Multiculturalism the New Paradox, Globalism the New Reality: Experts at International Conference by Jindal University

A 3-day international conference on “Multiculturalism and Globalism: India and the World” organized by The English Literature Society of O.P. Jindal Global University and the Indian Society for Commonwealth Studies concluded on the university campus. Aimed at creating greater awareness of the way India and most of the countries in the West are emerging as vibrant multicultural societies,
the conference drew more than one hundred participants from all over India and abroad.

Inaugurating the event, Mr. Vijai Vardhan, IAS, Additional Chief Secretary (Education), Government of Haryana, said, “India is a very diverse nation and probably home to the largest multicultural community in the world. We are known to be tolerant and peaceful people, but a lot of intolerance has built up within the country in the recent years. The centers of education and learning have a key role to perform in this regard. If you see, all of intolerance has its origin in ignorance. Prejudice, bias, and preconceived notions are harbored through ignorance, whereas all religions and cultures teach the same basic human value of unconditional love and care. What we need is an appreciation of each other’s diversity. Instead of resenting it, we must celebrate it.”

Professor C. Raj Kumar, Vice Chancellor, O.P. Jindal Global University, while welcoming the delegates, said, “The aim of this International Conference is to encourage academics, scholars, and practitioners representing an exciting diversity of countries, cultures, and languages to meet and exchange views in a forum encouraging respectful dialogue.”

Highlighting the comparative nature of the conference, Professor Kumar said, “The conference is both comparative and interdisciplinary in character. The conference will discuss, apart from literature, the major movements related to multi-cultural minority rights, caste politics, racial and social policies, intracultural and transnational phenomena—in all spheres of knowledge.” The scholars who took part in the conference included the well-known poet Keki N. Daruwalla, novelist Roswitha Joshi, scholars Prof. Frank S. Deena, Prof. Christine Nicholls, Professors C R Visweswara Rao, R.W. Desai, Sreeram Chaulia, Anand Prakash, R.K. Dhawan and Novy Kapadia.

The deliberations at the conference brought to light the fact that literature is closely related not only to humanities but also to social sciences. Certain political and social movements have an all-pervading influence on common people as also on the literary milieu. The issue of multiculturalism has acquired importance and urgency in view of the mix of people with different ethnicities and religions living together in modern societies.
A variety of opinions and points of view were shared by experts at the panel discussion on “Multiculturalism- Fact or Fiction”, moderated by Dr. Jagdish Batra of JGU. Taking part in the discussion,

Professor Frank S. Deena, East Carolina University, said, “Multiculturalism is a very global and distinct phenomenon, multiculturalism is more factual than fiction; it has a tremendous effect on nations, people, groups, cultures and universities across the world.” Underlining the important role education has to play in the creation of an ideal society, he said, “Education is not just important but an imperative need today, it is the key that will help erode ignorance, prejudices, racism and stereotypes and simultaneously encourage love. A conscious educated mind will have no need to discriminate, dehumanize or even go against anyone else because we will stop seeing others as inferior, and this will help us respect each other.”

“We do live in an increasingly globalized world, and it is inescapable”, said Prof. Christine Nicholls, Professor, Flinders University, Australia. “Globalism, as we know, is greatly enabled by the internet, and we live in such an inter-connected world and owing to these new technologies, it is not something new and it is not something we can avoid. We have lived side by side for ages with other cultures and communities while only recently we have begun describing them as multicultural societies.”

At a plenary talk, she also highlighted the aborigines’ problematic historical relationship with the white settlers in Australia, pointing out that ethnic literature, immigrant writing, and cross-cultural studies are the burgeoning areas of contemporary writing and these truly represent the face of multicultural societies in the democracies. Characterizing multiculturalism as the new paradox,

Professor Anand Prakash, University of Delhi, said, “There is no doubt that multiculturalism does exist, but it does so as a paradox. While the term is certainly popular in the realm of knowledge, its existence is doubtful in the arena of realism.” Prof. Prakash went by the Conspiracy Theory in explaining the highlighting of the term “multiculturalism”, and the politics being played in its name.
A total number of 77 research papers were presented at the conference which touched upon the disciplines of literature, history, political Science, philosophy, and psychology, within the larger framework of the theme of the conference. Some of the sub-themes dealt with by the speakers were: Cross-cultural Studies, Transnational Literature, Globalism and Literature, Challenges of Diversity, is Multiculturalism a Failure, Local, Global and Glocal Identity, Hybridity, ambivalence, contingency in Postcolonial literature, Feminist Issues from multicultural angle, Eco-Criticism in the multicultural context, Nation – reality or imaginary entity, Diaspora literature, Minority literature, Subaltern Studies and Comparative literature amongst others.