

Lecture on Race and Gender in the South Asian Diaspora in Canada

by
Professor Vijay Agnew

GRID had arranged a lecture on 'Race and Gender in the South Asian Diaspora in Canada' by Professor Vijay Agnew in collaboration with the Department of Sociology, on 22nd February 2010.

Professor Agnew is a social scientist and Professor at York University, Canada. She has worked extensively on gender and diaspora related issues. She was earlier Director of the Centre for Feminist Research at York University. Her edited volume 'Diaspora, Memory and Identity: A search for home' (2005, University of Toronto Press) has been critically acclaimed.

The lecture was attended by students and faculty members of different Mumbai University departments. Having lived in Canada for many years now, Professor Agnew drew upon her experiences in the host country. She spoke of how colour is a racial marker and part of identity politics in Canada and how one needs to also consider racial identity in the context of feminism. She further made a point that identity changes with time and space, especially for the second-generation diasporics who are constantly asked where do you come from, essentially making them homeless.

Professor Agnew also spoke of how language is an element of power. She raised this point in the case of immigrant working-class women who cannot speak English. It is in this context that Professor Agnew informed the audience about SALCO - South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario, a not-for-profit legal aid clinic, established to provide access to justice for low-income South Asians in the Greater Toronto area. She pointed out how racism is a barrier to employment and housing. Immigrants are generally viewed by the natives as a cost to the Canadian society rather than an advantage, in spite of how South Asians have contributed generously to the country's economy, culture and politics.

