

Three Days National Seminar on One Hundred Years after Champaran and the Making of the Indian Nation jointly hosted by the Department of History, Sikkim University, Gangtok and Omeo Kumar Das Institute of Social Change and Development, Guwahati

Venue: Sikkim University, Gangtok

Dates: October 27-29, 2017

Seminar Convener: Dr. V.Krishna Ananth, Associate Professor, Department of History, Sikkim University

CONCEPT NOTE

While it will be erroneous to hold that India's struggle for freedom began with Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi's arrival from South Africa (on January 4, 1915), it will be equally wrong to treat the struggle as one continuous movement since the Battle of Plassey in 1757. The science of history, indeed, teaches us to look for moments of ruptures in the course of a long movement and locate their significance. History, then, is not to be seen as a linear course. The ruptures then are metaphors that lend to a study of the past from the concerns of the present. 'All history' as Benedetto Croce held, 'is contemporary history.' The contemporary here is not to mean the history and events of the recent past. As Croce put it, History lives only, as a present interest and pursuit, in the mind of the historian when he criticizes and interprets documents, and by so doing re-lives for himself the states of mind into which he enquires.

The importance of Champaran in the history of our nation, in the words of Babu Rajendra Prasad, who cut his teeth, as a freedom fighter, there in Champaran was that 'we saw in Champaran on a smaller scale Gandhiji's satyagraha which he later organized through the length and breadth of the country.' Or as E.M.S.Namboodiripad, writing in 1955-56, held: 'Here was a movement in which a band of selfless individuals from the middle and upper classes identified themselves with and roused the common people against the power-that-be in order to secure some well-defined demands... This, therefore, may be said to be the first dress-rehearsal of a type of national struggle which Gandhi was subsequently to lead on more than one occasion.'

Champaran (April 1917), then, was not merely another event in a series of actions against British rule. Instead, it was a moment of rupture from when on the struggle for independence came to be premised on three core precepts:

- Satyagraha (distinct from passive resistance, which Gandhi had explained earlier in South Africa);
- All laws are not necessarily legitimate; and
- It was one's duty (rather than merely one's right) to disobey the illegitimate laws.

These precepts were put to use in a national scale in the Rowlatt Satyagraha and in all subsequent struggles since then where the quest for 'truth' and 'justice' derived out of this truth, which in essence was the concept of satyagraha (as distinct from passive resistance) was

reiterated by Gandhi (in the same way as he told the Magistrate in Motihari on April 18, 1917). Champaran left its imprint on the non-cooperation movement, the civil disobedience movement and the Quit India Struggle, all landmarks in the struggle for independence, and thus turned the Indian National Congress into a platform of the masses as distinct from an organisation representing the aspirations of the educated among the Indians that it was in the pre-Gandhian phase. This transition, indeed, was manifest in the Lahore session (from where it was resolved to shift the annual sessions from December to March) and the Karachi session in March 1931 spelling out the meaning of swaraj in the Fundamental Rights resolution. There is a continuum from Champaran to the making of the Constitution and Karachi was indeed an interim stage of this continuum.

Champaran, then, is a metaphor and the events that led to the abolition of the *tinkathia* system and the liberation of the peasants need not be seen in isolation. It is necessary to junk attempts based on the binary of success-failure and instead locate an epistemological break in them. The science of history rests upon studying Champaran from the concerns of the present, as to whether the epistemological break it achieved in the making of the Indian nation and evaluate as to whether the lessons are relevant in the present and in the task of setting out the future. Of importance, from this concern, is the Idea of Justice, as envisaged by Gandhi at Champaran.

The seminar will seek to interrogate this in its various dimensions rather than merely recalling the event as it happened. This, after all, was done by Gandhi himself when he recorded in his autobiography in 1924 and Gandhian scholars subsequently. The seminar will address the following themes:

- Testimonies as a tool in campaigns
- Public Reasoning and Reciprocity and the Law of the People: The Gandhian precept
- Just and Unjust Laws: From *A Theory of Justice* to *The Idea of Justice*
- The relevance of Satyagraha: Gandhi in his own times to Our own times
- Justice: Social, Economic and Political and the Constitutional scheme
- Law and Justice: Can the two reconcile
- Satyagraha and its relevance in the post-colonial era
- The neo-liberal state and Gandhian responses
- Gandhi's Idea of Journalism and the State of the Media
- Gandhism after Gandhi: Gandhi as an apostle, a Saint or a Metaphysical Rebel

The themes mentioned above are only indicative and certainly not exhaustive. The seminar will seek to gather historians and other social scientists, jurists as well as journalists so as to interrogate the past from the concerns of the present and attempt to draw a roadmap to strengthen the democratic edifice and the constitutional scheme further.

Seminar Calendar

Abstracts (not exceeding 300 words), stating the relevant themes, title of the paper, coordinates of the scholar included e-mail id, institutional affiliation and other such details shall be sent on or before **October 6, 2017**.

Scholars whose abstracts are accepted will be intimated by e mail latest by **October 8, 2017**.

Full papers are to be sent before October 23, 2017.

The organising committee may consider defraying of AC III Tier fare upto New Jalpaiguri and shared vehicle fare from there to Gangtok and shared accommodation subject to availability of funds.

Abstracts and all other correspondence shall be sent to vkananth@cus.ac.in with subject tagline marked 100 years of Champaran – Seminar