

Report on International Conference
Who are the People?
Populism and the Populist Movements
Organised by
Calcutta Research Group
Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung

August 31, 2018: Day 1
Venue: Rang Darbar, Swabhumi, Kolkata

10.00 am -10.30 am: Inaugural Session

The introductions were made by Apala Kundu, Research and Programme Assistant , CRG.

The welcome address was given by Anita Sengupta, Director, CRG.

A background note on the research project and conference was shared by Priya Singh, Research and Programme Associate, CRG.

The inaugural lecture was delivered by Ranabir Samaddar, Distinguished Chair, CRG.

Chair: Prasanta Ray

The programme was initiated by Prasanta Ray, who opened the conference to all the speakers and participants for continuation of dialogues between the presenters and those participating.

Speakers:

Anita Sengupta ushered all participants and speakers with a brief welcome note and introduced the theme of the project and conference. Her speech was followed by Priya Singh presenting the audience with a background note of the project being worked through three years. The session concluded with a special lecture by Ranabir Samaddar.

Anita Sengupta

Anita Sengupta mentioned that the Rosa Luxembourg Stiftung–Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group research project on *Popular Movements in West Bengal and Bihar* (2016-2018) comes to a close with the conference. The research brings to light and explores the numerous similarities and differences that are there between the forms and course taken by some of the popular movements that took place between the early 1950s and early 1980s in Bihar and West Bengal.

Priya Singh

Priya Singh briefly summarised the research areas covered by the project that spans over a period of three years (2016 -2018) with the first year i.e. 2016 covering the study of refugee movement in West Bengal, tram and teachers' movement in West Bengal, food movement in West Bengal, J P Movement in Bihar and Marxist Literary Discourses. The second year (2017) focussed on Naxalbari Movement of late 1960s and 70s and its role in shaping Bengal politics observed through the workings of social, political and literary components. The focal

point of the research lay in the exploration of mass movements in suburban and rural areas of select districts of West Bengal. In Bihar, the backward classes' movement led by Karpoori Thakur, a close aide of Jayprakash Narayan was the main theme of research in 2017. The research agenda for 2018 is to organize collaborative workshops and conferences to facilitate dissemination of knowledge beyond Kolkata. A Collaborative Workshop was organized on June 22, 2018, 'Of Resistances and their Interfaces', which contended with populism, popular movements, popular/populist politics and figures. The workshop was an initiative that took a look into varied dimensions of social and popular movements in addition to insurgencies in different parts of India. A number of publications in the form of journals, books and online research articles in addition to public lectures have facilitated dialogues between researchers, academicians and political figures. There has been theoretical elucidation of the concepts of class, people, citizens, multitudes, and the political moment in popular struggles/revolutions in terms of analysis of Marx's Class Struggles in France and also propagation of knowledge through the publication of research papers and book chapters entailing details of the struggles of Backward Classes in the movement led by Karpoori Thakur in Bihar.

This international conference seeks to explore the hitherto unexplored areas in the context of this project, keeping in mind the themes: Populism as a global phenomenon: ideology, dialogue, political approach; Populism and its attitude to law; Populism and Gender and Institutions, Immigrants and Populist Politics. It not only constitutes the culmination of the research that was initiated under the segment, Popular Movements in West Bengal and Bihar, it also signifies the beginning of new research ideas to carry the process forward.

Inaugural Lecture: Ranabir Samaddar

Ranabir Samaddar shared with the participants the main reason for designing the theme of the project. It was to work on the history of popular movements in Bihar and Bengal. The volume on the popular movements in Bihar and Bengal will be published by the Social Science Press. Ranabir Samaddar pressed on the fact that there was a gap in connecting the history of Naxalbari and popular movements and more questions arose than were answered, while preparing the framework of the project with RLS. The growth of popular movements from 1952-53 to the tram movement to teachers' movement, could be chronicled till 1972, while Naxal Movement had by then shifted to Bihar. Today popular movements in Bengal seem predictable. In Bihar, in those days these were much more paradoxical and parochial – being more intense than in Bengal between 1970 and 1974. How come in Bengal this trajectory seems to be a left-inclined movement, was the question that arose. On the whole the trajectory was unilinear and there were strong discontinuities also in the way programmes were organised and mobilised. Naxalites went underground; secrecy made clear the paradox lying in the fact that the more one goes underground, the more prominent it becomes. There are series of continuities and discontinuities between popular and rebellious movements: this turned out to be one of the major findings.

Researchers were at a loss while explaining the core causes and the nature of peasants' struggles in Bhojpur and Mushahari region of Bihar and Jay Prakash movement being identified with non-cooperation; thereby justifiably naming Bihar movement as J.P.

Movement. Bihar Movement was called *Sampoorna Kranti* – ‘a movement of total revolution’. Even when Naxalites never achieved a strong position in the state - one was either in support of it or against it. It was a part of history of Bihar. In research and writing, Arvind Narayan Das shows that agrarian poor in central Bihar were not involved in a way they wanted to in the peasants’ struggle and then joined Naxal movement. One class of people were perplexed that they had to keep their movement apart from people; thus, in case of Bihar, does one opt for Class Movement or People’s Movement? At this paradox our search stops. One cannot avoid J.P. Movement and speak about Bihar. The movement led by Karpoori Thakur, in such a way adds to Bihar’s history that one will come across J.P. Movement, which touched every house; so the question arises: who were the participants in the movement?

Whenever historians, researchers or academicians have written on Bihar, J.P. Movement has found mention with its ‘urban poor’ participants. The ultimate landmarks of political upsurge were the Naxal and J.P. Movements both in a continuous interface. The urban poor constituted by teachers, students, working class joined the Bihar Movement. The Janata Sarkar with people taking over power and control of government was therefore questioned on *Who are the People*: which led to the concept of Populism. The idea that the slogans of J.P. Movement created was of people and classes joining the movement. In case of Bihar, they were termed as masses. The term ‘People’ holds a legal connotation, unlike the word ‘masses’ which affects a movement. Russian populist history and Marxian study include the term populism whenever there is involvement of masses. In Lenin’s lifelong encounter with Russian populism it is reflected that despite his opposition to populism, by 1911 Lenin began appreciating Marx’s opposition of capitalism and autocracy. Populism has also found a place in the history of Latin America.

The research may be led forward through the inquest of history of populism in India among others. History of populism in India reflects a post-colonial context. Does in any way post-colonial populism lend a way for society to move forward? Are there such scopes? Is it true that populism in a way is a stepping-stone to fascism?

Now when globalisation faces challenge from around the world, populism may not be a rewarding theme of research. But why do people have negative attitude towards institutional power, can be enquired into. Ranabir Samaddar ended the lecture by pointing out that, people demand for democratic justice to be served immediately, whether it is responsive or protective or for welfare; if government gives away subsidies to poor then it is considered as populism.

11.00 am - 12.30 pm: Panel Discussion I- Populism as a Global Phenomenon: Ideology, Dialogue, Political Approach

Moderator and Discussant: Bishnu Mohapatra, *Independent Researcher*

Panelists:

Samir Kumar Das, *University of Calcutta, Kolkata*

Sumona DasGupta, *Independent Researcher*

Ambar Kumar Ghosh, *Siliguri College, Siliguri*

Rajesh Kharat, *Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi*

Bishnu Mohapatra introduced the panel theme and the speakers stating that populism as a global phenomenon resonates with the multiplicity of ideologies, dialogues and the path construed by them.

Panelists:

Samir Kumar Das

Representing “My People”: Ethnicity and Populist Leadership

Samir Kumar Das began by stating, the populist nature of a nation and its incorporation of different ethnicities or nationalities within the social tiers find mention in a number of literatures; however the varied ways in which nationalities or ethnicities commence their existence with their populist expressions is a much lesser pursued theme of study. Negotiations help in brining equivalence between members of different classes, communities, classes, groups, although populist leadership often defy institutions of politics; under the premise of which they are depicted as populist, not popular. Ethnic unity is often the result of violence replacing mediation. During Naga Insurgency at the time of Morarji Desai serving government term in late 1970s, Nagas had been referred to as ‘My People’. In 1960s, election to local urban bodies provided 33 percent reservation for women and unless protected under the constitution, Naga insurgent groups could violate the rights of people. According to Hoho and Naga bodies, they were not to take part in movements. If politics is about creating force, the differentiations in politics create barriers that are internal to the community. The issues culminate into violence and in order to overcome differences, all sections of society are to become equivalent. The principle of equivalence is central to Naga unity. There are rivalling organisations in Nagaland – a state which used to be an occupational one.

Naga leaders describe that they have their own ways of communicating with people and keep it their own. Huriyat parties say that it is mimicry of democratic policies. Achieving equivalence of unity is not important unless it is inclusive of nationality. History makes certain politics valid and others invalid. History of Nagaland leads one into believing that such sentiments are not represented well there. People have to be brought together to build a material force. Populism unlike popular plays a role in forcing a unity on a body that refuses to be united. The act of forcing unity is therefore perpetually contingent and momentary and therefore produces a politics that refuses to be framed by the truth of history, ideology or rhetoric. Popular politics can be only understood in the form of a perpetually unstable contingent and momentary trans-configuration of forces brought about by a popular leader; and therefore one cannot think of populism without a populist leader. Populism thus, can only be understood by its way of recording the moments that do not have any pre-determined path. Populism is politics that refused to be guided by forces. It is at times marked by abject absence of common sense that does not consequent into a coherent whole. Nagaland is marked by a history that asserts in reality, the connection between consistent and coherent

ideology. Bengal has in many ways over the years seen depreciation of popular politics of those who are known as *bhodrolok*, whose use of the term *chotolok* denudes the elegant language of *bhodrolok*. If the resistance of ULFA the largest insurgent agency of Assam is followed then it can be said that violence prevents the shifting of power and populism makes the fulcrum of violence. Samir Kumar Das wound up his presentation with a thought on the expression of political ideologies arising from liberal institutions and the social sentiments coming into being from ethnic leadership.

Sumona DasGupta

Populist Policies in Contemporary India: Some Reflections on the Aam Aadmi Party and Implications for Democratic Governance

Sumona DasGupta began her narrative on the role of Aam Aadmi Party in the establishment of popular, democratic governance by emphasising that populism is a confounding term. How one arrives at the meaning of populism, despite the fact that it has been used with increasing frequency in the last few decades is questionable. Directed slightly away from the general perception of populism as an ideology, the discussion reverberated with a dimension of populism being redistributive in nature, providing for the interests of common people and conflicting with power wielding by the elites. In DasGupta's mind, in the analysis of populism in the context of Indian politics, *Aam Aadmi Party* represents a text book case. There are clusters of ideas around which populism has been used. She said discursive populism retains its common meaning in a rudimentary sense limited to the interest of people among elites. In terms of redistribution and reallocation of political power, populism mediates between people and government. Economic redistribution is considered in terms of progressive tax, cash transaction etc. Populism and democratic institutions have been related, with a relation existing between class modulation and popular politics getting transformed into popular significance.

Sumona DasGupta made a statement on corruption as the common enemy, symbolising the class of elite. In case of Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) the significance lay in the fact that people would no longer be representatives of corruption. An 'aam aadmi' could be anyone who is an Indian citizen. In December 2012, Arvind Kejriwal decided to join politics and clean the government of corruption. Common people were invited to join politics. In Delhi Dialogue, the party manifesto had a participatory process with participation of citizens and with a seventy action point manifesto included electricity bill, water availability, disabling foreign direct investment in retail, legalising illegal colonies, all kinds of populist measures with respect to safai-karmacharis, farmers, education – all kinds. This populist judgement is seen in an analytical way.

S. DasGupta drew a relation between popular politics and emphatic institution. A dialogue between Kejriwal and Akhtar had turned educative when the framework for populist agenda of AAP came up with direct citizen action. AAP's version of direct citizen action was a series of sting operations that took place all over Delhi. There was vent of emotion through seeking people's verdict. Delhi's sting operation on drug use brought out the loopholes of use of free political power. The involvement of media in projection of the image of Kejriwal as a saviour

gave it a turn that may be in a way is undemocratic. AAP has been playing the politics of redemptive power. Sumona DasGupta questioned the enterprise of politics looking at people as singular. She concluded with AAP managing to signal at a politics that was representative by way of involving common people, with access to electricity and water for people who did not have to pay bribe for services (although not realised); she stated that, this directs to a politics that is representative and democratic in some way.

Ambar Kumar Ghosh

Political Populism in India: An Impediment in the Growth of Democratic Institutions?

Ambar Ghosh underlined that over the years, leaders in Indian politics have enjoyed indisputable power and audience from the masses bordering on hero-worship. Personality cult and personalised power often injects ideals of infallibility of the leader among the followers which sometimes supersedes institutionalisation. A cultural system of such ethos has the ability to stir nepotism, favouritism and authoritarian fervour, despite basking in the glory of electoral democracy. Indira Gandhi as a cult leader had harped on the concept of radical development. There has been modest record of despondency in Indian politics. Indian citizens always find anger and hatred in governance: corruption, red-tapeism; despite the anger there is, persistence of personality politics with empty rhetoric of populist leaders continue. In spite of the initiation of mass upsurge in making common people's voice heard problems and deformities in the Indian education and health sectors remain neglected. Indira Gandhi can be considered as a populist leader, followed by M. G. Ramachandran, Jayalalitha, Lalu Prasad Yadav, Narendra Modi, all of whom represent a number of popular genres of populist cult. There are also the crowd-pleasing political leaders with empty gestures who sometimes sideline legal procedures and institutional arrangements. Politics of faith is often used by them to galvanise the truth but also to instil false faith. Ayodhya Babri Masjid demolition was a formula for representation of popular faith. Leaders sometime use equivocal elements to satisfy people and become popular like Jayalalitha, Mamata Banerjee, Narendra Modi. Why do we fall prey to this mislead of populism in politics? The organisational structure of a political institution revolves around pleasing the leader thereby demolishing the ideologies of the political party.

The culture of reciprocity of content does not allow to take action, to address issues of health, welfare etc. There has not been much development of voice of people in expressing their needs within democratic society. Ambar Ghosh left the audience thinking as he concluded with the contemplation that common man easily falls prey to social media posts that leads one into easy belief of whatever is out on digital platforms, mostly due to the neglect of people when it comes to distortion of democracy in many forms; this in turn equates to the deficit of a dialogue that searches for the truth.

Rajesh Kharat

An Ambedkarian Movement in South Asia: A Critical Appraisal

Rajesh Kharat presented the participants with an interesting account of the instrumental role that Dr. B.R. Ambedkar had played in etching out a respectable position in the society for

those belonging to the marginalised communities in a Hindu orthodoxy bound society. Ambedkar had heavily criticised discrimination by Hindus against the *Shudras* who had been victims of social exclusion since long. A social movement took place in 1930s for serving justice to those discriminated against and for removal of the taboos of the dishonours and obliteration of untouchability, caste identity; the social movement acted as the foundation for adding to the number of followers of the ideology of Ambedkar.

The main focus of this discussion is Ambedkarian ideologies. Dalits prefer to be represented as Ambedkarites in Maharashtra. B.R. Ambedkar was born a Hindu and died a Buddhist. Why convert from Hinduism to Buddhism? Conversion had been used as a path to mobilise people in every sphere of life, be it socio-economic or political. In a Harijan daily run by Mahatma Gandhi, Ambedkar had once written, criticising Hinduism for its casteism and oppression, that one should care for Harijans. Ambedkar's first ideology was to 'education-agitate-revolutionise'. Ambedkar fought against British government and Hindu Orthodox. He established the Independent Labour Party in 1936. Independent Labour Party had contested panchayat and city level elections and was open to people of all strata of society but the chunk of members included peasants, land-less labourers and mill workers of Mumbai. People belonging to Dalit community and those from the so-called elite class were all elected to the party. Another important aspect of Ambedkar's contribution was to set up educational institutes that would have place for all. People's education society had thus been established to cater to the educational support of all; just as Missionary institutions had been functioning and Banaras Hindu University for the Hindus, Aligarh Muslim University for the Muslims, his institution looked into the needs of the Harijans as well as others. Growth of the educational institutes was meant to be part of the movement. The Dalit Panthers established in 1972 was a blunt, radical organisation that had its source of inspiration in Buddhist literature.

Speaking on the forms of Dalit politics and agitations in neighbouring countries of India, Rajesh Kharat added that the Dalit movement has also been part of Pakistan; and in Nepal there is a separate political party by the name of Dalit Janajati Party. Political agitation among Dalits in Bangladesh becomes known whenever there are protests by Ambedkarites asking for protection. Malaysia has separate political organisation for the Dalits which asks for deliverance of justice is receiving equal status as that of others in the society. Many states have adopted agendas drawing from the ideas of Ambedkar's philosophy. R. Kharat wended up his speech with a reminder of the foundation of Ambedkar's ideology which is the service of justice and establishment of democracy within a society free of discrimination of any form.

Moderator and Discussant: Bishnu Mohapatra

Bishnu Mohapatra added to the panel discussion by introducing another dimension which said, when people state the terms populism and populist they do not mean the same thing. He raised the question as to who are the ones who use the term populism. Questions followed in a series; who describes someone as populist? Where, when, by whom and why was the term used becomes important. Bishnu Mohapatra stated that, no concept can be understood well enough without the understanding of the language which connotes or stresses the populist. He

further placed emphasis saying if a concept travels multiple geographies multiple times, then for him it becomes important to understand who is using the term and why. In Indian context, B. Mohapatra said, that it was easy to find use of the word popular but was difficult to find *populist*. For those who do not understand populism it becomes an external discussion but popular is inherently internal. Constitution of the term in a specific language becomes the key pointer. Like when in Bengali a specific usage of the language incorporates the expression *chotolok*, people become of a particular category instead of being citizen. Why *Aam Aadmi Party* and not *Aam 'Nagrik' Party*? Why is the word *Nagrik* so sparsely used, was a question raised by Mohapatra. It is because the word 'people' adds-on a different dimension of popularity which is not paid much attention to. If the usages in multiple resistances, ramifications, linguistics, boundaries, excesses, ambiguities encircling the different manners in which populism is understood then it can bring in a different kind of understanding and research of populism.

Question and Answer Session:

The question and answer session featured several participants directing questions to the panelists and also putting forward comments for general discussion.

Ritu Menon requested Rajesh Kharat to expand a little on the Bhima Koregaon incident. She asked Sumona DasGupta for an explanation on Somnath Bharti being mentioned as a populist despite his actions against women.

K. M. Parivelan stated that talking about linguistics, semantics, clarity these are terms with important connotation; he wanted to clarify how one understands or distinguishes between the victims and the protectors or those targeted and the ones legally justified as correct when it comes to insurgent movements like that in case of the Nagas and ongoing NRC context.

Anup Shekhar Chakraborty raised the question on who is popular and who are the ones that are non-popular. Anything popular also tends to become populist; then can it be said that the non-elite over a period of time, through institutionalisation becomes the popular new elites and take on new roles? How does one find out the barriers that decide this?

Mandira Sen asked Rajesh Kharat about Ambedkar's movement pointing out that it was *Mahar-centric* and the *Mahars* are just beginning to get involved. Mandira Sen added, stating that Ambedkar's work was very influential in Bengal, where the *namashudras* got elected in Bengal. Sen expressed interest in hearing more on the recent insurgent movements by Dalits in Bangladesh and also complexities of politics in case of the Dalit Panthers and Shiv Sena.

Sudeep Basu floated a general question to the panel commenting that, if one constantly looks into the concept of populist somewhere it also brings in an anti-representative angle in the way of practicing politics and also a way of non-mediated politics. What note could then a certain communicative ethics or communicative rationality take? Does it signal the end of representativeness?

Rajesh Kharat shared with Ritu Menon a minute account of Bhima Koregaon, a place in Pune district of Maharashtra, where one would find an Indian army base serving the Mahar-

regiment. In January 2018, Dalits gathered at Vadhu which is a place of ritual and sanctity and violent clashes broke out between Dalits and Marathas which were further aggravated by bandhs called by Dalits of Maharashtra. On the part of the government it turned out to be a case of divide and rule because there were lakhs of people on the streets who are considered untouchable and they had come with physical, political and social force using the commotion as an occasion to take to the streets craving for an opportunity to settle scores with government, who deny to be suppressed and therefore raise their voice against government. Jogendra Nath Mandal from Bengal, his contribution for the cause of Dalits is always revered. The Dalit Panthers in 1972-74 were highly militant in nature. If they would wrongdo anyone they would go to the police station and register their names using pseudo-names of leaders of freedom struggle stating that they had committed a particular crime under that police station. The daring protest by the Panthers was what attracted the Shiv Sena to mould into the organisation of the Dalit Panthers which eventually led to the two coming together.

Sumona DasGupta answered Ritu Menon's question by saying that the bold actions of Somnath Bharti was termed populist by her because when Somnath Bharti was asked why he did it, he said that he had done it on the basis of a string of complaints he had received from the people of the Khirki Extension regarding drug abuse and alleged practice of prostitution in the area. Sumona DasGupta mentioned that, in case of Somnath Bharti it was a representative of law who did away with the law, ignoring all legal procedures because people had complained to him and he had taken action for the people. Since on people requesting he had taken up a stand or rather what can be called 'direct action'. In the public sphere this was a way of introducing a mechanism of unmediated democracy of direct action. In such cases, the overall framework of representative politics remains intact and makes the public sphere a more responsive space. S. DasGupta gave the example of the ethnographic study by Ishita Roy suggests that if only the government did their work as per rulebooks then all problems can be resolved. It therefore can be looked at, DasGupta suggested as a more responsive public sphere for smooth results with a whipping of popular sentiments into the political elites.

Samir Kumar Das answered the audience with the lines: populism is finally a game of languages, the response to which, in Marxist understanding is a language that gains with different popular and populist. When a populist leader uses a language he places a language to people like *janatabadi* and *janaprio neta* in Bengali. Populist leaders seek to place ideas of violence in the minds of people. The Assam movement included disintegration, deportation of people. By 1992 there was a pro-Bangladeshi stand. Bihar regiment was deployed against ULFA for this. ULFA later acknowledged it as a mistake. Here, populism becomes a victim itself and is irresolvable.

Ambar Ghosh was of the opinion that Nehru is a popular leader, Indira Gandhi is a populist; Obama is a popular leader, Trump is a populist. According to Ambar Ghosh, a populist leader is he or she who gives importance to constitutional structure of policies when they are taken up; whereas, popular leaders, as per the speaker, take up people's issues. Immediate emancipation of problems may be placed as non-popular, which do not please people but bring changes in the form of economic reforms.

Bishnu Mohapatra closed the panel discussion with the proposition of analysing the use of knowledge through language while understanding the concepts of popular, populist and populism. He stated that conceptual agility needs to be questioned and discussed through more number of dialogues.

01. 30 pm - 03.00 pm: Panel Discussion II- Institutions, Immigrants and Populist Politics

Moderator & Discussant: Ranabir Samaddar, *Distinguished Chair, MCRG, Kolkata*

Panelists:

Sudeep Basu, *Central University of Gujarat, Gandhinagar*

Nasreen Chowdhory, *University of Delhi, New Delhi*

Saiful Huq Omi, *Photographer and Filmmaker, Dhaka, Bangladesh*

Amrita Patel, *State Project Co-ordinator, Government of Odisha*

The panel began with the first speaker Sudeep Basu reflecting on the concepts of Institutions, Immigrants and Populism.

Panelists:

Sudeep Basu

Institutions, Immigrants and Populism: A Reflection

Sudeep Basu began by questioning the inclusion of a person into citizenship when the person is historically inflicted with indignities and other exclusionary practices of the state and the society. He also questioned the limits of popular forms of justice in the time of rampant population agitations and the majoritarian politics which seeks to keep the marginalised immigrants at bay. His paper tried to probe these questions and concerns, touching upon collective life, since the time of Ferdinand Tonnies' formulation of 'Gemeinschafts and Gesellschaft' and Durkheim's 'conscience collective'. Sudeep Basu made a clear distinction between sociology and politics of thrust. Sociology and Social Sciences' quest to establish itself as a general science of society, barely touches upon the concepts of mass, multitude and treatment of people as anathema. People or peoplehood as Wallerstein states, represents the ethnicisation of world, which resolves the basic contradiction of historical capitalists and 'a simultaneous thrust of the theoretical equality and practical inequality'. This could be the reason why we often find the major events of twentieth century dooms, where ironically heinous crimes were committed in the name of the highest virtues. The problem of postcolonial movement is the problem of collective entities such as masses of people, multitudes, immigrants and mobs. The structural violence takes on a new meaning precisely when identities are couched in party politics. Basu went on to provide a description of the identities of the sketch of party politics and linguistic communities such as, identities and differences, label of family neighbourhood, communities, historicisation of concepts based on political significance. Sudeep Basu ended by saying that the exclusionary systems, xenophobia, racism, the marginalisation of societal and populist debates are in need to be brought at the centre of discussions on the political management of the society to resist the

allure of mainstream or assimilating marginal or residual identities for the sake of unity or utopia.

Nasreen Chowdhory

The Idea of Protection and India's Refugee Conundrum: A Conversation

Nasreen Chowdhory spoke on addressal of the issues and conventions for protection of refugees. She talked about statelessness of refugees and the idea of their protection in India. The international refugee regime defines refugee as “one who is outside the country of nationality (or even habitual residence) due to one of five situations as stipulated in the definition of the ‘well- founded fear of persecution’ on the basis of religion, race, nationality or membership of a political or social group”. She tried to figure out the need of questioning ethics while widening refuge. The objective of her paper was to portrays “the ethics of admission” i.e. categorisation of people on the basis of race, ethnicity, caste, region which allows a certain category of people to enter to any particular region and restricts some other category of people from entering the same region. The politico-sociological man raises the question of “ethics of admission” for the stateless people. Focussing on some of the principles of admission, the author successfully made a distinction between refugees and migrants on the basis of the treatment they receive from society. She questioned the moral of the society, ethnicity and statelessness of the people, lack of legal protection and care facilitated to them was questioned. Refugees suffer from political loss, identity crises and several other modes of fear and thrust. The only possible way to marginalise their crises is to take them in. In India, the categories of aliens, illegal migrants, and refugees are conflated and refugee determination is not based on either individual or a group; rather, it viewed as a bilateral issue between the country of origin and of asylum. In conclusion it was made clear that, the unrevised regime of refugee rights is responsible for the unwilling transformation of a citizen to a refugee. Nasreen Chowdhory endeavoured to unravel some of these ethical considerations from the standpoint of people attempting to seek refuge and argues in line with ethics of admission.

Saiful Huq Omi

Documenting a Genocide for a Decade: My life with the Rohingyas

Saiful Huq Omi began the discussion with the trailer of his documentary film on Rohingyas, which previewed glimpses of regular life of Rohingya people, the kind of work they are engaged in, their struggle and hardship and the unnatural way of living a natural life. Omi started by recalling the experiences of when his quest for photographing and filming the Rohingyas had begun back in an early summer of 2008, when he interviewed them during his first visit to Cox Bazar. Saiful stayed there for 10 days and interviewed hundreds of Rohingyas. There he found the stories of persecution, rape, abduction, forced labour, displacement and killing. Omi stated Rohingyas are an isolated community with no friends and they regularly face deprivations and denials from the society. Rohingyas are found to take guns and other life threatening weapons, not to terrorise people but to reach out to the world through the press/media by indulging in such activities that have the potential of

attracting the attention of all societies. The days spent with the armed group, can make one realise what xenophobia can do. Rohingyas have more trust on extreme politics and terrorism than the government regulatory system because of the deprivation and noncooperation they face every day.

136 unrecognized groups of Myanmar had been photographed who are more preferably called Rohingyas. Among the photographs captured over the past two decades of Rohingyas, one portrayed a grass-land of Shamlapur village. This village is of historical significance in the sense that it is the area where Rohingyas had started to come in 50 years ago. Another picture shown, carried significance in terms of terror because when it was clicked the photographer was at gun point of six armed men and he had to crawl for three and half hour to escape the landscape through tunnels and cross over mountains. A picture of a small boy reading Quran depicted the truth of the Rohingyas otherwise not being allowed to go to any school. The photographs clearly illustrated the vulnerability, torture and assaults that women face, instilled upon them by armed men, military force and also by their natives. Women living in camps usually get raped, physically abused and often find dead. The ones who try to flee from the area often get trapped into human trafficking. The presentation came to an end with Saiful Huq Omi sharing the tale of a girl in one of his photographs, who had been sold to Bangladeshis for 10 dollars and from then on took on the role of a sex worker; she is also the main character of Omi's film.

Amrita Patel

Climate Change, Women and Planned Relocation: Some Explorations in the Context of Satbhaya, Odisha

Amrita Patel discussed about a planned relocation of five villages which took place in Satbhaya, Odisha because of climate change and its effect on the life, livelihood and overall existence of the villagers. The area of the Satbhaya gram panchayat of Rajnagar block of the Kendrapada district of Odisha. This region is one such region which is subjected to coastal erosion, ingression of sea water and salinisation. The cyclone of 1971 washed away four villages and the super cyclone of 1999 made another major disaster, causing the death of people. Government of Odisha had made a planned relocation to Bagapatia which is 9 km away from Satbhaya. This particular relocation has importance because this is the only planned relocation taken by Government of India in the context of climate change. There were 17 villages under the gram panchayat and only five remained after severe coastal erosion. The first resettlement project started on 1980 on paper but did not proceed further. In 1992, Birju Pattanayak came into power and helped resettle 3780 household in Bagapatia. But still there are many people who are not part of this enumeration and remain landless. A very limited number of people had been resettled in Bagapatia because others had migrated elsewhere after occurrence of massive erosion. A number of women who were interviewed had migrated from Satbhaya and the scenario that currently exists is that life at Bagapatia is smoother than Satbhaya because of accessibility to road, electricity and housing; however local people there have no work. The young and adolescent members of family migrate to other places in search of work. According to Amrita Patel, the migration trajectories develop not because of relocation but for topography and climate change, that has been affecting

people of the area since long. Women migrants are being helped and supported by campaigns such as Skill India. Under this programme girls are trained in different textile and marketing skills and then they can migrate to different places in North and South India, search for job opportunities as skilled workers. Patel found that most number of household at Bagapatia has atleast one migrant in their family. It is claimed that migration is dominant in the area because government had taken over relocation without a structured policy framework and everything had been adhoc and sporadic in dimension. The discussion concluded with the note that there was no good policy framework on climate induced migration and relocation planning in relation to the resettlement norms, women participation and articulation in this kind of resettlement process; this was because such resettlement schemes do not fall under the policy on resettlement and rehabilitation (R and R policy) of India and Odisha. This is definitely one instance where women have been left behind and their livelihood affected, although they have gained in terms of infrastructural development.

Moderator and Discussant: Ranabir Samaddar

Ranabir Samaddar initiated a discussion with the panelists and those amongst audience on the issues of **Institutions, Immigrants and Populist Politics**, leading the way to several interesting questions being raised for the panel.

Question and Answer Session:

Ranabir Samaddar raised the question of what happens if populism is not thought of or placed as an ideology but as a problem of language, as a body of political practices. What would happen if humanitarianism questions in the likes of who is a friend, who is an enemy or outsider at the level of material practices of communal liberations, are discussed? What will happen if the historical concept of friendship is negated and the philosophy of ethics is questioned for pointing out a person as an outsider or treating him/her as alienist - which is nothing but a matter of conquest. Ranabir Samaddar mentioning Nasreen Chowdhory's point of inquest on 'who is a refugee and immigrant' and 'who claims hospitality', 'who deserves protection' – stated that all these questions are enquiries of modern regime and governance. The city of refugee which is in a way radical and anticipatory was founded by European refugee right activists and had turned into a movement. He presented an insight into the lives of the Mahatos and Santhals of India, who are still dominated by societal norms and receives different treatment at different places because there are dominant material spheres of practices. R. Samaddar ended saying, the treatment of humanitarianism is just opposite of populism; humanitarianism believes in sentiments and works with institutions.

Parivelan K.M. placed forth a question for Nasreen Chowdhory, stating that, in India there is a kind of adoptism which is not very flexible with refugee law and regime, and also vividly ignores the universal principles of refugee regime; like people facing trouble in Assam regarding migration issues. He questioned if India has to accommodate all, why there is no proposition for sharing and why does Indian government then not impose the universal protocol of refugee regime. He requested that it be highlighted, whether there could be policies for relocating people or rehabilitating them in the context of climate change, like we have for migration, refugee rights and displacement issues.

Nasreen Chowdhory asked Saiful Huq Omi, what drives him to work with the Rohingyas and take the risk of clicking photographs such as a child trying to cross the border by climbing up a barbed fence at gun point?

Nasreen Chowdhory addressed the question raised by Parivelan K.M. by mentioning that everyone knows what kind of protocol is associated with the ethics of admission of refugee-migrants. But the resistant that a state has such as south Asian states, is what makes a researcher and academician go further in to investigate the issue. She argued that the question of recognition that Assamese face for the right of citizenship that should be asked to every so called Indian and then it would be interesting to see how many can prove their citizenship.

Saiful Huq Omi answered Nasreen Chowdhory by describing a particular photograph that shows a child trying to cross the border. The child was travelling without her parents with her aunt. Her mother was not in a position to travel, her father had disappeared few days back and her aunt got raped by the officials of military force. The hardships of life that the Rohingyas face and their troublesome time, sufferings and bitter experiences at camps breaks one's heart and therefore his job is to portray the truth to the world no matter how hard it is to uncover the horrifying reality.

Ranabir Samaddar wrapped up the session with the hope that each discussion would lead the way forward to profound thinking and quest for seeing beyond the boundaries of home.

03.00 pm - 04.30 pm: Panel Discussion III - Populism and Gender

Moderator & Discussant: Ritu Menon, *Women Unlimited, New Delhi*

Panelists:

Anushaya Collure, *South Asians for Human Rights (SAHR), Colombo, Sri Lanka*

Asha Hans, *Sansristi, Bhubaneswar*

Paula Banerjee, *Sanskrit College and University, Kolkata*

Ruchira Goswami, *National University of Juridical Sciences, Kolkata*

Samata Biswas, *Bethune College, Kolkata*

The panel was initiated by moderator and discussant for the session Ritu Menon, with brief introduction of the speakers and followed by the dais being handed over to the first speaker Anushaya Collure requesting her to present her paper and deliberate on the theme women as agents of change.

Panelists:

Anushaya Collure

Women: Victims Turned Agents of Change

Anushaya Collure spoke on how a section of marginalised or minority women were victimised by the populist policies of the two governments, the previous govt of Mahinda Rajapaksa and the present govt of Maithripala Sirisena. Anushaya Collure went on with the details describing the popular history of the government and the incidents that befell the

country of Sri Lanka. She pressed on the fame of President Rajapaksa, all knowing him as the person who ended the 30 year old civil war in Sri Lanka against the LTTE. He stayed for 2 terms from 2005 to 2015, in his first term he brought in some infrastructural projects just to promote his popularity among the rural Sinhalese in the southern part of the country and in 2010 he ended the war and after that he became very authoritarian in his governance by suppressing the Tamil minorities. Certain policies which were against the democratic values of the people were then introduced instead of promoting reconciliation. After the war he brought in the nineteenth amendment which abolished the two terms limit of presidency so that he could continue being the president - such things made him unpopular and finally in 2015, people voted him out and ousted him and brought in a new govt. In his second term of presidency there was no political will on the part of the government to help the minority people to resettle in the war affected areas, and women of these areas bore the brunt because the northern and eastern part of the country was the most affected areas and majority were women because all the males who were the breadwinner either perished in the war or they were arrested by the government forces, so there were a lot of women and statistics say that there were 50000 female headed households in the northern province itself. At the end of the war 3 lakh Tamil minority people, mostly males were detained by the armed forces in open air camps. They were released later by and by, but about 20000 males did not come home, they had just disappeared. So the families of the victims mostly women wanted to look for them, but despite searching the camps no trace could be found. The armed forces and government officials on being questioned by the victims' families were faced with harassment. The women lodged complaints and about 14 commissions were set up by the government to probe into the case of those who had disappeared.

Anushaya Collure added that, the last commission was set up by the Mahinda Rajapaksa government in 2013 but to their misfortune the reports were not released. Therefore either there were no recommendations or the recommendations made were not implemented. Women were not deterred; they tried their best to fight the situation. She gave a description of the initiatives roped in by the government. After 8 January 2015, the new government came into power because all the minority groups had voted for the government because they were seeking the exit of Mahinda Rajapaksa's government and expected the new government will look after them which had not been realised. In 2017 February, the victimised women without receiving any help got together in 5 locations in the northern and eastern parts of Sri Lanka protested continuously for over 500 days. The president had promised the release of lists of people detained by army to get them reparation and compensate the families. Anushaya Collure ended on a gloomy note by bringing up the fact that eight mothers had passed away while protesting and continue raising their issues. They are in hopes that the president will keep promises he made, but what will be done on the part of the government is yet to be seen.

Asha Hans

Migration and Climate Change: Women Forced to Move

Asha Hans commenced her discussion raising questions on populism and populist. How people in the country consider the concept of vulnerability and look at the issues faced by children and women open up multiple dimensions of discussion. Asha Hans shared her experiences on the perspectives of vulnerable children and women, while she was at a global compact convention on migration; she was faced with the difficult situation of delegates and researchers nation-wide looking at the scope of gender studies variedly. She stated that the word vulnerable is somehow conjoined with issues of international migration. Government of India has a structure for policies but have not done much to change the framework with time. Gender remains much neglected finding a place of three lines in India's national action plan. Migration due to climate change despite being of enormous worry is another area that is overlooked by government of India. Coastal erosion often takes with it a high percentage of households in coastal villages. Agriculture made people rich in Odisha, but those same agricultural villages got wiped out completely. Salinisation is forcing people to move seasonally. The region is characterised by extreme patriarchy, therefore women do not work and men mostly migrate. There is rural to rural migration and most are not facilitated with the basic needs of human life. Economic, political, or social indicators are low in the female headed households; they have low salary and no savings. Here, Asha Hans asked the question, how they manage to make both ends meet when they move to other places; they have no skills their literacy level is low. Marginalised by patriarchy, more than two-thirds of the coastal villages in Odisha do not get support from government or NGOs. Adaptation is the only way out where climate change is concerned. Another issue of concern voiced by Asha Hans was the kind of social situation that comes to be when young population in the villages have migrated out. A prominent feminist issue that has not been answered yet is - who has the ownership of land and unpaid work. There is problem of relocation, only 70 to 100 households were relocated, others have moved away on their own. There is a dearth of policies, policies for economy, environment and climate change and more; and amidst it all the government is still at a loss on how to position women while framing policies. The merging of internal migration with refugee issue is also a problem, in addition to the government grappling with subjects of citizenship and identity. Asha Hans brought her discussion to a close portraying the contrast that exists between the studies of climate change being scientific and gender studies being inherently grounded in the practices of society, thereby becoming difficult to fit gender issues into climate change. One hence needs to shift from science to people.

Paula Banerjee

Enforced Victimhood: Women in Refugee Movement

Paula Banerjee in a few words introduced the concern of women among refugees being forced into the mires of victimhood encapsulated by the whims in some cases and neglect in other cases on the part of society. She signalled caution in highlighting that there is lack of theorising of victimhood of women because when feminists entered the debate they entered

through the sphere of narratives, and talked for years of discovering, iterating, and reiterating narratives. Paula Banerjee focussed on the society's attempts at trying to locate women in the category of gender, people and populism, in completely disturbing the category of people. She shared her experience of her years of work in Tripura for a long time, when the state had a populist government there; the left wing government now in power constitutes a different type of populist fascist government. Women have been a very important part of government. Paula banerjee specified that women's popular interventions have been subsumed by the government which made women lose their critical edge. Research on women does not make the research a feminist one; reflexivity, ethicality, recognition that it is a political project, subjectivity and objectivity of values – all these together may make a research emancipatory and feminist. Paula Banerjee pondered on how these could be brought together to make a paradigmatic shift in the thinking process – which led the way of her research. She presented the audience with a vivid description of her years in upstate New York, where she had discovered a village called Utica, comprising 25 percent refugee population which today has 18 percent of its population constituted by migrants, who are Bosnian refugees, Somali Bantus, Karens and Rohingyas clubbed together as Burmese refugees, and Vietnamese refugees; these refugee groups date back to different historical times. To P. Banerjee, the Bosnians had seemed well off but the Myanmar refugees were not. The Myanmaris could not communicate with Bantus due to language barrier. She etched out a description of her visits to jail where she had been able to speak in Bengali to the Rohingya refugees in jails, who were claiming asylums. The Rohingyas are known to most as a political group who find a way out through attacks, fights, with the Myanmar government calling them terrorists. But an interaction with them mostly women, who were victims of molestation, rape and physical abuse, making claims for asylum, provided Banerjee with an insight that they were the most depoliticised people. However one has to notice they are asylum seeking people who could travel to New York - which makes them different from Rohingyas in Indian Jails. The discourses with the author, constantly conjured images that evaluated, critiqued and talked about women's victimhood as refugees, women's lack of voice as refugees. They are asked to go back to homes they are lauded because they took care of the education of their children and safe housing. Paula Banerjee ended the presentation stating that women are political being, and efforts that are critical in transforming them into agents of truth, lose the feminist edge and make it impossible for them to become subjects of study for feminist researchers with whom they share a symbiotic relationship.

Ruchira Goswami

Populism: Gender-based Violence and Judicial Response

Ruchira Goswami began by shedding light on the fact that popular movement and populist movement mean many things, but populism and women and populism and gender yield very limited literature in terms of research, study, traditional discourses for the concepts. There is very few limited work that cover populism and gender/ women in India or south Asia. Ruchira Goswami's paper highlighted the incidents and actions that populist ideologies trigger among people. She presented distinctive and definitive outlines of the concept of populism by associating the term with majoritarian and authoritarian politics. *Populist* is

often, Goswami mentioned, used majoritively to criticise the police for curbing people's enthusiasm. Conceptually populism has no specific relation to gender; populism infact tends to avoid the subject of gender, the main reason for it being the embeddedness of popular politics in a machismo culture and masculinism. Even in Latin culture one would find populism associated with machismo culture and not much with feminism. This however does not mean that women do not subscribe to populist discourse; they do often because they are mostly tied to patriarchy. Though populism does not directly patronise gender, populist actors do operate in an ideological space, which is bound to national culture and a broader ideology of populism that determines their gender dimension. R. Goswami took off from this conceptual stronghold and tried to look into certain changes that have taken place in legislative and judicial tiers in the recent past, using populist in a pejorative sense or appeared in a critical sense.

Ruchira Goswami reflected on one common feature that kept buzzing across the discussions of the conference, which was the lack of mediation, bypassing of institutional structure or subversion of institutional structure. Recent amendments of judicial system and laws are not the bypassing of institutional structure, the institutional process itself undergoes changes and the changes in law reflect the populist constructions. R. Goswami focussed on recent moments of populist upsurge by citing as example the implications and mass involvement that the 2012 Delhi gang rape of Jyoti Singh known as the *Nirbhaya* case, had evoked. It had made a mark as a turning point in the history of women and feminist activism forcing. Ruchira Goswami lastly expressed that populist legal reform on sexual violence, focus only on death penalty; but this however is not supported by everyone, since distinctions are made by the judiciary on the basis of age, which is unjustifiable and unjust at times. How the judiciary equates crime and perception of honour or dishonour does not help to rectify society's mentality in establishing justice and just action towards criminals and victims. Populist laws and policies often suppress the sensible voices with reformative policies building strong ground than those that are retributive.

Samata Biswas

Being Women, Becoming Students: Students' Movements and the Question of Gender

Samata Biswas began by making the statement: issues of women's education have not been resolved completely although most people believe they have been since the time of Mandal Commission. There are new people entering into the education system, in colleges and universities who are appealing the way in which politics has revolved till date. Samata Biswas tried to connect the dots and establish that students' movements can also be considered as popular movements not merely because at times they articulate popular demands but also because the ways in which they tie-in closely with civil society, because of the ambitions, participations in them and the networks that are forged. S. Biswas' presentation covered aspects of students' movements in India underlining the act of thinking on the part of those who are concerned about transformative and democratic policies at present times and in turn being shaped by gender. Samata Biswas raised two questions – one was 'who is a student activist and how does a gender identity among many other identities

define activism among students? The second question she raised was on the issues that culminate into bigger issues and the nature of gender panning-out in them. Taking the example of the '*hok-kolorob*' movement of Jadavpur University in 2014, Biswas elaborated that it was an instance where students were beaten up by police on pretexts of protests on minor issues such as internet failure inside hostel campus. This incident sparked a movement featuring rallies across different parts of Kolkata. Students, their family and relatives, alumni, and citizens had taken to the streets in a rainy evening which led to the removal of the then Vice-Chancellor of the university. But the important question that came up, was, the reason behind students protests. The harassment of a female student inside hostel campus and the failure of the authorities to act had led the first set of protests which later became a movement on police atrocities turning judge. The outcome of the protests for the complainant is no longer known and nobody has found out whether the student had discontinued her studies. Similar incidents in the University of Hyderabad in 2014 were also referred to by the speaker, where protests had sparked off after a woman was found in men's hostel. This according to S. Biswas adds the dimension of sexuality to popular movements in a way. Studies show that women activists always find themselves marginalised in movements, being exploited by authorities and being expected to fulfil domestic responsibilities. Transformative laws with missionary face have never made a place for gender law, playing out forms of side-lining. Social media has played an important role in helping students take on bold brave responsibilities as activists. Samata Biswas thus ended by making the point that how crucial a role women play in a movement gathering momentum is still debatable.

Moderator and Discussant: Ritu Menon

Ritu Menon wrapped up the session and opened the panel for taking up questions with a few words. She was of the opinion that the place of women when gender study is upheld is obscure in many ways because populism and women have not been equated on the same page frequently. When people's movements and gender issues are considered, there are gaping holes in the research because women are left behind or left out, or considered as 'not fitting-in', in most cases. Ritu Menon raised a few questions as in, whether at all women held a position in populist and gender theories and if so then how strong is the a position? And if not, then, she stated that, it may be assumed that such theorisation has not yet been well shaped. R. Menon enquired into whether people's movement can also be cased as women's movement? She further went on to ask, whether then women's movement remains popular movement or populist movement?

Question and Answer Session:

Bishnu Mohapatra commented that populism is not always totalising. Whenever workers are included in popular movement, trade union workers are inclusive. When people take law into their hands like cases of lynching, the legal system fails to provide justice and then the country is in need of new set of laws. This speaks scores on the fact that a nation or any agency cannot achieve success by projecting people as victim in all cases.

Neha Naqvi projected that the concept of women in gender takes away from the dimension of men identifying as feminist, because otherwise the concept of gender broadens the horizon

for any discussion or discourse or research. Gender instead of women is a more inclusive category.

Ritu Menon stressed on the word 'women', saying that women is a term that connotes struggle and if it is placed out of gender then it is a political choice that one makes and not a value judgement; because there have been women's movements and not gender movements.

Parivelan K.M. requested Anushaya Collure to share her experiences on seeing women's movement closely while doing her research.

Anushaya Collure shared her experiences and revealed that the 2015 protests were the outcome of women coming together and sharing their experiences and fighting for women's issues together, common people were the only ones involved in the protests.

Sudeep Basu requested the panel to shed light on the position of women in the context of where a particular class of women is located for e.g. violence against women in Mexico.

Ritu Menon tried answering Sudeep Basu by bringing out the facets of struggle for women around the world. She closed the panel discussion with a concluding line that drew attention to the relation between gender, patriarchy, power equation and power relation between men and women constituting a different topic of debate altogether.

September 1, 2018: Day 2

Venue: Raas Manch, Swabhumi, Kolkata

11.00 am - 11.20 am: Photo-Exhibit on Documentation of Popular Movements

The photo-exhibit incorporated documentation and display of a collection of photographs that captured incidents of Food Movement, Students Movement, Naxal Movement and Tram Movement along with newspaper articles reporting on them in dailies such as The Statesman, Jugantor and others.

11.30 am - 1.00 pm: Panel Discussion IV - Populism and its Attitude to Law

Moderator & Discussant: Sibaji Pratim Basu, Vidyasagar University, Medinipur

Panelists:

Sabir Ahmed, Pratichi Trust, Kolkata

Parivelan K.M., Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai

Sahana Basavapatna, Factum Law, Bangalore

At the outset, moderator and discussant Sibaji Pratim Basu introduced the theme of the panel *Populism and its Attitude to Law* and requested the speakers to present their papers.

Panelists:

Sabir Ahmed

People's Struggle for Freedom of Information in India

Sabir Ahmed spoke on Peoples Struggle for Freedom of Information in India in relation to the implementation of the Right to Information (RTI) Act and the gradual transition from Official Secrecy to the RTI. Sabir Ahmed distinguished between data that is meant for public policy, and data that can be accessed by people. He emphasised on how in terms of accession of data, compared to other countries, India lacks digital literacy and the ability to access data. Sabir Ahmed elaborated on the gap that exists between rural and urban India in terms of digital access and digitisation with mention of the popularity of Whatsapp and Facebook groups. People, society and the government alike need information, for better governance, design policy, which is an area still lacking enmass in India. But the way of using data gives rise to the question of how one should use the RTI Act. In reference to the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi, S. Ahamed enquired into the need of information. He said RTI seeks from the culture of official secrecy. Transparency should be guaranteed and should be an instrumental tool for freedom. Despite the RTI Act, very little could be known about demonetisation. Only during people's popular demand the RTI exerts its importance. The RTI has been working in many variants and subtle forms, since long. Previously, people received information from data that was localised, but with the terms of the law written in English it becomes difficult for people in remote to learn about their legal entitlements. RTI enables people to actively involve themselves in democratic processes. It helps to build trust in the government, eradicate poverty, promotes transparency of information by being more open to public scrutiny.

Since independence, people have demanded Freedom of Information, but save occasional outbursts from people much did not happen. There was no social media platform to express anger; this prompted the enactment of the Right. Demand of people to know about the removal of Indian Armed Forces in 1960s, issues of Human Rights in 1970s, train accident and the Bhopal Gas tragedy in 1980s and establishment of environmental groups played an important role in the formation and functioning of the RTI. Sabir Ahamed completed his presented speaking on the take of media and investors on cases of corruption charges and scams in India post liberalization. He said there was a second Independence for India, with the formulation of the RTI in 2005.

Parivelan K.M.

Popular Movements in Tamil Nadu with Focus on Sterilite Protest and Shoot-out Incident

Parivelan K.M. adjoined the element of an environmental analysis to the theme of panel discussion by speaking on a case study of Tamil Nadu and in specific he tried to look at the recent Thoothukudi violence and how the Sterlite copper smelters had been polluting the environment, causing health hazards. Parivelan mainly spoke of the huge number of protests that took place against the copper smelting company of Sterlite in Thoothukudi (Tuticorin). Agitations in Tamil Nadu were numbered at 30,450. He aligned the main reason for the

protests as public dissatisfaction regarding transport, health care, sanitation, public distribution and education. People questioning the risk factors have been historically linked to social movements. Initially people gathered and women assembled, to sustain the protests peacefully for a long period. When the ambitious state of Tamil Nadu tried to construct a port in the fragile coastal ecosystem of Kanyakumari, people came up in attempt of saving their 'culture' raising issues of displacement and ecological imbalances. There were anti-Sterilite protests in May 2018, claiming that it caused health hazards for women. The protests were mainly for shutting down factories and studies to be conducted on the same, assessing the ways in which factories discharged harmful chemicals that were hazardous for health. There were protests in March and April to shut down companies that discharged hazardous chemicals; the events turned violent in May, with 14 deaths. Women, men, transgenders and juvenile were part of the protests. The horror lied in the fact that while state exercised force, no one was aware of the fact whether the mishaps were accidental or premediated. The paper merged the significance of the capacity of cultural and environmental movements in Tamil Nadu to bring people together for safeguard of environment and society. The speaker concluded saying accountability and transparency becomes important whenever force is used by the state; whether be used for prevention of people from protesting or in cases of probes on the functioning of hazardous units of production companies for safety of environment.

Sahana Basavapatna

Populist Politics Speaking to the Law: the Case of Assam Sanmilita Mahasangha v Union of India and Ors

Sahana Basavapatna provided an account of the Indian judicial system's strides in interceding into the process of law making and governance. She said, in many cases it has been seen that petitioners seek, among others, a declaration that Section 6A of the Citizenship Act, 1955, is unconstitutional, being discriminatory and illegal. The National Registrar of citizens, 1971 found special mention. Several petitioners have filed for NRC in Assam, relating to citizenship and deportation. In terms of interface of law and populism, transparency and accountability of the Supreme Court plays an important role in managing the issue of immigration of Bangladeshi refugees into Assam. Sahana Basavapatna found it interesting that between 2014 and 2018, the Supreme Court heard cases of Bangladeshi refugees at regular intervals and passed several orders under Article 142 of the Constitution. In her presentation, S. Basavapatna confined the discussion to a few set of cases that were heard by the Supreme Court and their enactment. She mentioned that the Supreme Court has worked beyond what is mandated under the Constitution and has overstepped its boundaries in several cases. The paper questions whether the Supreme Court outstepped its boundaries while enacting Article 142 of the Constitution and whether it showed over eagerness in the same. Questions arose regarding constitutional validity filed in 2009 and 2016, which challenged the constitutional bench. Sahana Basavapatna ended by saying the Supreme Court's practice of taking on the role of the executive in matters that reek of populist politics

such as the NRC and the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2015 case, reflects the apex body of judiciary overstepping the precincts of its functioning while passing its jurisdiction.

Moderator and Discussant: Sibaji Pratim Basu

Sibaji Pratim Basu summarized the broad themes that the presentations dealt with. He mentioned that Sabir Ahamed had situated a link between the Right to Information Act and digital gap with emphasis on the issues of orders in English or vernacular further enhancing the disparity between classes of people protesting against corruption. Sibaji Pratim Basu spoke of the presentation by Parivelan K.M. in light of it focusing on popular movements as commitments in cases of protests against environmental and health hazards. He stated that Sahana Basavapatna's account raises concern of the Supreme Court over-indulging out of the structure of its judicial mechanism.

Question and Answer Session:

Ritu Menon requested Parivelan K.M. to comment on the Jallikattu protest because it was difficult to understand whether the protest would have been successful without the involvement of women.

Nirmal Kumar Mahato asked Sabir Ahamed to comment on the official acts, and the acts used to muzzle the flow of information and spread enmity to communities. He commented that the British Copyright Act is more liberal than the Indian Copyright Act, but asked what more could it include to become democratic?

Ranabir Samaddar commented that the panelists had stressed on the importance of RTI and NRC in the light of legality and judiciary carving out positions for themselves. The Government is not weary because, since it comes out into information, right to privacy has no more remained substantial. R. Samaddar questioned whether mobilization of legal power can be related to exploitation of information.

Bishnu Mohapatra stated that the allure to break law in case of social movements is terrible and unfortunately lack of transparency between responsibility and accountability excludes the questioning of why a particular institution behaves in a specific manner.

Asha Hans added her note on the strife that took place between people and the legal system with the coming of the RTI. Since people do not get responses in most cases of RTI, the efficient use of the process is pushed into shadows.

Sabir Ahamed addressed the participants with the actuality of lack of technology to track the flow of information giving rise to the complexity of transparency and accountability. Indicators of different reports provide common people with information but the cost incurred in procuring the information is not known. Government also in a way controls how much information is to be disseminated.

Parivelan K.M. stated that any protest that is largely dominated by male protestors for their rights would often not be joined by women protestors because of the cause of the protest being inherently rooted in masculine issues. But the fate of women killed or found missing due to protests makes one question whether her fate would be different if the protest had not occurred in the first place.

Sahana Basavapatna's comments concluded the panel discussion when she said that there are permissions that need to be taken from the court; despite it, can the Supreme Court take over legal bindings, is a question that should be asked.

02.00 pm - 03.30 pm: Concluding Session

Movie Screening

The concluding session of the conference screened the movie 'Harlan County, USA', a documentary directed by Barbara Kopple on the Brookside Strikes of 1970s in Harlan County, southeast Kentucky. The movie signified the control and influence that communities coming together in protest of environmental, social and economic issues can have on authorities holding power.

The conference ended with a vote of thanks presented by Shatabdi Das, Research and Programme Assistant, CRG.