

## **Report on the Mumbai Münster Institute of Advanced Studies (MMIAS)'s Internship Programme: January - February 2022**

The Mumbai Münster Institute of Advanced Studies (MMIAS), University of Mumbai, had appointed an intern, Ms. Shikha Mehta, for a period of one month, from 8 January to 8 February 2022.

Professor Nilufer E. Bharucha, Director, MMIAS, had multiple discussions with Ms. Mehta on the basis of which the internship programme was chalked out. It was decided that the internship programme would provide her with work experience and also enable her to update her academic knowledge in her target area of diaspora studies. Owing to the pandemic situation then, Shikha's internship was in a hybrid mode - 15 days in an online mode followed by her visit to the MMIAS, University of Mumbai, Mumbai, for 15 days.

In the first two weeks of internship, Ms. Mehta read and reviewed research articles sent by the MMIAS Director. They gave an insight into different topics related to diaspora, the representation of refugees, media ecosystems and digital diasporas, some that were known and some that were relatively new to the intern. These articles formed the basis for the face to face lecture and workshop that was organised in the second half of the internship.

In the second half of the internship programme, the Intern was also assigned administrative work. She did a diversity audit of MMIAS's book collection and also updated the book register. She also did some filing and updated the outward/Inward registers of the MMIAS. This enabled the intern to gain work experience. Given the brief duration of her internship it was not possible to assign more work to her.

She then attended a face-to-face workshop on "An Exercise on Conceptualizing Refugee Education through Martha Minnow's *Making All the Difference*", designed and facilitated by the MMIAS Researcher Mr. Mushtaq Shaikh on 29<sup>th</sup> January 2022. The workshop was intended to help the intern get a perspective on the Refugee diaspora and the critical issues affecting refugee education and identify these using the five assumptions made by the authors in the articles she had read in the first half of the internship.

During the workshop, she read and analysed three research papers, identifying critical issues the refugees faced. Shikha, along with Mr. Shaikh further discussed and created posters with mind maps that helped her understand the vital issues teachers and students face in refugee education. Finally, it was concluded that teacher training

was essential for improving refugee education. It needed to stem from empathy to decrease the negative connotations present in media and societal narratives. Both the intern and facilitator agreed that it should further be done by sharing ideas and culture between teachers worldwide and also between refugee students and their teachers.



MMIAS Researcher Mushtaq Shaikh designed and facilitated the workshop on “An Exercise on Conceptualizing Refugee Education through Martha Minow’s *Making All the Difference*”

Noting Shikha’s interest in Queer literature, MMIAS had also organised a lecture on Queer Diaspora by Dr. Sachin Labade, Associate Professor, Department of English, University of Mumbai, on 5<sup>th</sup> February 2022. The discussion on queer diaspora was enriching and factual since the intern had studied Sociology in her graduate programme, in which she had a module on the sociology of gender. As a result, she was aware of the primary issues the Queer Diaspora faced. However, the discussion with Dr. Labade proved to be fruitful and gave her new insights into the issues faced by the queer diasporic community.

As a result of this lecture, Shikha was also familiarised with the concept of internal diaspora and how this movement of oppressed people in a nation-state had its reasons. Shikha also realised that the idea that queer people were, in a sense, sexual migrants, and the core reason for their movement/displacement/dislocation was their sexuality.

The discussion on Queer Diaspora also touched upon the different reasons that queer people came together to form a community, also known as the Politics of Visibility. They are, in essence, fighting to create their own space.



Dr. Sachin Labade (Associate Professor, Department of English; Coordinator of Indo-Canadian Studies Center), with Shikha and some M.A. (English Literature) students of the University of Mumbai

Dr. Labade's talk threw light on the dilemma that queer theorists faced when it came to the community in real life: the rights-based approach where the community has demanded rights to be accepted as part of society and societal constructs. Queer intellectuals however believe that it is a defeat to their very being, the very idea of what it means to be queer. Fighting for the right to marry and the request to be accepted is something that queer intellectuals believe the queer people should not demand as being queer implies being different from heteronormative norms.

Dr. Labade discussed how society, marriage and family are built upon heteronormative ideas, and marriage and family are social institutions for heteronormative people. Having done the workshop earlier, Shikha relate it to Martha Minow's perspective in *Making All the Difference*.

The lecture discussed how queer people were similar to diasporic people; in that they were both fighting to create their own space and identity. However what sets queer people apart is that unlike the diasporic people, they do not have a physical and ideological space to look back at. Having grown up in a society that is mainly heteronormative, they are influenced by that to fight for equal rights, fight for the right to marry and have families since they have never known anything else. So it is essential to differentiate between theory and practicality/real-life scenarios, and that queer diaspora experience is not universal.

The discussion also led to cinema and literature in which one sees queer-baiting, queer representation. As a follow up to the discussion and to widen the knowledge

base, Dr. Labade suggested that Shikha read relevant material and watch movies to see how the queer community is represented in both.

At the formal oral presentation of her report, Shikha mentioned how she realised that even in diaspora, there are several underlying issues that exist, separate from ones of home and belonging. She ended on the note that she now needs to consider several factors that would help her in her future learning plans.



L to R: Institute's Researcher Mushtaq Shaikh, Dr. Sachin Labade (Associate Professor, Department of English, University of Mumbai), Dr. Nilufer E. Bharucha (Director, MMIAS, University of Mumbai)

The first Internship of the MMIAS therefore helped the Intern to combine work experience in the centre along with learning more about two not so commonly discussed aspects of the Indian Diaspora, i.e., refugee and queer diasporas.

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