



Calcutta Research Group
2019

POPULISM & POPULIST POLITICS IN SOUTH ASIA

A Report



In collaboration with Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung



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The Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung (RLS) is a Germany based foundation working in South Asia and other parts of the world on the subjects of critical social analysis and civic education. It promotes a sovereign, socialist, secular, and democratic social order, and aims at present members of society and decision-makers with alternative approaches to such an order. Research organizations, groups working for self-emancipation, and social activists are supported in their initiatives to develop models that have the potential to deliver social and economic justice. The work of Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, South Asia, can be accessed at www.rosalux.in.

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Introduction

Populism and populist politics has been a matter of academic and political concern across the world for some time. Whether in Latin America, the USA or in South Asia and the Middle East, the attendant perplexity around what makes populism *work* has led to significant scholarship on the theoretical and historical contours of populism. Left wing or right wing, the specific difficulty of articulating the ideological underpinnings of populism raises questions about its diverse and complex practices, rhetorics, institutional formations, mobilizing techniques and impact. The term has been used to describe leadership and opposition across the political spectrum; both Trump and Corbyn have been declared practitioners of populism; populism describes both the street of Paris and the Hungarian dictator. It is one of those terminologies that have found easy circulation and interpretation with journalists and common readers alike. However, that has not reduced the “confusion and frustration” in attempts to understand the vagueness and fluidity that is often attributed to the phenomenon and its conceptual application to practices and politics. If at the core of populism is the invocation of a “people” and their apparent unmediated relationship with a charismatic leadership, the question then remains who are the people in populism? How do we define populism in a way that can account for its economy across the political field? Further, the confusion between the popular and the populist produces all too common instances of misidentification.

Let alone research in India, internationally also, except the seminal work done by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, there is not enough study on the phenomenon of populism. One of the reasons for CRG to take up a project on populism was therefore not only the global interest in populism, but specifically to explore the scope and peculiarities of right populism in contemporary India. What is important is the remarkable combination of populism and authoritarianism and the suspicion with which both observe the arrival of democracy. A noteworthy mark of populism has been that there should be no intermediary between the people and the state; that the so-called representative institutions do not *actually* represent the people. The people, as the right wing would argue, have the right to communicate directly with their leader, as one does with god, therefore the possible religious basis of populism since almost all religions across the world mandate a direct relationship between people and their god. Additionally, since populism entails a dismissal of the intermediary between the

people and constituent institutions; what are the strategies used by a populist leader to undermine intermediary structures, and what is the nature of these structures? For instance, how have leaders such as Indira Gandhi, Jayalalitha and Mamata Banerjee ‘altered’ the structures of their own parties to become populist leaders? What then a Chief Minister does to her own political party is part of the process of undermining of structures of democratic governance? How are these structures replaced by another kind of structure which allows populist politics to continue and thrive? Given that one can draw on historical, religious, familial and other sources to study the sources of populism, questions can be raised about whether populism is an ensemble of practices or is there an ideological core to populism? What are the stakes involved in taking either of the two approaches? If populism is called an ideology, then one has to show how it has historically taken the shape of an ideology?

At the onset of this research, a number of broad themes of research on populism was to be foregrounded; that of the history of political mobilisation, a post-Laclau study on state populism, institutions, populist parties and populist practices. How for instance does a political party, once it forms governments, sustain its politics?

The year-long research project “Populism and Populist Politics in South Asia with special emphasis on India” has examined some of these issues related to welfare policies, leadership, political strategies etc. It is noteworthy that an earlier project on “Popular Movements in West Bengal and Bihar”, 2016-2018 and its book-length publication, *From Popular Movements to Rebellion: The Naxalite Decade* (Editor Ranabir Samaddar, Orient Blackswan & Routledge, 2018) pre-figures today’s enquiry in to populist politics and practices. Researchers were not dictated in any certain way—papers on the Kanyashree scheme in West Bengal, the Chattisgarh welfare programs, policies of the Aam Aadmi Party and Mamata Banerjee have led to the study of recent across the board welfare programs of state governments, revealing a pattern of enquiry towards governance and state populism. We could then ask why populism becomes so crucial in governance as a modern day pre-requisite of governance.

In the course of this year, Calcutta Research Group has organized one consultation/planning meeting, four public lectures, and an international conference. The target audience and contributors were intellectuals, youth, activists, researchers and scholars. Sociologists, political scientists, cultural studies and media researchers constituted the research collective and contributed through their participation in the conference and publications. CRG has

published two edited volumes in Hindi and Bengali, and three *Policies and Practices* on the theme.

The details of the year-long research project are available at:
http://www.mcrgh.ac.in/RLS_Populism/RLS_Populism_Home.asp

Planning Meeting



PLANNING MEETING
on
Populism and Populist Politics
in South Asia

Organised by
Calcutta Research Group
&
Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung

12
FEBRUARY
2019

Venue: Hotel Akash Deep, Kolkata
Time: 11:00 am - 5:30 pm

Planning Meeting

Populism and Populist Politics in South Asia with Special Reference to India

February 12, 2019

Venue: Hotel Akash Deep

48, Circus Ave, Lower Range, Beck Bagan, Ballygunge, Kolkata, West Bengal 700017

Programme

11:00 to 11:30 AM: Tea & Registration

11:30 to 11:45 AM: Welcome Address | Sibaji Pratim Basu, CRG, Kolkata

11:45 to 1:00 AM: General Outline of Project

Chair: Subhas Ranjan Chakraborty, MCRG, Kolkata

Speakers

Ranabir Samaddar, MCRG, Kolkata & others

01:00 to 02:00 PM: Lunch

02:00 to 03:30 PM: Discussion of Abstracts and Proposal

Chair: Amit Prakash, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi | MCRG, Kolkata

Speakers

Sumona DasGupta, Independent Researcher, New Delhi: *Political Parties and Populist Policies in Contemporary India: Some Reflections on the Aam Aadmi Party*

Sibaji Pratim Basu, Vidyasagar University and MCRG, Kolkata: *Mamata Banerjee's Populist Politics: 'Crisis' of Democracy?*

Rajat Roy, MCRG, Kolkata: *Populist Initiatives in a Competitive Democracy, Chhattisgarh: A Case Study*

Ria De, MCRG, Kolkata: *Mamata Banerjee and the Kanyashree Scheme: Gender and its Implications for Gender Politics*

Discussant: Ajay Gudavarthy, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

03:30 pm-04:00 pm: Tea

04:00 pm-05:30 pm: Discussion on Publications

Discussant: Paula Banerjee, Sankrit College and University and MCRG, Kolkata

List of Participants

1. Ajay Gudavarthy (Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi)
2. Amit Prakash (Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi and MCRG, Kolkata)
3. Apala Kundu (MCRG, Kolkata)
4. Anup Shekhar Chakrabarty (NIAS, Bangalore)
5. Arup Kumar Sen (Serampore College and MCRG, Kolkata)
6. Ashok Kumar Giri (MCRG, Kolkata)
7. Kaustubh Mani Sengupta (Bankura University)
8. Madhurilata Basu (Sarojini Naidu College for Women)
9. Maidul Islam (Centre for Studies in Social Sciences Calcutta)
10. Manish Jha (Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai and MCRG, Kolkata)
11. Monirul Hussain (Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi)
12. Nasreen Chowdhory (University of Delhi, New Delhi and MCRG, Kolkata)
13. Oishik Sircar (OP Jindal Global University, Sonipat)
14. Paula Banerjee (Sanskrit College and University and MCRG, Kolkata)
15. Prabir Sinha Roy (PIFPD)
16. Rajat Roy (MCRG, Kolkata)

17. Ranabir Samaddar (MCRG, Kolkata)
18. Ratan Chakrabarty (MCRG, Kolkata)
19. Ruchira Goswami (NUJS, Kolkata)
20. Ria De (MCRG, Kolkata)
21. Samaresh Guchhait (MCRG, Kolkata)
22. Shatabdi Das (MCRG, Kolkata)
23. Shyamalendu Majumder (Sivanath Sastri College and MCRG, Kolkata)
24. Sibaji Pratim Basu (Vidya sagar University and MCRG, Kolkata)
25. Soumen Mukherjee (Presidency University, Kolkata)
26. Subhashree Rout (MCRG, Kolkata)
27. Subhas Ranjan Chakraborty (MCRG, Kolkata)
28. Subir Bhaumik (MCRG, Kolkata)
29. Sumona DasGupta (Independent Researcher)
30. V. Ramaswamy (Howard's City Pilot Project)
31. Aditi Mukherjee (MCRG, Kolkata)

11:30 to 11:45 AM: Welcome Address | Sibaji Pratim Basu, CRG, Kolkata| Vidya Sagar University

The welcome address was delivered by Sibaji Pratim Basu. Following a brief welcome address to the participants of the Planning Meeting, Sibaji Pratim Basu introduced the first session on the general outline of the Project on Populism and Populist Politics in South Asia with Special Reference to India and welcomed the resource persons and participants attending the meeting.

11:45 to 1:00 AM: **General Outline of Project**

Chair: Subhas Ranjan Chakraborty, MCRG, Kolkata

Speakers

Ranabir Samaddar, MCRG, Kolkata & others



The session was moderated by Subhas Ranjan Chakraborty. He introduced Ranabir Samaddar as the lead discussant on the general outline of the project to be followed by inputs and ideas from all participants. Ranabir Samaddar started by giving a background of the Popular Movements project conducted by CRG during the years 2016-2018. The period

of research covered the popular movements in India during the years 1951-1971. The popular movements research project and the publications that emerged from it form the background to the proposed research on populism. Samaddar specified that although the project was to be designated for a period of one year, it would be productive to continue the work beyond the given time period. He went on to raise and respond to the question, “Why is it important to work on populism in the present context?” Given that there are not enough Indian books on populism, the research was to begin by looking at what populism would mean? Internationally also, except the research done by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, there was not enough theoretical work on populism in general and left wing populism in specific, which has been read widely by European English speaking left-wing students and activists. Samaddar further spoke about how critiques of populist politics, such as Subir Sinha, characterise populism as a mode of politics where hard stands are not taken or are avoided, thereby dismissing the possibility at all of a left wing populism. One of the reasons therefore, Samaddar argued, for CRG to take up a project on populism was not so much to study the possibilities of left wing populism, but given the global interest in populism, to explore the scope and peculiarities of right wing populism in India. He further asked, is there therefore an organic connection between popular politics and populist politics in India? Is there something intrinsic in popular politics that develops in to populist politics or is in some sense

a populist politics a form of popular politics? While it may be the case that popular politics developed in Bengal and metamorphosed in to the radical politics of the 1960s and 1970s, or on the other hand, Bihar emerged as a site of populist politics during the time of JP Narayan, there is some kind of amnesia which has prevented the study of populism in both the colonial and postcolonial times, simultaneously admitting that there may be discontinuities between the two. Samaddar argued that Marx stated during his time that it was then that the world in some senses was experiencing populism for the first time. People have also commented on Lenin's oscillating attitude towards populism. Samaddar went on to comment on the Russian and Argentinian leftists and their historical relationship with populism and populist politics. He then turned to the South Asian instances of populism, citing first from Pakistan and the rise of the People's Party under Bhutto's leadership and then Fajlul Haque's agrarian populism in Bengal and finally Indira Gandhi's 20 point program in India. Samaddar further argued that the combination of authoritarianism and populism has been remarkable, and that populism has been highly suspicious of the ways in which democracy arrives. The significant mark of populism has been that there should be no intermediary between the people and the state; that the so-called representative institutions do not represent people. The people therefore, as the right wing, would say have the right to communicate directly with god. Samaddar then pointed to the possible religious basis of populism since almost all religions across the world mandate a direct a relationship between people and their god. Popular movements on the other hand have shown a consistent distrust with popular leaders, and several prior researchers from CRG have worked on this. The innate suspicion then of the whole repertoire of representation is something that connects popular movements and populism. One of the approaches then to populism would be to study its theoretical contours, while the other would be to take a more historical approach. Samaddar asked if it would then be important to go back to the history of populist movements and study populist rhetoric and the ways of mobilising people? Further questions could then can be raised about whether populism is an ensemble of practices or is there an ideological core to populism? What are the kinds of stakes in taking either of the two approaches. If populism is called an ideology, then one has to show how it has historically taken the shape of an ideology? On the other hand, one can draw on historical, religious, familial and other sources to study the patterns of populism? Then one can look at the commonality of these sets of practices and term them as populism. Therefore, it is immaterial whether populism can be used by the right wing or the left wing. What is more important, especially for the project would be to identify these basic set of practices etc. The project at this point is open to either of these routes being taken

towards the study of populism. Samaddar stated that at least three research papers would be produced from the project. One of the primary aspects to study would be the trajectories of populism in South Asia and a general background to the contemporary or present history of populism in South Asia. He pointed out that an important element that needed to be looked at had to do with what is said about populist governments in West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka or Bihar etc. Samaddar pointed out that these concerns were the basis for Sumona DasGupta being invited to work on her research on AAP in Delhi. He insisted that instead of looking at the one year time period as a limitation, researchers should approach the problematic of populism on more conceptual terms. Subhas Ranjan Chakraborty, as moderator of the session, summed up the main points that the latter covered ie left wing movements, personalities, practices, rational basis of the variety of populism etc. Following this, the session was opened up to participants for discussion and their opinions.

Maidul Islam agreed with Samaddar that there could be two broad themes of research on populism; that of the history of political mobilisation, and secondly a post-Laclau kind of research on populism. He added that there was a need to look at state populism. In a post-Laclau context, what needs to be addressed is the ways in which a populist party, once it forms government, sustains its politics. This is something that Laclau does not address at all. One could take the example of the Biju Janata Dal which sustained its rule for 20 years, as well as the kind of politics practiced by Mamata Banerjee in West Bengal. He further stressed that existing literature does not look at aspects of state populism. Manish Jha stated that one of the important understandings of populism entails that there is a dismissal of the intermediary between the people and the constituent institutions. He went on to add another layer in terms of the strategies that a populist leader uses to undermine intermediary structures, and consequently the question remains, what is the nature of these structures? For instance, what did Indira Gandhi do to her own party in order to become a populist leader? What then a chief minister does to her own political party is also part of the process of undermining of structures of democratic governance. How are these structures replaced by another kind of structure which allows populist politics to continue and thrive? Samaddar responded to Jha that such an issue maybe addressed through a study of the historical nature of the political parties that function in India. Manish Jha further added that one needs to look at what constitutes the normative forms of party structures in India, and then find the contestations within that. Amit Prakash added to the discussion by citing Alain Badiou's notion of creative subversion. Then he went on to state that one should steer away from

making value judgements about whether populist movements and politics are good or bad. But one should still address the unease that remains with populist politics. There is a time in democratic practice when something happens and the institutions collapse, and a direct invocation takes place in terms of the leadership and the constituents. Why does this happen is something that we need to address. Is there then something in the liberal script which gives rise to populism from the left, right or centre? He pointed to a second issue whereby a large amount of writing on populist politics is averse to talking about social movements. One also needs to look at the ways in which populism has challenged the liberal script. A third question, Jha added to the discussion was about the ways in which the liberal script gained legitimacy if not through popular movements, and if that is accepted then how do we go about defining populism? Sumona DasGupta talked about her thoughts on populism, especially beyond the existing value judgements. She asked what then is the difference between populism and popular movements? She warned against the anarchic tendency in the understanding and definition of populism. She mentioned four clusters of ideas around which populism has been used which were populism as ideology (as already suggested by Samaddar), populism as a movement or an organisation, populism as a policy orientation and populism as a form of communication or as a form of discursive politics. The notion of an unfairly advantaged elite vs the masses remains at the centre of understandings of populist politics. In such a situation, the understandings of populism becomes too vague or amorphous. Looking at it as a discursive style will perhaps give populism an analytical significance, which we would not otherwise get if we look at it in terms of only ideology. Nasreen Chowdhury stressed on the need to look at populism in terms of practices, and the fact that even within practice-oriented studies, the classic example of Dravidian movements remains under-studied. She cited the Sri Lankan case and the one in Bangladesh as examples where the critical study of the practice of populism may be studied. The study of practices will be the only way in which one can understand if there is an ideological core to populism or if there is a continuity in terms of practices across political parties. Ruchira Goswami asked questions about the nature of the ongoing project and whether it would divest from the study of popular collective movements. Her primary question was about the scope of the project and the time period it is focusing on etc. Oishik Sircar, in his discussion, took two cues from Samaddar's speech; firstly, that populism is an ensemble of practices and the suggestion that that ensemble is a form of communication. He went on to ask a question whether there was a way to bring about the question of the private in populism in the sense of how a common sense language emerges in the private, and the kind of pedagogical training that

happens in the private. He also gave the example of *Sananda*, the women's magazine and the role it played in building a certain kind of a populist feminine common sense in the private space. He stated that although there was some kind of indeterminacy in the way that the word populism is used, the one critical area where the thinking and use of the word populism is under studied is judicial populism. He gave instances of various litigation movements where we see a certain kind of return of judicial populism under conditions that we would otherwise not consider to be not progressive or liberal enough. In 2018 for instance, three landmark judgements were passed in India; decriminalising section 377, the criminalisation of Triple Talaq and the Sabari Mala judgement. Sircar then raised the question of how the judiciary responds to the expectations that come its way. He pointed to shifts in Public Interest Litigation. In response to Samaddar's question about populism and the private or the familial space, Oishik Sircar added that the private space is possibly one with the least amount of intermediation, so the pedagogical practices in the private space are more intimate and far less adversarial within the family space.

Arup Sen spoke about the possibility of defining populism as an ideology at the discursive level. While talking about populism as a set of practices or a movement, it would be difficult to distinguish between what is a popular element and one that is populist. He felt that it would be problematic to define populism as a set of practices because one would have to begin by making a distinction between the specific practices of the left movement and those of the right etc. Sen pointed out that the subversion of institutions was one of the most important aspects of populist politics but questions maybe raised about whether those institutions actually worked or even if the governments could function. If one takes the government as a practice, then the distinction between the popular and the populist would be blurred. What then is the basis of saying that intermediary institutions are being subverted more spectacularly under the populist regime? Arup Sen pointed out the need to understand that institutions have been subverted long back.

Kaustabh Mani Sengupta made a brief comment about the scale of populist movements. He pointed out that the movements cited in the discussion were largely very local or regional, and that there may be a need to go back to the earlier decades or centuries, and think of populist movements that are national or transnational, thereby extending beyond the regional. Sengupta's second point was about the specific nature of populist movements; whether they are about language or identity or religion. How then does one analyse the idea of religion and how it becomes imbricated in articulating state power. In doing so one acknowledges that religion has become a very important driving force in Indian politics.

Rajat Roy, as the next speaker, talked about how one can arrive at the difference between the ideology of a populist state and the ideology of a welfare state.

Ajay Gudavarthy contributed to the discussion by focusing on policies and what makes them populist. Such policies always existed, given that different kinds of populism always existed in India beginning from peasant populism. He added that populist politics has something to do with a certain kind of flexibilization of social hierarchies. Without a sociology of caste, religion and region, there would not be much sense in talking about populism in the current context. The question to be asked then would be about how populist policies make flexible certain kinds of social hierarchies. Categories such as social psychology and political emotions are required to understand what is so fundamentally different about the current moment of populist movement. He suggested that this could be a common focus of the project and be an original contribution. The discussion then came to Soumen Mukherjee who talked about the need to look at some of the populist accounts from the colonial and premodern times. It would be relevant to understand how during this time religion does become an ideology. Europe is cited as an important example to understand the historical significance of religion and religious studies. What then constitutes religion? According to him, it would be important to understand how religion and ideology feed in to each other, and that would throw light on what is happening in the postcolonial times. One also needs to look at what emerges out of the dynamics between religious faith and ideology and how they articulate themselves. Madhurilata Basu referred to welfare regimes in India as a form of populist regime. She talked about the works about Jayalalitha, Mamata etc. that have shed light on how populist and welfare regimes go together. Monirul Hussain pointed out that the discussion on populist movements was limited primarily to a national level. He was however more concerned about Assam and other smaller areas, where the movement is absolutely different from what is happening in the rest of India, where it is tending more towards identity. The multiplicity of movements in Assam, Mizoram and Manipur need to be understood. It would also be important if CRG commissions a research to that effect, writing a paper at least on one specific movement. Maidul Islam pointed out at a singular confusion at the conceptual level in relation to the understanding of populism. Populism can be regarded as an ideology or a set of discursive practices as discussed earlier. However, one common theme in the Laclau-Ian point of view is that it is a strategy of political mobilization. So if it is a strategy of political mobilization, then should be taken in to account. Ranabir Samaddar concluded the discussion with a few comments about the challenges facing such a

research. It would entail taking all the points discussed in the session into account, one of which would be the varying scales of the different movements.

02:00 to 03:30 PM: **Discussion of Abstracts and Proposal**

Chair: Amit Prakash, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi | MCRG, Kolkata

Speakers

Sumona DasGupta, Independent Researcher, New Delhi: *Political Parties and Populist Policies in Contemporary India: Some Reflections on the Aam Aadmi Party*

Sibaji Pratim Basu, Vidyasagar University and MCRG, Kolkata: *Mamata Banerjee's Populist Politics: 'Crisis' of Democracy?*

Rajat Roy, MCRG, Kolkata: *Populist Initiatives in a Competitive Democracy, Chhattisgarh: A Case Study*

Ria De, MCRG, Kolkata: *Mamata Banerjee and the Kanyashree Scheme: Gender and its Implications for Gender Politics*

Discussant: Ajay Gudavarthy, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

The post-lunch session entailed a discussion of the themes and ideas that the researchers involved in the project proposed to study and reflect upon.

Political Parties and Populist Policies in Contemporary India: Some Reflections on the Aam Aadmi Party

Sumona Dasgupta

Sumona DasGupta's paper proposed to move away from a value laden understanding of populism as an ideology and focus on one that resonates the most easily with an Indian context, namely any policy that is redistributive in nature and as such favours the common person particularly those in subordinate positions over the elite typically represented by large business and financial interests. She argued that the contrast between the people and elite in terms of strategies, movements, policies, organization is perhaps the only way the term populism can retain its analytical usefulness without getting bogged down in polemical discussions as to whether populist movements/policies represent the ideological right or the

left, whether it is authoritarian or democratic in its origin, whether it represents a movement or simply a discursive style. Her presentation examined selected populist policies launched in contemporary India by a party that grew out of a popular movement against corruption namely the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) which by its very name creates an implicit contrast between the ‘people’ and the elite. By focusing on some of its key populist policies, DasGupta seeks to gain a deeper understanding of how a movement “for the people” transitioned into a political party which then had to make policies that were seen to be pro “aam aadmi” and what this populism implies in terms of democratic decision making and longer term impacts on the economic and political front.

Mamata Banerjee’s Populist Politics: ‘Crisis’ of Democracy?

Sibaji Pratim Basu

In light of the the recent scuffle between the forces of central intelligence - the CBI - and the State Police of West Bengal over the ‘interrogation’/ ‘arrest’ of the Kolkata Commissioner of Police and the subsequent *dharna* to ‘Save Constitution’ at ‘Metro Channel’, Esplanade – the heart of Kolkata by the Chief Minister, Mamata Banerjee, Sibaji Pratim Basu argued that a deep concern for the ‘crisis of democratic institutions’ was expressed all across the nation. Indeed, the populist politics in South Asia in general and the last 7 years’ rule of Mamata in West Bengal (with popular programmes like ‘Kanyashree’ for girl students, ‘Sabujspathi – cycles for students of backward classes, rice at Rs. 2/kg through PDS schemes for peasants, folk artists, artisans, fisher folk; donations to youth clubs etc.) has pushed further the sacred boundaries of conventional liberal democracy in such a way that it demands the insights and labour of social scientists to grasp adequately the meanings and connotations of such politics, which cannot be even fully comprehended by the spectacles of Ernesto Laclau alone. Such ‘new’ politics also raises a host of questions - What are the limits of such politics? Does its failure ensure the return of ‘traditional’ politics? Even if that happens, can the champions of ‘traditional’ politics abandon the contents of populist politics in its entirety?

Populist initiatives in a Competitive Democracy Chhattisgarh: A Case Study

Rajat Roy

By undertaking a case study of populist politics– reformation of the Public Distribution System and other programmes benefitting the poor — engaged in by the Raman Singh

government in the state of Chhattisgarh, between 2003 and 2019, and their recent loss to the Congress in the 2019 state assembly election, this paper will look at some of the following questions on the subject of populism in Chhattisgarh and their implications. He raised the questions, is populist politics more likely to give rise to competitive bidding by the contending parties in a democracy? What is the difference between a populist measure and a welfare initiative? How does one draw a line between these two? Does it mean that only those welfare schemes are tagged as ‘Populist’ that are targeted to address the poor people’s concerns? Also, what was the relationship between the Raman Singh government’s so-called populist measures and the growing threat of Maoist initiative in the region?

The Kanyashree and Rupashree Schemes: Gender and its Implications for Populist Politics

Ria De

Ria De proposed to study the ways in which gender is configured by the Mamata Banerjee government in West Bengal *vis-a-vis* two governmental schemes – the Kanyashree scheme that was introduced in 2013, and the Rupashree scheme which was rolled out last year. Both Kanyashree and Rupashree are conditional cash transfer schemes; in the first instance, the government promises an annual grant of Rs. 1000/- for girl children below the age of 18, and a consolidated amount of Rs 25,000/- to women above the age of 18. In either case, whether the girls are above or below the age of 18, the condition remains that they should be unmarried and that their family income should be below Rs 1.5 lakhs per annum. In the second instance, the Rupashree scheme promises a sum of Rs 25000/- for the marriage of women above the age of 18. While the Kanyashree scheme aims to enable the empowerment of women through education, Rupashree directly links women’s lives to the question of marriage. Taking the Kanyashree and the Rupashree as possible case studies to understand the ways in which the story of gender is being plotted within a populist project, De proposed to study these in relation to the various other “women’s rights” governmental schemes in contemporary India, for instance, the “Beti Bachao Andolan”, the various other schemes undertaken by the Ministry of Child and Women’s Development, such as the National Database of Sex Offenders, the linking of women’s medical histories to their Aadhar accounts as a means to control female foeticide etc. Given that the Kanyashree and Rupashree projects have very contradictory goals in terms of women’s lives, one that posits education as a means to prevent child marriage, while the other claims to ease the poor man’s burden of marrying his daughter, De proposes to look into how they relate to more historical,

social problems related to women's lives and upbringing; such as the entanglement of marriage and family with women's subjectivities and the positing of education in opposition to that. How does one really address the problems raised by caste and patriarchy through such schemes or does it in fact negotiate with it?

Discussion

Ajay Gudavarthy began the discussion by stating that the policies being discussed are by themselves not populist. We have had always such policies since our post-independence days – community development programmes, poverty eradication programmes. Why call them populist at all, he questioned. Populism would mean that these policies are invested in certain narratives, certain strategies of mobilization that are very distinct. Gudavarthy suggested that to study these policies in themselves would not be enough; they would have to be placed in narratives of certain strategies, slogans, modes of communication, new kinds of faultlines, new kinds of polarisations and interrelations with other political parties. One must look at a range of variables, since one of the most significant aspects of populism is its heterogeneity. About DasGupta's paper, Gudavarthy commented that both the AAP and the right-wing BJP's mobilization strategies were populist. Considering this, he suggested that it would be interesting to look at why the BJP is so antagonistic towards AAP, and the conflicts between the two. The notion of unmediated direct democracy has its own complexities. In one interview, Arvind Kejriwal himself admitted that his participation in the direct *dharna*, where he was signing files sitting on the Parliament street gave a cultural shock to Delhi. There is a certain conflict and overlap of meanings when it comes to questions of populism. For example, when Kejriwal resigned after 49 days, many thought that he was being honest, but many viewed it as a dereliction of duty and responsibility. Populism thus throws up multiple meanings. Referencing Sibaji Pratim Basu's paper, Gudavarthy reads it as delving into how populism works in the space between the regional and the national. In the Indian context, the spatial imagination has been very important regarding how democracy works. In a recent study conducted by the Azim Premji University on trust in institutions, it was found that most people have the least amount of trust on local institutions and place higher levels of trust in institutions that they never see. The BJP has very successfully exploited this disconnect between the local, regional and the national, one of the reasons why there is no opposition against them. Right wing politics displays a better understanding of what can translate into a national discourse, a regional or a local one. Basu's paper, Gudavarthy claimed, would be

able to sufficiently problematise the interrelations between populism and spatial politics. Drawing attention to Rajat Ray's paper, Gudavarthy explained how policy framework itself has a right-wing polarizing agenda and therefore, policy is not independent of this kind of faultline drawing that is being discussed. All the policy frameworks of this Raman Singh government under discussion is about defining who is a citizen, and who is eligible for a policy. Liberal notions of procedures have produced an exclusion, and the right-wing is being very aggressive about these exclusions. If one looks at the policy structure of the right-wing, one sees it is open-ended. The principle on which the policy is implemented is never really fleshed out. For instance, the policy dealing with autonomy of universities. The BJP are critiquing liberal universality for exclusion but are also using that critique to create new kinds of exclusion based on nationalist networks. This again has a strange purchase for the subaltern, because they were the ones who were excluded. To look at the populist politics in Chhattisgarh through the optics of exclusion would contribute to the paper greatly. Another question that the paper could explore, suggests Gudavarthy, is the reluctance of the BJP in engaging with agrarian populism. Finally, with respect to Ria De's paper, he stated that though it was exploring a new area, and that the links between gender and populism would have to be more explicitly discussed. The social content of the Kanyashree and Rupashree schemes need to be studied. What kind of narrative structures are they really part of? One of the reasons behind the rise in women-centric schemes is that post-2000, we are witnessing the emergence of women as an independent constituency like caste, regional identity. Gudavarthy ended with the claim that populism in the Indian context is also about creating new social and political constituencies, and how BJP, through their policies, as in the triple *talaq* issue, is upturning the notion of who is a minority in India. Oishik Sircar responded to Ria De's presentation with suggestions of literature on state feminism, carceral feminism and on governance feminism, the last two being offshoots of state feminism. Maidul Islam commented that the popularity of Mamata Banerjee among the masses must be seen in the context of the larger crisis of liberal democracy, and that of neoliberal economics. There was a continuity from the Congress regime and the Left Front regime. Briefly during the Indira Gandhi interregnum, there was a suspension of institutions and then the Left Front normalized it. It is when the CPI(M) was hegemonized by the neo-liberal economy that Mamata popularity begins to rise. It is with such populist policies like Kanyashree and Rupashree, as Ria suggested, that her popularity is sustained. Islam points out how the degree of identification with the populist leader varies with different categories of women. The lack of intermediaries supports her popularity. Amit Prakash raised the issue of how identity,

which is relevant to the question of populism, often, gets couched only in economic terms. Nasreen Chowdhory stressed on the need to establish some framework about the parameters of what is populist policy, what is a welfare scheme, and what is populism. She also expressed her discomfort with the phrase ‘crisis of democracy’. About the Chhattisgarh question, Chowdhory comments that the term period becomes important. This is because with a government coming back to power for three consecutive terms, there are chances of policies becoming populist. The evolution aspect of these populist narratives must be studied carefully. When the policies transform lives, then they take on a populist character. Finally, regarding Ria De’s presentation, she emphasizes that in viewing the Kanyashree and Rupashree schemes as populist; one stands a chance of neglecting the way in which they have benefitted the masses.

04:00 pm-05:30 pm: **Discussion on Publications**

Discussant: Paula Banerjee, Sanskrit College and University, and MCRG, Kolkata

The final session of the day involved a discussion on the possible modes of publications on populism. The discussant Paula Banerjee of the Sanskrit College and University, Kolkata and MCRG, Kolkata stated that gender is an important factor that needs to be taken into consideration for CRG’s current project on populism. Given that one of the proposed abstracts on populism by a staff researcher already raises questions about the ways in which gender and women in particular are mobilised by populist politics in West Bengal, CRG will work on a reader on populism where one of the thematic sections should be dedicated to research articles on gender. Paula Banerjee further suggested the possibility of a reader on populism similar to the one produced by MCRG for the Popular Movements project, titled *From Popular Movements to Rebellion: The Naxalite Decade*. She also stressed the need for a dedicated section on “gender and populism”. She added that at least four publications on populism may be published in the *Policies and Practices* series, including those by two staff researchers and two contracted researchers. She added that CRG must explore the scope of non-traditional forms of publications such as web publishing, web-based journals, pod casts, webinars etc. where short form and current deliberations on populism may be regularly published and updated. While adding to Paula Banerjee’s suggestions, Ranabir Samaddar from CRG talked about CRG’s earlier association with popular journals, in particular *Anustup Potrika* and practices of translating CRG publications in to Hindi for wider circulation and dissemination. He then suggested that the scope of public writing and

circulation in the form of newspaper articles, Hindi translations, contributions to the journal *Anustup Potrika* can also be explored. Following the opening up of the discussion to other participants of the session, possible themes of research in relation to populism and populist politics were suggested. Maidul Islam committed to contributing a paper on populism. Oishik Sircar from OP Jindal suggested themes such as private space and populism, populism and the university curriculum and juridical populism, all of which were found to be important for the current considerations on populism. Samaddar suggested CRG engage with how populism has been represented in the popular domain and thereby look at the integral relationship between the popular and populism, trajectories of Indian populism etc. A plan was made for CRG to contact interested contributors for articles for the proposed reader. Banerjee tentatively finalised a deadline of two months i.e. till mid-May to acquire 1000-word abstracts from interested contributors. Participants proposed the possibility of liaisons with law institutes and legal scholars who could contribute to the research theme on “Juridical Populism”. Oishik Sircar agreed to work towards contacting legal scholars and publications towards finding interested contributors for the theme of juridical populism. The possibilities of institutional collaborations between MCRG and TISS, Jamia Milia Islamia, JNU, Sarojini Naidu College for Women, PRIA, OP Jindal and Sanskrit University were discussed with participants of respective affiliations. Manish Jha, Monirul Islam, Amit Prakash and Ajay Gudavarthy, Madhurilata Basu, Sumona DasGupta, Oishik Sircar and Paula Banerjee tentatively agreed to act as liaisons between CRG and their respective institutions towards materialising different modes of intellectual collaborations such as conferences, workshops, public lectures, extension lectures etc. The limits of intellectual and logistical contributions from each of these institutions was also deliberated upon. Samaddar stated that it would be very impactful if keeping in mind the upcoming national elections, CRG could contact EPW to host a special issue on contemporary populist politics. Further, journals such as *Seminar* and the *Routledge Indian Law Review* were suggested by participants as possible platforms for publications on the Populism project.

Research Briefs

Research Briefs

Populism as a Crisis of the Liberal Script: Reflections on Politics and Policy in India

Amit Prakash

Liberalism has been seen as a framework for organising the political process while prioritising individual rights, liberty and equality of citizens. Alongside, liberalism may also be seen as a set of promissory notes emerging from a complexly negotiated social contract in each society, the attractiveness of which has been underlined by the widespread support that it has found the world over. However, liberalism has also been characterised by a set of broken promises under the conditions of contemporary finance capital; belying legitimate democratic concerns — about increased participation, better deliberation, or proportional equity for all sections. Populism speaks to such belied expectations and constructs the trope of a homogenous popular will – without any opposition, with promises to deliver on these belied promises. The impact of such populist political process is complex and far reaching – from institutional ossification, to the TINA of finance capitalism, and, rising socio-political expectations in the face of increasing inequality. Research on populism has been conducted within the broad contours of the discipline of Political Science with little focus in cognate disciplines. Consequently, understanding of the processes that undergird populist transformations are not fully understood, least in the case of India. For instance, how does the neoliberal turn create conditions for the rise and growth of populism or how do both together impact social structures. How does the interplay between information technology, finance capital and crisis of liberalism colonise the political space to create conditions for the emergence and growth of populism and its implications for the liberal project? The paper will examine some of these issues with the help of Indian material drawn from recent political patterns at the national level. To be able to examine the large phenomenon and to induce some coherence and finiteness, politics and policy debates on select areas will be the main focus.

Manish K. Jha

In the present paper, I am proposing to examine populism as political practice; the practice that invokes the idea of social justice through instrumentalities of caste. The ideal of the Indian constitution and demands of liberal democracy that shaped post-colonial Indian politics witnessed the evolution of populism in dynamic yet diverse forms. The subtleties could be observed, ascertained and assessed in different federal units in very many ways. The ideological underpinning of populism engages with its idioms and phrases, rhetoric, institutional formations, mobilizing techniques, impact etc. In this paper, however, I am looking at populism at play in the hindi heartland in general and in the state of Bihar in particular. Apart from what do we mean by populism and how do we construe the practice of politics in the realm of populism, the paper primarily engages with the idea of '*samajik nyaya*' (social justice) that dominated the tapestry of populism in the states under discussion. What has been the articulation and manifestation of social justice and where does caste enter in this practice of politics? Conceptually and strategically, it is non-elitist and attempts to bring together masses. Is it that in the process of caste arithmetic, the practice of inclusion and exclusion complicates the process? If one takes Ambedkarite idea of dealing with caste question and therefore responding to justice in classical terms, it would have meant annihilation of caste. But did the social justice articulation in the hindi heartland at any point in time attempted that. The answer is emphatic 'no'. Instead, it reconfigured the caste groupings for mobilization and electoral assertion and thereby turning caste social into caste political. Has this been a careful and conscious decision and informed by the pragmatism that populism seems to value. The language, tone, tenor, idiom, phrases and slogans used since the time of articulation for social justice in general and quota politics in particular by leading socialist leaders in late 1960s, the route that practice of populism took in the hindi heartland navigated through tumultuous phases. How are we to appreciate this practice of politics through the management of caste? How are we to comprehend the ideas, strategies and outcome of such populism? To grasp the inception and trajectory of the contours of populism in hindi heartland, it is prudent to restrict one's engagement within a specific timeframe. Yet, the present paper would take a risk to traverse from the past to the contemporary so as to understand the politics and shifts in a nuanced manner.

Populist initiatives in a competitive Democracy, Chhattisgarh: A Case Study

Rajat Roy

Chhattisgarh came into being in November 2000 when it was separated from Madhya Pradesh. The state is tenth largest in area, but its population is 25.5 million as per 2011 census, thus its population density is one of the lowest at 189 per sq.km. as against all India average of 382. With 44% of its land area under forest and vast mineral resources, Chhattisgarh is a resources-rich State. It ranks second in production of coal, ranks third in production of iron ore, and there are large deposits of other minerals like bauxite, limestone etc. It is a power surplus state. It has good industrial base with steel plant, power plants, aluminium plant, cement factories and various other mines. Though it is known as a rice basin, its agricultural activities are by and large restricted to cultivation of paddy, mostly mono crop. (An Evaluation of the Finances of the State of Chhattisgarh, 13th Finance Commission) Thus, despite having a sound economic base and favourable land to people ratio, 48.7 % population of Chhattisgarh were below poverty line as against national average of 27.5%. In other words, of the total population of 25.5 million there were 12.19 million poor people in the state (Chhattisgarh: Economic and Human Development Indicators, UNDP). Since the yield from farming was never enough to sustain them throughout the year, a significant number of farmers used to migrate to other areas as unskilled and semi skilled labours, and traditionally they became known as Bilaspuri coolies. In December, 2003 BJP won the election in Chhattisgarh and Raman Singh became the chief minister. Next year with the introduction of Chhattisgarh Public Distribution System (Control) Order, 2004, Raman Singh started radically reforming the PDS of the state. Before that, Fair Price Shops were mostly run by private owners and people were not getting even what was officially allocated for them. With that order Raman Singh cancelled license of all private run Fair Price Shops (FPS) and handed over the responsibility of running that to cooperative societies, gram panchayats, women's self help groups, primary credit cooperative societies and forest protection groups. He increased the number of FPS from 8492 to 10465. With the introduction of end to end computerisation the government could monitor the PDS system and bring in transparency. While effort was made to reach out to the consumers by setting up one FPS in every gram Panchayat, the village committees were encouraged to monitor the distribution to plug pilferage. In fact, all gram panchayats were engaged in keeping a strict vigil over the process of PDS. On the other hand the government started buying paddy

directly from the farmers and not encouraging the middlemen to run the show. Through the PDS the government had tried to give rice at the rate of Rs. 2 to 30 lakh BPL families and at the rate of Rs. 1 to another 7 lakh 'Antyoday' families. As a result of that, people of Chhattisgarh started fondly calling Raman Singh 'Chawar wala Baba' (One who gives rice). One could argue that this role of 'Annadata' coupled with other populist measures initiated by him helped Raman Singh rule the state for three consecutive terms. Raman Singh went ahead with his Reform of PDS programme not merely through bureaucratic fiats, but he actively mobilised people around it. By handing over the running of FPS to Panchayat and other local bodies and giving them responsibility of monitoring the supply and distribution of ration, he Made them stakeholders. Thus a parallel system was created to the bureaucrats on rein, which eventually made the delivery system smooth and functional. It is also true that Raman Singh's Food Security Programme preceded that of Centre's Food Security Bill. It should be mentioned here that the Raman Singh government did not stop at reforming the PDS only, but it also introduced some other populist programmes focussed on the poor. Yet, in 2019 state assembly election, Raman Singh and his party was swept out of power by Congress. Questions might be raised that the populist measures that kept him in power for 15 years might have lost their edge. But, the government run PDS system after the reform proved to be most efficient, transparent and people-friendly one, as acknowledged by Jean Dreze and others. So, we need to look for the answer elsewhere. After he returned to power for third consecutive term, Raman Singh tried to make his much lauded food security programme more attractive by adding nutritional values. The state government started giving grams and other nutrients to ration card holders free. Also, he announced a scheme under which around 55 lakh rural people would be given free mobile. But the Congress came out with a promise of complete waiver of debts for the farmers. It is too early to say that it was the main factor that saw Chaur Wala Baba cornered in the hustings and finally routed in the election. But if it is factored in the post mortem of recent Chhattisgarh election, then we are faced with another question: Is populist politics more likely to give rise to competitive bidding by the contending parties in a democracy? If so, then in a parliamentary democracy, especially, as it is unfolding in India, the prospect of the end of ideology based politics is likely to end and be replaced by the populist politics soon. Whether the parties of Left, Right and Centre are getting ready to give up their class, caste based politics and would try to address the issues dear to broad mass, especially poorer sections in the society, and reposition themselves accordingly, is to be seen. But if the present trend is any indication, then the

pressure on them to change their position is only growing. There is another problem that this paper would like to ponder over. What is the difference between a populist measure and a welfare initiative? How does one draw a line between these two? It cannot be denied that while welfare programmes have got moral approval of the society as a duty of the State towards its people, the populist programmes initiated by the state have always evoked some consternation among the urban elites. It seems that the very word Populism has a derogatory meaning. According to Oxford Dictionary the word Populism means ‘‘A Political approach that strives to appeal to ordinary people who feel that their concerns are disregarded by established elite groups’’. Does it mean that only those welfare schemes are tagged as ‘Populist’ that targeted to address the poor people’s concerns?

The Kanyashree and Rupashree Schemes: Gender and its Implications for Populist Politics

Ria De

This research will study the ways in which gender is configured by the Mamata Banerjee government in West Bengal vis a vis two governmental schemes, first the Kanyashree scheme that was introduced in 2013, and for which Mamata Banerjee won the UN Public Service Award in 2013, and the later Rupashree scheme which was rolled out last year. Both Kanyashree and Rupashree are conditional cash transfer schemes; in the first instance, the government promises an annual grant of Rs. 1000/- for girl children below the age of 18, and a consolidated amount of Rs 25,000/- to women above the age of 18. In either case, whether the girls are above or below the age of 18, the condition remains that they should be unmarried and that their family income should be below Rs 1.5 lakhs per annum. In the second instance, the Rupashree scheme promises a sum of Rs 25000/- for the marriage of women above the age of 18. While the Kanyashree scheme aims to enable the empowerment of women through education, Rupashree directly links women’s lives to the question of marriage. Taking the Kanyashree and the Rupashree as possible case studies to understand the ways in which the story of gender is being plotted within a populist project, I wish to study these in relation to the various other ‘‘women’s rights’’ governmental schemes in contemporary India, for instance, the ‘‘Beti Bachao Andolan’’, the various other schemes undertaken by the Ministry of Child and Women’s Development, such as the National Database of Sex Offenders, the linking of women’s medical histories to their Aadhar

accounts as a means to control female foeticide etc. Such a study would require me to look at what the scheme is claiming to achieve in terms of their impact on women's lives in specific and in terms of a social transformation in general. What for instance is the basis of these schemes; what is the relationship between the scheme and the social reality? What kinds of research goes in to the formulation of such monetary plan? What is the constitution of the committees? It would then be interesting to look at the bureaucratic-administrative processes. Given that the Kanyashree and Rupashree projects have very contradictory goals in terms of women's lives, one that posits education as a means to prevent child marriage, while the other claims to ease the poor man's burden of marrying his daughter, how do they relate to more historical, social problems related to women's lives and upbringing; such as the entanglement of marriage and family with women's subjectivities and the positing of education in opposition to that. How does one really address the problems raised by caste and patriarchy through such schemes or does it in fact negotiate with it?

Mamata Banerjee's Populist Politics: 'Crisis' of Democracy?

Sibaji Pratim Basu

The recent scuffle between the forces of central intelligence, the CBI and the State Police of West Bengal over the 'interrogation'/ 'arrest' of the Kolkata CP and the subsequent *dharna* to 'Save Constitution' at 'Metro Channel', Esplanade – the heart of Kolkata by the Chief Minister, Mamata Banerjee and then holding of cabinet meetings in a makeshift office room beside the platform of *dharna* have startled, if not shocked a large number of people throughout the country. Mamata's *style* of politics and administration once again consumed the prime times of national/regional news channels, hit the headlines of all the dailies and was in most circulation in all forms of social media – Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter. In this nationwide discourse – apart from allegations and counter-allegations over the 'hyperactive' CBI and the 'resisting' WB Police (which detained the CBI officers and even temporarily besieged the latter's office buildings) – a deep concern for the 'crisis of democratic institutions' was also expressed. The 'purists' decried the holding of cabinet meetings and official programmes on street as the instances of supreme disrespect to the long cherished democratic norms and practices. In a recent editorial, *Ananada Bazar Patrika*,

while giving a lefthanded compliment to Mamata's tit-for-tat politics over Modi's highhandedness has also treated it as 'defeat of democracy'. In recent history, we find a parallel of Mamata's *dharna* in the sit-on-dharna at Raj Niwas, Delhi Lt. Governor's residence by the *enfant terrible* Aravind Kejriwal in June 2018 along with some of his colleagues of the AAP government. One can also find somewhat similarity between the Janata Darbars of Kejriwal since 2014 and Mamata's holding of public Secretariat meetings in districts of the state since her coming to office in 2011. But the latter has now become a regular affair, which has generated tremendous enthusiasm and expectations in common masses (especially in faraway districts from Kolkata) but at the same time which has disturbed the formalistic mindset of top bureaucrats who generally like to rule Bengal from Kolkata. Many critics even saw a 'drama for cheap popularity' at the cost of harassment of bureaucrats and thereby lowering down the values of an essential institution of the modern state, the bureaucracy. Indeed, the populist politics in South Asia in general and the last 7 years' rule of Mamata in West Bengal (with popular programmes like 'Kanyashree' for girl students, 'Sabujisathi – cycles for students of backward classes, rice at Rs. 2/kg through PDS schemes for peasants, folk artists, artisans, fisher folk; donations to youth clubs etc) has pushed further the sacred boundaries of conventional liberal democracy in such a way that it demands the insights and labour of social scientists to grasp adequately the meanings and connotations of such politics, which cannot be even fully comprehended by the spectacles of Ernesto Laclau alone. Such 'new' politics also raises a host of questions. What are the limits of such politics? Does its failure ensure the return of the 'traditional' politics? Even if that happens, can the champions of 'traditional' politics abandon the contents of populist politics in entirety?

Political Parties and Populist Policies in Contemporary India: Some Reflections on the Aam Aadmi Party

Sumona DasGupta

There appears to be little definitional clarity around the term populism. Though the use of this term has proliferated in the last decade, in common parlance there appears to be a pejorative connotation associated with it and mixed views about how populism is connected with democracy and democratic institutions. In this paper we move away from a value laden understanding of populism as an ideology and stay with an understanding that resonates the

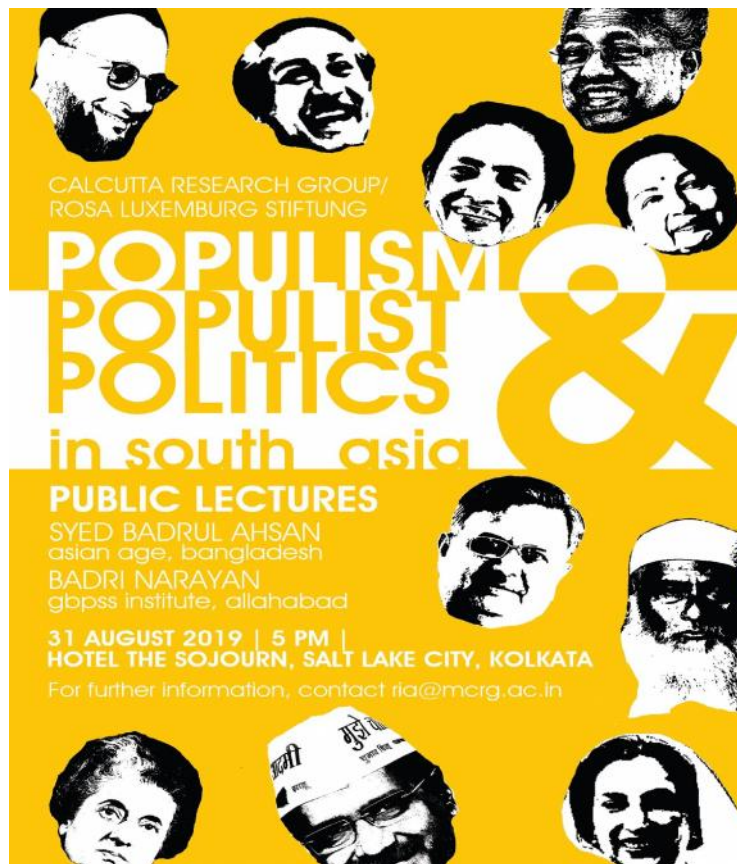
most easily with an Indian context - namely any policy that is redistributive in nature and as such favours the common person particularly those in subordinate positions over the elite typically represented by large business and financial interests. The contrast between the people and elite in terms of strategies, movements, policies, organization is perhaps the only way the term populism can retain its analytical usefulness without getting bogged down in polemical discussions as to whether populist movements/policies represent the ideological right or the left, whether it is authoritarian or democratic in its origin, whether it represents a movement or simply a discursive style. This presentation will examine selected populist policies launched in contemporary India by a party that grew out of a popular movement against corruption namely the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) which by its very name creates an implicit contrast between the ‘people’ and the elite. By focusing on some of its key populist policies we seek to gain a deeper understanding of how a movement “for the people” transitioned into a political party which then had to make policies that were seen to be pro “aam aadmi” and what this populism implies in terms of democratic decision making and longer term impacts on the economic and political front.

Public Lectures I-IV

&

Friday Lectures

Public Lecture I & II



Poster: Lecture Programme I & II



Lecture I & II, Badri Narayan Tiwari, Sayed Badrul Ahsan, Ranabir Samaddar, Prasanta Ray and Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhury

Public Lectures I & II

Programme

August 31, 2019

Venue: Hotel The Sojourn

Address: Plot No. KB 23, Sector III, Salt Lake City, Kolkata, West Bengal

5: 5:30 PM: Tea & Registration

Chair: Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhury, RBU & CRG

5:30-5:35 PM: Welcome Address: Prasanta Ray, CRG

5:35-5:50 PM: Introducing CRG & the Project: Ranabir Samaddar, CRG

5.50-6:20 PM: Public Lecture I: Syed Badrul Ahsan, Asian Age, Bangladesh

6:20-6:50 PM: Public Lecture II: Badri Narayan, GB Pant Social Science Institute, Allahabad

6:50-7:15 PM: Discussion

7:15-7:25 PM: Chairman's Remarks

7:25-7:35 PM: Certification Ceremony for Library Volunteers

7:35-7:40 PM: Vote of Thanks by Rajat Roy, CRG

Introduction

The panel of 5 scholars was introduced by Shatabdi from Calcutta Research Group. Basu Ray Chaudhary reiterated the welcome to the lectures on behalf of CRG and facilitated the panel then on. The welcome address was given by Prasanta Ray, CRG who welcomed the room to both the public lectures and CRG, and wished everyone a great stay in Kolkata for the weekend.

Following Ray, Ranabir Samaddar introduced CRG and the research project on populism, that shaped the conference. Samaddar said, “CRG is 23 years old since it was founded. It was founded as a forum of public intellectuals, scholars, and activists of peace—issues connected with justice; more importantly, issues of migration and forced migration, development and democracy, gender and peace studies; starting from 2011-12, issues of labor activism and history. While CRG is a membership-based body, there are several institutions with which CRG collaborates on various research themes. Some of them include: orientation of postcolonial democracy; studies of autonomy and justice in form and liberal democracies; interface of development and democratic citizenship and how migration features in it; popular movements in Bengal and Bihar from the 1960s and 1970s. A recent book was published titled *Popular Movements and Rebellion of the Naxalite Movements?*.” About the theme of the present workshop, Prof. Samaddar said, “Populism has been used for everybody. Everybody seems to be a populist. For example, both Trump and Corbyn have been declared populist; both street protests in Paris and the Hungarian dictator are populists. The question then remains—who are the people in populist? There are instances when we want to say popular, and we say populist, and vice-versa. The term has been with us for 150 years, however now we have to ask who is NOT a populist.” He suggested that there is “either something wrong with the definition [populism] or something wrong with the idea of populism as prescribed to people.”

On the research design in CRG on populism, Prof. Samaddar said, “In history, Indira Gandhi, Fazlul Haque, Sheikh Mujib emerge as classic instances for research on populism. Although pure theory has not attracted CRG in a big way, constraints of funding forced us to focus on a one-day conference.” He had two introductory points around the theme of research covered at the conference that was to follow the public lectures.

First, “Researchers were not dictated in any certain way—papers on Kanyashree, Amma canteens and Chhattisgarh welfare program were not planned, but they all led to study of recent across the board welfare programs of state governments. Rather than asking, why is it that the researcher is forced to ask about the state—going beyond Laclau and others—we could ask why populism becomes so crucial in governance as a modern day pre-requisition of democracy. Laclau speaks of populist reason, however, you do not find any substantial idea about how does populism articulates itself as a way of managing society.”

On other social theorists on populism, Prof. Samaddar said, “Marx in his engagement with populism in Russia had an ambivalent attitude. He was sure populism can avoid the evolutionary history of capitalism. He said it is perfectly possible that the populist way of politics was something that the history of capitalism does not show.” He spoke about Lenin’s agrarian populism in Russia and Jackson’s agrarian populism in the US.

He added that populism has developed as an innovative governmental practice over the past centuries, and hoped that the conference can contribute in new discoveries of political thought.

His final point was on the notion of the people in populism. “Who are the “people” in populism? Ranajit Guha says that “people” signifies the popular, and not populist. Although subaltern scholars have given us a lot of work on populism in 20th century, there is a paradoxical set of ideas on populism. While theorists have attempted to understand populist responses from the lower classes, they have, at the same time, tried to avoid class-based analysis in discourses on populism.

Following Ranabir Samaddar’s introduction, the two speakers for the public lecture were introduced. Syed Ahsan Badrul, the first of two public lecturers, is a current editor of Asian Age. He was the Press Minister at the Bangladesh High Commission in London. He has written a biography of Sheikh Mujib in 2013, and has recently worked on Taijuddin Ahmed. He frequently contributes to different papers in South Asia, and was off late a fellow at JNU, Delhi.

Public Lectures I & II

Maulana Bhashani and his Populist Politics

Syed Badrul Ahsan



Mr. Ahsan began with an anecdote of how partition, and ensuing bureaucracies of postcolonial states of India and Bangladesh have shaped belonging and identity through a regime of passports and other documents of affiliation. He said, that while there is public interest in history in present-day Bangladesh, history is also causality in the public discourse. His lecture focused on the history of populism in Pakistan, Bangladesh and India, and in particular consisted of insightful examples of negative populism. The first example was that of statements by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto after the 1965 Tashkent declaration. Mr. Ahsan argued that such negative populism remained till Bhutto's resignation in 1966. Another example was the Lahore resolution of 1940 where the two nation theory was popularized. Using the political history of East Pakistan and later Bangladesh during the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, the lecture showed the complexities of Bangladeshi popular politics. Mr. Ahsan argued that Maulana Bhashani's political career, one that spanned three decades during the formation of the state of Bangladesh, was particularly "noted for many flip-flops." However, the Maulana throughout his eclectic political campaigns remained the populist figure of Bangla politics.

In the early 1950s, during the formation of the Awami Muslim League party in East Pakistan, Maulana was its first President. In 1957, "he adopted a leftist turn" and critiqued the party on its affiliation of Western capitalism. Mr. Ahsan argued that "Up to that point Bhashani's populism was very positive." Later during the 1960s, Mujib was in jail for the Agartala Conspiracy Case. When Bhashani proclaimed he would lead a million people in protest against Mujib's arrest, the latter was released the next day by the state. The Maulana even "withdrew [his party] from the elections of" December 7, 1970 to help Sheikh Mujib-Ur Rahman's Awami League obtain an absolute majority. Three days before the elections, "on December 4, he declared East Pakistan a free country." However, soon after the formation of

the new state, the Maulana critiqued Mujib on his Indian and Western-oriented foreign policy and argued that “Bangladesh should be independent of Delhi’s suzerainty.”

Mr. Ahsan said, “Bhashani was mercurial, but he lived in a hut in a village, was in touch with the [ordinary] people. When Mujib wanted a one-party state, Bhashani was critical. But two months later, he told Mujib that what he was doing was great.” From these examples that spanned the of life of both Maulana Bhashani and the state of Bangladesh, Mr. Ahsan argued that “Populism became radicalized at times,” and it becomes important to analyze the ends of negative and positive populism. “How does one reconcile Netaji’s siding with Germany and Japan with his Indian nationalism?” Similarly, in populist politics of the Awami League, “other political leaders of the Mujib Nagar government—[the government of Bangladesh in exile during the 1960s—are being ignored.” Mr. Ahsan concluded his lecture by intersecting his discussions of populism with the changing notion of secularism, religion and Bengali identities in contemporary Bangladesh.

Problems of Cultural Populism

Badri Narayan Tiwari



Badri Narayan Tiwari, the second speaker, is a professor of anthropology at the GB Pant Social Science Institute, Allahabad. He is a cultural anthropologist and social historian, and has undertaken various ethnographic projects focusing on marginalized politics, social anthropology. He was previously at the University of Leiden, and an HGIS fellow of the Royal Tropical Institute, Amsterdam. He has written on multiple books and chapters on Dalit history and mobilization as well as on saffron politics.

Narayan began with the assertion that “Every politician is populist. Without being a populist, they cannot survive.

Populism is a manipulative political selection from what is popular.” He argued that “populism creates hope and produces desire in the people. Through that populism, politics can sustain and work.” The idea in populism is to create “new janta is a purpose of populism, a new subject to rule. In cultural populism, you need to connect with the people and create trust, [for which] you need a memory base to society. Those who are doing religion-based

populism in India, have a language that reaches the language of the people.” He was reminded of an anecdote where a Congress leader mentioned that while the Congress has a history of over 150 years, the history that the RSS draws from spans 5000 years. “They can use the metaphors, symbols and words that help in creating cultural populism.” However, Narayan argued that cultural populism cannot work alone as a political strategy. While “the RSS [presents] cultural populism, the BJP propounds economic and social welfare programs targeted, on paper, at the poorest. Cultural and economic populism therefore are interdependent.”

In the rest of his lecture, Narayan attempted to establish the idea of cultural populism and its interdependency with economic populism using examples from ethnographic fieldwork.

First, he analyzed the discourses of lectures in Baudhiki, UP, by RSS *pracharaks*. “They all talk in the same language and same form. [We have to] explore where the form is coming out of. They are from the story traditions of India.” It is similar to narrating “*satyanarayan katha* and the *Bhagwata Puran*.” He defined the *katha* as an essential part of village life in India. He briefly eluded to how right-wing activists have been using the *katha* style as a political communication strategy since the days of Madan Mohan Malviya and Golwalkar of the RSS.

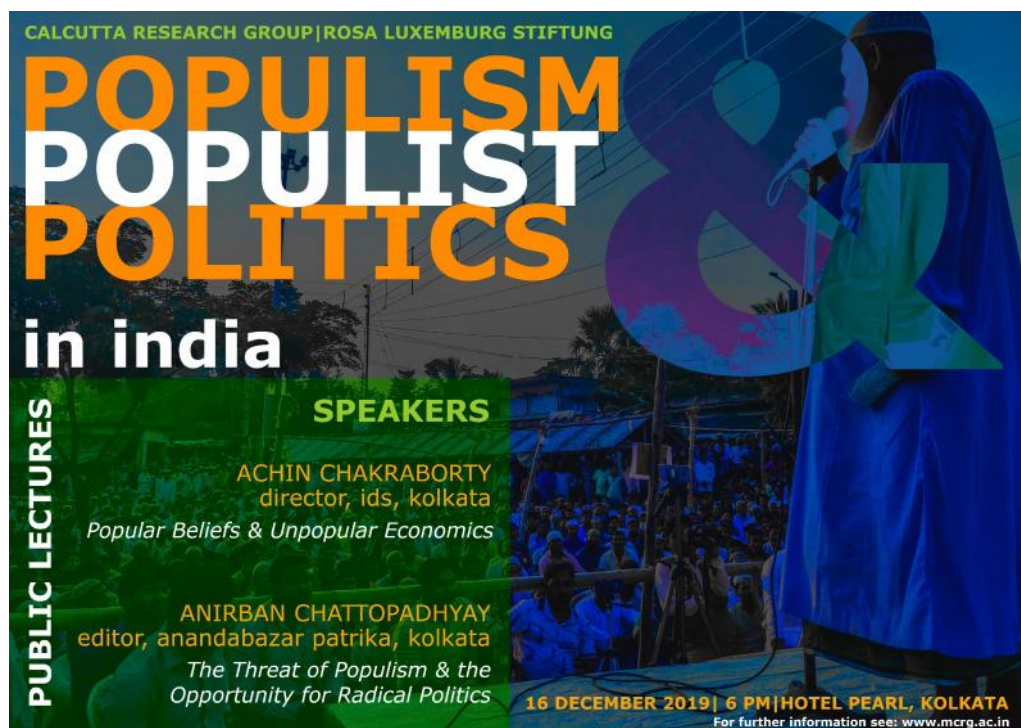
The second example came from his fieldwork in Bundelkhand, UP, where his research was among tribal communities. “Some of them have migrated from tribal forests to villages. When they migrated to the village, they brought their Deity with them. They want now a temple of their deity.” It was RSS that collected data that they wanted to make a temple and ensured its creation”—which according to Narayan resulted in the creation of a loyal base of voters. This is a political strategy for “creating identity through religious symbols.”

Narayan connected his examples to argue that these political strategies can be termed politics through appropriation. From other examples, he showed how the RSS is accommodating Dalit icons and marginalized heroes in their narratives, and “through that RSS is waging a cultural hegemony.”

He analyzed the methods of populism as he concluded from his fieldwork. “There are two ways of political mobilization. One protest, resistance and dissent. The other is by appropriation—using the language of inclusion. The frame is decided by them, the RSS, and you will be included in their frame. They are creating appropriation. RSS is working on Buddha Jayanti, celebrating BR Ambedkar. This appropriation as a method politics is killing resistance. They are creating a condition where resistance dies, it is submerged in Hindutva politics.” He argued that “all icons that become sources of inspiration for the opposition”, are systematically appropriated by the RSS. “Appropriation is the only way that populism works.

Following the public lectures, Prof. Sabyasachi summarized the two lectures. “The first speaker spoke on populist politics witnessed in Bangladesh, Pakistan and India. Stories were reflective of negative and positive sides of populism. Narayan’s lectures—stories and anecdotes—indicate how the BJP/RSS are able to appropriate culture, and why the other political parties are losing in the process.” He pondered about the future of democracies in a populist world. “while democracies are thought to die at coups, revolutions and guns, now democracies are strangled in the name of the people.” He also urged researchers present at the audience to work on whether “financial crises create a notion that they are being governed by an aloof economic elite.” Referring to an Italian experimental study that showed children who were subjected to social media and entertainment had “poorer cognitive skills,” he commented that “every hour in front of TV or something else, we are not reading, exploring or doing something else. Perhaps our addiction to mindless pleasure and desire will be our doom.”

PUBLIC LECTURES III & IV



Pic 1: Poster of the Public Lecture Programme

Pic 2: Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhury, Anirban Chattopadhyay and Achin Chakraborty in the Public lecture programme.

Public Lecture Programme III & IV

December 16, 2019

Venue: Hotel Pearl

Address: 35 Z, Radha Madhav Dutta Garden Lane, Opp Salt Lake Stadium, VIP gate on EM
Bypass Road, Kolkata, West Bengal 700010

5:30-6:00 PM: Tea & Registration

Chair: Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhury, RBU & CRG

6:00-6:15 PM: Overview of Project on *Populism & Populist Politics in South Asia & India*
by Rajat Ray

6:15-6:55 PM: Public Lecture III: Achin Chakraborty, Director, Institute of Development
Studies, Kolkata

6:55-7:35 PM: Public Lecture IV: Anirban Chattopadhyay, Editor, *Anandabazar Patrika*,
Kolkata

7:35-8:00 PM: Discussion

8:00-8:10 PM: Chairperson's Remarks

8:10-8:15 PM: Vote of Thanks by Ria De, CRG

Two public lectures on *Populism and Populist Politics in India*, organized by CRG was held on December 16, 2019. The programme was chaired by Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhary. Rajat Roy gave an overview of the project, *Populism and Populist Politics in South Asia & India*. He explained how the project on populism had begun with many questions, towards an attempt to understand and conceptualize populism. He underlined the need to differentiate between the populist discourses in the west from the experiences of post-colonial countries.

Popular Beliefs and Unpopular Economic

Achin Chakraborty

Achin Chakraborty, in his presentation attempted to understand the divergences that exist between economic analysis and people's beliefs. He argued that this divergence becomes more visible at present though it existed earlier and the cross country surveys done in recent times prove the same. There is a deeper disconnect between the expert knowledge of the economists and the interests and popular beliefs of the people. For example, if we look at the issue of immigration, the scientific studies show that it does not affect the job prospects of the host country, but most of the people in those countries have a different belief. The policy of immigration receives greater visibility during elections in the west. Folk economic belief is a subject of study only now. Chakraborty says that it would be important to speculate upon the reasons that cause the divergences between folk economic belief and economic wisdom as it would be difficult to pin down the exact reasons.

Collectively held beliefs and opinions of people are formed not by validation to any empirical studies. But differently, Chakraborty argues that in the case of economic studies these beliefs and opinions have two types of consequences. People choose according to their beliefs and form their expectations in regard to this and secondly, they act according to these beliefs. This kind of unintended consequences may affect the dynamics of the economics itself. This could be considered as one kind of connection that had discussed before and another could be the fact that people mostly in democracies vote according to these formed beliefs and that become their opinions.

Now the economists themselves understand the gap that exists between good economics and politics. Chakraborty raised the question that whether the economists are supposed to work until that gap is converged. This has been the view expressed by Banerjee and Duflo in their recently published book *Good Economics for Hard Times*. He surmised that probably these

economists believe that their views are right and a beneficial outcome of scientific studies could be attained in the long run. This may make them move away from the policy realm that further extends the gap between both. People are mostly interested in immediate issues. He argues that economics expertise confines themselves into long term issues in contradiction to people's interests.

Chakraborty further discussed the development of the collective cognitive model. If we look at the tacit knowledge of Michael Polyani, such a model entails knowledge that cannot be codified but has an epistemology. This kind of knowledge has a social aspect to it different from the codified knowledge that is produced in an institution. Thus tacit knowledge has a much wider scope. Probably one could think about shifting between beliefs and tacit knowledge. Nevertheless, it would be difficult to demarcate the borderline between both. It is also significant that the institutional production of economic knowledge, on the other hand, has become more and more disconnected from people's interests and choices.

In conclusion, he tried to bring in the psychological aspects, the process of formation of the other and the aspects of the zero-sum game that becomes part of the collective cognitive model. It is difficult to explain populist politics in the realm of economic policies through a single approach. The beliefs of the people are dynamic and vary according to the context. An exploration of behavioural economics is indeed important.

The Threat of Populism and the Opportunity of Radical Politics

Anirban Chattopadhyay

The second lecture of the evening was delivered by Anirban Chattopadhyay, editor of the vernacular newspaper, Anandabazar Patrika. The esteemed speaker, as introduced by Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhary, is an economist by training and has authored numerous articles and journals.

At the onset of the lecture, Chattopadhyay clarified that his lecture would be more of a discourse which would help dispel some of his confusions about the thematic premise of the lecture. His confusion, as he suggested, stemmed from the inadequacy of literature on populism, which he deems to be a stretched concept. The goal of the lecture was to try and understand, whether the available literature on populism gives any useful insight into the current state of politics in India, in the context of majoritarian aggression and to devise an effective counter-strategy to deal with such divisive politics.

The speaker opined that from a perusal of populism literature, three fundamental elements of populism prevalent in the United States and the European Union can be traced: the “people”, the “elite” and the “others.” This kind of populism, describable as an ideology pits a virtuous and homogenous “people” against a set of “elites” and “dangerous others.” The latter are depicted to be attempting to deprive the people of their sovereign rights, values, and voice. The lecturer presented a short summary of this: virtuous people, bad elite and dangerous others.

The concept of the “elite” versus the “people” is inherently an amalgamation of western philosophy with the concept of representative democracy. It is sometimes confused with fascist authoritarian rule. Chattopadhyay was of the opinion that the idea and working of populism are both embedded in the structure of representative democracy, more realistically, it is in its permanent shadow and it also feeds on the broken promises of representative democracy. He went on to explain the mechanism of the same: the neoliberal takeover of global economy and politics in the last 35 years portrays that populist politics has hugely increased inequalities and deprivation; it has wreaked havoc on social justice and social security and undermined the agency of governments, since most governmental policies have come to be governed by capitalist interests. This has paved the way for broken promises by the governments of the world. These broken promises imply that the people are not ruling, as it should be in democracies, which creates a vacuum and facilitates the entry of populists. The populist motto is, “we are the people; we represent them and we take over the façade of representative democracy to rule over them.” In simple terms, populists’ function on the ideology of liberating the people from their democratic capture and then ruling over the people, as their agents. The speaker feels that this situation is an example of homogenous people versus the elite, who had captured the institutions of representative democracy.

The knowledgeable lecture pointed out that in India, it is clear that there are huge dissimilarities with this structure as described above, which may be attributed to widespread inequalities, a neoliberal onslaught, and the agency of the people. Behind the façade of representative democracy, the actual ability of people to elect their rulers is getting less day by day. Chattopadhyay was of the opinion that it is incorrect to say that representative democracy has failed completely, and that the populists have taken over the elites. Instead, the reality of the situation is that the people who have taken over are a part of the political elite. India’s Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, tries to portray himself as the toiling commoner, sometimes in the avatar of a chaiwallah, sometimes in the garb of a chowkidar, but this creates a farcical rhetoric, albeit a successful one. In the enlightened views of the

speaker, the present BJP government looks at the opposition, the dynastic Congress party, as the corrupt elite, however, ironically, they themselves are a part of the entrenched elite.

In the next segment of the discourse, Chattopadhyay shifted focus on the “others.” He expressed that the “people” versus the “others” debate is important to understand, more so because it is crucial to find a counter-strategy against this distinction in the context of India’s current majoritarian rule, a rule where the rulers try to typify the “others” as vicious, dangerous and “anti-national” and try to prove that their actions are against the interest of the people. The speaker tried to shed light on who these “people” actually are, a concept which is beyond the narrow and homogenous definition given by the present rulers. He suggested that this tendency of the ruler’s stems from a typically populist idea of claiming moralistic monopoly over the “people.” Chattopadhyay expressed his concern that a section of society that has been bearing the brunt of the tyranny of these rulers, is the section that expresses dissent or does anything that is against their ideologies. A relevant example would be that of Non-Governmental Organizations or NGOs that oppose the government, whose problems and conflicts stem from the backlash that they face because of their anti-government stance. The learned lecturer believes that the rulers cannot tolerate NGOs since they question the morality of the government, which is a bane to the government’s attempts to maintain a moral monopoly over the people. The speaker directed the attention of the audience to events such as the ones in campuses like Jawaharlal Nehru University, where the real issue was that the moral authority of the rulers was challenged, which is calamitous for them since the very foundation of the ruler’s rule is based on their moralistic claim that they are naturally homogenous rulers of the people. Chattopadhyay further gave the example of Donald Trump, who had, in his electoral campaign, voiced the populist philosophy of giving primacy to the people and dismissing the “rest” as insignificant. The speaker stressed on the fact that the people versus the others construction is crucial to understand the nature of populism, society is facing at present.

Chattopadhyay then moved on to the final section of his address: a discussion on counter-strategies. According to him, the first strategy is to deny that there is one homogenous people. Left liberalism has revolved around this idea, since India is plural and diverse, which is the country’s strength. He opined that Indians should convey how diverse they actually are., as an attempt to decry what the rulers want to disseminate. However, this strategy alone is not enough to counter the right populist onslaught, especially since the talk of diversity, as evinced in the last Lok Sabha elections, is being used by the right populists as a sign of weakness. The lecturer mentioned the works of several intellectuals such as Chantal Mouffe’s

“Left Populism”, and the Ruth Benedict lectures given by Partho Chatterjee in Columbia University, entitled “I, the people.” Chantal’s idea is to construct an alternative and radical definition of “people”, constructing a “people” out of the different kinds of social movements taking place and finding the chain of equivalences among these movements. From the commonalities amongst these movements, one can think of building a radical idea of “people” and radicalising democracy. The speaker apprised the audience that though Partha Chatterjee accepts that society is in a populist moment, he questions the idea of radicalising democracy on the basis of social movements. The speaker coincided his view with that of Partha Chatterjee, which states that one has to transcend populism to fight populism. He explained the meaning of the same by explaining that one has to think of the radical political subject to create a counter-strategy against rightist populism.

In a concluding note, the speaker shed some light on the recent events plaguing the country. He opined that one must think of alternative constructions of not just one, but of many types of “people”, on the basis of different social movements around us. He felt that the multitude of struggles happening in a political context compels people to shut their eyes on many such struggles and focus on the biggest struggles of the lot. He elaborated that such struggles relate to livelihood, education, health, forest rights, and many more issues, which we invariably allow to get side-tracked by the most catastrophic of the lot. The speaker ended his lecture by impressing on the audience the need to reflect on and think about all the struggles that people are facing in the present socio-political landscape and examine their potential to challenge the oligarchy, which is one way in which we, as a whole, may make it out safely from this onslaught.

Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhary summed up the lectures delivered by the distinguished speakers. He pointed out that Achin Chakraborty had highlighted the disconnect between popular beliefs and the expert knowledge of social scientists, economists in particular, and explained how these beliefs lead to populism. He also reiterated Anirban Chattopadhyay’s reference to the monopolisation of the moralistic state of the people by the government, particularly in the Indian context. He posed a pertinent suggestion to the audience about the means of finding a counter-strategy by means of the construction of an alternative “peoples,” drawing attention to the plural words, and radical political subjects. He reflected that the issue that remains unanswered, with scope of further study, is how contemporary trends of populism impact representative democracy. In the post-truth era, these contemporary trends

include both electronic and print media, and more importantly, social media – all of which spread rumours, make beliefs and perceptions and help the ascent of populism.

The next segment of the event was a question and answer session, where some analytical and highly topical questions were asked by the audience. Ranabir Samaddar, quoted the Roman statesman and philosopher Cicero and his views on the sharing of wealth. With this background, he asked Achin Chakraborty the extent to which experience factors into economics as a science, on the clarificatory presumption that economics is a science and not philosophy, since experience is not considered to be an essential element of science. He also asked for the speaker's opinion on whether he considered economics to be pure science or a concept that he termed as "policy science." A member of the audience asked the pertinent question of where the disconnect between popular beliefs and good economics actually exists. Moreover, another attendee suggested that the disconnect between these two concepts is embedded in the very language of economics. He asked that in the event of connecting the presentations of the two speakers of the night, how would economists connect themselves with radical democracy. Achin Chakraborty, in his answer, drew attention to the fact that at present, scientists are not happy since they are tormented by the constant question of whether their research is being utilised to help people. The speaker confided that he feels that in order to validate their existence and work, economists and all other social scientists impose it upon themselves to make their work socially relevant. As far as the significance of experience in economics – a science, goes the speaker stated that on the basis of recent trends in economics, people discard the instrumental rationality of giving any importance to experience in economics. As a shift from how it was understood earlier, economics has now transcended into a realm where research translates into policy suggestions.

Samir Kumar Das posed the next set of questions for both the speakers. He stated that contrary to Achin Chakraborty terming it as "good economics versus bad politics," he would term it as "bad economics versus bad politics," since had the concepts in question been veritably good, they would have taken into account folk economic beliefs, common beliefs, tacit knowledge, and other issues. Instead, he attracted the attention of the audience to a creature christened "political economy," which takes into account many of these issues. Political economy registers the failure of economists to take these issues into account. He also spoke about the speaker's attempt to explain popular beliefs by way of clutching on to cognitive science. Samir Kumar Das also addressed Anirban Chattopadhyay's speech and stated that one problem that makes us believe that there is no counter-strategy to the picture painted by the speaker is that populism wipes out the alternatives because it establishes

monopoly over the moral world of people: a possible result of the post-modern intervention. Anirban Chattopadhyay answered the question by reminding the audience that the postmodern movement was extremely important in this context, since at that time, we lost a lot when the old world crumbled, but also gained a lot, such as new ways of looking at justice. He said that while connecting movements as a counter-strategy, we have to connect moral worlds. As an example, he spoke about economic developments benefitting tribal people. The proponents of such development belong to a starkly different moral world than the tribes they seek to benefit. The way to connect these moral worlds is by creating a dialogue or multilogue between these two worlds and alternative moralities.

In another question, a member of the audience asked whether between the two classes of economists, namely, the pro-capitalists and welfare economists, the latter group is trying to satisfy the needs of populists. To this, Achin Chakraborty suggested that economic policies of populists vary from country to country, so, an economic policy such as a poverty alleviation programme would be considered a populist strategy in India, but not so in Europe, where poverty is measured in relative and not absolute terms. The answer remains variable and contextual. Another member of the audience asked Anirban Chattopadhyay if the alternative politics he advised the audience to create could be done without usurping power. To this, Anirban Chattopadhyay pointed out that the kind of politics that is seen in the practical world, any political struggle may be based on the idea of capturing power. He said that it was important to note that though the recent past has been bad for radical political movements in India, there have been important local or regional movements which have had an impact on state and central elections: a manifestation of which is power politics. He ended the session by sagely stressing on the fact that there is a huge possibility that movements such as these may have the impact of capturing power.

Friday Lectures

1. "On Left-Wing Populism"

Ranabir Samaddar, Distinguished Chair, Migration and Forced Migration Studies, Calcutta Research Group

Date: 7 June 2019

Venue: Calcutta Research Group

Report: In a large number of countries from global north to global south, including South Asia, populist politics is fast gaining ground. South Asia and India has been the crucible of several types of populism over time. In this context Professor Ranabir Samaddar's lecture included a review of Chantal Mouffe's book 'For a Left Populism' as well as his observations ranging from Machiavelli's *The Prince* to more contemporary thinkers regarding the future of populism. Different possibilities of populist politics in South Asia and India were discussed in the lecture and their potential to pose a challenge to neo-liberalism probed. The lecture is part of CRG's ongoing research project on Populism and Populist Politics in South Asia.

2. **"Re-articulating 'Agrarian Populism' in Postcolonial India: Considerations around D.N. Dhanagare's *Populism and Power: Farmers' Movement in Western India, 1980-2014 and Beyond*"**

Atig Ghosh, Assistant Professor at the Department of History, Vidya-Bhavana, Visva-Bharati University, Santiniketan

Date: 18 July 2019

Venue: Calcutta Research Group

Report: To take the example of D.N. Dhanagare's study of the farmers' movement in western India, especially Maharashtra, from the 1980s to 2014 (*Populism and Power: Farmers' Movement in Western India: 1980-2014*), we find ourselves on the trail of rich archival sources and informed field studies where the umbrella category of 'agrarian populism' is woven warp and weft into the fabric of 'political populism'. Situating his study in the aporia between populism as an ideology, on the one hand, and as political power within the democratic state structure, on the other, Dhanagare, in fact, explores the complex crosshatching between populist ideology and mass participation. How well did it fare at the hustings? Sometimes it fared well; sometimes not. Against this backdrop of mixed electoral fortunes, the 'popular' emerges as the demotic idiom that undergirds the book's chief problematic; *demos*, in my reading then, comes to constitute the 'popular' interstice between Dhanagare's meta-binary: ideology and political power.

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POPULISM & POPULIST POLITICS in south asia

CONFERENCE

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Populism, Popular Culture & the Production of the Public
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Parties, Leaders & the Democratic Question

Land, Caste & Identities

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Samir K Das, Manish K Jha, Harendar Singh and Nasreen Chowdhory



Manish K Jha, Moulashree Vyas, Amit Prakash and other participants



Participants and other audience hearing the conference



Participants and other audience hearing the conference

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

International Conference

Populism & Populist Politics in India

September 1, 2019

Venue: Hotel The Sojourn

PROGRAMME

Organised by Calcutta Research Group | Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung

September 1 2019

9:00-9:30 AM: Registration

9:30-10:00 AM: Introductory Session

Chair: Subhas Ranjan Chakraborty

Round of Self-Introduction

Introducing the Conference and the Modalities: Rajat Roy, CRG

10:00-10:30 AM: Tea

10:30 to 12 PM: **Populism, Popular Culture and the Production of the Public (A)**

Chair: Paula Banerjee, SCU & CRG

Speakers

Gopa Sabharwal, LSR: *The Newspaper as Political Actor—The Dawn, New Delhi, 1947*

Sounita Mukherjee, CSSSC: *Populist Politics, New Urban Spectacles and the Idea of the Popular in Contemporary Kolkata*

Discussant: Iman Mitra, SNU & CRG

10:30-12 PM: **Populism, Popular Culture and the Production of the Public (B)**

Chair: Rajesh Kharat, JNU & CRG

Speakers

Muhammed Puthusseri, BITS Pilani: *Cinema and the (Re)construction of the Left Popular in Kerala*

Muhsina K.K., UoH: *Religion, Community and Minor Subject Positions: Understanding Contemporary Populist Movements in Kerala*

Discussant: Samata Biswas, SCU & CRG

12:00-12:30 PM: Tea

12:30 PM-2:00 PM: **Land, Caste & Identities (A)**

Chair: Byasdeb Dasgupta, KU & CRG

Speakers

Manish K. Jha, TISS & CRG: *Populism as Political Practice: Interrogating Caste and Social Justice in Hindi Heartland*

Harender Singh, TISS: *Populist Land Policy and Decoding Marginalisation: Study of Land Rights Movement of Dalits in Punjab and Change in Identity and Representation*

Discussant: Nasreen Chowdhory, DU & CRG

12:30 PM to 2:00 PM: **Land, Caste & Identities (B)**

Chair: Kalpana Kannabiran, CSD & CRG

Speakers

Indrani Talukdar, JNU: *In the Name of the "People": Cultivating Identity and the Peasant in Assam*

Kapil Tamang, UoH: *Right-Wing Intervention in Gorkha Identity Politics*

Rashad Ullah Khan, TISS: *Shrinking Spaces: Impact of Hindutva Populism on the Vulnerable*

Discussant: Sudeep Basu, CUG & CRG

2:00-3:00 PM: Lunch

3:00-4:30 PM: **Parties, Leaders & the Democratic Question (A)**

Chair: Bharat Bhushan, Catch News & CRG

Speakers

Sumona DasGupta, Independent Researcher & CRG: *Political Parties and Populist Policies in Contemporary India: Some Reflections on AAP*

Shefali Jha, UoH: *'An Other People': Muslims and Populist Politics in the Deccan*

Lipin Ram, The Graduate Institute, Geneva: *Democracy's Unfulfilled Promise? 'The Participatory Tradition' within Kerala's Communist Politics*

Discussant: Anjuman Ara Begum, PRIO & CRG

Parties, Leaders & the Democratic Question (B)

Chair: Anjoo Sharan Upadhyaya, BHU & CRG

Speakers

Sibaji Pratim Basu, VU & CRG: *Mamata Banerjee's Populist Politics*

Maidul Islam, CSSSC: *Electoral Democracy and the Nature of State Populism in West Bengal*

Discussant: Anup Shekhar Chakraborty, NIAS & CRG

4:30-5:00 PM: Tea

5:00-6:30 PM: **Schemes, Policies, Politics (A)**

Chair: Mouleshri Vyas, TISS & CRG

Speakers

Amit Prakash, JNU & CRG: *Populism as a Crisis of the Liberal Script: Reflections on Politics and Policy in India*

Ria De, CRG: *Kanyashree Scheme: Populism & Governmental Feminism*

Discussant: Xonzoi Barbora, TISS & CRG

Schemes, Policies, Politics (B)

Chair: Mahalaya Chatterjee, CU & CRG

Speakers

Rajat Roy, CRG: *Populism in the Times of Competitive Democracy: Chhattisgarh, A Case Study*

Atig Ghosh, VBU & CRG: *Rearticulating 'Agrarian Populism' in Postcolonial South Asia: Considerations around D.N. Dhanagare's Study of the Shetkari Sangathana in Maharashtra and the Populism of 'Maulana' Bhashani in Bangladesh*

Nirmal Mahato, GBU & CRG: *Populism and Identity Politics: The Case of Purulia, West Bengal*

Discussant: Arup Sen

6.30-7 PM: Wrap-up Session

Chair: Ranabir Samaddar, CRG

Vote of Thanks by Ria De, CRG

Panel Discussion I: Populism, Popular Culture and the Production of the Public (A)

Chair: Paula Banerjee, Sanskrit College & University, CRG

The Newspaper as Political Actor—The Dawn, New Delhi, 1947

Gopa Sabharwal

Drawing on a larger, co-authored, interdisciplinary project examining six English language newspapers from five Indian cities in the year 1947, Sabharwal's paper confined its analysis to the *Dawn*, New Delhi and its role in representing the case for the creation of Pakistan and itself as the official and only authentic voice of the Muslims in India. The *Dawn*, founded by Mohammed Ali Jinnah, published from New Delhi was an important partner in the League campaign for Pakistan. This successful campaign used many techniques to get across its message of rejecting any idea of India being a composite whole. It critiqued everything and everyone from Nehru and his interim Government, to Gandhi, the Congress and all leading

‘nationalist’ Muslims. It crafted its message with clarity and purpose never losing sight of its purpose. All of its space including advertisements where possible and even columns like the letters to the editor and the Children’s section were harnessed to the task. Her presentation set out the composite instance of the case for Pakistan in the *Dawn* – its achievement and finally the newspaper’s shift to publication from Karachi in September 1947. It thus cut across many of the themes of the conference.

*Populist Politics, New Urban Spectacles and the Idea of the Popular in Contemporary
Kolkata*

Sounita Mukherjee

The paper focused on the contemporary interface of populist politics and visual spectacles, as witnessed in the context of Kolkata under the regime of Trinamool Congress (TMC) headed by Mamata Banerjee. It attempted to make an intervention in the analysis of the contemporary modes of populist politics in Kolkata by foregrounding the importance of the field of the ‘visual’ in the performance of the ‘political’. The paper explored how recent modes of governance and populist mobilization techniques in the city under TMC are keenly focused on controlling perception and affective management of the masses, with systematic programs of aesthetic renovation of the city spaces. One of the central arguments of the paper was to use the thematic of the new visual fields of populism to stage the main lines of break from the past forms of populist politics in the city along three main lines, firstly through spreading government drive towards urban beautification schemes. Secondly, through organization of year-round cycle of festivals, and thirdly the unprecedented investment in building a personality cult around a single leader; by suffusing the city spaces with the omnipresent iconography of the Chief Minister’s face in every government sponsored event and programmes. These are propelled by the logic of appealing to popular taste and capturing the imagination of the people. Drawing on ethnographic research, this paper attempted to analyze how popular urban cultures of leisure, consumption and spectatorship that the current ruling party in Bengal has been offering to the people at large, is trying to create a space for new urban public culture, one that is markedly distinct from the earlier (left) mode of mass-politics in Kolkata. What is the imagination of the ‘public’ and what are the notions of ‘public good’ and ‘popular taste’ that is driving the present investment in the politics of festivities and beautification? The first part of the paper offered a detailed fieldwork based case-study of the Laketown and Sreebhumi that has transformed from a postcolonial refugee

settlement to an increasingly upmarket locality along the lines of gradual political shifts over the years, wrought by local clubs and backed by the patronage and image of local party leaders in recent years. From this microstudy of a locality the narrative moved to a larger space—the E.M. bypass, where it is more directly about the state and the ruling party's capture of public spaces through direct Governmental investments in continuous political signages. It provided a critical intersection of the governmental strategy of populism on the one hand and what can be fundamentally seen as image politics on the other hand, where the 'visual' constantly becomes the performative ground for the 'political'.

Iman Mitra, the chair of the session drew a connection between the two papers and posed a few pertinent questions to the presenters. Firstly, what is public and what is popular? How does one differentiate between the public and the popular? When exactly does the popular begin? With regard to the first paper on *The Newspaper as Political Actor—The Dawn, New Delhi, 1947* by Gopa Sabharwal, he observed that the ambiguity regarding who exactly were reading the newspaper makes one wonder how the political propaganda initiated by *The Dawn* resonated with the public on the ground and to what extent and how the 'cult' of Jinnah was actually fructified. He also pointed out that the anonymity of the letters to the editor is another intriguing aspect and the identity of the authors of such letters would have facilitated our understanding about which sections of people were shaping and expressing their opinions to the newspaper. With regard to the second paper on *Populist Politics, New Urban Spectacles and the Idea of the Popular in contemporary Kolkata* by Sounita Mukherjee, he observed that while the festivities like book fair and film festival in Kolkata marks a continuity between the erstwhile and the present ruling dispensation in West Bengal, such events are no more just purely intellectual exercises. Policies like free entry are perceptible attempts to popularize such events. He was further of the opinion that shift from local communities to local clubs as the organizational bulwarks of the current ruling party in the state does have a semblance with the past in the sense that most of the organizational activities of the left parties during their regime also took place in the club buildings. Thus, it is difficult to conceptually segregate the imageries that marks the organizational patterns of mobilization of the erstwhile left regime and the incumbent TMC rule in the state. With regard to the religious festivities as tools of mobilization, he wondered if the continuity of time and space is at all possible. Mitra also pointed out that the festivities, as tools to galvanise popular imagination, is indeed a matter of scale due to political economy related to urban rent as it is manifested in the soaring prices of residential complexes in the areas

known for spectacular and extravagant manifestations of festivities, especially Durga puja, in the city. V. Ramaswamy asked Sabharwal if it was possible to fathom how the political propaganda initiated by *The Dawn*, with its communal innuendos, influenced the agenda of partition. He drew a parallel of such propaganda tactics with contemporary developments; for instance the congratulatory letters of Prime Minister from the children of Kashmir to extract legitimacy for the government's recent move in Kashmir. Mr Ramaswamy also pointed out to Mukherjee that the political appropriation of clubs is not new in Bengal and how RSS eventually initiated the process of consolidating their control in the state by similar organizational tactics. Sudeep Basu pointed out that as Mukherjee's discussion mentioned the commodification of the social, it would be interesting to see how the spectator would look at the spectacle and what is the effect of such representation on the family and neighbourhood. He also differentiated the two different periods of 1947 and the present that the two papers dealt with and observed that the commodification of the social happened differently in two different times. Xonzo Barborá wanted to understand from Sabharwal whether an equivalent of the modern day trolling in social media also took place via letters to the editor in the newspaper way back in 1947. Sumana Dasgupta asked the panel how they would want to define populism? Since there is no consensus regarding the definition, is it a discursive style? Is it that populism is always defined in opposition to a disadvantaged elite? How do we analyse it? Anup Shekhar Chakraborty wondered how does the political projection of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee with the other historical illuminaries in the same banner or poster resonate with the masses, especially in the slum areas? He also asked Sabharwal whether the presenter came across women speaking through the newspaper in 1947 in the course of her research? Gopal Sabharwal, in response to the questions asserted that populism indeed needed to be defined against something. For instance, the political propaganda of *The Dawn* had a strong communal overtone as it placed itself against the 'hindu-dominated' Congress party in 1947. However, it is interesting to note that it was not communal. Sounita Mukherjee, in her response, said that she is attempting to comprehend who constitutes the people through her research and also exploring the connect between the popular and the spectacle. She mentioned that the political economy of rent is also taking place due to uptown settlements and how the idea of glamour is juxtaposed with the idea of development. Lastly, she drew the attention of the house to how the transition of regimes is marked by the change in the nomenclature of identifying the festivities. For instance, the usages of phrases like Durga Utsav and Sarot Utsav, are cases in point. She concluded with the observation that the occasions are increasingly getting universalized.

Panel Discussion II: **Populism, Popular Culture and the Production of the Public (B)**

Chair: Samata Biswas, Sanskrit College & University, CRG

Cinema and the (Re)construction of the Left Popular in Kerala

Muhammed Puthusseri

Looking at the re-efflorescence of what may be called red films—films that thematize and celebrate the spirit of communism— and the visible presence of Left-leaning film makers in the Malayalam film industry, this paper argued how popular cinema has emerged as a key site in the reconstruction of a Malayali national-popular. Despite the apparent distrust the Left in Kerala shows towards popular cinema, the domain of the popular has played a significant role in the construction of a national-popular centred on the linguistic identity in Kerala. While Marxism shares a historical affinity with popular forms such as romance, opera, melodrama, etc., the Left in Kerala shows a renewed interest in the field of culture as a result of the rise of Hindu nationalism in the country which conflates culture with religion. Apart from the “cultural interventions” of the right-wing, the Left also faces serious challenges from the part of various social movements centred on the question of caste, gender and religious identities. The rise of social movements in the 1990s “rought to the fore the questions of caste and gender that were submerged under the earlier socio-cultural consensus generated by the hegemonic Malayali national popular shaped by the communists. In such a context, Puthusseri argued, that the domain of popular registers questions related to gender, caste, etc. which the political Left has often failed to adequately theorize. He further argued that the red films and the left-leaning filmmakers undertake the construction of a new “Left popular” in the state which contributes to the imagining of a new “people”. Given the distinct nature of the relationship between cinema and Left politics in the state, this paper explored the transactions between the popular domain and popular politics in the state in the contemporary times.

*Religion, Community and Minor Subject Positions: Understanding Contemporary Populist
Movements in Kerala*

Muhsina KK

Drawing on Laclau, Muhsina argued that reinforcing the idea of “people” and presenting it as a morally good force against “the elites”, populism, is a set of political practices that primarily dwell on the opposition between the elites and the common people. Populism that put into question the institutional order by constructing an underdog as a historical agent is an emancipatory social force through which marginalised groups challenge dominant power structures. There has been a steady rise in populist politics across the world in the recent past and it has become detrimental to liberal democracies more than ever. The right-wing populism that has become so prominent in India in the recent past is largely drawn upon the claim of ownership of the Hindu majority over the nation and the subsidiary existence of Muslims and other minorities. This apparent right-wing populism which has achieved momentum in India is arguably quite different from the left-wing populism which claims to be more distributive in nature and the rhetoric of peasant populist sentiments. Her study tried to critically engage with contemporary populist movements in Kerala namely, The Kiss of Love protest (2014), Amanava Sangamam (2015) and ‘People’s Hartal’ (2018) which are quite different from the national experience. Unlike the classical Marxist conceptualisation of populism as a movement driven by false consciousness, the driving force behind many populist movements took place in the Southern Indian state of Kerala in the recent past were certain events. These movements were neither held within the ambit of any political parties nor motivated by any ideological imperatives. While Kiss of Love was a non-violent protest against moral policing following the calls in a Facebook page, Amanava Sangamam was a counter response to the alleged exclusion of Muslim organizations in Manushya Sangamam (Humans Meet), a left collective of People Against Fascism. On the other hand no organization claimed responsibility of People’s Hartal, a mass strike which was called through certain WhatsApp groups to protest and seek justice for a minor girl who was brutally raped and murdered in Kathua region of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. The paper further focused at the dynamics in the return of popular political movements into the Kerala social fabric quite different from the Marxist narratives of class struggle and mobility. Engaging with the dominant idea that populist movements limit democratic possibilities, the paper studied the complexity in the relationship between populist movements and popular

culture. The paper further studied at how communitarian spaces configure within the ambit of 'populist' particularly looking at the absent presence of Islam in the movements above mentioned. As populist movements denote a particular mode of articulation it is important to look at the social logics of these articulations. The paper focused on how the conception of the idea of general will as identity politics has become highly crucial in Indian context and how does general will manifest in these movements unlike the conception of general will by the social contract theorists as the condition of democracy.

Following the panel discussion, Rajesh Kharat, argued that it is important to not get caught in notions such as 'left popular' when we are thinking about populism as it prevents us from seeing certain realities. For instance, in Kerala, the left has mobilised not only leftist icons and symbols as part of their intervention in the popular culture but in recent times has also been using figures like Vivekananda. This raises the question of the content of their interventions in the culture and the feasibility of the idea of a 'leftist popular culture.' Samata Biswas posed the following question to both panelists: are these populist moments and movements in question becoming possible as a result of populist measures enacted by the central government as well as the majoritarian politics of the ruling dispensation? She also raised doubts whether some of the specific examples Muhsina raises in her paper can be truly classified as 'populist.' Further, what are the cultural forms integral to the populist moment(s)? How does something like Onam, the annual Hindu festival in Kerala, for instance, get caught up in the debate around culture and populism? Biswas also brought to bear on the papers a comparative framework – the Mamata brand of Bengal politics has largely depended on religion to facilitate its populist mobilization that has ultimately been seen as unsuccessful. Ranabir Samaddar's intervention in the panel brought attention to the issue of conceptual clarity. Before venturing into describing and analysing empirical phenomenon in terms of 'populism,' he argued, it is important that we engage with the concept with enough seriousness so that there can be consistency and clarity in its deployment. This will require patient attention to the theoretical contours of the term populism and the various analytical possibilities, challenges, as well as shortcomings that the framework brings into play. Empirical work that uncritically deploys the framework of populism will tend to remain superficial and largely unproductive. Rather than taking the term 'national popular' for granted, he urged the panelists to look into the specific meaning of the term in Gramsci. Further, Samaddar invited the panelists to consider the following question: Has there ever been a 'national' without also simultaneously being popular? Lipin

Ram brought up the following question: what might be a left intervention in ‘culture’ conceived broadly – as the lived experience of people in the everyday, i.e., within family, workplace and so on rather than that which takes place in cinema and theater – look like? He also pressed Puthussery on the term ‘communist desire’ – a term Puthussery borrows from Jodi Dean – and argued for a closer attention to the term in terms of the ‘content’ of this desire, i.e., whether it needed to be ‘non-capitalist’, ‘anti-capitalist’ or at the least an ‘egalitarian’ desire. Do we need to look at the kind of portrayals in recent popular cinema that are often attributed as instances of a ‘communist desire’ more critically, he wondered. Maidul Islam’s comments, directed at Puthussery’s paper, helped to throw light on the fact that ‘Dalit’ is not an identity that exists with any kind of self-sufficiency. Rather, it comprises of a group of subaltern caste identities that can only come to assume the subject position of Dalit through conscious politics and mobilisation.

Panel Discussion III: **Land, Caste & Identities (A)**

Chair: Byasdeb Dasgupta, Kalyani University & CRG

Populism as Political Practice: Interrogating Caste and Social Justice in Hindi Heartland

Manish K. Jha

In his presentation, Jha examined populism as political practice; the practice that invokes the idea of social justice through instrumentalities of caste. The ideal of the Indian constitution and demands of liberal democracy that shaped post-colonial Indian politics witnessed the evolution of populism in dynamic yet diverse forms. The subtleties could be observed, ascertained and assessed in different federal units in very many ways. The ideological underpinning of populism engages with its idioms and phrases, rhetoric, institutional formations, mobilizing techniques, impact etc. He however, looked at populism at play in the hindi heartland in general and in the state of Bihar in particular. Apart from what do we mean by populism and how do we construe the practice of politics in the realm of populism, the paper primarily engaged with the idea of ‘*samajik nyaya*’ (social justice) that dominated the tapestry of populism in the states under discussion. What has been the articulation and manifestation of social justice and where does caste enter in this practice of politics? Conceptually and strategically, it is non-elitist and attempts to bring together masses. Is it that

in the process of caste arithmetic, the practice of inclusion and exclusion complicates the process? If one takes the Ambedkarite idea of dealing with the caste question and therefore responding to justice in classical terms, it would have meant annihilation of caste. But did the social justice articulation in the hindi heartland at any point in time attempted that. The answer is emphatic 'no'. Instead, it reconfigured the caste groupings for mobilization and electoral assertion and thereby turning caste social into caste political. Has this been a careful and conscious decision and informed by the pragmatism that populism seems to value. The language, tone, tenor, idiom, phrases and slogans used since the time of articulation for social justice in general and quota politics in particular by leading socialist leaders in late 1960s, the route that practice of populism took in the hindi heartland navigated through tumultuous phases. How are we to appreciate this practice of politics through the management of caste? How are we to comprehend the ideas, strategies and outcome of such populism? To grasp the inception and trajectory of the contours of populism in hindi heartland, it is prudent to restrict one's engagement within a specific timeframe. Jha's paper took a risk to traverse from the past to the contemporary so as to understand the politics and shifts in a nuanced manner.

Populist Land Policy and Decoding Marginalisation: Study of Land Rights Movement of Dalits in Punjab and Change in Identity and Representation

Harender Singh

Harender began his presentation by stating that since the question of annihilation of caste remained unsolved, identity politics of Dalits emerged as a key factor in the reaction to this. It was very hard among the leaders who raised the voice of Dalits as these are socially, economically and politically backward groups. Even in Dalit political groups we can see the dominance of particular sub castes. The backwardness of Dalits helped the government to make so called 'populist' policies where Dalits were denied agricultural land rights and therefore they remained landless labourers. Punjab is a state where more than 31% of its population is Dalit and the data on land ownership states that they own less than 2% land. Despite the large numbers of Dalits, Dalit politics is not emerging in the state as expected. The recent agitation of rights over Panchayati Zameen is considered landmark where every Dalit sub caste and gender is coming forward to claim their constitutional rights. It has been mentioned in the 'Punjab Village Common Land Act, 1961' of the state that one-third of the Panchayat land would be sanctioned to the Scheduled Caste population of the village through

auctioning. This process never materialised into reality, till as late as 2008. A massive peasant movement, the outcome of small agitations, of Dalits, demanding ownership of land started in the Malwa region. From 2009 to 2016, transparent and fair distribution of land was observed in more than 65 villages with a parallel game of violence, arrests of Dalits and electoral changes. Dalit farmers have started working in those land as landowners. The hierarchy and division of labour and labourers has been broken to a certain extent by the movement. Above this, Dalits have been doing collective farming and hence they are equally dividing the products within the community. There has been tremendous change in the social, economic and political life of Dalits of rural Punjab, who acquired land thereafter. Harender's study focused on the qualitative and quantitative analysis of changes in the political life of Dalits of Balad Kalan village of Sangrur district in Punjab. His paper raised questions about how the representation of Dalits emerged in the Gram Sabha, Panchayat Raj Institutions, Local committee elections and since one-third of Punjab's population is Dalit, how does state politics affect this movement. It also explored the role of various institutions of families, gender, PRIs, police, administration, state and other stakeholders in making the populist policies where Dalits are denied their rights and dominant caste groups are acquiring the rights of other villagers. Another aspect of his study was to come up with the demands and suggestions of these Dalits which could help agricultural policy frameworks that ensure social justice.

Prof Chowdhory commented on the "incredible work on practice" that Manish Jha had done. She pointed out that it is interesting that the wishes of the people and what the author sets out to do is invoke the idea of social justice (*samajik nyay*). But where is populism? She argued that Jha was not talking about caste or caste interplay, and how successful the movement has been in crushing the class dimension. Can social justice movements in the territory of Bihar be invoked in UP if one is going in to class frameworks and not using other dimensions? In mobilization of electoral alliances, populism provides dividends electorally. She points out that the question he brings in is critical, caste as an economic resource, which is not only about identity but materiality. Chowdhory asks, "How do you bring about the lens in the case of Karpoori Thakur and Modi now? Are we to see Modi's achievements and shifts from the same lens? Are we to undermine the engagement and shun anything elitist, shun English? For instance in Tamil Nadu where English becomes a rallying point, albeit which is different in comparison to Bihar. Only time will tell if the Karpoori Thakur regime will fit into the lens". She pointed to a methodological issue that becomes problematic if Bihar and UP are brought

together. Ramaswamy pointed out that de-elitization is an impactful term to refer to when and in what form things happened in India. In Calcutta, there are large numbers of Bihari migrants and in the last election, Bihari migrants played an important role and they supported the BJP. He asked Harender about the role of Khalistanis in the caste politics of Punjab. Ranabir Samaddar asked Manish Jha whether there are parallels between Traditional socialist politics and new BJP politics. He further asked, when exactly does socialist politics become the fodder for right politics? The particular social justice is perceived, in order to make it a mainstay in the new right politics. What is it that enables the new right to create support among dalits and say that they are in their politics? Where is the place of the nation in the story? Is there an all India notion in this theory? Samaddar's second point was about the danger of modern populism arriving in India with local desires. Bharat Bhusan asked "What happens to the larger category in the UP elections? Does the UP election fit in to demonetization?" He also asked about the farmer movements where large sections of resentment were present; where do these resentments on larger categories go? Are we talking about secularism in the possibility of right wing politics? Atig Ghosh asked Manish Jha, "If we consider populism to be an anti-thesis; how do you bring in populism in this social engineering?" Iman Mitra went on to refer to the phenomenon of power cuts. There was no power cut in the Yogi regime and the people were happy about this. He asked Jha, what then is the connection between political infrastructure and physical infrastructure? Amit Prakash had questions for both Manish Jha and Harender. To Manish, he asked, "when you talk of social justice, and the unhappiness with the conclusion; how is that different in social engineering? Are there no parameters left in the populist culture of the left? With the same frame of the meaning, there also has to be a critical understanding. He wondered about the need to talk about de-elitization? To Harender, he asked, why his work was shying away from real politics? It emerges in Punjab and provides further meaning. Harender responded that the Khalistan movement was being instrumentalised by the right wing. Jha responded that his work takes in to consideration the larger canvas of nationalism and nation, and it will lose out if it talks about BJP's nationalism and socialist nationalism together. One would have to go through Lohia, Narendra Dev and others. In his response to Nasreen Chowdhory he said, "through English, we have to understand dalits who have never complained about English. With OBC reservations there has been tension with English but dalits never had problems with English which OBCs have". He then went on to talk about social engineering with Karpoori Thakur and the socialists making way to rightism, criticizing Congress and what brought RSS here when in fact after Gandhi's killing RSS was suffering. It was at this time

that socialists provided the opportunity to make them come back. He added, “what do we say as populist, how do we moralize people, either they are monolith or making them a monolith. The only hope I have will run its course. To me, populism will not stand the test of time and it should not stand the test of time.”

Panel Discussion IV: **Land, Caste & Identities (B)**

Chair: Kalpana Kannabiran, Council for Social Development & CRG

In the name of the ‘People’: Cultivating Identity and the Peasant in Assam

Indrani Talukdar

Indrani began her presentation by arguing that historically, the processes of uneven development, internal colonialism, neo-colonialism as well as the centre-periphery debate have occupied the central stage in the discourse on ethnic based nationalism in the North-east India. In the understanding of these mobilisations, she asks, what role do cultural factors play? The paper identified this question with the role played by Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti (Revolutionary Forum for Peasant Liberation), a leading and prominent peasant organisation in contemporary period that also identified itself with the ethno-nationalist question in Assam, India. It is primarily a peasant organisation which has mobilised landless peasants for land rights in forest villages, thus leading to constant tussle between the ‘encroached’ peasants and the globalised state and its institutions. By tracing its genesis from its inception during the post-independence period, the paper highlighted how through the politicisation of ethnic identities based on the control of resources, a horizontal mobilisation is formed across caste and religious lines by leaders, to maintain the legitimacy of the ‘culture’. In popular politics while the question of identity assertions is largely dissed as ‘identity politics’, what must be noted as to how politics based on the ‘identity’ shapes itself, especially in the debate around populism. The pilot study conducted for the paper suggested, that it is not merely peasant populism nor regional populism. It argued that asymmetrical power structures and their institutions impact the course of mobilisation and negotiations at various levels in the form of cultural ‘repertoires’ as tactics and strategies. A peasant-based movement lends its voice to the national forum by actively participating for the National Register of Citizens (NRC) and against the Citizenship Amendment Bill, 2016 in Assam. The

paper found that over the period, the issue of land and natural resources (economic struggle), and the advancement of ‘development’ through legal and democratic means (rule of governance) have been consolidated by the process of ethnic standardisation. The paper thus questioned whether culture is a strategic resource in the populist movement or is it an adaptable apparatus to protect from the neo-liberal onslaught.

Right-wing intervention in Gorkha Identity Politics

Kapil Tamang

Tamang argued that nationality/identity politics has the potential to move towards right-wing politics as the question of insider/ outsider stands on thin ice. The oppression of the minority by majoritarian dominance and the process of othering makes a good field for right-wing politics to rise. The politics of Gorkha identity has always been the question of belongingness and a dream of a utopian solution from the long oppression and discrimination. The movement started a century ago which went through many ups and downs but post 1980s a paradigm shift came within the politics of Gorkha identity which brought in the traits of ethnocentrism and right-wing inclination. A recent change in national politics towards the rise of right-wing politics has affected the Gorkha identity politics to a large extent. The paper tried to explore the historical changes that happened to the movement and how the intervention of Right-wing politics on the identity politics of Gorkhas took place, it’s causes and effects also the process with which the intervention happened.

Shrinking Spaces: Impact of Hindutva Populism on the Vulnerable

Rashad Ullah Khan

Rashad argued that the resurgence of the NDA in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections underlines the evolving political mindset of the majority in India. The Hindutva ideology that the BJP espouses has been validated yet again on the national stage. The impact of this ideology on the public sphere – especially between 2014-19 has been pronounced with persecution of minorities, mob lynching, caste-based atrocities and those who oppose the ruling alliance. A further insidious attempt is the reframing of the existing policies with a specific agenda to cater to populist demands. These significant problems will in all probability now intensify with the re-election of a populist religious nationalist agenda. The aim of his paper was to evaluate the effect of this agenda on the everyday public sphere of India, quantify the rise of

religious populism and its spatial distribution. The paper attempted to understand the mobilization of electoral support by a populist regime and specifically the impact this has on minority and tribal populations of India.

Sudeep Basu had three primary questions: How do we make sense of the renewal of affective and individual definitions? What conditions allow for the rise of right wing movements? What optics can be devised to deal with right wing politics arising from real or perceived deprivation? He asked Kapil if this turn of majoritarianism was inherent to the Gorkhaland movement, or to the class attachments of Gorkhas? Rashad, in Sudeep's opinion, tried to trace the ways in which public spaces were shrinking, and the functioning of RSS in that space. Sudeep pointed to a common thread in the two papers, that of the unfolding of capitalism, and the role of motivations and aspirations to cross or build boundaries. He then commented on the uneven geographies of capital in Indrani's paper, and how different trajectories have their impacts. He then spoke about culture as a strategic resource in that context, the employing of an ethnic card to dilute the peasant question, and delineating or relinquishing movements based on ethnic demands. KMSS cultivated ethnic identity over class identity, and there emerged an emphasis on the ethno-national-political over basic issues. The politics of populism in Dayang brought ethnic support to the neo-liberal state, it brought the movement close to the state, and related it to threats from migrant others. He spoke of how the papers attended to fractures in peasant identity, as well as ethnic layers on peasantry. Maidul agreed with Rashad's overall argument, but had a problem with him engaging both Laclau and Habermas, since they represent divergent arguments. Maidul was also dissatisfied with Rashad's description of the tensions between an urban slum and the middle classes. Kalpana pointed out that all the papers needed to delve deeper into details. She asked, how do we calibrate the detail enough so the big picture can emerge through that.

Panel Discussion V: **Parties, Leaders & the Democratic Question (A)**

Chair: Bharat Bhushan, Independent Journalist & CRG

Political Parties and Populist Policies in Contemporary India: Some Reflections on the Aam Aadmi Party

Sumona DasGupta

In her presentation, Sumona argued that there appears to be little definitional clarity around the term populism. Though the use of this term has proliferated in the last decade, in common parlance there appears to be a pejorative connotation associated with it and mixed views about how populism is connected with democracy and democratic institutions. In her paper she suggested moving away from a value laden understanding of populism as an ideology and staying with an understanding that resonates the most easily with an Indian context—namely any policy that is redistributive in nature and as such favours the common person particularly those in subordinate positions over the elite typically represented by large business and financial interests. The contrast between the people and elite in terms of strategies, movements/policies, organization is perhaps the only way the term populism can retain its analytical usefulness without getting bogged down in polemical discussions as to whether populist movements/policies represent the ideological right or the left, whether it is authoritarian or democratic in its origin, whether it represents a movement or simply a discursive style. The presentation examined selected populist policies launched in contemporary India by a party that grew out of a popular movement against corruption namely the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) which by its very name creates an implicit contrast between ‘the people’ and the elite. By focusing on some of its key populist policies the paper tried to gain a deeper understanding of how a movement “for the people” transitioned into a political party which then had to make policies that were seen to be pro “Aam Aadmi” and what this populism implies in terms of democratic decision making and longer term impacts on the economic and political front.

An Other People': Muslims and Populist Politics in the Deccan

Shefali Jha

Jha's paper took Muslim political representation in the post- 1947 Deccan as a site for exploring the dialectical relationship between institutional politics and populist mobilization. Among the foremost charges against populist politics is the scapegoating of vulnerable groups as 'the other', and therefore the enemy of The People that is the subject of populist rhetoric. If populism names a fantasy of political community unmediated by institutional representation and based instead on a logic of embodied and thereby direct representation by a charismatic leader or party, it is worth noting that precisely these characteristics are usually attached to the political practices of minority groups and pathologized. Moreover, it is when one looks at the dynamics of minority political representation that the inevitable entanglement of populism with institutional representative politics becomes visible. These are the connections Jha explored in considering the career of the All Indian Majlis-e-Ittehad'ul Muslimin (AIMIM) of Hyderabad, which now represents the city of Hyderabad as well as Aurangabad (Maharashtra) in Parliament, in the post- Police Action (1948) period.

Democracy's unfulfilled promise? 'The participatory tradition' within Kerala's Communist politics

Lipin Ram

Lipin argued that nothing in the constellation of notions subsumed under the term populism provokes divergence of thought perhaps as strongly as 'participation.' It is the source of much hope and much fear, both in theory and society. While the fear comes from sources as diverse as the anxiety about the unruly crowd to the worry of majoritarian subversion of constitutionalism, the hope usually stems from one question: could 'participation' be the modality that finally fulfils the emancipatory promise of democracy? The contentious debates centring on populism has a lot to do with this tension between fear and hope around the notion of 'participation,' for often populist movements mobilise disaffection against elites who, it is perceived, thrive by keeping the people 'out.' This paper was based on ethnographic and historical research on the 'participatory initiatives' of the Communist Party in Kerala. It attempted to show how the idea of 'participation,' while carrying the emancipative promise of democracy, retains the potential to be incorporated into various discursive practices within a given political landscape, often resulting in digression,

repetition, parody, and banality. Analysing the ‘participatory tradition’ within Kerala communism in three phases, it demonstrated how the modalities of ‘participation’ can bring about forms of political engagement that range from the truly transformative to the utterly farcical. Rather than treat them as ‘ideal’ or ‘corrupt’, the paper showed them as possibilities ingrained within democratic politics that find expression subject to the contingencies of history and politics.

The Chair asked the panelists whether populism can only be seen as a redistributive strategy? How does it negatively affect the people? Does the construct of populism emanate from the people or from the leader? How is populism linked to charismatic leaders? He observed that the Anna Hazare movement, which was an expression of popular upsurge against the ruling establishment gave rise to two significant bonaparist leaders in India; Arvind Kejriwal and Narendra Modi. He also gave an example of the populist measures adopted by a minister in Kerala by distributing jackfruit plant. Iman Mitra asked the presenter if we can trace the origin of AAP style politics in the post 1991 era, that is the post liberalization period, which ushered in an era of consumerism and raised the political slogan of *sarak, bijli, pani*? He wondered whether the recipient of AAP’s politics is the consumer political subjects. And he further went ahead to ask whether such an explanation be extended to MIM in Hyderabad. Is it that the politics of circulation and access is working here? He further asked, whether in the 2019 national elections, one form of populism triumphed over another? With regard to the second paper, he asked when does majority-minority populism become communal? In the context of the third presentation, he asked when do populist parties question centralization of power? He further mentioned that green technology and related governance practices are ideas of consumerism. Abhishek Bhattacharya asked in the context of the third presentation how can Maoist mobilization be viewed and what would be the connotation of people and participation? Can there be a non-populist trajectory of mass mobilization? Sudeep Basu raised questions about the participatory potential of populism in the context of the third presentation. What is the use of language of the participants in the research on populism. Amit Prakash asked the first presenter whether the successful experiments of transforming schools and health clinics can be called populist? He also commented that the third presentation on populism exists in Kerala from time immemorial. Lipin Ram observed that the Communist party in Kerala remains internally democratic but grossly ineffective. He asserted that popular participation stalls Stalinist tendencies. With regard to the use of language, he responded that a leader is identified both as a father as well as brother.

However, the language on the ground proves to a tragic farce which needs to be historically constituted. He further pointed out that in reality there are not only examples of emancipation but also of ensuing violence. Lastly, he invoked the example of new social movements which point to the fissures and challenges in the existing narrative. Shefali Jha stated that people's voices have to be coupled with governmental authority. She further responded that the problem with majority and minority populism is not the same. The political success of MIM in Hyderabad has raised hope of empowerment amongst the minority and they aspire to have some clout that is commensurate to the majority. Lastly, she observed that it is not possible to 'other' the majority. Sumona DasGupta highlighted the contradiction that marks the politics of AAP. On the one hand, it has carved a distinct political narrative in the realm of its regional politics. On the other hand, it also aspires to grasp the narrative of the national political discourse which is often marked by tremendous nationalistic overtone that bears resemblance with the discourse of RSS and BJP. She invoked AAP's recent nationalist stand on Kashmir which is incongruous to its political predilection at the local level. Lastly, she defined populism as an unmediated relationship between the leader and the people which gives considerable flexibility to the term and she concluded that populism can coexist with authoritarianism.

Panel Discussion VI: **Parties, Leaders & the Democratic Question (B)**

Chair: Anjoo Sharan Upadhyay, Banaras Hindu University & CRG

Mamata Banerjee's Populist Politics: 'Crisis' of Democracy?

Sibaji Pratim Basu

The recent scuffle between the forces of central intelligence, the CBI and the State Police of West Bengal over the 'interrogation'/'arrest' of the Kolkata CP and the subsequent *dharna* to 'Save Constitution' at 'Metro Channel', Esplanade – the heart of Kolkata by the Chief Minister, Mamata Banerjee and then holding of cabinet meetings in a makeshift office room beside the platform of *dharna* have startled, if not shocked a large number of people throughout the country. Mamata's *style* of politics and administration once again consumed the prime times of national/regional news channels, hit the headlines of all the dailies and was in most circulation in all forms of social media – Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter. In this nationwide discourse – apart from allegations and counter-allegations over the 'hyperactive' CBI and the 'resisting' WB Police (which detained the CBI officers and even

temporarily besieged the latter's office buildings) – a deep concern for the 'crisis of democratic institutions' was also expressed. The 'purists' decried the holding of cabinet meetings and official programmes on street as the instances of supreme disrespect to the long cherished democratic norms and practices. In a recent editorial, *Ananada Bazar Patrika*, while giving a lefthanded compliment to Mamata's tit-for-tat politics over Modi's highhandedness has also treated it as 'defeat of democracy'. Basu pointed out that in recent history, we find a parallel of Mamata's *dharna* in the sit-in-dharna at Raj Niwas, Delhi Lt. Governor's residence by the *enfant terrible* Aravind Kejriwal in June 2018 along with some of his colleagues of the AAP government. One can also find somewhat similarity between the Janata Darbars of Kejriwal since 2014 and Mamata's holding of public Secretariat meetings in districts of the state since her coming to office in 2011. But the latter has now become a regular affair, which has generated tremendous enthusiasm and expectations in common masses (especially in faraway districts from Kolkata) but at the same time which has disturbed the formalistic mindset of top bureaucrats who generally like to rule Bengal from Kolkata. Many critics even saw a 'drama for cheap popularity' at the cost of harassment of bureaucrats and thereby lowering down the values of an essential institution of the modern state, the bureaucracy. Basu argued that indeed, the populist politics in South Asia in general and the last 7 years' rule of Mamata in West Bengal (with popular programmes like 'Kanyashree' for girl students, 'Sabujspathi – cycles for students of backward classes, rice at Rs. 2/kg through PDS schemes for peasants, folk artists, artisans, fisher folk; donations to youth clubs etc) has pushed further the sacred boundaries of conventional liberal democracy in such a way that it demands the insights and labour of social scientists to grasp adequately the meanings and connotations of such politics, which cannot be even fully comprehended by the spectacles of Ernesto Laclau alone. Through his presentation Basu attempted understand the 'new' politics which raises a host of questions. What are the limits of such politics? Does its failure ensure the return of the 'traditional' politics? Even if that happens, can the champions of 'traditional' politics abandon the contents of populist politics in entirety?

Electoral Democracy and the Nature of State Populism in West Bengal

Maidul Islam

Maidul Islam began his presentation by arguing that in the liberal democratic political discourse, populism has often been used pejoratively. However, off late, major scholars in the field of political theory regard populism as a governing principle of democratic political

practice and the only substantive strategy of political mobilisation under conditions of representative democracy. Political parties and political movements, irrespective of their ideological persuasions adopt populist rhetoric and articulate populist political agenda to appeal various plebeian and heterogeneous sectors of the population against the antagonistic frontier(s) for popular mobilisation. In this paper, Islam tried to theoretically understand populism as a robust analytical concept in the domain of both electoral politics and governmental initiatives, which could throw light on the idea of state populism. From the recent experiences in Britain, one could argue that Left-wing populists are ‘more socio-economically focussed’ and ‘more inclusionary’ than the rightwing populists (March 2017). While agreeing with such an analysis, one could contend that in the current conjuncture, the left populists at least, promises an alternative to neoliberalism while rightwing populists, although on occasions, are critical to select set of neoliberal policies, they do not have a vision of transcending neoliberal capitalism. Moreover, left-wing populism is based on hope with socially progressive policies, particularly, promising redistributive programmes as part of its ideological vocabulary. In contrast, the rightwing populism has been based mainly on fear, a fear of the immigrant with a strong xenophobic character and the fact that in all cases immigrants are presented as a threat to the identity of the people, while multiculturalism is perceived as being imposed by the elites against the popular will. Besides the academic study of left and right populisms (Mouffe 2018, Bobba and Duncan McDonnell 2016, Mudde 2007, Mény and Surel 2002) there is a marked difference between the recent works of Müller (2016) and Weyland (2013) that treat all kinds of populism as a danger to democracy and those who think that populism might not be necessarily associated with the extreme right (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2008). In fact, some argue that populism can be only leftwing and may not be the most appropriate category to conceptualise outright nationalist, racist and fascist movements (Stavrakakis and Katsambekis 2014). Islam pointed out that most academic studies tend to overlook the nature of state populism. State populisms are in contrast to the theoretical literature on populism like that of Ernesto Laclau (1977, 2005), which proposes an oppositional politics but at the same time has the mark of Laclau’s own normative project for a search of leftist populism. However, how does a populist party sustain its rule by expanding the logic of equivalence while using the state? Various prominent forms of state populisms existed in South Asia like that of the regime of Indira Gandhi in India in the late 1960s and early 1970s and Mujibism in early 1970s in Bangladesh. In the recent past, we could also notice the state populism of Sheikh Hasina in Bangladesh, and the Latin American state populisms. In this respect, this paper attempted to conceptualise the specific

form of state populism in West Bengal by examining the distinct articulatory practices of the All India Trinamool Congress, the ruling party in the Eastern Indian state of West Bengal, led by Mamata Banerjee. While populism is regarded as the equivalential logic of the people against an antagonistic frontier including the state, the specific form of state populism as it exists today in India's electoral democracy uses the state to challenge a real or perceived enemy. In other words, the logic of anti-establishment populist political challenge is being transformed into using the state apparatuses against an enemy, thus giving a unique dimension to the populist configuration. The paper assessed the Trinamool's peculiar form of state populism, in response to the rightwing populist politics of Modi led Bharatiya Janata Party that combines the xenophobic rhetoric against religious minorities. In contrast to such a righting populist rhetoric, a centre-left populism of Trinamool conglomerates pluralistic approach to politics along with distributive policies of giving massive doles to the poor under conditions of what could be described as neoliberalism with Indian characteristics. In doing such an exercise, the paper attempted to theorise how state populism besides building the equivalential logics also accommodates democratic demands through a new logic of governance, which although has a parallel to Laclau's logic of difference and yet dissimilar to the differential logic. Thus, while populism in Laclau's works has the dual logic of equivalence and difference, the nature of state populism in West Bengal operates through a triad: the logic of equivalence, difference and governance.

Anup Shekhar pointed to a few problems with Basu's paper. Firstly, it did not mention that it is talking about state populism. He pointed out that the notion of "people" is an "amorphous category" and can be as large and diverse as one needs it to be, and should therefore be used carefully. He also pointed to the ambiguity with the concept of Trinamool's slogan—Ma, Mati, Manush. Except Mati, both Ma and Manush are ambiguous. The party's own motto is therefore ambiguous. Given the ambiguity, to what extent can they then pursue their own governance projects? Anup Shekhar pointed to the theoretical richness of Maidul Islam's paper. He concluded that both papers speak to each other. He further added that on the 2019 *dharna* by the WB chief Minister against a centrally managed CBI, Dr. Islam argued that conducting bureaucracy outside for the public to see is an important example of populism in WB. The conduct of governance and bureaucracy in public during the protest was an attempt to make governance more transparent, one of many examples that the state government has taken to ensure transparency. Chakrabarty then asked "why is there so much of silence in critique of populism by the state government? Why is there a silence from the public?"

Ranabir Samaddar asked Basu why is it that in populist politics, there is so much emphasis on leadership. In Communist states, in China for example, the Chinese president could not be president for more than two terms, which has now been lifted. This anxiety about the person being a leader—is it an anxiety from liberal [understandings]? Is the exception that there is a one-person party? Is it a liberal fear? Ramaswamy pointed out that a more profound critique of the Left is needed. CPM was a symptom of a deeper darkness in the age of Bengal. There are also significant differences between Banerjee in 2011 and the Left Front in 1977. Maidul Islam responded that the Government coming to the road is indeed a liberal anxiety. We are already enmeshed in liberal governance, where an elected government is [supposed to be] different from street politics. Responding to Samaddar, Dr. Islam wondered if this era is a return of a Hobbesian space from a Lockean state? He added that, because of “the expansion of media, the leader is always accessible.” A particular individual can actually be identified with an ideology. “Mamata Banerjee is not just a leader, she is a family member. From governance [to relief], she can do everything single-handedly. This is a form of a single window management.” The *Didi ke bolo* strategy is another example of the omnipresent leader. He concluded that Laclau is inadequate in the ever-changing circumstances and contexts of populism. As a working paper, it was to deal with something that many have not grappled with well—the questions of why and what regarding populism. He added that there are hardly any vibrant labor movement today, and populism is an answer for many small workers who are working in unregistered establishments. In Mamata Banerjee’s populism, *Didi* does not rule from the city, but rules from the rural.

Panel Discussion VII: **Schemes, Policies, Practices (A)**

Chair: Mouleshri Vyas, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai & CRG

Populism as a Crisis of the Liberal Script: Reflections on Politics and Policy in India

Amit Prakash

Prakash began by arguing that liberalism has been seen as a framework for organising the political process while prioritising individual rights, liberty and equality of citizens. Alongside, liberalism may also be seen as a set of promissory notes emerging from a complexly negotiated social contract in each society, the attractiveness of which has been

underlined by the widespread support that it has found the world over. However, liberalism has also been characterised by a set of broken promises under the conditions of contemporary finance capital; belying legitimate democratic concerns — about increased participation, better deliberation, or proportional equity for all sections. Populism speaks to such belied expectations and constructs the trope of a homogenous popular will — without any opposition, with promises to deliver on these belied promises. The impact of such populist political process is complex and far reaching — from institutional ossification, to the TINA of finance capitalism, and, rising socio-political expectations in the face of increasing inequality. Prakash argued that research on populism has been conducted within the broad contours of the discipline of Political Science with little focus in cognate disciplines. Consequently, understanding of the processes that undergird populist transformations are not fully understood, least in the case of India. For instance, how does the neoliberal turn create conditions for the rise and growth of populism or how do both together impact social structures. How does the interplay between information technology, finance capital and crisis of liberalism colonise the political space to create conditions for the emergence and growth of populism and its implications for the liberal project? His paper examined some of these issues with the help of Indian material drawn from recent political patterns at the national level. To be able to examine the large phenomenon and to induce some coherence and finiteness, politics and policy debates on select areas were taken to be the main focus.

Kanyashree Scheme: Populism & Governmental Feminism

Ria De

De's research proposed to study the Kanyashree scheme, a conditional cash-transfer programme, introduced by the Mamata Banerjee government towards reducing school drop-outs and underage marriage of girl children. The research historically locates itself in the context of 'welfare' schemes introduced for the 'upliftment' of women and girl children across India. In the process, the study further attempted to recognise the specific point of departure at which constitutionally mandated welfare schemes for population groups (women being identified as one such cluster) become populist measures in the sense that while they 'claim' to place the 'welfare' of the 'people' at the centre of their concern function as self-serving instruments in the electoral agendas of ruling political parties. Given that on the one

hand, welfare schemes already entail the governmentalization of certain democratic principles, including those of egalitarianism and justice, in the case of schemes for women, one may think of how these are necessarily the governmentalization of feminist politics and principles? How then do we characterise a populist scheme, such as the *Kanyashree*, as an active organ of a populist government? Through a study of the *Kanyashree* scheme, the study attempted to arrive at an aspect of what populism may entail, given that populism as a political practice has been historically difficult to define.

Xonjoi Barbora asked if the tensions between liberalism and populism are indeed paradoxes? He argued that they are not, but rather, that they are an expression of history today. As an example, he discussed how a few years ago, a survey at IIT Delhi about students condemned anti-homosexuality laws, but they felt empowered to combat Pakistani aggression. Because of this, the discussant concluded that maybe it is not a paradox. He then discussed Max Weber, and how this frame was most likely how he came to view his world in his moment on seeing “a very belligerent nationalism emerging in Bismark’s Germany. At the same time, a certain liberalism that existed in certain institutions in the country.” He followed with two questions. The first is, where are we to locate these tensions and convergences between liberalism and populism. And the second question is how do we analyze the institutional responses to persuade people about what is liberal and popular. Why are we able to persuade people? By “we” he meant people like himself, who teach at universities about the “right” kind of politics to follow at a time like this. He advised Ria De to go in to deeper descriptions of her survey, and rest longer on the so-called peculiarities of the phenomenon described in her research. Further discussions concluded that papers both spoke to one another through the idea of populism, but were also more specifically interrogating whether a particular scheme is a populist one or not?

Panel Discussion VIII: **Schemes, Policies, Practices (B)**

Chair: Arup Sen, Serampore College & CRG

Populism in the times of competitive Democracy: Chhattisgarh, A Case Study

Rajat Ray

Chhattisgarh came into being in November 2000 when it was separated from Madhya Pradesh. The state is the tenth largest in area, but its population is 25.5 million as per 2011

census, thus its population density is one of the lowest at 189 persq.km. as against the all India average of 382. With 44% of its land area under forest and vast mineral resources, Chhattisgarh is a resources-rich State. It ranks second in production of coal, ranks third in production of iron ore, and there are large deposits of other minerals like bauxite, limestone etc. It is a power surplus state. It has good industrial base with steel, power and aluminium plants, cement factories and various other mines. Though it is known as a rice basin, its agricultural activities are by and large restricted to cultivation of paddy, mostly mono crop. Ray pointed out that despite having a sound economic base and favourable land to people ratio, 48.7 % population of Chhattisgarh was below poverty line as against the national average of 27.5%. In other words, of the total population of 25.5 million there were 12.19 million poor people in the state. Since the yield from farming was never enough to sustain them throughout the year, a significant number of farmers used to migrate to other areas as unskilled and semi skilled labours, and traditionally they became known as Bilaspuri coolies. In December, 2003 BJP won the election in Chhattisgarh and Raman Singh became the chief minister. Next year with the introduction of the Chhattisgarh Public Distribution System (Control) Order, 2004, Raman Singh started radically reforming the PDS of the state. Before that, Fair Price Shops were mostly run by private owners and people were not getting even what was officially allocated for them. With that order Raman Singh cancelled license of all private run Fair Price Shops (FPS) and handed over the responsibility of running that to cooperative societies, gram panchayats, women's self help groups, primary credit cooperative societies and forest protection groups. He increased the number of FPS from 8492 to 10465. With the introduction of end to end computerisation the government could monitor the PDS system and bring in transparency. While efforts were made to reach out to the consumers by setting up one FPS in every gram Panchayat, the village committees were encouraged to monitor the distribution to plug pilferage. In fact, all gram panchayats were engaged in keeping a strict vigil over the process of PDS. On the other hand the government started buying paddy directly from the farmers and not encouraging the middlemen to run the show. Through the PDS, the government had tried to give rice at the rate of Rs. 2 to 30 lakh BPL families and at the rate of Rs. 1 to another 7 lakh 'Antyoday' families. As a result of that, people of Chhattisgarh started fondly calling Raman Singh 'Chawar wala Baba' (One who gives rice). Ray argued that this role of 'Annadata' coupled with other populist measures initiated by him helped Raman Singh rule the state for three consecutive terms. Raman Singh went ahead with his Reform of PDS programme not merely through bureaucratic fiats, but he actively mobilised people around it. By handing over the running of the FPS to Panchayat

and other local bodies and giving them responsibility of monitoring the supply and distribution of ration, he made them stakeholders. Thus a parallel system was created to the bureaucrats on rein, which eventually made the delivery system smooth and functional. It is also true that Raman Singh's Food Security Programme preceded that of the Centre's Food Security Bill. It should be mentioned here that the Raman Singh government did not stop at reforming the PDS only, but it also introduced some other populist programmes focussed on the poor. Yet, in the 2019 state assembly elections, Raman Singh and his party was swept out of power by Congress. Questions might be raised that the populist measures that kept him in power for 15 years might have lost their edge. But, the government run PDS system after the reform proved to be most efficient, transparent and people-friendly one, as acknowledged by Jean Dreze and others. Ray further pointed out that after he returned to power for a third consecutive term, Raman Singh tried to make his much lauded food security programme more attractive by adding nutritional values. The state government started giving grams and other nutrients to ration card holders free. Also, he announced a scheme under which around 55 lakh rural people would be given free mobile phones. But the Congress came out with a promise of complete waiver of debts for the farmers. Ray argued that it was too early to say that it was the main factor that saw Chaur Wala Baba cornered in the hustings and finally routed in the election. But if it is factored in the post mortem of recent Chhattisgarh election, then we are faced with another question: Is populist politics more likely to give rise to competitive bidding by the contending parties in a democracy? If so, then in a parliamentary democracy, especially, as it is unfolding in India, the prospect of the end of ideology based politics is likely to end and be replaced by populist politics soon. Whether the parties of Left, Right and Centre are getting ready to give up their class, caste based politics and would try to address the issues dear to the broad masses, especially the poorer sections in the society, and reposition themselves accordingly, is to be seen. But if the present trend is any indication, then the pressure on them to change their position is only growing. The paper tried to address an additional problem. What is the difference between a populist measure and a welfare initiative? How does one draw a line between these two? It cannot be denied that while welfare programmes have got moral approval of the society as a duty of the State towards its people, the populist programmes initiated by the state have always evoked some consternation among the urban elites. It seems that the very word populism has a derogatory meaning. According to the Oxford Dictionary the word populism means "A Political approach that strives to appeal to ordinary people who feel that their concerns are disregarded

by established elite groups''. Ray concluded by asking, does it mean that only those welfare schemes are tagged as 'Populist' that are targeted to address the poor people's concerns?

Populism and Identity Politics: The Case of Purulia, West Bengal

Nirmal Kumar Mahato

Mahato began his presentation by arguing that in populist political ideas, the people's identity gradually received importance. In the idea of populism, various types of shared identities among different groups of people are incorporated. During Mamata Banerjee's rule in West Bengal, various populist programmes such as, distribution of cycles to students, distribution of rice at Rs. 2/kg, schemes for peasants, folk artists, artisans, fisherfolk have been introduced. The introduction of Santali language in the primary level, donations for the Manjhithans of the Santals, patronage of Kurmali language, recognition of Kurmi Mahato artists encouraged the identities of Adivasis and caste groups, which intern paved the way for the rise of identity politics. Due to the weakness in the implementation of the populist programme, vernacular elites became richer and the Hinduwta forces of populism successfully mobilised the Adivasis and caste groups who are 'becoming Adivasi'. Thus, this paper attempted to explore the complexities and limitations populist politics and the emergence of identities of different social groups in Purulia.

Rearticulating 'Agrarian Populism' in Postcolonial India: Considerations around D.N. Dhanagare's Populism and Power: Farmers' Movement in Western India: 1980-2014 and Beyond

Atig Ghosh

Atig Ghosh began his paper with a reference to Edward Shils who popularised 'populism' in 1954 as a concept by broad-basing it to connote anti-elite trends in US society in general (and not specifically in connection with the People's Party); the concept, Ghosh argued has travelled a long way. Quite literally, for it has found application in other countries and continents and, more importantly for us, in disparate postcolonial/ 'third world' contexts. The remit of the term, predictably, has widened, so much so that Margaret Canovan, one of the foremost commentators on populism, has had to painstakingly justify the continuing

relevance of its analytical purchase even as she has had to disaggregate the term into a seven-legged typology. Going by this typology, three of these seven ‘types’ of populism can be grouped under the general rubric of ‘agrarian populism’, i.e. farmers’ radicalism, peasant movements, and intellectual agrarian socialism. The remaining four similarly can be clubbed under the umbrella of ‘political populism’, representing populist dictatorship, populist democracy, reactionary populism, and politicians’ populism. Obviously, these are meant to serve as heuristic, and not historical, ‘types’, since in reality these categories betray a great degree of overlap. To take the example of D.N. Dhanagare’s study of the farmers’ movement in western India, especially Maharashtra, from the 1980s to 2014 (*Populism and Power: Farmers’ Movement in Western India: 1980-2014*), we find ourselves on the trail of rich archival sources and informed field studies where the umbrella category of ‘agrarian populism’ is woven warp and weft into the fabric of ‘political populism’. Situating his study in the aporia between populism as an ideology, on the one hand, and as political power within the democratic state structure, on the other, Dhanagare, in fact, explores the complex crosshatching between populist ideology and mass participation. How well did it fare at the hustings? Sometimes it fared well; sometimes not. Against this backdrop of mixed electoral fortunes, the ‘popular’ emerges as the demotic idiom that undergirds the book’s chief problematic; *demos*, in my reading then, comes to constitute the ‘popular’ interstice between Dhanagare’s meta-binary: ideology and political power. From this perspective, Atig Ghosh attempted to splice Dhanagare’s narrative in the west with a somewhat similar story from the east, but in the latter case one which is focussed on the political career of one man who became emblematic of a movement: ‘Maulana’ Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani. Here, too, in the case of the ‘Mazlum Jananeta’, we find comparable simultaneity of entanglement and opposition between apparent binaries: that of ideology and political power, intellectual agrarian socialism and the barnstorming politician’s populism, mass participation and electoral gambit, and so on.

Arup Sen pointed out that Ray’s paper provided a comprehensive background of the Chhattisgarh state and how Raman Singh could mobilize his populist measures through subsidies intended to the poor as strategies of governance for a long time. He found Raman Singh’s electoral defeat after three consecutive terms as paradoxical. He also noted how Maoist movements remained prominent in Chhattisgarh parallel to other mainstream Marxist groups although they were to certain extent populist movements. For him this interface was important. He also pointed out how there has been a constant tension between Maoist

movement and populist dimension in the state. It was noted that Ghosh's paper attempted to rearticulate agrarian populism in a larger perspective with a focus to the materiality of agrarian populism and the paper largely talked about how class formation was changed after the green revolution. Ghosh was asked if gender was a relevant category in his research. He responded that only women of a particular religion were addressed in these movements while referring to Hindu metaphors used. He added that the specificity should be further discussed and he left other markers like religion and so unsaid due to the limitation of time. He argued that Maulana Bhashani had a completely different paradigm since he regarded human beings more important than ideology. Ranabir Samaddar's asked Ghosh about the interaction between political economy and populism. He raised his concern over how other sections of agrarian peasants could join populist enterprises asking if political economy is subject or market in the dominant discussions and he added that while market never remains a subject it affects all and creates the subject. Islam asked Ray about the logic of governance. He was specific about the question of limitation and its terms talking about how BJP constructs people through different rhetorics and varied political narratives. He pointed out how an established system can not necessarily have alternatives. Mahato responded that the rhetoric of sympathy towards Adivasis favoured them to earn legitimacy whereas Trinamool Congress could not remain connected with the general will of the people. Ranabir Samaddar also commented that there should be efforts to find a way of doing populism and the focus should be given to materialise populism as a strategy not merely a possibility.

Researchers
&
Paper Presenters in the Conference

Researchers



Amit Prakash is Professor at the Centre for Study of Law and Governance, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. He has been Associate Professor at the Centre for the Study of Law and Governance, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi; and, Assistant Research Professor at the Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi. Amit Prakash holds a PhD from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. His areas of research include politics of development and identity; critical governance studies (including governance indicators); conflict, governance and the state; democratic political process in India; policing in India; and global governance. His publications include. *Jharkhand: Politics of Development and Identity* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2001); *Local Governance in India: Decentralisation and Beyond*, co-edited with Niraja Gopal Jamal and Pradeep Sharma, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006) and *Governance in India: Empirical Evidence from Twenty States* (New Delhi: Routledge, forthcoming).



Manish K. Jha, the Vice-President of the Calcutta Research Group, is Professor and Dean of School of Social Work at Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai. He teaches courses on Community Organisation and Development Practice, Social Action and Movement and Social Policy, Planning and Programmes. His research interests include issues of development and governance, urban poverty and migration, social justice, social exclusion and human rights. He has authored the book *Human Rights: Agencies and Agenda* (2003) and co-edited the book *Traversing Bihar: Politics of Development and Social Justice* (2014). He has authored several papers on Food Security, Social Action,

Marginality and Justice, Disaster and Development, Politics of Social Justice, etc. He has been recipient of Commonwealth Academic Fellowship (2009) at the School of Oriental and African Studies, UK; Erasmus Mundus Academic Fellowship (2011) at University College Dublin, Ireland; UKIERI visiting Fellowship (2013) at Durham University, UK and Palme Professorship (2013) at Gothenburg University, Sweden. He is a member of several research organisations and has been actively engaged with development practice, policy advocacy, and relief and rehabilitation work in post disaster situation.



Rajat Roy is the project coordinator of the ongoing research project Populism and Populist Politics in South Asia with special reference to India (2019) of Calcutta Research Group (CRG). Earlier, he was also involved in another research project ‘Ecosystems of Life: A Bangladesh India Initiative’ (1914), that was taken up by CRG and supported by IUCN. He has co-edited a book titled ‘Political Ecology of Survival’ (Orient Black Swan)

with Madhurilata Basu and Ranabir Samaddar. Besides working as a professional journalist, first as fulltime, and now as freelancer, he has also been regularly delving into research work under the aegis of CRG. Other than writing numerous articles for various newspapers and magazines on current affairs, he has contributed to Economic & Political Weekly, SEMINAR and other journals. He is also a reviewer of manuscripts for Orient Black Swan.



Sibaji Pratim Basu, a well-known political scientist and political commentator from West Bengal, teaches Political Science at Vidyasagar University, Midnapore. Graduated from Presidency College (1981) and post-graduated from University of Calcutta (1983), he obtained his Ph.D. also from Calcutta University, working on the thesis: “The Concepts of Nationalism and

Internationalism: Tagore and Gandhi”. With a teaching and research career spanning more than three decades, he has taught, written books and articles, conducted and guided research in the areas like Modern Indian Political Thought & Politics; Socialist Thought; Forced Migration in South Asia; Popular Movements and People’s ‘Sustainable Rights’ in India. Some of his publications include: The Poet and Mahatma: Engagement with Nationalism and

Internationalism; an edited volume called *The Fleeing People of South Asia: Selections from Refugee Watch*; a co-edited volume called *Politics in Hunger Regime: Essays on the Right to Food in West Bengal* and also an edited book, *Forced Migration and Media-Mirrors*. He has also contributed articles to edited volumes published by Macmillan Publishers, Oxford University Press, Sage Publishers, Routledge/Social Science Press etc. He is a member of the editorial board of *Vidyasagar Rachanasamagra* (The Complete Writings of Paandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar) published by Vidyasagar University. He is a board member, and presently the Secretary of Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group and also holds membership of Institute for Development Studies Kolkata (IDSK – as a nominated member); West Bengal State Book Board (Member, Political Science); besides being the life member of West Bengal Political Science Association.



Sumona Das Gupta is a political scientist, researcher and independent consultant and is also a Senior Visiting Fellow with Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA). She is a Member of Calcutta Research Group, Kolkata, and the Chair of International Advisory Group at International Conflict Research Institute, University of Ulster in Northern Ireland. She has written extensively on conflict transformation, critical security studies, governance and politics in South Asia, particularly on Jammu and Kashmir and gender issues as a crosscutting theme.

Dr. DasGupta was a Visiting Fellow at the Rajaratnam School of International Studies and Nanyang Technological University, Singapore in 2014 and Lead Researcher for Participatory Research in Asia on the European Union Research Project on Cultures of Governance and Conflict Resolution in Europe and India. Previously, she served as Assistant Director at Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace (WISCOMP).



Ria De is a Research Associate at the Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group. She has submitted her PhD thesis at the Department of Film Studies, English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad. In her doctoral thesis, she worked on contemporary film stardom and intermediality in popular Hindi cinema. In addition to film, her areas of interest include populism, popular cultures, caste and gender studies, feminism etc. She also writes film reviews for popular news domains.

Paper Presenters in the Conference

Gopa Sabharwal founded the undergraduate Department of Sociology at the Lady Shri Ram College for Women (1993). Her research interests focus on ethnic identities, urban India, visual anthropology, and the history of society. Gopa served as founding Vice Chancellor, Nalanda University entrusted with giving shape to a unique international, research focused post-graduate University with a focus on inter-Asian relations (2010-2016). Her books include *Ethnicity and Class: Social Divisions in an Indian City* (New Delhi, Oxford University Press 2006); *The Indian Millennium- A.D.1000 to A.D.2000*,(Penguin India, 2000) and *India Since 1947: The Independent Years* (Penguin Random House India, 2017).

Sounita Mukherjee was an M.Phil research scholar at the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta(CSSSC) where she submitted her thesis titled, “The City as a Political Exhibitionary Space: Kolkata, 2011-2018” in the year 2018 and this paper is a part of her recent MPhil work. Thereafter she taught as a Guest Faculty in the department of Political Science at Scottish Church College, affiliated to the University of Calcutta and has been actively working as a research assistant in various projects funded respectively by the University of California, Santa Barbara, USA, by the UNESCO and Ministry of Culture, Government of India, and on a project on pre-primary education in West Bengal, funded by the ICSSR, New Delhi. She did both her BA(Hons.) and MA in Political Science from Presidency University Kolkata. She has two publications in an international refereed journal and the third one is forthcoming. Her research interest mainly addresses the areas of Urban Governance and Visual Politics, the relations of Culture and Politics, and also Gender studies.

Muhammed Puthusseri is an assistant professor at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, BITS Pilani, Pilani. His doctoral dissertation titled “Cinema, politics and historical consciousness: the Left and the production of a modern subjectivity in Kerala, 1950s-1980s” examined the constitutive role that the Left has played in the emergence of a modern subjectivity in Kerala through its engagement with culture. He can be contacted at muhammedafzalp@gmail.com.

Muhsina K K is an MPhil candidate at the Centre for comparative Literature in University of Hyderabad. Her MPhil dissertation is titled as 'Hidden Transcripts and Rituals of Resistance : Domestic Labourers in Select Malayalam Films'. Her research interests include Cultural anthropology, Minority Literature, Occupation fiction, Film Studies and so on.

Harender Singh, a fresh graduate from TISS Hyderabad in MA Rural Development & Governance is currently working at Foundation For Ecological Security, Rajasthan as Assistant Project Manager. He completed his bachelors in Geography from Kirori Mal College, Delhi University. His current work is on Common Land Development by MGNREGS and community involvement. He wrote his thesis on Dalits and Agricultural Land Rights in Punjab. He has also worked on Natural Farming in Malwa region of Punjab. Since the Anna movement, he has been involved in its various organisations. He has also worked on the Forest Rights’ Act and PESA in Jharkhand.

Indrani Talukdar is a PhD Research Student at the Centre for the Study of Social Movements, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. She is working on the Peasantry and Nationalist Consciousness in Assam.

Rashad Ullah Khan is a student at Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Hyderabad. His objective is to understand the various aspects of economic equalities that hinder the economic and political growth of any nation.

Kapil Tamang is currently pursuing PhD from Department of Sociology of the University of Hyderabad. The tentative title of his thesis is “Sociological Study of the Industrial Relations in Tea Industry in North Bengal.

Shefali Jha teaches at the Centre for Comparative Literature at the University of Hyderabad. She has a PhD in Anthropology from the University of Chicago, and her academic interests

include political anthropology, urban studies and popular culture in addition to feminist theory and practice.

Lipin Ram is a PhD candidate in Anthropology and Sociology at The Graduate Institute, Geneva. He completed his second Master's in Political Science from Central European University in Budapest (2012) with a distinction, successfully defending the thesis titled 'Talking about political violence': Mapping the contested discursive space of North Kerala. His first Master's (also in Political Science) was secured at the University of Hyderabad (2010-12) where he was awarded the 1st rank. His current research is located at the intersections of political theory and anthropology. His PhD dissertation looks at the anthropological meanings of democratic politics in north Kerala and their implications for a theory of democracy. He has been a Junior Research Fellow at the Institute for Human Sciences in Vienna. In addition to the question of democratic politics, his broad research interests include violence, affect, and social and political theory.

Maidul Islam is Assistant Professor of Political Science at the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta. After completing his doctorate from Oxford University in 2012, he has taught Political Science at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences and Presidency University, Kolkata. He was also a Fellow at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla. As a Clarendon-Hector Pilling-Senior Hulme scholar at Brasenose College, he studied political theory for his doctoral studies in the Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Oxford. His research interests are in political theory, political ideologies, populism, identity politics, Indian Muslims, Cinema, contemporary West Bengal and Bangladesh. As a political analyst, he also appears for Bengali news channels and occasionally gives expert opinions on Indian politics, West Bengal politics and terrorism to various national and international media houses. His doctoral thesis at Oxford University has been published as *Limits of Islamism: Jamaat-e-Islami in Contemporary India and Bangladesh* (Cambridge University Press, 2015). His second book, *Indian Muslim(s) after Liberalization* has been recently published by the Oxford University Press.

Atig Ghosh, Assistant Professor, Visva Bharati University and Member of CRG and former Research and Programme Associate, CRG (Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group). He also taught history on a part-time basis at the West Bengal State University (Barasat). Having studied history at the then Presidency College, Calcutta, and Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, he received his doctoral degree from El Colegio de México, Mexico City. His

doctoral research was lodged around conjoint concerns of political economy and cultural anthropology in the context of small-town (mofussil) Bengal in the nineteenth-century. Presently, he is researching statelessness and its socio-ontological textures and tangles in the intractable fastnesses of the Indo-Bangladeshi enclaves.

Nirmal Kumar Mahato is an Assistant Professor at the University of Gour Banga., and a member of the Calcutta Research Group. His research areas include migration, ecology and environmental history, identity politics, gender and adivasi studies, populism etc.

Publications

Publications

Policies & Practices

1. Populism I: Politics, Policies & Social Justice (PP 106) by *Amit Prakash and Manish K. Jha*
2. Populism II: States & Political Parties (PP 107) by *Sumona DasGupta and Rajat Ray*
3. Populism III: Leadership & Governmentality (PP 108) by *Sibaji Pratim Basu and Ria De*

Edited Volumes

1. Hindi volume: “*Bharat mein lokubhavanbad rajniti ka sandarbh*”, edited by Anjoo Sharan Upadhyay, Banaras Hindu University, Kolkata, Calcutta Research Group, December, 2019.
2. Bangla volume: “*Populism: Bharotborshe jonopriyotabaadi rajnitir utthan*”, edited by Rajat Ray, CRG and Sibaji Pratim Basu, Vidyasagar University & CRG, Kolkata, Calcutta Research Group, December 2019.

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