

February 27, 2025

Press Release

Dr. M.A. Ansari Memorial Lecture at JMI Explores the Intersection of Nature, Nation, and History

The Department of History and Culture at Jamia Millia Islamia (JMI) organized the prestigious Dr. M.A. Ansari Memorial Lecture, “Nature and Nation in the 20th Century and the Future of the Planet Today.” Prof. Mahesh Rangarajan, an Environmental Studies and History expert at Ashoka University, delivered the lecture. The session was chaired by Prof. Hassan Imam from the Centre of Advanced Study (CAS) in History at Aligarh Muslim University.

Prof. Imam commenced the session by highlighting Dr. M.A. Ansari’s multifaceted contributions to medicine, politics, and academia. He underscored Dr. Ansari’s instrumental role in India’s Freedom Movement and his legacy in shaping JMI as a former Vice-Chancellor. His insights drew upon references from Mushirul Hasan’s acclaimed biography of Dr. Ansari. Prof. Preeti Sharma, Head of the Department of History and Culture, highlighted the enduring significance of the memorial lecture, which has been held annually since 1982 and is now approaching its golden jubilee.

Prof. Rangarajan’s lecture provided a thought-provoking analysis of the intersection between nature and nationalism. He explored historical and environmental narratives of the symbolism of power and identity associated with the use of titles like *Sher* and *Babbar Sher* by rulers such as Tipu Sultan. He referenced his lecture with the detailed work of Mohibbul Hasan, who wrote a biography of Tipu Sultan.

Delving into environmental history, Prof. Rangarajan examined the introduction of non-native plant species like Eucalyptus, which was brought from Australia in the 1830s, and Neem, which originated from the Indo-Burma border. He questioned conventional notions of native versus alien species, drawing parallels with the historical distribution of lions and cheetahs across North-Western India, Western Asia, and the Sinai Peninsula. His analysis challenged the perception of the tiger as an exotic symbol, explaining how it was chosen as India’s national animal to represent unity in diversity.

Prof. Rangarajan further explored the post-independence environmental transformations, analysing how social realities, rights, and privileges influenced environmental policies and conservation efforts. He examined the differing environmental experiences of various social classes and the ways in which historical narratives influence ecological policies in contemporary India.

The lecture stimulated thought-provoking discussions among students and faculty members. Prakash Sharma, a student from the Department of History and Culture, introduced Prof. Rangarajan, acknowledging his pioneering contributions to environmental history. The event concluded with a heartfelt vote of thanks by Sana Siddiqui, also from the Department of History and Culture, who extended her gratitude to the speaker, the chair, faculty members, and attendees.

Organised annually, the Dr. M.A. Ansari Memorial Lecture serves as a platform for scholarly discourse, bridging the past with contemporary issues. As the series nears its golden jubilee, it stands as a testament to JMI's commitment to historical inquiry and intellectual enrichment.

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Jamia Millia Islamia



