

Professor Nilufer E. Bharucha
participates in
Law and Literature in Diaspora Studies Conference in Italy, 6-9 2013

Professor Nilufer Bharucha, CoHaB Coordinator and Scientist in Charge, Mumbai University, went to the 'Law and Literature in Diaspora Studies' International Conference, Villa Vigoni, Italy organized by the German Research Foundation. She presented a paper on 'The Indian Diaspora and Laws: Reflections in Literature from the Jahajis to the Transnationals'.

Professor Bharucha's paper focused on the fact that the 26 million strong Indian Diaspora is spread over a 100 countries around the world and can be broadly categorized into the Colonial Diaspora and the Postcolonial Diaspora. These two categories can be further sub-divided into the Indentured, Entrepreneurial and Professional for the Colonial Diaspora and Labour, Professional and Entrepreneurial for the Postcolonial Diaspora. The Postcolonial Diaspora from the last decade of the Twentieth Century also includes the Cyber Coolies, the Illegals, the Transnational and Global Indians, who flit with their laptops hefted on their shoulders to do contract outsourced software work, or cross oceans and continents in leaky boats or dilapidated vans, or with their financial teams storm into European/American board rooms to take over/make over Western industries, much to the chagrin of the former colonisers and neo-colonisers, who find it difficult to accept that the Global Indians/Transnationals are doing to them, what they used to do to them.

All these Diasporas/examples of Transnational trade and or residence were and are governed by diverse Imperial acts and National Laws that sought to benefit by the labour/money/expertise of these Diasporics/Transnationals but balked at letting them have equal rights within their countries. These laws range from the ones evolved from the 1830s onwards by Britain and its various colonies to govern and regulate Indian Indentured Labour. Some of these laws were more discriminatory than others, for instance the infamous stand-off in the Vancouver Harbour in 1914 with hundreds of Indians in the ship Komagata Maru, many of who were joining their relatives already working as agricultural labour in British Columbia. These laws did not in the tradition of British justice and fair play (!) distinguish between friends and foes of the Empire, so that an upholder of Imperialism such as Cornelia Sorabji was in the 1930s not allowed to cross over from the USA to Canada, in spite of her British Imperial Overseas Citizen Passport.

Literature written by Diasporic Indians from the *Jahajis* - the voyagers, the indentured labour who crossed the *Kala Pani* in ships - to their postmodern urban, postcolonial cousins, have all written on their experiences involving diverse laws which governed entry or denied entry to Indians into those countries. Many of these texts explode myths about the low 'mobility' factor of Indians and the lack of the 'Return Home' element in the Indian Diaspora, which theorists today term 'dediasporisation'. Hence the laws evolved by the Indian Government in the 1990s and which are still being developed to deal with the PIOs, OICs and NRIs and their increasing interest in returning or partly returning to India.

Professor Bharucha's paper looked at the laws that regulated the colonial and postcolonial Indian Diasporas and now the ones that govern the 'return homes' or 'partly return homes' and their reflection in literature ranging from the diaries maintained by the *Jahajis*, to the earliest diasporic literature, to texts that deal with these issues in contemporary times. Not all of these texts were written in English/French as the majority of these Indian Diasporics and not just the Transnationals who are aided by Bollywood in retaining their Indian identities, have held on to their languages, cultures, cuisines and religions. So some references were also been made to texts written in Indian languages.







