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*Report*

## **Equinox 2022: The Annual International Conference**

Sanjana Sinha \*

Department of Sociology, Maitreyi College, University of Delhi, Delhi, India

\*Correspondence: [sanjana.1012sinha@gmail.com](mailto:sanjana.1012sinha@gmail.com)

The Centre for Research, Maitreyi College, University of Delhi, organised a three-day Annual International Conference, Equinox 2022, under the aegis of *Vantage: Journal of Thematic Analysis*, from 11th to 13th August, 2022. Prof. Haritma Chopra, Officiating Principal, Maitreyi College was the coordinator of the conference and Dr. Gopi Devdutt Tripathy, Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, Dr. Brototi Roy, and Dr. Meena Yadav, Associate Professors, Department of Zoology, Maitreyi College, were the convenors. The theme of the conference was ‘*The Expanding Frontiers of Knowledge*’.

The conference pondered on the question of how frontiers of knowledge in natural and social sciences are being shaped in relation to the existential questions of life itself. Underlying this was the understanding that the pursuit of knowledge has its own value. It extends the frontiers of knowledge by revisiting issues that have been debated over the years, that is by addressing questions that have emerged from different social contexts and by exploring the conditions that make life and living possible. Multidisciplinary work in sciences and social sciences is producing knowledge to overcome the fragmentation of holistic perspectives that look at living interconnections between man and nature. Nature is increasingly being included in the equation of the well-being of mankind. The anthropocentric approach in understanding nature is being questioned. There are efforts made, in both the sciences and social sciences, to include life experiences, voices and language of people, marginalised either economically or politically or socially or intellectually or all of these. New knowledge is being generated for the revitalisation of people and landscapes suffering from increasing violence, lifestyle diseases, pandemics, indebtedness, climate change, deforestation, scarcity of potable water, of land, of habitat, to name a few.

The inaugural session of the conference began with the welcome speech by Prof. Haritma Chopra, who emphasised on the importance of encouraging sustainable environment and social well-being. This was followed by an address by Dr. Gopi Devdutt Tripathy, who gave an overview of the Center for Research, its visions and initiatives and also talked about the genesis of the name of the conference i.e. Equinox. Honorable Vice Chancellor of University of Delhi, Prof. Yogesh Singh, was the Chief Guest of the conference. He started his address with the quote, “Knowledge is power.” His constructive criticism on expansion of research was very enlightening. He also released the book of abstracts of the presentations, to be made at the conference. Shri Prakash Singh, the Director of South Campus, University of Delhi, congratulated Maitreyi College for the inauguration of the girls’ hostel. He emphasised that the completion of 100 years of University of Delhi is an achievement and milestone, for not only the professors and faculty, but also for the students. The event was attended by dignitaries such as Mr. Vaibhav Shrivastava, Chairperson, Governing Body of Maitreyi College, Prof. K. Saraswathi, Former Chairperson, GB, and others. The inauguration session concluded with a Vote of Thanks by Dr. Brototi Roy and Dr. Meena Yadav.

The inaugural session was followed by Session I on the theme- “Academia and Production of Knowledge”. The session was chaired by Prof. Savyasaachi, Department of Sociology, Jamia Millia Islamia, and had two speakers. The session was moderated by Dr Brototi Roy. The keynote speaker for the session was Prof. Kambadur Murlidhar, former professor and Head of the Department of Zoology, University of Delhi. The title of his talk was “*Ethics of Biology Education and Ethics in Biology Research in India - A Philosophical and Sociological Perspective*”. In his paper, he emphasised on issues pertaining to limitations of science and drawbacks of the education system in India. He also addressed the problems concerning the pursuit of higher education. Prof. Murlidhar concluded by emphasising on the importance of a conducive learning atmosphere for the proper functioning of educational institutions. This was followed by a lecture by Prof. Manosh Choudhury, Jahangirnagar University, Bangladesh on the topic, “*Academia and the Regimes: On Under Preparedness of the Scholars in Understanding Neo-Liberal Actors*”. He questioned the academics in the Bangladeshi context which is rather comfortable with defining an electoral system as a democratic one despite the harsh and graphic ground reality. Prof. Choudhury urged the academicians to be more aware of their surroundings, criticise the government when required and identify and move beyond a restrictive structure. Day 1 of the Conference ended with a talk by Mr. Sopan Joshi, an India-based journalist, and author. He elucidated the audience on the issues of climate change. He interpreted climate as an average relationship between biotic and abiotic processes on our planet and explained that a complex system like the earth has experienced different climate disruptions because of the shift in average temperature. The session was moderated by Dr. Meena Yadav.

On Day 2, the first session was moderated by Ms. Devangana Jha, Assistant Professor from the Department of Economics, Maitreyi College. The first speaker for this session was Prof. Imarana Qadeer and the title of her talk was - “*Revisiting Perspectives in Public Health for Peoples Health and Well Being*”. Prof. Qadeer is a renowned public health expert and before joining the Center for Social Development she was a professor at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi. In her lecture, she introduced the audience to the vast terminologies associated with public health. She emphasised that medical care and public health cannot be separated and we need to see them as one since both are very critical in the development of public health in India.

The second speaker of the session was Prof. Amalendu Jyotishi from the School of Development, Azim Premji University, Bangalore, India. The title of his talk was “*Fish for food or fish for feel*”. In his lecture, he focused on fish, as a livelihood for some people. He talked about his project, in which he has specifically targeted the coastal regions of urban areas, especially in the south of India, in states like Mangalore and Karnataka. He said that there is a need to focus on production of fish products because, in comparison to raw fish, dried fish products and powders need less maintenance and care. Also, it helps to reach islands and reduces wastage of the fish. He concluded his presentation by applauding women for actively participating in fisheries. He also revealed that around 50% of women are involved in this field out of the total population of that coastal area. The coordinator of the session was Dr. Neeraj Kumar, Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Maitreyi College.

The speaker for session II was Prof. Anindya Sinha, who is an Indian primatologist and a Professor at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore. The title of his talk was “*The Monkey in the Mirror: Thinking about the Urban Macaques of India*”. He addressed a major concern, which has been side lined by the government as well as the public, that is “non-human.” He emphasised that the spirit of coexistence appears to be threatened in the current scenario, not only due to the drastic reduction and fragmentation of the natural environments, but also due to the increasing competition between humans and non-humans, regarding the

shared resources across a wide range of landscapes, both natural and anthropogenic. He then defined urbanization as the process of transforming nature into novel, nature-society hybrids and this, he stated, is evident in the ubiquity of the Macaques, which are found in almost every Indian city and town. The session was moderated by Dr Luni, Assistant Professor, Department of Zoology, Maitreyi College. The next speaker of the session was Dr. Aarti Grover, who is the Head of the Department and Associate Professor in the Post-Graduate Course of Landscape Architecture at School of Planning and Architecture, New Delhi. She spoke on “*Paradigms of man-nature association: An ecological perspective*”. Her talk was about the shift of society from one form to another through different stages of history. She further spoke on how the economy is killing the environment. According to her, it is the mercantile capitalism that has evolved and has resulted in the degradation of the environment and with this, we have entered a dangerous time. Concluding her talk, she raised some pertinent questions like whether the human race is really progressing? whether the intelligence we have gathered as a species will be able to save us from our doom? This session was coordinated by Dr. Aditi Narayani, Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Maitreyi College. The last speaker of the day was Prof. Miguel A. Nicolelis, who delivered a talk on – “*Brain Machine Interfaces: From Basic Science to Neuroprostheses and Neurological Recovery*”. He is a distinguished Professor Emeritus, Neurobiology, Biomedical Engineering Neurology, Psychology and Neuroscience. He explained the division of parts in brains of different species and elucidated on the process of tracing the brain activity of monkeys. Through this talk, Prof. Nicolelis, lucidly expounded how the brain machine interface driven exoskeleton can not only allow motor movement by the paralyzed patients but also facilitate tactile sensitivity, visceral and motor recovery. This session was coordinated by Dr. Gazala Ruhi, Assistant Professor, Department of Chemistry, Maitreyi College.

The second half of Day 2 witnessed paper presentations by faculty and students from different universities and colleges from India and abroad, in eight parallel sessions. The eight parallel sessions were divided based on themes of the papers. The various themes of the sessions were: session 1- “Drug Discovery and Novel Therapy”; session 2- “Public Health Concerns”; sessions 3 and 4- “Emerging Frontiers of Research”; session 5- “Innovations in Education”; sessions 6 and 7- “Steps Towards Sustainability” and session 8- “Social Change Perspectives.” These sessions were coordinated by Dr. Parul Yadav, Dr. Gazala Ruhi, Dr. Jyoti Singh, Dr. Luni, Ms. Devangana Jha, Dr. Anita Devi, Dr. Aditi Narayani and Dr. Bijayini Mishra, respectively.

Day 3 of the conference began with a talk on “*End of the Road: Tribes and Anthropological Enterprise*” by Prof. Ritambhara Hebbar, Professor and Dean at the School of Development Studies, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai. Prof. Hebbar, in her talk, examined the indigeneity in India and explored the epistemic barriers in understanding the tribal question in India. She discussed the issues regarding the politics of elimination in relation to the indigenous tribes and further explored the question of who these tribes really are and how we can move out of this impasse. She concluded her talk by emphasising on how an adequate definition of tribes does not exist in anthropology and rather has to be borrowed from the constitution which is largely inadequate. The idea of ‘mainstream’ she said, was somewhat detrimental to the identity of these heterogeneous people. The session was coordinated by Dr. Bijayini Mishra, Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Maitreyi College. The conference concluded with a Valedictory address by Prof. Prabhat Ranjan, Vice Chancellor, D.Y. Patil International University, Akurdi, Pune, India. He spoke on “*Nuclear Fusion: Dream Source of Energy?*” He gave a historical touch to the invention of nuclear fusion and its development. He also explained nuclear fusion and its progress related to the world. Lastly, Prof. Ranjan also talked about the problems we face while finding the best fusion technology and techniques. The moderator for this session was Dr. Parul Yadav, Assistant Professor, Department of Physics, Maitreyi College.

Following this session, Dr. Meena Yadav took over for the much awaited prize distribution ceremony. There were a total of 48 presentations which were conducted over a series of eight parallel sessions via Zoom platform on the 2nd day of the conference i.e. 12<sup>th</sup> August, 2022. The prize distribution was divided in two categories - the stream of sciences and that of social sciences. Dr. Yadav heartily congratulated all the winners. A formal vote of thanks was given by Dr. Gopi Devdutt Tripathy, who expressed her heartfelt gratitude towards all the people involved in the Conference. Following that, Prof. Haritma Chopra, Principal of Maitreyi College, formally announced the end of Equinox 2022: The Annual International Conference.

*Equinox 2022 marked the centenary year celebration of University of Delhi, an initiative that led to the development of critical thinking around the spectrums on the themes across disciplines truly expanding the frontiers of knowledge.*

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