

July 9, 2021

Press Release

JMI organises online lecture on “Reimagining South Asia: Ideas, Debates, and Realities”

The MMAJ Academy of International Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia (JMI) organised an Online Lecture on the topic “Reimagining South Asia: Ideas, Debates, and Realities” on 8th July 2021 as part of the South Asia Lecture Series. Prof. D. Suba Chandran, Dean, School of Conflict and Security Studies, National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bengaluru, delivered the lecture.

Prof. Ajay Darshan Behera, Officiating Director, MMAJ-AIS welcomed the speaker and the participants. In his initial remarks he introduced the theme of the lecture and underlined how making and unmaking a region is a function of politics and the dynamics of that particular region’s international relations. The idea of South Asia as a concept has historical connotations going back to the 1940s and increased interests of American scholarship on the region.

Prof. Chandran began his presentation by pointing out that in the 1990s and 2000s enough attention has been paid to the idea of re-imagining the region or concept of South Asia. He stated that there have been multiple ideas, debates ranging from economic, cultural and political while re-imagining the idea of South Asia. Instead of arguing from the given set of ideas and debates, Prof. Chandran divided his lecture into two broad categories, one dealing with a set of questions pertaining to the problematique and the second one discussing the prospects of re-imagining South Asia.

He put forward five broad hypotheses in order to understand the given debate on re-imagining South Asia. The hypotheses were, South Asia is not the only region trying to reimagine itself. There are also other regions, which are either in the category of re-imagining after the success of initial re-imagination and trying to do it again. There are regions which have not been successful in the initial attempt and thus attempting it again. The second hypothesis dealt with the question of geography as an important factor in the re-imagination of the region of South Asia. The third one was about the dissonance between the “dreamers” - those who imagine a region and the “doers” -- those who are responsible for policy implementation. The fourth hypothesis was about the centrality of the state in the

re-imagination of a region and how this centrality hinders the imagination itself. The fifth and last hypothesis dealt with the issue of how states are otherwise also disconnects themselves from the imagination and the disconnection between the states and the civil societies leading to multiple narratives pertaining to re-imagination.

He also raised questions about what shapes or has shaped the idea of a region and how regions have been constructed historically. Whether political and economic institutions dominantly play an important role in the idea of re-imagination, or even the military as an institution also plays an important role. And lastly, how international order becomes an important factor for re-imagination of regions. As regards, the imagination of South Asia he stressed on the fact that the concept did emerge from outside the region but there are also historical references by Aga Khan and K. M. Panikkar which points to the fact that there is a history of imagining South Asia even before it was labeled through western imagination.


Prof. Chandran also pointed out to the problems of re-imagining in terms of state's centrality effectively hindering the process either by being inward looking or looking at extra regional ambitions. The problem of India being the largest state feeding into the fear of the smaller states has also been one of the important reasons in the problem of re-imagining South Asia. In terms of prospects, he visualised that the idea of Southern Asia, shorn of its security connotations, needs to be re-imagined taking into consideration historical, cultural, economic, religious and political factors.

The lecture was well attended by participants from all across India. It was followed by a question-and-answer session where a number of questions were raised by the participants. Prof. Behera thanked the speaker for his insightful lecture and the participants for their enthusiastic participation.

Public Relations Office

Jamia Millia Islamia

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D. Suba Chandran

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