



PHASING OUT CANADIAN STUDIES PROGRAM

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Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) has lately announced that it will phase out the funding for the International Canadian Studies program, which lasted for about forty years. I received this announcement with mixed feelings.

I strongly believe that instead of phasing it out, its money should be channeled into other programs. The five million dollars that Canada invests every year in the Canadian Studies programs in 55 countries can be used in better ways to promote Canadian Literature abroad.

Before touching the issue of better ways, I would like to say something about myself and my personal experiences.

I am an Indo/Canadian writer who has been in Canada for the last about fifty years. Since 2010, I have been to India thrice on the invitation of two or more universities, each time as a special guest at their national and international conferences of teachers of English at the college and university levels. In those conferences, I met knowledgeable lecturers and professors. Once within India, I was invited further usually by more campuses to talk to their students at the master's level where their teachers and scholars at the doctorate level were also present. I am also a paid life member of the Indian Association of Canadian Studies. I am convinced that I am in a position to state my observations about the impact of the International Canadian Studies program in India.

I support the decision of the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) because I had frustrating experiences where the Canadian Studies

existed. On the other hand, I had positive experiences where the Canadian Studies did not exist. I can share those experiences if anyone would like to know.

I believe that the program should be phased out in its present structure, but not its money. I would suggest channeling its money to other related programs because the Canadian Studies Program did not work as it was expected. This program has given rise to politics among some university teachers who look for positions in associations related to Canadian Studies to travel abroad to attend meetings. Those days when elections for office bearers took place were political gatherings.

To get better results, this money should be used to sponsor Canadian authors widely for literary tours abroad, and for more translation grants to foreign book publishers. I would suggest that:

1. Canadians who are invited abroad by at least two universities in one tour should be sponsored with only to and fro air tickets and some travel allowance. Once the invitee is in a foreign land, most domestic expenses should be met by the host organizations. It would help authors more than the present Canadian Studies program does.
2. Canadian universities should be encouraged more to give grants to foreign students to study Canadian literature in Canada. Any grant given to foreign students remains within the country.
3. More funds should be available to foreign book publishers to translate and sell Canadian authors in their languages, and to attend foreign book fairs. It should be based on cost sharing.

I would like to repeat that the International Canadian Studies Program has given rise to filthy politics among university teachers in India. I heard that the Indian Association of Canadian Studies has been split into two factions and both claim to be the real representative of Canadian Studies Program. This has less to do with Canadian Studies and more with dollars and going abroad for official meetings. A director of one of the centers of Canadian Studies refused to buy my books for the library because they received them free from the Canadian Government. It certainly did not create awareness about Canadian Literature, considering the amount that was spent. The money would be used more fruitfully if Canadian authors are widely and partly sponsored to visit universities abroad. Also, more incentive should be made available in the form of translation grants to foreign publishers.

It is notable that overseas literary tours and translation grants are available in some shape even now. However, it is shrouded in mystery that who gets benefits and how often they have been benefitted. I would suggest that the overseas literary tours should be handled also by organizations like the Writers Union of Canada for their members. I would also suggest that the present Canadian reading program handled also by the Writers Union of Canada should include the entire North America.