



Report on the National Symposium on Indian Diaspora Studies
17th February 2020

CoHaB Indian Diaspora Centre (CoHaB IDC), University of Mumbai, had organised a national symposium on Indian Diaspora Studies on 17th February 2020. Professor Smita Shukla, In-Charge Director, ICSSR (Western Region) was the Chief Guest at this symposium.



Professor Nilufer E. Bharucha introducing Professor Smita Shukla

Professor Shukla in her remarks appreciated that CoHaB IDC was indeed an interdisciplinary centre. In her capacity as the In-charge Director of ICSSR, she also expressed her desire to collaborate on more such interdisciplinary projects in the future.



Professor Smita Shukla delivering her remarks



Professor Nilufer E. Bharucha and Keynote speaker Dr. Ajaya Sahoo

The first session was chaired by Professor Nilufer E. Bharucha. The first keynote paper was presented by Dr. Ajaya Sahoo, Associate Professor at the Centre for Study of Indian Diaspora, University of Hyderabad. Dr. Sahoo's paper 'South Asian Youth in the Diaspora: Issues of Identity and Transnationalism' focussed on how the diasporic youth occupy spaces of significant positions in this age of globalization and transnationalization.

His paper indicated how the youth in today's times easily adapt to and adopt the new developments in information and communication technologies and it also holds true for the South Asian youth in the diaspora. Dr. Sahoo gave several examples of the different youth organisations formed by the diasporic youth in order to help the community. He gave examples that showed how the organisations, although occupied a physical space, transcended borders and forged connections and networks with the homeland and host countries and co-diasporics across the globe.

Dr. Sahoo's paper thus examined how South Asian youth in the diaspora reinforced their identities through online mediums such as websites, blog pages, and social networking sites and thereby connected with their kith and kin across the world, and formed virtual networks on the basis of a single or multiple affiliations.



Dr. Ajaya Sahoo

After a tea break, Professor Sridhar Rajeswaran, CoHaB IDC Advisory Committee Member and Visiting Professor in Humanities, Centre for Excellence in Basic Sciences, University of Mumbai, presented the second keynote paper titled 'Voice of Lie and voiceless truth': Deepa Mehta on Gandhi's India and the India Thereafter?' focussed on the Indo-Canadian film-maker Deepa Mehta's Elements Trilogy – *Earth 1947*, *Fire* and *Water* – against the back drop of Gandhi's statement on God and Truth which is central to the film-maker's narrative. Professor Sridhar noted that the Elements Trilogy in itself has only a partial validity and needs at least two other important films in Mehta's oeuvre for completion i.e., *Bollywood Hollywood* and *Heaven on Earth*. His reading of the Elements Trilogy against the backdrop of these two films reveals the outsider insider positions and periscopic visions of Mehta's cinema which are central to diasporic discourses on re-presentations. As a film-maker Mehta's style is more of that of a documentary film maker and her narrative is linear and episodic and she does not tinker much with time and space. The particular form in the genre of film-making, she has chosen interlocks with memory/re-memory/post memory, as she looks at bearing witness testimonies, at which she arrives through symbols imaged in diverse ways drawn from the nation, as well as the nation-state. In the earthy and elemental worlds of Deepa Mehta the earth is cracked, there is smoke in the Water and Fire in the sky. Copious are the expositions in her films on colonialism, hegemony and the masculine's subordination of gender, which in her narrative are linked and dynamically feed into each other. Deepa Mehta's *Earth*, *Fire* and *Water* stand testimony to the bigoted patriarchal voices of lie and the voiceless truth of the women protagonists with the gods and goddesses being bearing witness to this.

Professor Rajeswaran's paper had thus re-read Mehta's Trilogy against the backdrop of Derrida's 'lie of the state and the state of the lie', which he has re-worked as 'the voicelessness of truth and lies that have voices', in the context of Gandhi for whom Truth was God.

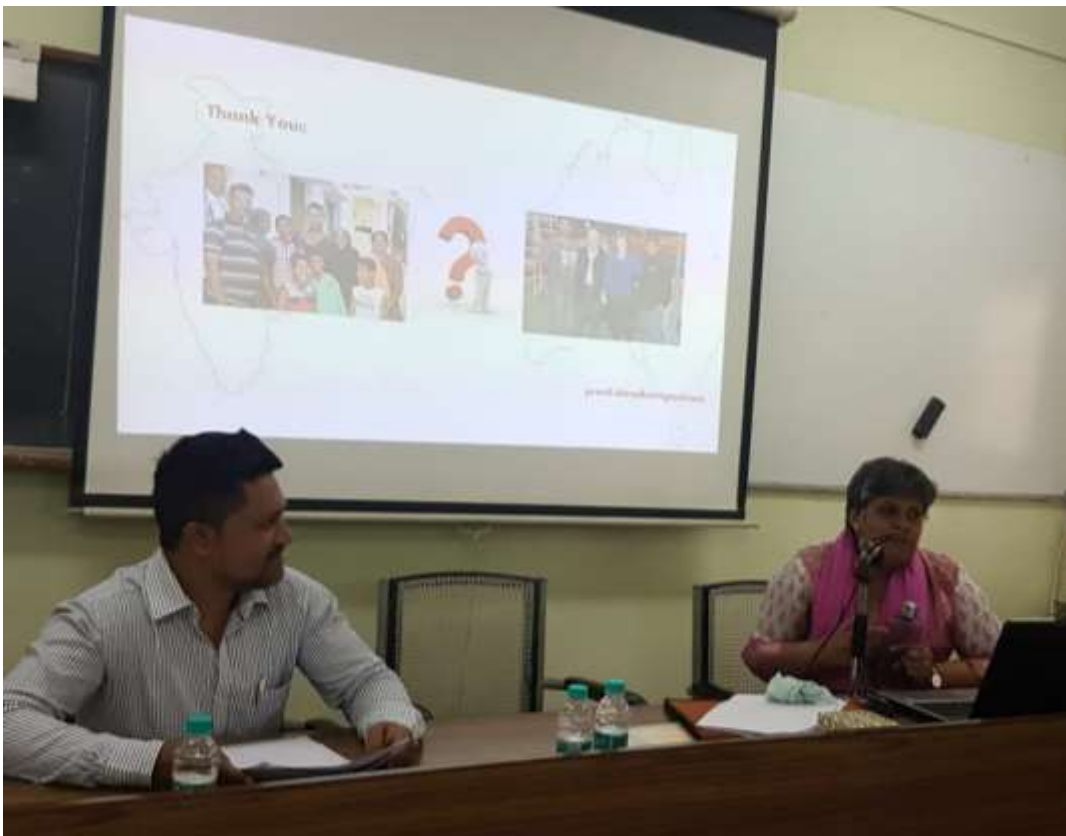


Keynote Speaker Professor Sridhar Rajeswaran

The next session was chaired by Dr. Sachin Labade, Associate Professor, Department of English, University of Mumbai, in which two papers were presented by Dr. Preeti Shirodkar, Associate Professor, Kohinoor Business School, Mumbai and Ms. Anmol Datta, Research Scholar, University of Mumbai.

Dr. Shirodkar's paper titled "(Re)Tracing Routes/Roots 'A Long Way Home'" discussed the memoir/novel *A Long Way Home*, author Saroo Brierly's journey to trace his routes, between his homes and families, gaining rather than losing much along the way.

Dr. Shirodkar discussed how diasporic writing has come a long way from the initial longing for home, an experience of displacement and a quest for identity, to simultaneously belonging to multiple contexts. Saroo's memoir is spread across spatial and temporal realities. It is written in the first-person narrative style and grippingly touches upon the themes and the concerns of the diaspora with a fresh outlook.



Dr. Sachin Labade chairing the session; Dr. Preeti Shirodkar presenting the paper

Dr. Shirodkar thus looked at the novel as the one that reinvents diasporic writing that retraced routes/roots and at the same time remained true to its genre.

The last paper of the symposium was presented by Ms. Anmol Dutta titled “‘*Vo Bharat Se Aaya Hai*’: Nation, Nostalgia, and the NRI Wife in Bollywood Cinema.” Ms. Dutta’s paper explored the NRI wife in Indian cinema, where her migration stems from marriage in diaspora. The paper illustrated some examples from Bollywood movies like *Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham*, *Namaste London*, *English Vinglish* and Mira Nair’s *The Namesake*, where the women are prototypes of the ‘good Indian wife’ as they attempt to recreate home and culture in a foreign setting. She spoke of how these characters adapt and or alienate their immigrant status.

All the women characters in the movie are preoccupied with nationalism which in turns roots from nostalgia towards their homeland.

Thus, Ms. Dutta’s paper highlighted the ambivalent position these women occupy as they try to recreate a home away from home.



Ms. Anmol Dutta presenting her paper

Professor Sridhar Rajeswaran offered the vote of thanks at the end of the symposium. The symposium was attended by faculty and students of the University of Mumbai .
