised the need for the scientists to stay connected to the grass root realities for furthering research. In a video message from Prof. Muhammad Khaleeq-ur- Rehman, Vice Chancellor of Lahore University, Pakistan, addressed the audience and described his association with Prof. Ruchi Ram Sahni.

The third dimension of the seminar was the celebration of the Foundation Day of Panjab University. The second Annual Foundation Day Public Lecture (2013) was delivered by the eminent writer, Jananpith Award winner and Fellow, Panjab University, Prof. Gurdial Singh. In an enthralling lecture, he traced the trajectory of social change in Punjab in an encyclopaedic account of the history of Punjab and its people. He spoke of how colonization had disrupted the significance of Punjabi Language and the education system through manipulative academic policies. Prof. G. K. Chadha , prominent economist and President South Asian University, who chaired the session, cautioned against any compartmentalization of academic disciplines and said that multi disciplinary approach was the true way to further education.

A souvenir of the seminar was also released during the first day of the seminar and contains messages from Vice President of India, H.E. Shri Hamid Ansari also the Chancellor of Panjab University, H.E. Shri Shiv Raj Patil, Governor of Panjab and Prof. A. K. Grover, Vice Chancellor Panjab University. The souvenir includes invited research papers, papers presented by young research scholars during the seminar, brief biographical essays on Prof. Ruch Ram Sahni and Prof. Gurdial

Singh, reminiscences and interviews with some eminent alumni of Panjab University and reprints of old archival material.

The first academic session of day one the seminar, a panel discussion on 'Science, Technology and its Popularization' was chaired by Prof. V. P. Kamboj, President National Science Academy of India. During this session Prof. Ajay Sood, from Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore spoke on incorporating and popularizing science by giving examples from simple scientific phenomena like soap bubbles, corn starch and even the magical walk on water. Prof. Vinod Sahni, Former Director Raja Ramanna Centre for Advanced technology emphasized the need for research and innovation; product development added with entrepreneurship. Prof. Yash Pal enumerated upon pedagogical problems at primary and undergraduate level of education by sharing biographical anecdotes with the audience. Prof. V. P. Kamboj spoke of making culture as an essential part of scientific study and reaching scientific information to the grass root level through connecting it to and delivering it in local language. Prof. R. B. Grover, Director, Homi Bhabha National Institute spoke about developing scientific temper in order to popularize science. Prof. Rajesh Kochhar spoke of arousing scientific curiosity in the learner and the challenges of research and study of science. Dr. Rajneesh Arora, Vice Chancellor, Punjab Technical University presented his views on the relevance of popularizing science and technology in the contemporary times.

The second academic session of the seminar was held on day two with invited lectures by eminent historians Prof. J. S. Grewal and Prof. Kamlesh Mohan. This session was chaired by Prof. Rajmohan Gandhi, renowned biographer, Research Professor at the Centre for South Asian Studies at University of Illinois, USA and the grandson of Mahatma Gandhi. In his lecture titled "Ruchi Ram Sahni: His Life and Works" Prof. Grewal emphasized two important aspects of Prof. Sahni's life: his association with Brahma Samaj and Akali movement. Prof. Grewal also highlighted Prof. Sahni's concern for spreading scientific temper in the country and the role of Punjabi language as a vehicle for disseminating scientific ideas. Prof. Kamlesh Mohan, in her paper titled "Making of Indian Scientific Community: 1880-1980", discussed the complex and multi layered process of making and advancing of the Indian scientific community which fought against the colonial science policy with the formation of groups in Chemistry, Physics, Maths, Botany, Astrophysics and Geology. In his presidential remarks Prof. Rajmohan Gandhi quoted Tolstoy while suggesting that to grasp the impact of history was not easy for the people in the present. It could only be achieved by continuous hard work such as the papers presented in the session illustrated.

The third academic session of the seminar held on day two was chaired by the Dean University Instruction, Prof. Madhu Raka. During this session eight research papers were presented by young scholars from diverse spheres like history, architecture, education systems, public sphere and policy making. Dr. Yaquob Bangash, from Forman Christian College, Lahore spoke about the formulation of educational pattern and modern education in his paper titled "Workers in Wilderness: The American Presbyterian Mission and Forman Christian College". Dr. Jyoti Pandey Sharma compared public parks in Lahore (Lawrence garden) and Delhi (Queens garden) in her paper titled "Urbanity Redefined: The Public park as an Agent of Cultural reform in Colonial Punjab". Nishtha Saxena of Panjab University presented a paper titled "Revisiting Lala Lajpat Rai's idea of India in the Contemporary Context with Special Reference to Young India (1915)." Kanika Singh's paper, "Representation of Heritage in a Museum of Sikh History: Case Study of the Sisganj Gurudwara Museum in Delhi", focussed on the pedagogical role in informing the community about the visual

display in the museum. Preeti spoke on “Meeting Local Needs: The Indigenous Education System of Punjab”. Gurveen kaur, Ph.D. scholar from Joint Programme in Anthropology and History, University of Michigan, stated that history was not just a European concept but could be traced in pre-colonial India, where History was not a genre and instead drew on not only depiction of facts but also drawing lineages from the past. Sarabjit Kaur, Gurpreet kaur too presented papers in this session. Prof. Madhu Raka, applauded the young panellists for their scholarship and urged them to sustain their search for knowledge in future also.

The third day of the seminar began with a panel discussion on ‘Higher Education in Punjab: Achievements and Challenges’ chaired by Prof. A. K. Grover, Vice Chancellor, Panjab University. In his address Prof. Grover spoke of the new ideas that have been shared with him and the audience during the three day seminar and asked the teaching fraternity as well as research scholars to work together for the progress of Higher Education. The panellists of this session were Vice Chancellors of Universities from North India. Prof. Jaspal Singh, Vice Chancellor, Punjabi University, focussed on the need to have an all inclusive model of education. This system was essential for the all round development of society and scholars. Lt. Gen. D.D.S Sandhu, Vice Chancellor, Kurukshetra University, emphatically said that teachers need to inculcate a sense of accountability and concentrate on potentialities of higher education and also that education was the bed rock of every society even more than societies focus on health. Prof. Peter Ronald deSouza, Interim Director, International Centre for Human Development said one had to look within the larger landscape of Higher Education to understand the demands and challenges that confronted higher education. He also stated that seeking truth and knowledge was more important in the present context than any other thing. Prof. Jai Rup Singh, Vice Chancellor, Central University of Punjab, spoke of improving standards of Higher Education, through striving for autonomy as well as accountability. The session was extended to comments and questions from the audience and the responses ranged from suggestions on pedagogy, accountability, utilization of funds and opportunity for research and teaching.

An emotionally surcharged moment of the seminar was the Unveiling of a Plaque in the memory of Prof. S. R. Kashyap, by his daughter, Ms. Uma Sood (famous as Kamini Kaushal), on the second day of the seminar. The function was held at Botany Department in Kashyap Block. While introducing Prof. S.R.Kashyap, Prof. A.K.Grover informed all present that Prof. Kashyap was the founder of Botany Department and a committed teacher who had inspired many great scholars like Birbal Sahni, Prof. A.C. Joshi and how he along with stalwarts like Sir Fazli Hussain, Maharaja Bhupinder Singh, Sir Sikandar hayat Khan and Sir J.C.Bose, to name a few, had contributed to the making of Panjab University. The chief guest Ms. Uma Sood went down the memory lane to share some her most beautiful and intimate memories of her father. She spoke of him as being a Gandhian at heart, who could speak nine languages and who had a brilliant photographic memory. She emphasized that Gandhian Philosophy was relevant in contemporary times. She gave an endowment of Rs three lakhs to institute a Memorial Lecture named after her father, Prof. S.R.Kashyap, to be held annually by any of the Science Departments of the University. Prof. Rajmohan Gandhi, in his addresses asked the audience to cherish Ms. Uma Sood’s words and the department to keep her conversation with the audience as a legacy for the future generations, for she spoke of values which are much needed and very relevant in the present and will be in future times too.

Last but not the least was a cultural programme that was hosted by the University on the second day of the seminar. The guests and audience were treated to a colourful cultural programme, comprising

of award winning performances in Zonal Youth Festival by students of Panjab University and its affiliated colleges. The audience applauded, swayed and smiled and were imbued with the infectious enthusiasm of the young students who showcased Panjab University's best talent while effortlessly displaying the rich culture of the country.

The seminar concluded with the valedictory address by Prof. R. P. Bambah wherein he complimented the University for organizing the seminar and congratulated the Vice Chancellor and his colleagues for the excellent programme and arrangements. He narrated the incident when he had seen Prof. Ruchi Ram Sahni, in 1945-46, sitting in S.P.S.K Hall. In Lahore, where Prof. C.V. Raman had come to deliver a lecture and how everyone held Prof. Sahni in great esteem. Prof. Bambah highlighted the traditional function of the Universities which was to advance knowledge for its own sake and for a select few. Information Technology and new awareness has made the developing societies aspire for knowledge and inclusion in the larger world view. Hence there is a need for inclusive growth, upward movement and imaginative approach if our education system is to become one of the best in the world.

The Seminar was thus a well received and highly appreciated event that while looking at Higher Education in the past focussed on the challenges of the future too. The wide range of ideas that were exchanged and the thought provoking lectures were indicators of intelligentsia's awareness of its responsibility in society and the things that need to be reassessed or focused on. It was rightly a forum for intellectual debate and a platform for young faculty and scholars to interact with hear and exchange ideas with people who are recognized for their excellence in their respective fields of knowledge.

Prof. Pratibha Nagpal

Convenor