

Report

Gaatha Lecture Series #7: Exploring Bureaucracy and the Colonial State in India

The Department of History, Mata Sundri College for Women, University of Delhi, through Gaatha - The History Society, organised the seventh lecture in its Gaatha Lecture Series on 9 April 2026 at Bebe Nanki Hall. The lecture, titled “Structures of Governance: Bureaucracy and the Colonial State in India,” was delivered by the renowned historian Prof. Amar Farooqui. The academic session commenced at 1:00 PM and brought together students and faculty members for an engaging discussion on the structures and mechanisms through which colonial governance was established and sustained in India.

The lecture focused on the formation and functioning of bureaucratic structures under colonial rule and their significance in the making of the colonial state. The theme provided an opportunity to examine colonial governance beyond the conventional understanding of the British administration as merely a system of officials and institutions. It encouraged students to think about how administrative structures, systems of information, official procedures and various instruments of governance became integral to the consolidation of British authority in India.

Prof. Farooqui's discussion situated bureaucracy within the broader history of the colonial state, drawing attention to the ways in which administrative institutions developed alongside the expansion and consolidation of British power. The lecture enabled students to consider how governance operated at different levels and how the colonial state sought to translate its authority into everyday administrative practices. The discussion also highlighted the importance of understanding bureaucracy historically, rather than treating it as a neutral or purely technical apparatus of administration.

A significant aspect of the lecture was its relevance to the study of colonialism and state formation in India. The emergence of new administrative structures transformed the relationship between the state and the population and affected the manner in which territories, communities and resources were governed. The lecture therefore provided students with a framework for understanding the colonial state as a developing institutional structure, shaped by changing political, administrative and social requirements. The session was particularly valuable for students of history as it connected theoretical questions concerning state formation, governance and bureaucracy with the historical experience of colonial India. Prof. Farooqui's scholarly perspective encouraged students to approach familiar aspects of colonial administration critically and to examine the processes through which institutions acquired authority and became embedded within the structures of colonial rule.

The lecture also served as an important academic interaction between students and a distinguished historian. The discussion following the lecture provided an opportunity for students to engage with the subject, clarify their understanding and reflect upon the wider implications of bureaucratic governance in colonial India. Such interactions contribute significantly to creating an intellectually stimulating environment beyond the conventional classroom and encourage students to engage with historical scholarship through direct academic dialogue.

The event was organised under the guidance of Mr. Satveer Singh, Convener, and Dr. Simmi Kapoor Mehta, Teacher-in-Charge. The student team of Gaatha – The History Society, comprising Kajal Yadav, President; Nehal Verma, Vice-President; Agreema Yadav, Secretary; and Jhanvi Bajaj, Executive, contributed to the organisation and coordination of the lecture.

The successful organisation of Gaatha Lecture Series #7 reaffirmed the Department of History's commitment to providing students with opportunities to interact with leading scholars and engage with diverse dimensions of historical research. The lecture by Prof. Amar Farooqui enriched students' understanding of the colonial state and its structures of governance, while also encouraging a more critical and historically grounded approach to the study of bureaucracy and administration in colonial India.