



Report on the International Symposium on the Indian Diaspora
6th February 2020

CoHaB Indian Diaspora Centre and the Indo-Canadian Studies Centre, University of Mumbai, had organised an international symposium on the Indian Diaspora on 6th February 2020. The Consul General of Canada in Mumbai, Ms. Annie Dubé, was the Chief Guest at the symposium, Professor Rajesh Kharat, Dean of Humanities, University of Mumbai, was the Guest of Honour. The speakers at this symposium were Professor Brian Kennedy and Professor Shane Underwood who teach at the Pasadena City College in California. The third and final speaker at this conference was Dr. Paromita Chakrabarti, Associate Professor of English and Director of Global Research Initiatives at the HR College of Commerce and Economics, Mumbai.

Professor Nilufer E. Bharucha, Director, CoHaB Indian Diaspora Centre (CoHaB IDC), and Honorary Coordinator, Indo-Canadian Studies Centre (ICSC), welcomed the dignitaries and the members of the audience. She gave a brief overview of the activities carried out at the CoHaB IDC and ICSC. She then requested Ms. Annie Dubé to give the opening remarks. At the outset, Ms. Dubé expressed her happiness at being the Chief Guest. She briefly spoke of her role as the Consul General. Ms. Dubé gave the statistics of student level exchange in India and Canada and also spoke of the extent of the Canadian presence in India across different sectors. She mentioned how the Canadian Consulate in future would welcome academic collaboration with the ICSC, University of Mumbai. She also offered any assistance in this regard on behalf of the Canadian Consulate.



Professor Nilufer E. Bharucha welcoming the dignitaries and the audience

In conclusion, Ms. Dubé once again expressed her happiness at being a part of this symposium and the organisers were indeed grateful the Consul General managed to squeeze some time out of her busy schedule to be the Chief Guest at the symposium.



l-r: Professor Rajesh Kharat, Ms. Annie Dubé, Professor Nilufer E. Bharucha

Professor Bharucha then invited the Guest of Honour, Professor Rajesh Kharat, to speak. Professor Kharat spoke briefly and assured that the University of Mumbai shall continue supporting both the CoHaB IDC and ICSC in their future endeavours.



Professor Rajesh Kharat delivering his remarks

The inauguration was followed by tea before the start of the academic session.

Professor Shoba Ghosh, Former Head of the Department of English, University of Mumbai, chaired the academic session of the symposium at which Professor Brian Kennedy, Dr. Shane Underwood and Dr. Paromita Chakrabarti presented their papers.



Professor Shoba Ghosh introducing Professor Brian Kennedy

Professor Brian Kennedy presented the first paper of the symposium titled 'The Kinetics of Canadian Culture: How a Diasporic Indian Might Survive in the Great White North.' His paper focussed on the impact Indians had on the Canadian culture. He also indicated that the reverse is true, i.e., the Canadians had a strong impact too on immigrants/Indians.

His paper outlined how hockey by which he meant ice hockey has a strong impact on the cultural, recreational and commercial lives of the Canadians. He suggested that hockey not only connects people, but also connects one's body and soul. The movements made when playing hockey are very much Canadian, comparing them to the movements made during yoga or playing cricket in the Indian context. He termed them as the cultural attachments.

According to Professor Kennedy hockey acts as a metaphor when immigrants/new Canadians seek to play in the Canadian cultural, social space. As he mentioned, hockey plays a very important role in determining what makes a person Canadian. The paper ended with a discussion.

The second paper was presented by Dr. Shane Underwood on 'Dispersing Diversity in American Higher Education: From Frameworks to Diffusion'. His paper outlined the ways in which diversity is measured in American higher education institutions. He also spoke about his interaction with students to understand their motives, outcomes and experiences associated with diversity discourse on their respective campuses.

Dr. Underwood cited contemporary scholarship that indicates that diversity is intended to foster positive educational environments that support and represent diversity groups through campus programs in order to increase proportional student output. His paper presentation ended with a discussion with the audience.



Dr. Shane Underwood

The final paper of the symposium was presented by Dr. Paromita Chakrabarti on 'Of Language and Culture: Writing Vernacular from the Diaspora.' Dr. Chakrabarti's paper focussed on the politics of language and culture in the Bengali diaspora with particular reference to the ways in which both Indian Bengalis and Bangladeshis in the diaspora engage in myriad ways of communicating and interlinking with each other, going between and beyond nations through cultural mediation, transculturation and transnationalism.

Dr. Chakrabarti deliberated on the literature in Bengali language in the diaspora, especially the contribution of writers from West Bengal and Bangladesh. She illustrated how writers from India and Bangladesh who speak and creatively engage with Bangla bhasha in the diaspora are growing in number particularly in the United Kingdom, United States, Canada and Australia. However, she also spoke of how most of this writing circulates within the diaspora or/and are confined to Bengali speaking population in India and Bangladesh. Her paper addressed this issue and opined that one of the main reasons for its limited reach is the unavailability of translations from Bengali to English or other languages, this is further compounded by the resistance of the publishing industry to buy translation rights for regional language writing. However, in the current age of the internet, a substantial amount of Bangla literature from various diasporas is available widely. The paper ended with a discussion with the audience.



Dr. Paromita Chakrabarti

The symposium ended with a vote of thanks by CoHaB IDC Research Associate Ms. Kirti Risbud. The symposium was attended by faculty and students of the University of Mumbai.



Ms. Kirti Risbud
