

हंसराज महाविद्यालय

दिल्ली विश्वविद्यालय

महात्मा हंसराज मार्ग,

मलकागंज, दिल्ली - 110007

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HANSRAJ COLLEGE

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NAAC ACCREDITED 'A++' GRADE COLLEGE

2023-2024

Name of the Department/Society: The English Society

**Name of the Event: Lecture Series- Lecture by Prof Raj Kumar on
*Autobiography: Reading Self and Society in India***

Date of the Event: October 11, 2023

Convenor of the Department/Society: Dr. Maitri Baruah, Dr. Meenakshi Malhotra

Description of the event

On October 11, 2023, the English Society of Hansraj College organised a talk titled *Autobiography: Reading Self and Society in India* by Professor Raj Kumar of Delhi University, a celebrated academician and a figure of inspiration for many of us.

Professor Kumar engaged with the intricate topic of autobiographical literature, examining its origins, prevalence in Western literary traditions, and its role as a mirror to societal and cultural dynamics. Transitioning to the Indian context, he shed light on the absence of a formal tradition of written autobiographies and emphasised their importance in chronicling the lives of marginalised groups.

Tracing the inception of autobiographies back to St. Augustine's *Confessions* in 4 AD, professor underscored their significance in Western literature, attributing their popularity to the Age of Enlightenment's emphasis on individuality and self-expression. In contrast, he highlighted the dearth of autobiographical works in India, citing Banarsidas' *Ardhakathānaka* in 1641 as the first, appearing considerably later than its Western counterparts. He attributed this discrepancy to the collective nature of Indian society and limited access to education.

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Despite these obstacles, Professor Kumar presented a diverse array of Indian autobiographies, providing glimpses into the lives of marginalised communities such as women, Dalits, hijras, and sex workers. Works like Rassundari Devi's *Amar Jiban*, Revathi's *The Truth About Me*, Lakshmi Tripathi's *Me Hijra, Me Lakshmi*, Baby Halder's *A Life Less Ordinary*, and Nalini Jameela's *Autobiography of a Sex Worker* were cited as pivotal texts in challenging conventional narratives and offering alternative perspectives on Indian history.

Furthermore, Professor Kumar probed into the educational value of autobiographies, exploring concepts like cultural capital and the influence of memory on shaping these narratives. He stressed the necessity of situating autobiographies within their social context, drawing parallels with the evolution of autobiographical literature in Latin America from personal expression to a form of resistance.

Cumulatively, Professor Kumar's lecture underscored how autobiographies serve as reflections of societal changes, documentations of marginalised experiences, and challengers of dominant narratives. He urged the attendees to perceive autobiographies as a tool for resistance, underpinning the truth, and the reclamation of history.

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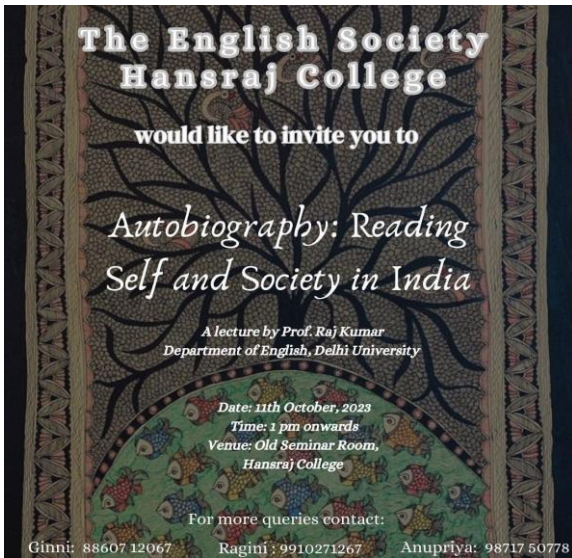
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Poster of the Event



Pictures from the Event



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List of participants

1. Mehwish
2. Ginni
3. Arshia
4. Ambika
5. Prateek
6. Chaitanya
7. Lakshay
8. Ragini
9. Anoushka
10. Ananya
11. Pragya
12. Nikita
13. Satakshi
14. Aditya
15. Anupriya
16. Sanjivanie
17. Sakshi Solanki
18. Soumya
19. Megha
20. Arushi
21. Jasmine
22. Vanshika
23. Maithili
24. Saignik
25. Ankit
26. Srishti
27. Aradhya