March 9, 2019

Press Release

Talk on 'The Emergence of the Ubuntu World: New Discourses on the Upsurge of the Commons and Visions of the Future' at JMI

As part of its 30th anniversary celebrations, the Academy of International Studies, JMI organized a talk by Prof Manoranjan Mohanty on 'The Emergence of the Ubuntu World: New Discourses on the Upsurge of the Commons and Visions of the Future' on 5th March 2019 in memory of Prof Ali Ashraf at the Ho Chi Minh Conference Room, AIS. This was the second talk in a series to remember and honour the founders of the Academy on topics that were close to their academic interests. Prof Akhtural Wasey, Professor Emeritus in the Department of Islamic Studies in Jamia Millia Islamia and President of Maulana Azad University, Jodhpur, chaired the talk. He pointed out that the Academy, set up in 1988, was unique because Prof Ali Ashraf, who had been Vice-Chancellor of JMI (1983 – 1989), had identified the Third World as the 'area' of focus and this was the first centre anywhere in India to do so. Other area studies centres in universities focused on specific regions or continents (Africa, Latin America, South Asia, West Asia, etc), but to set up a centre for studies on the Third World required a vision that believed that developing countries should not be just seen as victims but as confident agents of history.

Prof Manoranjan Mohanty, eminent political scientist and China scholar, recalled his personal memories of Prof Ali Ashraf as a multifaceted social scientist who combined empirical studies with theoretical questions, a pioneer of Urban Studies and an educationist with democratic values.

Prof Mohanty wove his inspiring lecture around the concept of 'Ubuntu', a Zulu word that means 'I am because you are'. He pointed out that the present context of worldwide violence, wars and destruction; neoliberalism propelled cut throat competition, consumerism and alienation; the obsessive self as against the creative self; and the palpable negative effects of climate change, Ubuntu pointed to a way where everyone was equal and developed through dynamic interaction. He connected Ubuntu with 'Jiefang', a Chinese concept that stood for liberation and 'Swaraj', self rule, proposed by Mahatma Gandhi. He stressed the need for alternative sources of knowledge and learning and questioning of truth-claims that were available through peoples' movements the world over. He spoke of global movements such as the World Social Forum, Network of Environmental Movements, women's movements, the Food Sovereignty Summit, UN linked NGO Summits, Resistance Campaigns to global capitalism (which were not merely 'Global Civil Society' initiatives), particularly in the Third World. Rights are not claims affirmed by rulers, he reminded the audience, but are won through continuous struggle. It is through the struggle for independence that Gandhi's concept of satyagraha went through three stages: the Non-Cooperation Movement, Civil Disobedience and the Quit India Movement. He ended his lecture by stating that the task of

developing new discourses on global transformation demanded great determination and solidarity, in the spirit of Ubuntu.

The talk was followed by a lively discussion and comments by faculty and students.

Ahmad Azeem
PRO-Media Coordinator

EMERGENCE OF AN
UBUNTU WORLD

NEW DISCOURSES ON THE UPSURGE OF THE
COMMONS AND VISIONS OF THE FUTURE
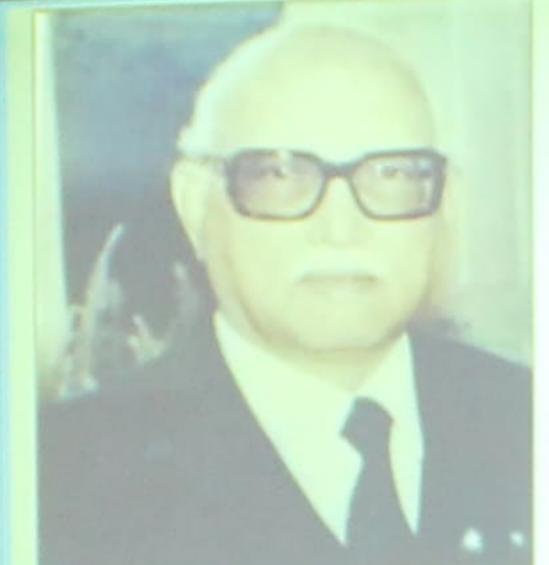
ALI ASHRAF MEMORIAL LECTURE

JAMIA MILIA ISLAMIA UNIVERSITY

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