



## Romila Thapar on campus: a thought provoking interaction

### Description



**In a short but vibrant interaction, the students got a chance to share views on a wide range of issues with one of the most respected historians of the country.**

Speaking in an interactive session with Pondicherry University students and faculty, arranged by Department of History, noted historian Romila Thapar opined that Kashmir issue is much more than a political problem. Thapar addressed a full house in an informal and informative session. "I think it's a problem where first of all you have a situation where the history of Kashmir is really not understood, it's not talked about either", she replied when a student put a question related to the issue before her.

**"Indian civilization did not lack the sense of history"**

Thapar, disagreeing to a student who opined the Indian history is lacking the tradition of writing on *Puranas* and *Ithihas*, said she is now writing a book to suggest that there was a tradition in India of writing book on history and she

would treat her concerns about the subject in two ways. One, she said, is embedded history, which has elements of historical information embedded in rituals like you have hero songs, you have epics, you have heroic societies and you have *Puranas* which are said to be religious text. She reminded the audience of one chapter in *Vishnu Puran* which, she said, is straight forward Genealogical descent and that kind of information which goes into making the history. She then, subsequent to embedded history, pointed out that we have historical biographies. She called the 12<sup>th</sup> century's Raj Tharangini as superb example of a chronicle. So, she concluded by saying that, "the Indian civilization lacks a sense of history is something that was started by colonial scholarship and we should think twice before we question that."

#### **On the construction of historical period of a country:**

Answering to a question, a Sri Lankan student of the University asked relating to the historical construction of his country, Romila Thapar said that history cannot be constructed just on a change of dynasty or the change of their administration. "You have to build it on the total change right across the side, which means whether there is a social change or economical change psychological change", she added on. To understand the historical change, she said, one cannot avoid changes that taken place in religion or the way the religion is handled by the social institutions and in creative literature of that period.

#### **"Very powerless to make a change, yet not keeping quiet"**

Talking about the objectivity of the historians and their struggle to remain so and also constantly making their statement in society, she said she has been trying to overcome it through continuously getting involved in signature campaigns and writing articles in newspapers. Ms. Thapar said that she is doing so because she does not want the future generations thinking of her generation as one which kept quiet and did not object.

Mentioning the role of different "isms" in historiography, she said understanding them is very important. But choosing to use it or not is your decision and should be based on analyzing the texts and subjects you are going to work on. She advised the next generation historians that it's their duty to try and understand what post modernism means, rather than believing someone else's views about it.

#### **"Integration the only way"**

Talking about the status of Kashmir, she called Raja Hari Singh's decision on the status of Kashmir as an unclear one amidst all the disarray. She stressed on sincere efforts to integrate the valley at the interaction, attended by many students from Kashmir, pointing out the economic and political realities that make it more or less impossible for the valley to stand alone. She also said she believed that the situation in Kashmir would be much easier if India had a more positive attitude towards the Muslim community and really showed the characteristics of a secular state.

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