

Canada & India – Embracing Diversity

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By Ms. Roohi Ahmed, President, [India Canada Friendship Circle](#)

The India Canada Friendship Circle (ICFC) launched its 2016-2017 lecture series this fall with a presentation by Mr. Chandra Arya, Member of Parliament and Chair of the Canada-India Parliamentary Friendship Group. Mr. Arya spoke about the role of MPs in fostering closer ties between the Parliaments of Canada and other countries as a means of promoting bilateral and multilateral relations. Parliamentary friendship groups do not have budgets or administrative support and are formed on a cross-party basis as well as a member's interest in a specific country. Parliamentary friendship associations, on the other hand, have formal budgets and administrative support from the Parliament of Canada and are actively engaged with their international counterparts. Mr. Arya and his fellow MPs who have an interest in India hope to elevate the status of the Canada-India Parliamentary Friendship Group to an association, and they also wish to help move forward talks on the Canada-India Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) in order to increase trade between the two countries. Mr. Arya also noted that MPs who happen to have a large concentration of Indo-Canadians in their constituencies had joined the Canada-India Parliamentary Friendship Group to learn more about India.

ICFC members suggested that the Canada-India Parliamentary Friendship Group study the issue of immigration and integration, as some members felt not all Indo-Canadians were socially integrated. Some found it fascinating that we had Hockey Night in Canada in Punjabi, and that Asian television programs seem to have become a favourite pastime while Asian language print media cover local news. While these reflect the hallmarks of Canadian multiculturalism, Mr. Arya felt that this was also an inter-generational issue, pointing out that first-generation migrants in some communities may not be so integrated, but their children are.

Mr. Arya also agreed with his audience on the importance of finding the right balance between cultural diversity and integration. He highlighted the added value of leveraging Indian diaspora strengths and shared his own personal experience as testimony to the openness of Canadian society towards giving immigrants a chance to become positive, contributing members to the economy and community. He brought to Canada his skills as an engineer and business executive, and in turn learned new ways which he felt enriched his life. For example, Mr. Arya appreciated the culture of "volunteerism" in Canada, which influenced his path to politics. The audience concluded that the Canadian experiment with immigration and multiculturalism is not yet complete and still evolving, and that the Canadian model of socio-economic integration is on the right track relative to the US and Europe.

The next ICFC lecture will be held in collaboration with The College of the Humanities, [Carleton University](#) featuring the articulate speaker Dr. Geeti Sen, Cultural Historian, Professor, Author and Art Critic who is travelling to Canada from New Delhi. She will demonstrate through visual images and text how 20th century Indian nationalism was driven as much by politicians as it was by painters, poets and patriots.

More details are available at the following website: <http://www.icfc.ws>