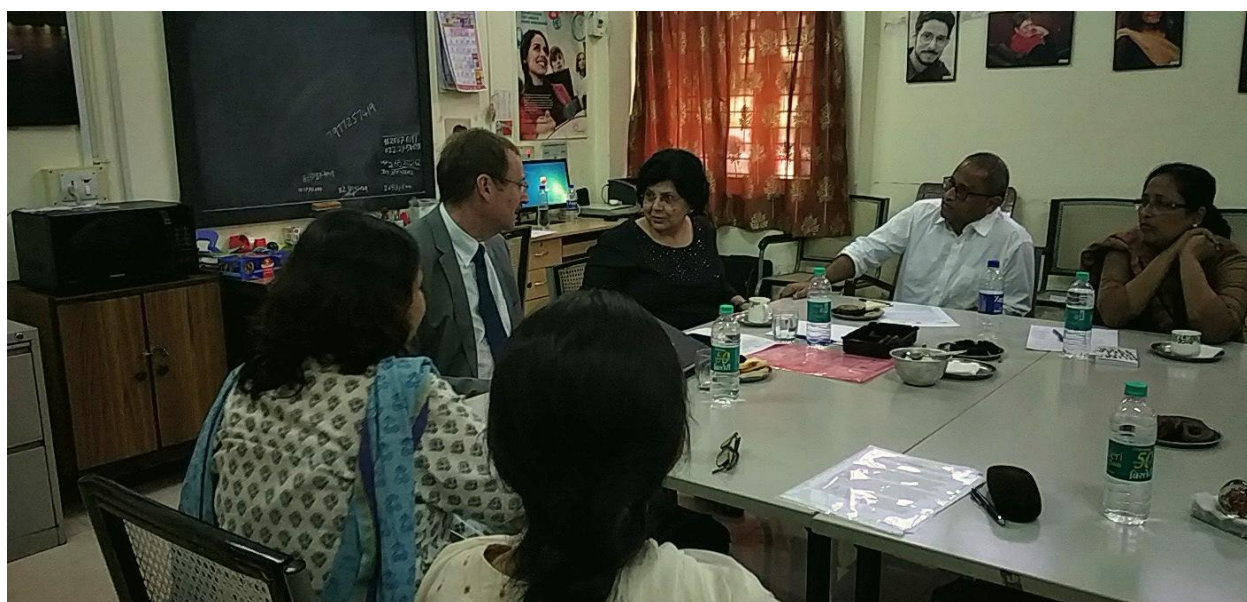


Report on the Round Table on Law, Literature and the Diaspora

17th December 2019

CoHaB Indian Diaspora, University of Mumbai, and its partner, University of Muenster, had organised a Round Table on Law, Literature and the Diaspora on 17th December 2019. Professor Klaus Stierstorfer who is the Chair of British Studies and Director of the Collaborative Centre 1385: Law and Literature, University, Muenster, Germany, was moderating the discussion.



In the photo: Professor Klaus Stierstorfer, Professor Nilufer E. Bharucha, Professor Rajesh Kharat and Professor Renu Modi

Professor Nilufer E. Bharucha, Director & Scientist-in-Charge, CoHaB IDC, welcomed Professor Stierstorfer and introduced the topic of discussion to the participants. Invitations to participate in the discussion had been sent out to various department heads and directors including the University of Mumbai's Law Academy, Alkesh Dinesh Mody Institute, and several other university departments (African Studies, French and English). The former Head of the Department of English, Professor Shoba Ghosh and Ms. Armin Wandrewala, Advocate, High Court of Mumbai, were also invited to participate in this multidisciplinary discussion. The newly appointed Dean of Humanities, Professor Rajesh Kharat, was a special invitee.

Professor Bharucha in her welcome speech spoke about the need to look at law and literature as interdisciplinary and how the fields are no longer exclusive of each other. She then requested Professor Stierstorfer to take over.

Professor Stierstorfer gave a brief introduction to the project on Law and Literature of which he is the Director at Muenster University. He gave examples to show how law and literature have always been interdisciplinary and that this has been the case since many years now right from the times of Aristotle and others. He mentioned how the movement in law and literature in the 1970s in the US was a reaction to law and economy being hand-in-glove always. He mentioned how there is a need especially in today's times to make law more humane. He also said from his experience how lawyers are and were always interested in literature, to which Professor Bharucha seconded citing her own experience wherein as part of the interviewing panel, the University of Mumbai there is usually a senior retired High Court of Mumbai Judge. Professor Stierstorfer also mentioned how in contemporary times diaspora studies are intertwined with law as the movement of diasporics across national borders is governed by the laws of the countries in which they seek employment, education or refuge.



Professor Stierstorfer responding to a point raised by the Dean of the Humanities
Dr. Rajesh Kharat

Professor Stierstorfer then opened the meeting for discussion. Professor Smita Shukla, I/C Director of the Alkesh Dinesh Mody Institute, spoke of her experience as a reader when she read a book by an author from Mizoram, North East India, who wrote about the conflict he faced between the statutory law and his tribal law which were contradictory in nature. In response to this Professor Ghosh said how one needs to define law as there are formal and informal systems of law prevalent in a diverse country like India. She mentioned how at times people are more stringent in following their tribal/community law afraid of being ostracised.



Professor Ghosh (second from left) adding to the discussion

Professor Renu Modi from the Mumbai University's Centre for African Studies said how law affects the people in Indian African diaspora at multiple levels. She explained with case studies that showed how the diaspora in Africa is affected by the laws of the country they reside in. She could think of oppression of the people on the basis of negritude, migritude, indentured labour, being a woman, and so on. Everyone agreed how relevant it was to the topic of discussion.



Professor Renu Modi putting forth her views on the topic of discussion

Dr. Meera Venkatachalam, Fellow CoHaB IDC and Head of the Gandhi-Mandela Centre at the Observer Research Foundation, Mumbai, mentioned her concerns that many diasporics now are not attracted to the idea of the “nation-state”. They do not identify with it at any level. So instead of focusing on conventional forms of literature, one should also look at the unconventional forms of literature like the media, social network, Twitter, etc. Everyone agreed that it would increase the scope of study. Professor Stierstorfer also asked a very engaging question on why we actually need the law? Is law the only way to produce justice? This was one of the few questions that needs detailed deliberation.



Dr. Meera Venkatachalam discussing her views on the topic

Dr. Manpreet Singh who was formerly an Associate Professor and who has now turned to full time writing, analysed the novel *The Year of the Runaways* by Sunjeev Sahota. The story set in Britain is about the lives of its immigrant protagonists and their brush with the law of the land they live on. It was well received by all.



Dr. Manpreet Singh making her presentation

Professor Shukla responded to the narrative by adding how law is being flouted to make gains. It is therefore required to identify these loopholes.



Professor Smita Shukla making her point at the discussion

Dr. Sachin Labade, Associate Professor, Department of English & Coordinator, Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute's University Centre, University of Mumbai, also mentioned that one needs to look at the queer diaspora and the global laws around queers. Everyone noted how interesting this angle would be to explore the problems faced by the queer diaspora in every country across the world.



Dr. Sachin Labade adding to the discussion

Professor Vidya Vencatesan, Department of French, University of Mumbai, also mentioned that in the context of indentured labour in Mauritius, an interesting scenario obtains wherein three legal systems operate in the same space and impact the life of the coolie from India steeped in jaati dharma, hired by British law from India and legislated in Mauritius by French law.



Professor Vidya Vencatesan making her point

Professor Rajesh Kharat, Dean of Humanities, University of Mumbai, said he would give complete administrative support to this project in future. This was welcomed by all the discussants.

In conclusion, it was decided that Dr. Sachin Labade would help Professor Nilufer Bharucha to keep the dialogue going by charting the further course of action. They would be supported by Professor Shoba Ghosh, Professor Renu Modi and Dr. Manpreet Singh.

In conclusion, Professor Bharucha thanked all the participants who made it to the discussion. However, everyone missed the participation from the Law Academy and Ms. Armin Wandrewala who had to attend to her cases in the High Court and hence could not attend the Round Table.

The Round Table ended with refreshments for all the participants.

Mumbai

Professor Nilufer E. Bharucha
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