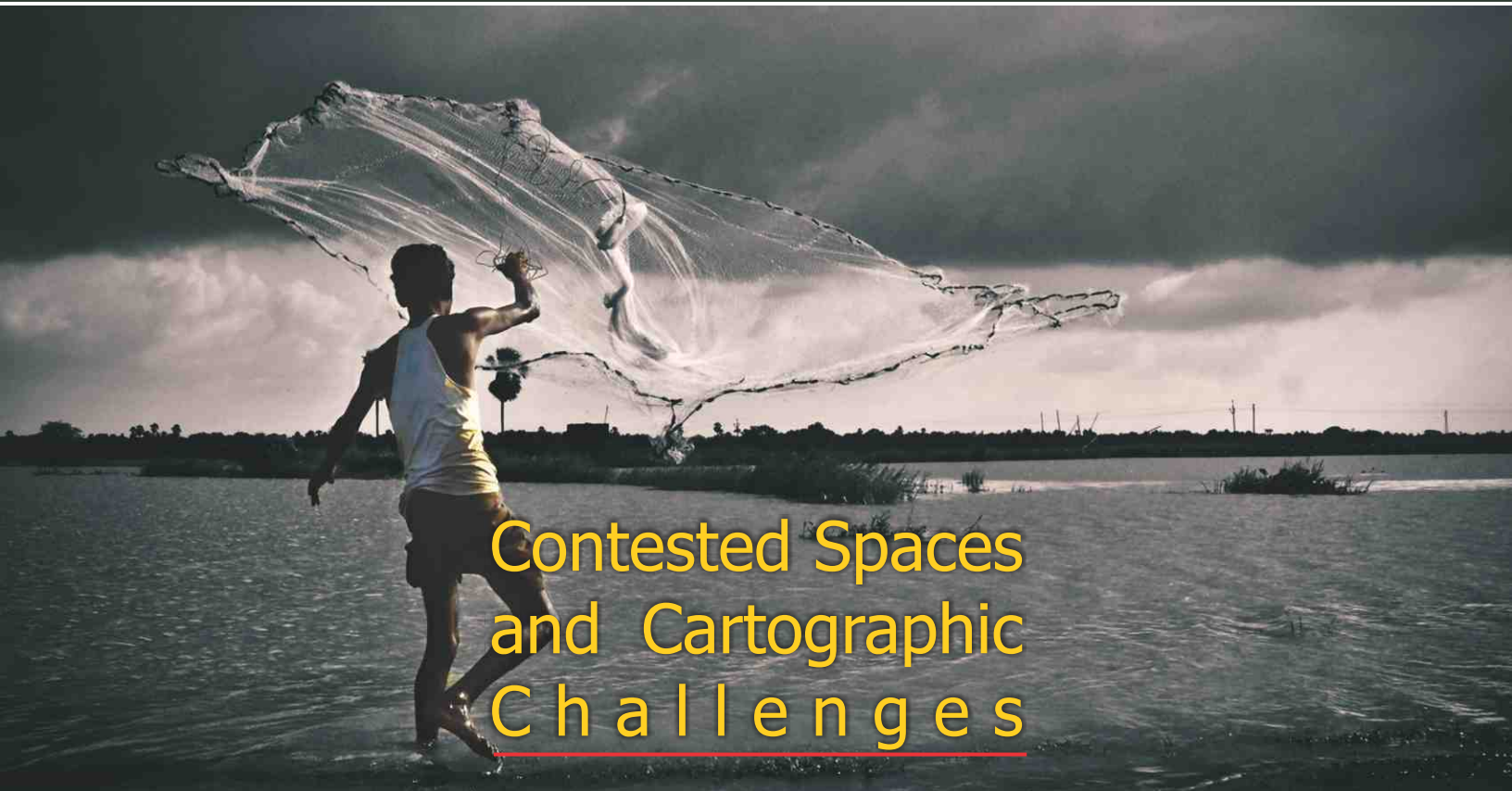




Mahanirban  
Calcutta Research Group



# IASFM 14



## Contested Spaces and Cartographic Challenges

# THE 14th CONFERENCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR STUDIES IN FORCED MIGRATION

Date : January 6-9, 2013

Venue: **Swabhumi**

Eastern Metropolitan Bypass, 89C Moulana Abul Kalam Azad Sarani,  
Formerly Narkeldanga Main Road, Opposite Subhas Sarobar,  
Kolkata 700 054, Phone 23205487, 23203903, Fax 23203909



## Introduction and Background

The 14th conference of the International Association for the Study of Forced Migration (IASFM) is scheduled to be held in Kolkata, West Bengal, India and hosted by Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group (henceforth referred to as MCRG), Kolkata, India. The MCRG has been involved in research particularly on issues of forced migration, internal displacement, refugees, trafficking and other pertinent issues such as questions of autonomy, social justice, and minority rights that are enmeshed within its fold, since its commencement during 1995-96. It also works on issues of peace, inter-cultural understanding, and issues of democracy in the region, particularly in the east and northeast of South Asia. It was created as a public forum for deliberations on public policies with regard to the aforementioned themes.

The International Association for the Study of Forced Migration is a reincarnation of its predecessor called the International Research and Advisory Panel (IRAP) that was initially launched at a conference by the Refugee Studies Programme, University of Oxford, in January 1990. IASFM happens to be an independent international association (registered otherwise as a non-profit organization in Netherlands). With the year 1994 marking its official inception as the International Association for the Study of Forced Migration, the year 1996 saw the

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genesis of the biennial conference in its full fervour and has so far held thirteen further conferences each in a country that hosts and/or is responsible for the augmentation of the issue of forced migration; namely Kenya, Jerusalem/Palestinian Territories, South Africa, Thailand, Brazil, Canada, Egypt, Cyprus and Uganda.

The objective of the conference is to disseminate and advance the pursuit of knowledge surrounding the issue of forced migration and thereby creating a platform for scholars, activists, policymakers to proffer a dialogic approach, which would further facilitate a better understanding of the complexities of the issue of forced migration. The conference would thus not only be instrumental in effective policy advocacy but also be a forum for better networking and communication that would further lead to effective human rights praxis.

The IASFM currently has approximately 300 members representing over 30 countries worldwide. It is governed by a Executive Committee, and is assisted in the organisation of its biennial conference by a Conference Programme Committee. Details of the current Executive and Conference Programme Committee members are provided later.

The significance of the conference remains its multi-disciplinary nature coupled with its international composition and the sheer variety in terms of the mix of scholars ranging from hard core academicians, activists, policymakers and practitioners to the refugees themselves. The platform it provides calls for an interdisciplinary exchange and communication that stimulates debate and discussions on the research priorities and policy issues on forced migration issues thereby offering a 'glocal' analysis of the same.

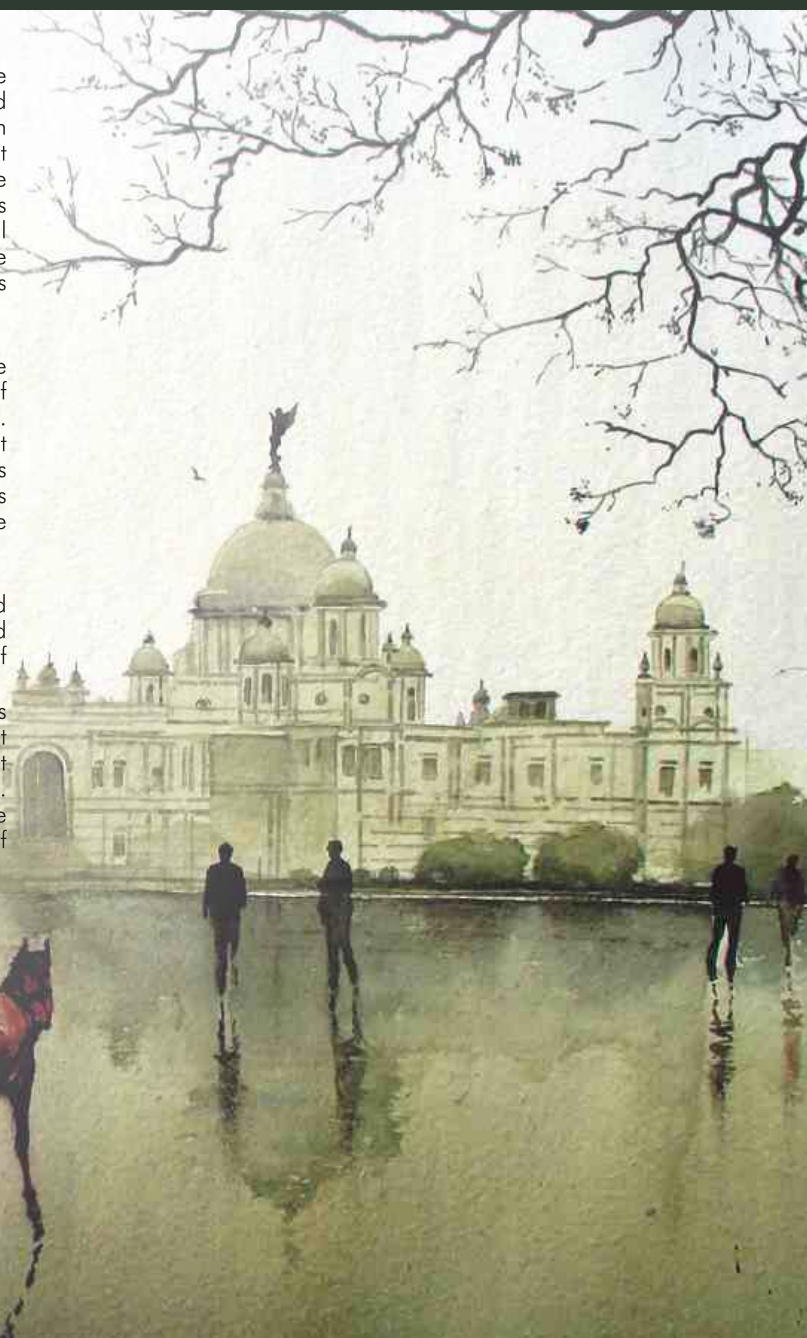
The reports and proceedings of the conferences are generally published in the *Journal of Refugee Studies* (Oxford University Press) along with a large number of papers that are presented at the conference. This in turn has promoted further research projects and collaborative work carried out by individuals and organisations in the study of forced migration.

## KOLKATA AS A VENUE FOR THE CONFERENCE

IASFM for the first time in its history is hosting the conference in South Asia. The conference will be held in Kolkata, West Bengal, India. Kolkata has been chosen as the Venue for hosting the conference since it is among the most culturally diverse cities of the country. The colonial structures that adorn the city's landscape mix curiously with the post colonial sensibilities to give the city its very own unique essence. The appeal of this cocktail culture is enhanced by a vibrant migrant community.

Not only is Kolkata a home to people from all the corners of India but it also hosts a sizeable number of migrant population from South Asia and greater Asia. Thus it boasts of an immigrant community that has not remained isolated in the corners of the city but has through their interaction with the native population as well as other migrant groups played a vital part in the emergence of the culture of Kolkata.

Refugee influx, as a phenomenon is deeply intertwined with the history of post-Partition India in general and West Bengal in particular. The constant process of movement of people to the state continues to this day. Kolkata happens to be the nerve centre of the process not only because it is the capital of state of West Bengal but also because the city itself saw a significant inflow of the refugees since post partition times. However in case of both West Bengal and Kolkata the refugee population underwent a process of integration with the land of their domicile.





The burgeoning refugee population faced housing and employment problems but from the beginning they had a distinctive right in being recognized as citizens of India armed with voting rights. Subsequently through various means of forced occupation of empty lands, these forced migrants began to settle themselves in a land which henceforth would be their home. This had an impact on the urban structure of the city itself. The refugee colonies created spontaneous, unplanned suburbanization extending the city in all directions. Thus Kolkata in its present shape owes a significant part of its geography and identity to the forced migrant community. Identity of Kolkata today is the result of the interface between the refugees and the original inhabitants.

Among the migrant population Kolkata is also a home to refugees from Bhutan, Tibet as well as China. These people have migrated to India fleeing persecution in their country and have added their essence to the city's identity. Squeezed into a tiny area of Tyagraj in north-west Kolkata, Chinatown has remained an immigrant enclave and retained its unique cultural appeal. This has been a home to the 200 odd Chinese families who have continued to reside here for a few generations. Kolkata has a thriving community in its Chinatown, engaged in different trades, such as tanning, shoemaking, medicine shops and food.

Internally displaced persons also happen to form a part of Kolkata's forced migrant community. This includes migrants from Northern and North Eastern India mostly. Also the incidence of human trafficking remains an evil that thwarts the city. This is another dimension of forced migration which is often ignored. In this scenario Kolkata often serves as a conduit from where these girls are sent off often to places as far off as USA.

Finally Kolkata also has a section of economic migrants who have arrived here in search of better job opportunities or to sell their labour. The migrants in this group mostly originate from Bihar, Jharkhand and Orissa.

Therefore it can be seen that Kolkata in essence is a city of migrants. Forced migrants both across the borders as well as within, individual victims of forced migration in the form of human trafficking as well as economic migrants all find their place in Kolkata. They have integrated in most cases with the native community and given the city its distinctiveness. A conference on forced migration can hardly find a more suitable venue than this.



## MCRG and Forced Migration

Since its inception, MCRG has been involved in research on many pertinent problems of the day. It was founded in 1995-96 to work on issues of peace, inter-cultural understanding, and issues of forced migration, particularly in the east and northeast of South Asia. It was created as a public forum for deliberations on public policies related to these themes. It has on its roll eminent social scientists, peace researchers, people engaged in cultural studies, journalists and an editor of a journal on women in Bengal, an information expert, and members working on gender history and justice. Thus, right from its inception it has been an eclectic organization with special focus on forced migration.

MCRG has initiated path breaking research work on autonomy, social justice, and minority rights among many other themes. It is however in the field of forced migration, displacement and refugee studies that the MCRG has made its most significant contribution to the academic discourse. Some of the senior researchers in the organization have been involved in pioneering research on the various themes of forced migration. Apart from a sizeable number of publications which come out every year the MCRG has been conducting an annual course on forced migration for the last decade. This comprises of a two and a half month of distance education followed by an intensive fifteen day workshop. The course is supported by the UNHCR as well as the government of Finland and Brookings Institution, Washington DC. It draws its faculty and participants from all over the globe, with special focus, in terms of participants, on South Asia. This enables the emergence of a very vibrant and global perspective on the intricacies of the issue of forced migration.

In 2004-05 it has been instrumental in organizing a South Asia advocacy campaign on the United Nation's Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. This campaign sought to explore how coupled with the legal and non formal measures these principles could be used to serve the interest of the victim community. To strengthen this campaign it has also initiated and conducted several meetings and workshops in all the corners of South Asia from Nepal to Sri Lanka and also held a review meeting in Thailand. Through all this it has successfully built up a scholar activist community which supports the advocacy programme and makes their contribution to it. MCRG has been engaged in research on Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) since 2002 given their plight and rising number in South Asia. In this endeavor it has been organizing an ongoing public lecture series.



The MCRG publishes the only regular journal on forced migration in South Asia, *Refugee Watch*. This journal through the last five years has built up a substantial body of writings, case studies, analyses, interviews, and documents on forced migration, its victims, its effects among many other themes. The news and views, critiques and analyses of policies of the States and international humanitarian institutions that it presents with regard to forced population flows across the borders have been widely read. It stresses the need for a broad legal framework for the region with regard to refugee asylum and protection of other victims of forced displacement. It tries to inform and build a network of intellectuals, such as teachers, journalists, lawyers, jurists, and human rights thinkers, academic institutes, and various public interest groups in order to address the task of drawing political and social attention to the cause of the human rights of the victims of forced migration. One of the essential features of the publication is its constant attention to the requirements of gender justice with regard to the victims of forced displacement.

MCRG in collaboration with the Brookings Institution has completed a significant study of the patterns of internal displacement in South Asia (2003) based on country analyses of Pakistan, India, Burma, Nepal, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal.

MCRG presently has regular contributions from a number of visiting professors not only from other parts of South Asia but also from outside the region. They have not only written for *Refugee Watch* but have on many occasions actively collaborated with our senior researchers in their projects. This interaction has given MCRG a global and international perspective, which we believe would be ideal for the conference.



## Themes and subthemes of the conference

### Geography and economies of Displacement-

- a) Modes and Patterns of Displacement
- b) Margin of space of development, Places for contest
- c) Geographies and Costs of Displacement

### Borders and Displacement –

- a) Negotiating Borders
- b) Gendered experiences of borders
- c) Lives in transit

### Rights, Ethics, and Institutions-

- a) Protection, Ethics and Justice
- b) Governmentality, Laws and Institutions
- c) Social Movements and Rights of the Displaced





This is the first time that the conference is being hosted in South Asia.

<http://www.iasfmconference.org>

To be hosted by  
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