



Report on the talk on Coconut Dreams by Derek Mascarenhas
12th December 2019

CoHaB Indian Diaspora Centre and the Indo-Canadian Studies Centre, University of Mumbai, had organised a talk on *Coconut Dreams* by Derek Mascarenhas on 12th December 2019. The talk was chaired by Dr. Sachin Labade, Associate Professor, Department of English, & Coordinator, Shastri Indo Canadian Institute's University Centre, University of Mumbai.



(l) Derek Mascarenhas and (r) Dr. Sachin Labade

Coconut Dreams is the debut short story collection by Derek Mascarenhas. The stories are set in Canada and explore the lives of the Pinto family through seventeen linked short stories. The stories are set in a predominantly white suburb of Canada, Burlington, Ontario, and narrate the experiences in their day-to-day lives.



Derek Mascarenhas reading the story

Derek started the talk by reading one of the short stories from the book titled, “Picking Trilliums”. All the short stories are told from the point of view of children. This particular short story is from one of the child protagonists, Ally’s, perspective. Here, Derek explained that he consciously focussed on giving the children voices since he as a child could not identify with most of the books he read. He felt he was not represented enough in the stories being told or the ones that he read. Hence, his stories centre around the children’s perspectives instead of them being mere voices in a bigger set up. Some of the themes he explores in *Coconut Dreams* are family, racism, bullying, identity and belonging. In “Picking Trilliums”, Ally speaks to Aiden, her brother, about the bullying and racism she faces in her class.

Moving forward, Derek explained how writing a novel was not an easy process and it took him around 10 years to finish *Coconut Dreams*. His stories are also unique as it is uncommon for a book to centre on Indian, Goan children in a white Canadian suburb. Although the seventeen short stories are linked, one can read them as a novel or they can be read as standalone stories in themselves.



During the course of the talk, Derek mentioned how some of the authors he read influenced him greatly and how he draws inspiration from them. He mentioned Rohinton Mistry's *Tales from Firozsha Baag*, which are also linked short stories that inspired him to write *Coconut Dreams*. He spoke of how authors like Jhumpa Lahiri, Arundhati Roy, Anosh Irani and Kiran Desai among others served as his motivation.

Derek concluded the talk with the reading of another short story titled, "So Far Away". This story is told from the point of view of Aiden. The story talks about how a Goan cousin moves from Goa to Canada and starts living with them and their trip to the beach with her. The story talks about how the family decides to play match makers between the cousin and their acquaintance in Canada.



As the stories are told from the children's viewpoints, some sections are funny and at the same make a greater point about racism, identity and culture.



The talk was well received and was attended by the faculty and students from the Department of English, University of Mumbai. The talk was followed by refreshments for the invited guest and audience.

Mumbai

Professor Dr. Nilufer E. Bharucha
Director, CoHaB Indian Diaspora Centre
& Coordinator, ICSC