

**CoHaB Doctoral Fellowships: Three Early Stage Researchers (ESRs) appointed in the European Union's Marie Curie Initial Training Network Centre for Diasporic Constructions of Home and Belonging (CoHaB) at Mumbai University**

The CoHaB Centre at Mumbai University has in October 2012, after interviews and due processes recommended by the University of Mumbai and the CoHaB Advisory Committee, appointed three CoHaB Doctoral Fellows as Early Stage Researchers – Ms. Iulia Rascanu, Romania, Ms. Melanie Wattenbarger, USA and Ms. Ruby Rana, Canada. They have after clearance of an on-line Ph.D. Entrance Test for foreign students, title approval of their projects and clearance from the Eligibility and Migration section, registered for their Ph.D. degrees under the supervision of the CoHaB Coordinator and Scientist-in-Charge, Professor Nilufer E. Bharucha. The University of Mumbai has received a grant from the European Union of Rs. 3.2 crores for the CoHaB centre.



**IULIA RASCANU** is an Early Stage Researcher with the University of Mumbai, within the European Union 'Marie Curie' ITN Project 'Constructions of Home and Belonging'.

She is a graduate of Modern Languages and Literatures from the University of Bucharest, Romania (English and French). She also holds an M.A. in American Studies with the same university.

Although she has worked for more than ten years as an Assistant Professor in Romania, teaching business English, she has always wanted to go back to doing research in literary studies. Her current position as a CoHaB Doctoral Fellow gives her the opportunity to follow this dream and improve her qualifications. Thus, her research study focuses on studies of the South Asian diaspora as reflected in fiction and film. The researcher is interested in (re)defining meanings of 'home' and 'identity' as perceived by female characters in diasporic novels and films in the UK and the US. In order to this, she needs to employ theories mainly from literary studies but also from sociological and anthropological studies. Studies on transnationalism and globalization are also part of the analysis. As the researcher seeks to go beyond and even challenge Western perspectives upon 'home' and 'identity' in the context of 'third'-world women's migration to countries such as Great Britain and the United States, third – world feminist theories will be employed as well.

Transnationalism is a much debated and utilized concept in today's world and the research study comes to verify the implications of the term within the context of the analysis. South Asian women who move between countries and even continents are motivated by incentives that are not difficult to be understood. The difficulty, nevertheless, lies in comprehending the complexity of consequences of their decisions to migrate. As by their movement at least two cultures meet/collide, two facets of a subjectivity meet/negotiate, there are continuous influences and modifications of perceptions, mindsets, lifestyles, values, customs, traditions and even acceptance of oneself. Two aspects of the research study will narrow down the research: the concept of 'sisterhood' understood as female solidarity (or friendship) and the concept of 'love'. The study seeks to explore the significance of the bonding between women in defining 'home'. It is also important in women's choice of 'home'. On the other hand, their understanding of 'love' and the meaning of 'love' as shaped by culture are elements that contribute to the construction, deconstruction and even reconstruction of 'home'. The researcher is determined to find out both what those modifications are and their consequences.

In order to accomplish this, the researcher will benefit from all the input generated by the CoHaB network, the facilities and information available at the University of Mumbai, as well as from participation in international conferences on the relevant topics: diaphora, transnationalism, identity, concepts of 'home'.

The primary resources utilized in the research study are all works by female diasporic writers/film-makers are famous in the West but poorly if at all known in South Asia, except for academics who work in the field of literature. It is therefore another reason for the researcher to explore the dynamics that influence the success and failure of these works in the 'home country'. Is it a competition between artists living the West and those living in the East? Although, as already explained earlier, it is not the main theme of the study, the researcher feels compelled to follow this route a part of the grand study.



**Ruby Rana** joined CoHaB as a Doctoral Fellow and Early Stage Researcher in October 2012. Earning both a B.A. degree in Psychology and a post-graduate diploma in Intercultural Education and Training from the University of Victoria, she focused on social and cross-cultural psychology, identity, and biculturalism. Outside of her academic pursuits Ruby spent four and a half

years working at the University of Victoria's English Language Centre (ELC) in the areas of intercultural leadership, socio-cultural facilitation and recreation. Working with upwards of two thousand young adults from approximately twenty different countries every year at the ELC, Ruby's interest in intercultural and international dynamics increased. She went on to complete an M.A. degree in Intercultural and International Communication from Royal Roads University; where her M.A. research was presented as an ethnographic narrative of a transnational Diasporic Indian negotiating belonging between India and Canada. Ruby's related writings regarding: diversity within the Indo-Canadian community; the social context of Sikhism in British Columbia; and interviews she held with Canadian Diasporic Indians, have been recently published in a Canadian post-secondary textbook titled *Diversity, Culture, and Counselling: A Canadian Perspective, second edition*. She has recently presented papers in international conferences in Mumbai, India and Oxford, UK. As a member of the Indian Diaspora, Ruby is keen on questioning socially constructed cultural norms and exploring how these widespread conceptualizations impact feelings of home, belonging, and identity. Ruby's current research interests include: exploring personal narratives; identifying points of similarity *and* difference within the Indian Diaspora; and writing in support of diasporic members who are navigating their own sense of connectedness and belonging.



**Melanie Wattenbarger** moved to Mumbai to join the CoH Heritage Researcher in October 2012. Ms. Wattenbarger earned her Bachelor of Arts degree from Ohio Wesleyan University with majors in Humanities-Classics, Religion, and Pre-Theology and a minor in Sociology-Anthropology. A strong supporter of the Liberal Arts tradition, Ms. Wattenbarger's projects at Wesleyan focused on holistic views of literature through the perspectives of culture, religion, and gender construction. In May of 2012, Ms. Wattenbarger completed her Master of Arts degree from Ohio Dominican University. Her Master's thesis is entitled "Reading Postcolonialism and Postmodernism in Contemporary Indian Literature."

Ms. Wattenbarger has contributed to scholarship with a presentation at the Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association conference in October 2011 entitled "Re-Creation: An Educational Pastime" for a panel discussion on "Teaching English Composition: Servicing Diverse and Non-Traditional Students Panel." Her publications include reviews for the Rocky Mountain Review and World Literature Today. Ms. Wattenbarger also has an essay available in "Western Pennsylvania Reflections: Stories from the Alleghenies to Lake Erie" entitled "Reminiscence and Regret in Portage: Cambria County."

While working on her bachelor's degree at Ohio Wesleyan, Ms. Wattenbarger came to India for the first time with a program which placed teachers in local schools in Dharamsala. It was on this trip that India captivated Ms. Wattenbarger, humbling her as she experienced the deep richness of Indian culture, life, and history. A bibliophile from a young age, Indian literature quickly became Ms. Wattenbarger's area of specialization as a result of this first trip to India. She hopes to continue to develop her understanding of Indian life and culture in diaspora and how it relates to life in India today through the study of literature during this CoHaB project. Her project specifically examines how literature about India that is written in the diaspora is perceived and received in India and abroad.