

Friday Faculty Research Seminar Series **(A MAC-IQAC Initiative)**

Report of the 2nd Talk by Alok Puranik

The second FFRSS talk was delivered by Dr. Alok Puranik on 22nd April. Dr. Puranik teaches in the department of Commerce, and has a distinguished career as a satirist for over two decades.

Dr. Puranik began his talk titled “The Changing Face of Hindi Satire” on a personal note. He talked about his own understanding of satire, evolved with time and practice, and not through any formal indoctrination in the definitions or theories regarding the genre. He spoke of satire as a “creative portrayal of contradictions” which inspires corrective laughter. He also emphasized the essential distinction between humour and satire, stressing that there is nothing crude or mindless in satire: satire inspires thoughtful engagement. He referred to his recent piece on Ms. Pankaja Munde’s smiling selfie against the backdrop of a drought stricken landscape in Maharashtra. He commented that the selfie was evidence of the fact that happiness can be “sookha proof;” only the farmers killing themselves don’t seem to get it.



Dr. Puranik outlined the changes in the nature and practice of satire writing since the liberalization of Indian economy in 1991, in effect, charting the transitions in satire through globalization and its proverbial (dis)contents. His broad arguments were as follow:

The post 1991 scenario saw less and less of governmental intervention and more of private enterprise, opening up to a market economy that rewrote the earlier caste/ class divisions. The market economy generated a different world view where social hierarchies were determined solely by money. The senselessness, posturing and contradictions of earlier times were replaced, not eliminated, as the bragging rights went to the rich. Not just that, senselessness and posturing and contradictions seem to further perpetuate power and wealth. The general public could be forced to tolerate any kind of nonsense, so long as it came from the rich and the powerful; the Nirmal Babas and Donald Trumps of the world being cases in point.

The internet revolution further brought in some radical transitions, which affected both the form and content of satire: the traditional satire piece of 800 words came through 500 to 350 words to finally 5 tweets of 140 words each. The twitterfication of satire had other consequences as well. For one, it leveled the playing field. From the bastion of a select few, it became a game at which non-official players could and did have a shot.

Through all these transitions, however, certain things did not change: jealousy, greed, selfishness, cash obsession and deceit. Crusaders with feet of clay still abound, and every ethic and value has a price. This is fairly fertile territory for the satirist, since it effectively manifests the utter superficiality and fragility of human relationships in a world where money is the only reigning deity. At the larger social level, this leads to new cash-centric divisions. There emerged within India, the distinct US of India, the Malaysia of India and indeed, the Bangladesh and Uganda of India: the haves, the aspirants and the never wills.

Dr. Puranik closed his talk with some instances from his satirical pieces, and his take on the customary 'what it takes to be a satirist' question. He attributed it to discipline and consistency. Among others, Dr. Pundir spoke of Dr. Puranik's insight and encouragement in the shaping of his own career as a cartoonist and joke writer. The session was very lively and interesting, with a string of questions and observations from the audience.



