



University of Mumbai



Diasporic Constructions of Home and Belonging

Indian Diaspora Centre

Report on the talk “Belonging in America: Race, Religion and the Indian Diaspora”



Diasporic Constructions of Home and Belonging Indian Diaspora Centre (CoHaB IDC) had organized a talk titled - “Belonging in America: Race, Religion and the Indian Diaspora” by Professor Khyati Joshi on 26th March, 2018. Khyati Y. Joshi is a Professor of Education at Fairleigh Dickinson University. Prior to joining the faculty at Fairleigh Dickinson, Dr. Joshi was a Visiting Assistant Professor at the Centre for the Study of Ethnicity and Race at Columbia University, where for two years she taught Asian American Studies and Comparative Ethnic Studies. She also taught in the American Studies program at Princeton University. Her research interests include - Immigrant and second-generation Americans in K-12 Education, Religion in Schools, Multicultural Education, Race in America, Immigrant Religious Communities, and Racialization of Religion. Her forthcoming book examines the intersections of race and religion in US history and contemporary social culture.

According to Professor Joshi, racism and religious oppression go hand in hand, and in a way, takes the form of a double helix which propagates the constant Othering of religious minorities in the USA. Being Christian and white, automatically legitimizes one’s subjectivity as

'real'. In the USA, religion is primarily seen through a Christian lens. The belief systems of other religions are often misrepresented and/or discounted



Professor Khyati explained in detail how racialization of religion occurs. To illustrate her point, she gave various examples. She shared how the officials covertly avoid granting permission to build places of worship of religious minorities in the US, under the pretence of causing traffic jams and finding no parking space. This can be interpreted as a response laden with anxiety, as the Other (diasporics and religious minorities in this context) imagines and enjoys the 'Nation Thing' differently by negating the dominant discourses of minoritarian ways of belonging and 'enjoying' the nation. 'Religious Accommodation' is thus considered a 'special favour/treatment' of non-Americans. Thus, the Nation can be 'enjoyed' only by white-Christian subjects by establishing Christian normativity. Images of various Indian deities are reduced to the realm of the comical/fantastical/mythical, since Christianity is seen as the only 'real' religion.

The latter part of Professor Joshi's talk concentrated on how race and religion surreptitiously seeped into various state and federal laws in the US. For example, the Barred Zone Act of 1917 prohibited South Asians from immigrating to the US. On the other hand, with the Immigration Act of 1924, the US opened its door for immigrants (mainly Christian) from Southern and Eastern Europe. Thus, these acts served as tools for selective filtering of individuals through laws, which were subterraneously based on religion. Citizenship was granted on the basis of skin colour, religion and geographic location of the individual.

The American society speaks about the necessity for diversity but essentially looks at various non-Christian religions as monolithic. Homi K. Bhabha states that the focus should be on looking at the differences rather than finding similarities. A diasporic subject remains in constant tension with the host-land, negotiating and navigating his/her way through the society, hoping for a positive change.

Professor Joshi ended the talk by opening it up for discussion, comments and questions from the audience. The talk was well attended by the students and the professors of the English Department.