



Mumbai Münster Institute of Advanced Studies (MMIAS)

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**Report on the National Seminar organised by the Mumbai Münster Institute of Advanced Studies (MMIAS), University of Mumbai, and Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi on
The Indian Ocean as a Memory Space: Reflections from Indian Diasporic Literature and Culture
7-8 December 2023**

The Mumbai Münster Institute of Advanced Studies (MMIAS), University of Mumbai, had organised a two-day National Seminar on *The Indian Ocean as a Memory Space: Reflections from Indian Diasporic Literature and Culture* on 7th and 8th December 2023 in collaboration with the Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi. The seminar was held in the ICSSR Conference Hall, J. P. Naik Bhavan, University of Mumbai, Kalina Campus, Mumbai.

Speakers for the seminar were invited from India and the world. Professor Nilufer E. Bharucha, Co-Director, MMIAS, was the Convenor of the Seminar and Ms. Kirti Risbud, MMIAS Research Associate, was the Coordinator. Professor Klaus Stierstorfer, Co-Director, MMIAS, University of Münster, Germany, was present on both the days of the seminar.

Commodore Dr. Srikant Kesnur, VSM, (Retd), Indian Navy was the Chief Guest at the Seminar and Professor Smita Shukla, Director, Alkesh Dinesh Mody Institute, University of Mumbai, and I/C Director, Western Regional Centre - Indian Council of Social Science Research (WRC-ICSSR) was the Chief Guest at the Valedictory function.



l-r: Professor Klaus Stierstorfer, Cmde Srikant Kesnur, Professor Nilufer E. Bharucha, Mr. Om Nagar

The seminar began with Professor Bharucha welcoming the Chief Guest, speakers and participants of the seminar. She introduced the MMIAS and the concept of the seminar briefly before inviting Professor Stierstorfer to give his Introductory Remarks. Professor Bharucha touched upon the different aspects of Indian Diaspora and how in the last few years the Indian Diaspora has been engaged by India. Professor Bharucha spoke about how diaspora deals with memory and post-memory and how the seminar aims to look at these aspects through literature and culture. Professor Stierstorfer then spoke in brief about the importance of studying and deliberating on the topic of Indian Ocean, especially given the current geopolitical scenario.

Professor Bharucha introduced and invited Commodore Dr. Srikant Kesnur to give his remarks on the topic of the seminar. He spoke about how his experiences as a naval officer shaped his view about the Indian Diaspora and their connect with India and its people. He spoke from the military and maritime perspectives and maritime is viewed differently by those at sea and those who aren't.

The vote of thanks at the end of the inaugural session was offered by Mr. Om Nagar, Officer-in-Charge, Sahitya Akademi Regional Office, Mumbai.

A high tea was arranged after the Inaugural Session.

The first session, chaired by MMIAS Advisory Board Member, Professor Sridhar Rajeswaran. Professor Somdatta Mandal, Former Professor of English, Visva-Bharati University, Santiniketan, West Bengal, presented a paper on *The Indian Ocean as Memoryscape: Multiple Crossings in Minal Hajratwala's Leaving India*. Her presentation focussed on one very significant memoir that brought out several of the issues of crossing the Indian Ocean or the proverbial kalapani (black waters). She spoke about how the memoir is a saga that is epic in scale, that vividly captures the motivations, trials, and travails of migration.

The second presentation on *The Coolie Odyssey* was made by Professor Vidya Vencatesan, Head of the Department of French, and I/C Director, Centre for European Studies, University of Mumbai. Her paper looked at Natacha Appannah's *Les Rochers de Poudre d'Or* and *La Mémoire délavée*, traits et portraits that delve into the family memory to look at what is remembered and what is transmitted to the next generation and what is silenced, forgotten or simply rewritten.

Dr. Kurush Dalal, Archaeologist, Culinary Anthropologist and Museum Consultant made the last presentation in the first session on *The Indian Ocean as Culinary Memory Space*. His presentation explored the interactions of foreign and autochthonous foods brought to India by Indians and by foreigners, the way in which these foods impacted our culinary legacy and the way many of them became some of the greatest Indian ambassadors in the world.



l-r: Dr. Kurush Dalal, Professor Somdatta Mandal, Professor Sridhar Rajeswaran, Professor Vidya Vencatesan

The second session that followed the lunch break was chaired by Professor Vidya Vencatesan. Professor Mala Pandurang, Principal, Dr. BMN College, Mumbai, made a presentation on A

Gendered Reading of Memory Texts from East Africa. She derived her presentation from a wider project that she had undertaken on *Wives, Mothers and Others*, which aimed at reconstruction of migration experience of women from the Indian subcontinent to East Africa. Her paper focussed on Parita Mukta's *Shards of Memory: Woven Lives in Four Generations*, which deals with the Gujarati diaspora in Kenya and the memories and stories shared by women from this diaspora.

Professor Renu Modi, Former Head, Centre for African Studies, University of Mumbai, made a presentation on *Indian Diaspora in Africa and Memory Spaces in the Indian Ocean*. Her presentation dealt with the pelagic view of history and the memory spaces that the continuum of the Indian Ocean has engendered over the last centuries.

The last presentation on Day 1 of the seminar was made by Dr. Vidya Rao, Associate Professor and Head of Department of English, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavans R A College of Arts & Commerce (UG & PG), Ahmedabad, on *Select Indo-African Diaspora Playwrights of the Post Apartheid Era*. Her presentation focussed on South African Indian Literature, particularly plays written by Ashwin Singh that deal with trauma and survival, and the hope for a better future.



l-r: Professor Mala Pandurang, Professor Vidya Vencatesan, Dr. Vidya Rao, Professor Renu Modi

Day 2 of the seminar began with the third session that was chaired by Dr. Sooshilla Gopaul, Open University of Mauritius, Mauritius. Dr. Sachin Labade, Associate Professor, Department of English, and Hon. Coordinator, Indo-Canadian Studies Centre, University of Mumbai, made a presentation on the *Marathi Diaspora in Mauritius: A Review*. His presentation looked at the rich tapestry of the Marathi Diaspora in Mauritius, shedding light on a community that has contributed significantly to the island's cultural and historical landscape. His paper reviewed the Marathi settlement in Mauritius, researched exclusively from online sources encompassing oral history, interviews, community centres, archives, and academic journals. Dr. Labade also aimed to identify gaps in the existing literature, encouraging an interdisciplinary approach to unravel the complexities of Marathi diasporic experiences.

The second presentation in the session by Dr. Anagha Kamble, Assistant Professor, Department of History, University of Mumbai, revolved around *Cinema and the Indian Diaspora in Africa*. Her paper concentrated on how cinema has been crucial in identity formation and how Hindi cinema travelled to Africa via Indian Ocean trade networks. She also mentioned how cinema halls were spaces for socialising for the Indian community. She concluded by critiquing the

stereotypical representation of the Indian diaspora in Bollywood.



I-r: Dr. Sooshilla Gopaul, Dr. Sachin Labade, Dr. Anagha Kamble

The fourth session after a short tea break was chaired by Dr. Sachin Labade. Dr. Sooshilla made her presentation on *Building up the New Thalassology of the Indian Ocean through Edward A. Alpers' Views*, where she spoke about how important it is to look at the role imagination plays in the study of the world of the Indian Ocean. She referred to Mauritian poetry, Romesh Guneseckera's *Prisoner of Paradise* and Abdoolrazak Gurnah's *The Last Gift* in her presentation.

The second presentation in this session was made by Dr. Anjali Singh, Assistant Professor, Department of English, Mohanlal Sukhadia University, Udaipur, on *Transcending Heritage, History and Homeland: Rediscovering India in Indian Diasporic Literature from South Africa*. Her presentation explored the South African Indian Diasporic Literature, which although small and relatively young, is rapidly expanding. She spoke about how identity and belonging, as extrapolated in South African Indian Fiction, are slippery concepts for South African Indians, since they kept shifting with the political changes in the region, pre and post-apartheid.



I-r: Dr. Anjali Singh, Dr. Sachin Labade, Dr. Sooshilla Gopaul

The fifth and last academic session of the day and seminar was chaired by Professor Somdatta

Mandal. Dr. Sharmila Jajodia, Associate Professor of English, Ramniranjan Jhunjhunwala College (Autonomous), Mumbai, presented a paper on *Representation of Indian Diaspora in Africa in Literature*. Her paper dealt with the socio-economic and politico-cultural roles that diaspora plays along with integration and assimilation as culture and tradition that connect the home and host countries are preserved. Her paper studied the representation of Indian Diaspora in Africa in literature taking into consideration the points mentioned above.

The last presentation of the seminar was made by Dr. Preeti Shiroadkar, Associate Professor, Communication and Soft Skills, Kohinoor Business School, Mumbai, on *Beating Stigma, Breaking Silence: Reflections on Vanessa Govender's Beaten but not Broken*. Dr. Shiroadkar spoke about how although gender-based violence is a prominent issue in South Africa, it rarely finds a voice, remaining merely statistics that reach hardly a few. Her paper further touched upon how *Beaten but not Broken*, a re-memory, in the autobiography genre, creates a space where through candid narration Vanessa Govender is able to draw attention to its debilitating effects, while also pointing out that this need not be a given/an 'accepted reality'.



l-r: Professor Somdatta Mandal, Dr. Preeti Shiroadkar, Dr. Sharmila Jajodia

The last Valedictory Session of the seminar was chaired by Professor Klaus Stierstorfer. Professor Stierstorfer gave his remarks on the proceedings of the seminar and handed the stage to Professor Smita Shukla, Director, Alkesh Dinesh Mody Institute, and I/C Director, Western Regional Centre-Indian Council of Social Science Research (WRC-ICSSR), Chief Guest at the Valedictory Session. She spoke about how studies pertaining to Indian Ocean are the need of the hour and how multidisciplinary studies should be encouraged. The concluding remarks were given by Professor Nilufer E. Bharucha.



l-r: Professor Klaus Stierstorfer, Professor Nilufer E. Bharucha, Professor Smita Shukla

Participants were asked to give their comments and remarks on the two days of the seminar. The formal vote of thanks was offered by Ms. Kirti Risbud, Research Associate, MMIAS.

The seminar ended with a High Tea. Students and faculty of the departments of Mumbai University and affiliated colleges attended the seminar. A question and answer session at the end of each academic session saw interesting deliberations on the topics discussed in that session.

Place: Mumbai

Date: 3rd January 2024