



INDIA ASSOCIATION
OF MANITOBA



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WINNIPEG



India Centre

Academic, Business and Community Excellence

<http://www.uwinnipeg.ca/index/india-centre>

“The Indo-Canadian: Over the Past 40 Years” **“Self, Family and Community”**

Anupam Sharma.

“The Indo-Canadian: Over the past 40 Years” was the subject for consideration by Anupam Sharma at the second annual Public Forum on inter-community dialogue convened by the India Centre and the Dakota Ojibway Tribal Council. The topic this year for the public forum was “**Self, Family and Community**”. Also supported by the Department of Indigenous Studies at the University of Winnipeg, the event took place on January 22, 2015 at the Convocation Hall, the University of Winnipeg and was moderated by Dr. Pawan K. Singal, Director, Institute of Cardiovascular Sciences and a community leader.

The public-forum sought to understand the importance of “self, family and community” as both building-blocks within the respective communities and, how these are serving to transform the Canadian society. The goal was also to discern the shared-commons as a basis for discussion, understanding and sharing among the various communities. In addition to the Indo-Canadian perspective by Anupam Sharma, Mr. Lyle Longclaws, Ms Shahina Siddiqui, and Dr. Julie Pelletier provided the First Nations, Islamic, and Cross-Cultural perspective respectively.

According to the 2011 National Household Survey, the Indo-Canadian community comprises 3.8% of the population in Canada. For Manitoba, Ontario and British Columbia, the corresponding numbers are 2.0%, 5.3% and 6.5% respectively. These are significant clusters that lead us to discern potential impact and potentials arising from the community. Over the past four decades, the Indo-Canadian community and its members have gained assurance and confidence to evolve from the “preservation mode” to “assertion and contribution” to all spheres of the larger society- economic, political and social. This shift can be attributed to exposure to a broader education-base and gains from economic participation. However for the community, this is also a progression away from an isolated and “unique” and more towards an integrative and a “normal” community.

When searching for the “shared commons”, relative to the larger Canadian society, the Indo-Canadian community is aware and accepts the idea of diversity and accommodation.

After all, Indo-Canadians trace their roots and origins to India- a country encompassing a diverse range of religions, languages and ethnicities. These resulting diversities and outlooks can only be reconciled in a social and political order that has commitment to accommodation, acceptance and respect and, a bias towards a liberal-democratic society.

Shifting to an inter-community comparison, much common ground can be noted when considering the idea of self, family and community. The primary identity of the individual is rooted in the family. Family honour trumps over all else. Traditionally, the family is extended in its orientation and is for a person a safety-net. The “Elder” of the family plays a greater role as authority and in the ordering of the family. Though the female members may not be as assertive in public; they do nonetheless have influence and a play a greater role within the family.

Not surprisingly, at all levels –self, family and community- this results in a dichotomous context and environment. The Indo-Canadian experiences two environments and countervailing tendencies. The contexts -internal and external to the family/home- result in the constant negotiation between cultural isolation and social conformation respectively. How does one attain balance and equilibrium?

There was common recognition among speakers that an “Identity” is not static receptor but a flowing river taking into account the change of life, space and time. This is seldom a definitive end-point but rather; a continuing project in progress. Technology and telecommunications is an important mid-wife enabling possibility of change and adjustment. It is more about the “what” rather than the “who”.

Platforms such this initiative serve focus on education and raising awareness about each other- and this is a good starting point. For an optimist, this can lead to possibilities with respect to deeper understanding of multiculturalism and diversity. Awareness is an important step to accommodation, empathy, trust and collaboration. For the speakers, these are the underlying foundations need to be privileged as markers of the Canadian society.

Ultimately, a society is an abstract concept, given content and meaning by its citizens...it is about understanding and of course a “give and take”.