



SWEDISH
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for ADVANCED STUDY

REGULAR SESSION INFORMATION

Session: Provincialising History: A Reappraisal of Shri Dharampal's Work and Its Implications for Contemporary and Future Research

Session Convener(s): Gita Dharampal-Frick, University of Heidelberg

Chair: Gita Dharampal-Frick, University of Heidelberg

Comments: -

I) *Self-Rule and Rule of Law: An Indian Civilizational Perspective With Special Reference to Shri Dharampal's Work on Civil Disobedience*

Satish K. Jain, JNU, New Delhi

II) *Interrogating "Education": Unlearning Learnt Lessons*

Pawan K. Gupta, SIDH, Mussoorie

III) *Rediscovering India: Dharampal's Historical Quest*

Jatinder K. Bajaj, Centre for Policy Studies, Delhi & Chennai

Mandyam D. Srinivas, Centre for Policy Studies, Delhi & Chennai

IV) *Dharampal and the Recovery of the Self*

Claude Alvares, Goa Foundation, Mapusa

ABSTRACTS

Session description

As one of the seminal products of Enlightenment reasoning, the academic discipline of History has been ideationally and structurally implicated with the establishment of Western hegemony. Cognisant of this state of affairs and of its repercussions for India's relationship with its own past, Shri Dharampal (1922-2006), a provocative Gandhian thinker, engaged in substantive archival research about 18th and 19th century Indian constellations, the results of which have initiated a radical contestation of conventional truths, thereby "provincialising" so-to-speak the historical master narrative relating to the colonial past. Besides reappraising a selection of his publications, such as *The Beautiful Tree* (1983), *Indian Science and Technology in the Eighteenth Century* (1971), and *Civil Disobedience and Indian Tradition* (1971), this panel intends to discuss the theoretical implications of Shri Dharampal's oeuvre for contemporary and future research in the social sciences.

Papers

I) *Self-Rule and Rule of Law: An Indian Civilizational Perspective With Special Reference to Shri Dharampal's Work on Civil Disobedience*

Satish K. Jain, JNU, New Delhi

Civil disobedience against an authority one considers unlawful requires no explanation; however, when there is no repudiation of the legitimate character of the law-making authority, but refusal to obey some specific laws enacted by the lawful authority, then the question of the consistency of these requires addressing. If one assumes the existence of both self-rule and rule of law and interprets them in the modern sense, then, at first glance, the conclusion that civil disobedience has no place in such a system seems inescapable. It must, however, be noted that the formal existence of self-rule by a collective together with the rule of law does not preclude the enactment of laws which violate deeply held principles of justice; the reason being that in the principles of self-rule and the rule of law, as they are usually interpreted, there is nothing to prevent the pursuit of self-interest at the expense of general welfare. Thus, it is possible to have a situation where there are laws which some people find difficult to obey, although at a formal level self-rule and the rule of law prevail. The inclination to disobey some laws in such a situation need not imply repudiation of the law-making authority of those entrusted with the task. There is, however, another way to interpret the ideas of self-rule and the rule of law in which pursuit of self-interest at the expense of general welfare has no place. This paper attempts to distinguish between these two radically different interpretations of self-rule and the rule of law, and argues that when these ideas are interpreted in such a way that they become inconsistent with the pursuit of self-interest at the expense of general welfare, civil disobedience can be justified even when at a formal level self-rule and the rule of law prevail.

II) *Interrogating "Education": Unlearning Learnt Lessons*

Pawan K. Gupta, SIDH, Mussoorie

In this paper I shall share my learning experiences gained during the past two decades running little schools in the rural areas of Tehri Garhwal. Confronted with the discomfort of parents about the way in which modern education was alienating students from their roots, much as Mahatma Gandhi had observed long ago, it became apparent to me how the present education system was actually disempowering children, turning them into mindless imitators, whereby 'developmental progress' was infusing them with a deep sense of inferiority, instead of giving them self-confidence in the true sense. To elucidate this, I shall present an experiential critique of modern education by

underscoring the distinction between *bona* (essential being) as opposed to *dikhaana/dikhana* (appearing) and between *nirapeksha atma-vishwaas* (real self-confidence) and *sapeksha atma-vishwaas* (self-confidence based on comparison). I shall also briefly mention what we have done to restore the students' self-confidence, namely by relocating the pedagogic focus away from textbooks and instead reconnecting the students with their physical environment, cultural traditions and their past. The influential role played by Dharampal and Mahatma Gandhi in reaching this understanding will be highlighted.

III) *Rediscovering India: Dharampal's Historical Quest*

Jatinder K. Bajaj, Centre for Policy Studies, Delhi & Chennai

Mandyam D. Srinivas, Centre for Policy Studies, Delhi & Chennai

Dharampal was imbued with a deep sense of the urgent need to recover the dignity of India and her civilisational ethos from the caricatured version which was being projected in mainstream history. Burdened with a negative self-image arising out of misconstrued assessments of the recent past, and compounded with the debilitating impact of extended alien rule, India, according to him, was hampered in restoring functionality to its public life, and consequently failed to come to terms with the modern world as an equal and dignified partner. Hence, Dharampal's historical quest had a clear objective which set out to rectify this disabling disjuncture. By meticulously sifting through early British archival documentation, after decades of research he succeeded in assembling a corpus of historical data that establishes the efficiency and functionality of Indian society in varied fields of public endeavour in the period prior to European domination. Given the revolutionary nature of these discoveries vis-à-vis conventional historical assumptions, in this paper, we shall present an analysis of Dharampal's historical quest and provide some glimpses of the corpus of his work.

IV) *Dharampal and the Recovery of the Self*

Claude Alvares, Goa Foundation, Mapusa

Nations – and not only the individuals that constitute them – have a self. Sometimes that notion of self gets accentuated; sometimes it can be assaulted or denigrated as well, leading to the demoralisation of entire classes of people concerning their self-worth. It is without doubt that in India's history the most serious assault on its self came via the British conquest. Dharampal, in fact, put all the various hostile and hate speeches of Englishmen together in a remarkable volume which he aptly titled, *Despoilation and Defaming of India: The Early Nineteenth Century British Crusade* (1999). The institutionalisation of the denigrated version of the Indian self was thereafter successfully carried out through the Indian educational system. The present paper examines how Dharampal's work has led to a rediscovery of the Indian self, even if it has not as yet recreated feelings of self-worth.