

REFUGEE WATCH

A South Asian Journal on Forced Migration

**Contemporary Perspectives on
Internal Displacements in South Asia**

55

Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group
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From the Editor's Desk

By

Paula Banerjee *

Refugee Watch has been consistently shining a light on the situation of displaced populations over the last two decades. Our journey began even before displacement/forced migration had become a buzzword in social science discourse. *Refugee Watch* began its journey when historically dominant migrant receiving countries such as United States, Canada and Australia were becoming more and more unwilling to receive the new migrants. On the other hand it was becoming clear that countries such as Italy, Spain, and Portugal, which only a decade before had been sending migrants to wealthier countries in the north, began to import workers from Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. At the same time, Japan-with its low and still declining birth rate, its aging population, and its high standard of living-found itself turning increasingly to migrants from poorer countries in Asia and even South America to satisfy its labour needs. With the change in the origin and hence racial composition of migrants, attitude towards migration was changing the world over. The new migrants were viewed as aliens and so there was a growing xenophobic fear that they might soon take away resources from the desired population. Therefore, walls began to be erected against these migrants whose labour was sought but whose bodies were looked upon with suspicion. Around the same time due to growth of neo-liberal economies people from poorer countries were being dispossessed and displaced in large numbers. In migrant receiving countries therefore new laws were created so that the alien/migrant workers could be kept away from becoming part of the citizenry and thereby xenophobic efforts were made to keep certain groups of people ideally out. *Refugee Watch* was born to intervene in this process and become a strong voice in favour of the displaced population.

From its inception the editors of *Refugee Watch* refused to accept the division of the forced migrant population into refugees, internally displaced, climate refugees, labour migrants etc, and argued that the phenomena is one

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of mixed and massive flows. This was a terminology that was later universally accepted. At present, there is no single, coherent theory of South Asian or Southern global migration, only a fragmented set of theories that have developed largely in isolation from one another, sometimes but not always segmented by disciplinary boundaries. Often migration is considered as a product of voluntary and individual choice but today migration is often a result of factors that are usually structural and outside the scope of individual choice. Research undertaken by the Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group, that brings out *Refugee Watch*, portrayed that the boundary between voluntary and forced migration is becoming increasingly thin. This was further proven by the pandemic and the fate of migrant workers in over much of South Asia. *Refugee Watch* has always endeavoured to bring out research oriented articles for our readers. Often we bring research work from the fields to your table. Never shy of taking up controversies and challenges that the phenomena of forced migration brought our way, we have endeavoured to keep abreast of current research. The only constant that has been with *Refugee Watch* is that most of the articles are based on primary research and they are largely on South Asia. In this issue we showcase research undertaken under the aegis of the South Asia Network of Displacement and Development (SANDD) project. Other than that this issue of *Refugee Watch* reflects the interdisciplinary nature of the research and understandings of forced migration in the current times. We are grateful to the editorial team and the advisory team for their support. We are also grateful to Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung and IWM Vienna for partnering with us in this journey.

South Asia Network for Displacement and Development (SANDD)

By

Liza Schuster^{*} & Saqib Jafarey[†]

SANDD is an incipient network of researchers and community-based advocacy groups based in six countries of South Asia. SANDD was set up in June 2018 and is currently funded by the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) and City, University of London. SANDD aims to promote South Asian collaboration on research into the causes and consequences of forced displacement that affects every country in the region.

South Asia is home to one of the largest populations of displaced communities, both internally and across national borders. The triggers causing displacement – climate change, conflict and disruptive development – loom large in all South Asian countries and at times simultaneously affect more than one country, *e.g.* the Taliban insurgencies in Afghanistan and Pakistan, cyclones in the Bay of Bengal, and the persecution and subsequent flight of Rohingya Muslims from Myanmar to Bangladesh and India. Yet historical tensions between the region's national governments have prevented the emergence of regional approaches to the challenges facing displaced and displacement-vulnerable communities. This is the need which SANDD aims to address.

SANDD's present membership includes Afghan Human Rights and Development Organisation, Alliance for Social Dialogue (Nepal), Centre for Humanitarian Affairs (Sri Lanka); Civil Society Coalition for Climate Change (Pakistan); Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group (India); Research Initiatives Bangladesh. Alice Mesnard, Liza Schuster and Saqib Jafarey of City, University of London facilitate the network. Between themselves, SANDD members bring together disciplinary perspectives from sociology, economics, political science, demography, cultural studies, legal studies, as well as many years of collective experience in community-based activism and advocacy.

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At the time of its inception, SANDD's focus was on fostering dialogue and sharing of perspectives among its South Asian partners, and to develop bottom-up, community-based, inter-disciplinary research agendas that enable country partners to pool their resources by cooperatively researching issues that their respective communities collectively face.

With these aims, during Autumn 2019, SANDD facilitated six stakeholder dialogues, one in each of its partners' country. In these dialogues, each country partner met with their affiliated communities over a 2-3-day period in order to hear the voices of various stakeholders and identify issues of concern to them. The findings of these dialogues were discussed in two workshops held respectively in Islamabad (December 2019) and Kathmandu (February 2020). A larger workshop was planned for Colombo in May 2020 for brainstorming towards an integrated, multi-faceted research proposal.

With the outbreak of COVID-19, SANDD's country partners, all of whom have strong advocacy and activism remits, swiftly adjusted their priorities in order to address the fresh challenges posed by the pandemic. Rural communities that were being depleted by out-migration faced an abrupt reversal of migrant flows as their kinfolk and neighbours returned home, at times forcibly. Even where such reverse migration did not occur, there was a loss of income as opportunities for casual labour disappeared. For communities living in remote areas, even access to essential goods and food items was disrupted as marketised supply chains broke. In the case of our Kolkata and Dhaka partners, the disruptions of COVID-19 were further exacerbated by Cyclone Amphan which hit Bangladesh and West Bengal in May 2020.

The pandemic is affecting the world order in many profound ways. In the case of SANDD, it has made us aware that in confronting the long-standing triggers of displacement, the disruptive potential of future pandemics should be included as an additional factor. This is an additional element that SANDD is taking into account in developing its regional agenda.

A Social Mapping of Displacement in India

By

Shatabdi Das *

Introduction

The occurrence of displacement either as involuntarily or forced relocation of people, results from the interplay of a number of circumstances. It could be a product of forced migration, exile, resettlement or conflict. Physical and cultural barriers, political and legal structures, ideas of nationalism, ethnicity, and roots come to the forefront whenever one tries to analyse the nature or dominating causes of displacement. Displacement mostly brings with it an identity of someone 'in transit', moving away from home or towards a refugee camp, or else crossing over borders, sometimes legally and at other times unlawfully.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), defines displacement of people as 'forced movement of people from their locality or environment and occupational activities.'

UNHCR in 2015, upheld *displacement* as 'a forced or involuntary form of human mobility that can occur internally or across international borders in the context of disasters linked to the impacts of natural hazards, including the adverse impacts of climate change'.¹ It is a circumstance that comes in the form of a social change or change of enumeration or residence resulting from natural disaster, famine, conflict or development induced economic changes.² Displacement in varied forms has been instrumental in shaping history, politics, ethics, affecting the lives of millions across the globe.

In the light of growing casualties in the era of Cold War, number of people affected by conflicts and war had started coming to the forefront in case of South Asian countries. The assessment of the dimensions of possible hazards, risks on health and vulnerability of people having taken refuge in camps in the backdrop of growing number of displaced persons in the last two decades becomes significant. With the numbers growing for displaced

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people around the globe, mapping of displacement becomes indispensable, to facilitate protection, public health analysis and for combating the social vulnerabilities that tow loss of homes.³

Since the middle of 1990s, the category of ‘internally displaced people’ became prominent with the rise in conflicts in Sri Lanka that had resulted into the displacement of more than one million people. Paula Banerjee in her work on displacement in South Asia (2005) brings to light the shift in consideration of peace organisations such as the United Nations (UN) for the inclusion and protection of sections of population affected by conflicts. The Guiding Principles on the Internally Displaced Persons laid special attention to women and children who held a large number among displaced persons.⁴ Ahmad et al. stress on the significance of vulnerability assessment that can help built strategies of protection and sustenance. The analysis also helps support provision of healthcare and education, which becomes a daunting task in the face of unforeseen influx of people displaced from homeland.⁵ The book ‘Internal Displacement in South Asia’ provides typology of internal displacement in India after the 1998 UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, such as *ethnicity-related displacement*, *border-related displacement*, *externally-induced displacement* and *potentially displaced persons*. It lays emphasis on legal intervention and the state response to displacements.⁶ The Global Risks Report 2019 by the World Economic Forum harps on the risks that cities are faced with (more so in case of coastal cities) due to rising global sea level in terms of impact on rural migrants coming into the cities for work.⁷

The process of social mapping helps to gather information on causes of displacement and thereby provides an understanding of the forms of displacement⁸ triggered by conflicts and the incidences of disruptions consequent to the involuntary shift of place of residence and eviction. Social mapping in case of displacement helps associate the factors harbouring dislocation and the analysis of temporal trend of events that have drove millions to make a home out of a tent.

The National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR) defines a social map as a facilitator of clearer understanding of stratification and patterns in the society. The World Bank articulates that social mapping helps in relating the occurrence of a phenomenon over space or visualising the relative location and extent of an incident in relation to society. Displacement as manifestations of natural and social circumstances mostly builds up a pattern over land, waterfront, across territories or region. Hence, displacement as an outcome of varied driving forces (either occurring singularly or through the interplay of multiple factors) could be typified as concentrated in certain parts of the country, when India is taken into consideration. This study attempts to identify the drivers of displacement and the challenges faced as a result of their manifestations at the hot-spots of displacement in India.

Section 1

1. Displaced Population

Displaced population may be recognised as Internally Displaced Persons, asylum seekers, refugees, potentially displaced persons - the form of displacement in each case being largely shaped by the 'reason' for moving from one place to another also termed as 'drivers' or 'triggers' of displacement. This section studies the different groups of population that are displaced under the influences of varied forces or circumstances.

Walter Fernandes (2008) elucidates *displaced persons* (DPs) as 'those who are forced to move out of their habitat, whether it is individually and formally owned, or a traditional, customarily, and collectively owned area. Some of them lose all access to most of their land, but their houses may be left untouched.'⁹

Displaced communities mostly strive to rebuild their traditional, religious spaces and environment to preserve their cultural and ethnic identities that becomes evident from their narratives.¹⁰ Their mortifying grievances often lead them astray from integrating into the new cultural landscapes and this is where the role of care and acceptance comes into play - put into place by protection and humanitarian agencies.

Forms of displacement or the underlain factor behind classifying displaced population into different types is determined by the 'force' or 'trigger' or 'reason' for a person's movement, also addressed as 'drivers' of displacement. The following section enlists a brief typology of displacement mainly based on internal and external drivers in relation to international border.

1.1. Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement set by UNHCR, hold internally displaced persons (IDPs) as 'persons or groups of persons who have been forced to flee, or leave, their homes or places of habitual residence as a result of armed conflict, internal strife, and habitual violations of human rights, as well as natural or man-made disasters involving one or more of these elements, and who have not crossed an internationally recognised state border'.¹¹

IDPs are defined as people who remain within national borders, implying that the national government is responsible for meeting their protection needs; this culminates into complexities whenever displacement is triggered by government or collaborative projects.¹² Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) are commonly citizens of the country in which they are resident and in other cases may also be habitual residents, many with similar rights to nationals. Recognition of rights as citizens and non-discrimination in case of protection of rights of IDPs is essential. IDPs face challenges when it comes to recognition of their rights, especially through the expressions of

ethnic discrimination in states that are actively hostile to IDP group, and whenever conflict or natural disaster razes infrastructure and leaves the state with a weak capacity to combat and manage post-disaster damage.¹³

Vulnerability is both 'situational' and 'personal'. Depending on adaptive capacity or ability to adjust or the resilience to the impacts of climate change, people move across borders and legal barriers of international boundaries, sometimes attaching to themselves the tag of 'criminal' based on immigration policies and border restrictions.¹⁴ Hence the confrontations of cross-border migrants become slightly different from those internally displaced. When displaced persons cross borders in search of safety and/or hope of receiving aid and protection in another country they are cross-border displaced persons. If such persons have come across borders after their experiences of agony during disasters then they fall into the group of cross-border disaster-displaced persons, whose journeys across states is generally controlled by the outcome of the lack of preparedness against disasters of their respective countries.¹⁵

1.2. Asylum Seekers and Refugees

Asylum-seekers are vested with the right of not being returned to the country of their origin till there is adjudication of their claim for refugee status; however, since national laws dictate social protection rights, asylum-seekers' rights to work or access to social protection is heavily restricted.¹⁶ According to UNHCR, asylum-seekers are 'individuals who have sought international protection and whose claims for refugee status have not yet been determined'.¹⁷ The notion of asylum seekers, as them being the 'other' or aliens, places rein on the treatment met out to them; such individuals are convicted under the jurisdiction of Foreigners Act 1946 even today.¹⁸ According to UNHCR, refugees and asylum-seekers have access to basic government services such as health care and education and also have access to law-enforcement and justice but the time taken and path to justice being served is a long and difficult one. India has hosted refugees seeking asylum in India from Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan on humanitarian grounds although the Indian Asylum Policy remains pending.¹⁹ The absence of a specific agency or machinery for determination of the status of refugees persists in India, while the nation handles flow of refugees through political and administrative measures.

The 1951 Refugee Convention defines a 'refugee' as a person who 'owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it'.²⁰ The UN Convention of 1951 declares the obligation of refugees to be treated as nationals when it comes to consideration of social benefits. India despite not having ratified the 1951

Refugee Convention and the 1967 protocol is home to refugees from Bangladesh, Myanmar, Nepal, Bhutan, Afghanistan, and Sri Lanka.²¹

Section 2

2. Drivers of Displacement

Statistics show that there has been an increase in the number of cases of displacement, most being the outcome of climate induced disasters and development projects. A Government of India report in 1994 highlighted that an estimated 15 million people and above had been displaced due to projects on dams, mining, industrial plants, especially from mineral-rich districts of Odisha and Chhattisgarh by the early years of the decade of 1990s; the worst hit among the victims were tribal people - marginalised and impoverished, ousted from their traditional land.²²

Risks that are *in-situ* and threaten human rights add to the vulnerability of a population, which then can act as a driver of migration and displacement. Climate induced disasters have been increasing in India. In 2018, more than 500 million Indians have been impacted by natural disasters in the form of droughts, floods and storms.²³

In the era of globalisation when global trade is growing, mobility, circulation of goods and economic opportunities pull more and more skilled and unskilled workers beyond a country's territorial limit. But then again, unemployment, poverty, conflicts, constricted political freedom, issues of safety and security, social and cultural intolerance, violation of human rights, discrimination on the grounds of religion-ethnicity-race, and failure of protection systems build up as push factors that force people to move out.

India's susceptibility to hazards such as cyclones, storm surges, drought and earthquakes forcibly uproot people. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre in the 'Global Report on Internal Displacement 2019' recorded that out of 3 million cases of displacement, nearly 0.2 million were due to conflicts while a whopping 2.7 million, across 15 states were disaster induced²⁴. Among the weather related hazards, storms had triggered most of the new displacements associated with disasters in India. In case of countries with most number of displacements, India ranked third after Philippines and China. The country had been badly hit by monsoon-driven floods, particularly south western Kerala in August 2018; victims swamping the flood relief camps of Kerala in 2019, placed India in a leading position among the other South Asian countries namely Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal in cases of new displacements due to conflict, violence and disasters.²⁵

2.1. Conflict Related Displacement

Forced displacement refers to circumstance or situation that forces people to leave or flee from homes due to violence, conflict, war, persecution and human rights violations. A person forcibly driven out does not have the option of choosing the destination where they would move in, so it becomes

difficult for such displaced persons to engage in skilled occupation, if they are not experienced with a particular set of skill that is 'in demand' for earning remuneration.²⁶

Conflict-related displacement is sparked from ethnicity and border related disputes. In case of displacement due to conflict, the nature of displacement could be interstate or intrastate. The border states of Punjab, Assam and other North-Eastern states, Kashmir as zones of conflict have faced dislocation of residences and lives, with people receiving differential treatment over issues that have boiled discontent in the east and north of the country. Parts of Kashmir under Indian administration were faced with around 1, 60,000 new displacements in 2017-2018. Terror, religious and communal strife and political tensions, have since time immemorial plagued Jammu and Kashmir.²⁷ Jammu region has 10 lakh people settled in 39 camps.²⁸

Assam has been a site of conflicts since Indian independence. Disputes of 1961 and 1971 had affected language speakers in the state with count of Assamese speaking population decreasing and Bengali speakers rising in number.²⁹ The issues of illegal migration across Bangladesh border and citizenship have always weighed down the inhabitants of the state. Conflicts over land reforms and possession, peasant protests, tribal struggles and ethnic clashes have scarred the recent decades in Assam. Tribal conflicts and issues of governance, violation of right to law, militarisation and discrimination have characterised the lives of local people and implicated peace in the North-Eastern states.

Indian states of West Bengal, Maharashtra, Tripura, saw caste and political violence ending up in small-scale displacement.³⁰ Conflicts in Gujarat in 2002 were the outcome of communal clashes which further breathed riots.³¹ Government data indicated that during the riots of 2002 in Gujarat close to one lakh persons were displaced, living in more than 100 relief camps spread across the state, as a result of clashes in the event of the Sabarmati Express attack on 22 February 2002. Women had been terrorised and were victims of sexual violence during the break-out of mob violence at camps;³² it is only recently, after 17 years of outbreak of the riots that some of the victims have received justice.³³ Even a decade and a half after the riots, segregation and marginalisation persists.

Fear of terror, rebel and violent force of Naxalites on one hand and government forces on the other had forced 57,528 villagers to flee from their homes and live as IDPs within 23 relief camps in Chhattisgarh. Uprooted tribal people lost their access to abundant forest resources of the state and with that their right on resources.³⁴ It is the local people who turn out to be the worst sufferers caught in the mesh of negotiations between government and rebellions.

Refugee camps are sites where the inmates, especially child-bearing or nursing mothers and children below the age of five are left vulnerable due to the dearth of medical supplies and risk of contraction of diseases as a result of overcrowding.³⁵ Dislocation and relocation beyond in-situ invites breakdown of community network and ecologically sound ways of sustenance. This is

exemplified through the lifestyle change of tribal women of the forests of Singrauli in Madhya Pradesh, caused by displacement due to the establishment of the National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC).³⁶

UNHCR in its report on 'Climate Change, Disasters and Displacement' (2017) points out that climate change can also lead to conflicts that cause displacement.³⁷; thus conflict induced displacement may not always be anthropogenic in its origin but may also be thrown-in by the vagaries of nature. This therefore, could lead the way to research that seeks to establish the connection between climate change and natural disasters and conflict and instability.

2.2. Development Related Displacement

Development-induced displacement can be of two categories - direct and indirect. Direct displacement comes from installation and establishment of development projects leading to direct displacement of people who have inhabited the sites of projects. The years between 1955 and 1990 in India saw 21 million people internally displaced by reason of installation of dam, industrial projects and opening of mines. Indirect displacement is the outcome of local people continuously being pushed out of the region due to consumption of natural resources that the indigenous people are dependent on for sustenance.³⁸ Development projects in India have caused environmental and socio-economic problems - strategies and plans of economic development in India have been largely garnered at the cost of sustenance of marginalised sections of society.

Although lack of development is many a times an attribute that gives rise to social unrest and protest movements, development often takes up the role of a process that forcibly displaces people and triggers conflict and social inequality. Growing demand of rail and roads in the Chota Nagpur region of India has transformed the lives of many an indigenous population in the Jangal Mahal stretches. This part of the country in the east used to be sheathed by dense forest but has witnessed gradual clashes of tribal people with local authorities and government when transport development projects that connected the industrial cities of Jamshedpur, Asansol, Durgapur and other cities in the vicinity received impetus in the region. The challenge lies in striking a balance between development and the social cost entailed by development ventures.

New factories, dams, multipurpose projects, mining, have accelerated economic growth but have also forcibly displaced tens of thousands of people from their ancestral land. Land acquisition deprives people of their subsistence livelihood leaving them dispossessed, displaced and jeopardises sustainability. Between 1952 and 1990, a total of 164 lakh people were displaced by dam construction in different parts of India; those ousted in large numbers were small and marginal farmers, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes population and people from backward regions.³⁹

2.2.1. Land Acquisition and Displacement

The Damodar valley in Eastern India has borne witness to resettlement and rehabilitation for displaced persons since 1950s. The paradox of prioritising development schemes over the sustenance of local means of livelihood has always impoverished the weaker section of the society. A number of times compensation is appraised as rehabilitation. Episodes of acquisition and displacement have risen since the period of liberalisation but the important question remains whether development projects pushing people away from their land have been successful in amending the losses and benefitting, allotting and redistributing resources equally among all sections of society.

Acquisition of agricultural land for industrial, transport and other infrastructural projects (dams, hydel and thermal power projects, other utilities) or township planning initiates displacement and pushes several community towards marginalisation. The history of industrial development in the Damodar Valley region studded with large-scale manufacturing units and mining of coal and other mineral ores have witnessed the expansion of industrial premises like the IISCO Steel Plant (ISP), Eastern Coalfields Limited (ECL) with rehabilitation schemes designed in the last few decades but ‘yet-to-be’ completely executed. Engagement in community-based participation could better ensure and aid the facilitation of the rehabilitation process in coal mining areas under ECL in Jharkhand and Bengal by means of greater level of involvement and participation of affected people through absorption in work for the development of sustainable landscape and prevention of land degradation. The expansion of several public sector undertakings, as well as the development of new townships is sometimes based on large-scale land acquisitions and rehabilitation of local populations. Several past and present land acquisitions have been done under the umbrage of “public purpose” clause of the LAA of 1894.

The era of introduction of policies of liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation, was also a decade that spelt out rehabilitation policies. In this light, states like Jharkhand, West Bengal, Gujarat, Haryana which had registered large sizes of displaced population added to the figures in their attempts of land acquisition for Special Economic Zones (SEZs) that were expected to usher in investment. Extension of areas of coal mines and transport in heavy industrial sector by late 1980s like mines in the Upper Karanpura Valley of Jharkhand and National Aluminium Company (NALCO) in Odisha created jobs but at the same time also displaced over 1 lakh persons.⁴⁰ During land acquisition for proposed Tata Motors Nano car factory, in Singur of Hooghly district of West Bengal along the National Highway Number 2 in 2006, more than 2400 people who owned 339 acres of land were affected.⁴¹ The Singur project had been ultimately abandoned in the face of protests and criticism, when 2500 unwilling farmers had led the anti-land grab agitation. A news report in 2019 sheds light on the fact that even eight years after the protests, during 2018-19, around 792 farmers harvested land, while many sold off their land at high price. After 955 acres of land had been returned to the farmers in 2016 by the government, only 30 percent of

the plots could be made cultivable because much of the remaining area lies barren from the remnants of concrete structures.⁴² Despite the distribution of seeds and manures with cultivable form of land being retained, the number of farmers tilling land in the area has decreased. Much still remains to be realised for the return of normal life in the area.

Issues of land acquisition for development projects such as power, industries, railways, roads, defence, administrative and IT hubs set the path to the complexities of land acquisition and displacement. For example, if the case of the land-locked state of Assam is studied - in 2003, more than 14 lakh acres of land was required for road, rail, dams and industrial projects in Assam, for seven major irrigation dams. Land was drawn from common property resources (CPR's) that acted as means of earning for the rural poor and tribal communities.⁴³ India has seen more land acquisition since globalisation which has ushered negative consequences on displaced persons (DP) and have deprived people of livelihood sans relocation such as project affected persons (PAP).

2.2.2. Industrial Development and Displacement

Experiences of the backward regions of Maharashtra, Odisha, and Chhattisgarh after establishment of industrial and infrastructural projects and acquisition of forested land during opening of collieries in West Bengal provide insightful stories of dislocation of people from their natural habitats. Again, closures of industries forge out stories of displacement when employees are forced to migrate out leaving behind remnants of ghost towns; Hindustan Cables Town in the district of Paschim Barddhaman in West Bengal, home to Asansol – Durgapur industrial belt represents involuntary movement of people into other nearby towns and cities on account of closer of industrial departments due to decelerated economic performance.

In India, from 1947 to 2000, as many as 60 million persons were displaced, 40 percent of them being tribals and 20 percent each Dalits and Other Backward Classes - a large ratio not properly rehabilitated.⁴⁴

Redistribution of land after acquisition from tribal people for resource sustenance and economic development impoverishes and marginalises a section of population. Large-scale investment in mineral-based industries of backward regions in the decade of 1990s could be considered as a watershed in terms of the nation embracing globalisation and also an intrusion into the subsistence and traditional practices of farming.⁴⁵ Displacement and livelihood insecurities have afflicted the mineral-rich regions of West Bengal, Odisha and Chhattisgarh whenever mineral based industries were established in these states.

2.2.3. Dam Construction and Displacement

Displacement is often one of the consequences of dam construction. The intensity of damage caused to the environment and indigenous population, along with the complications of resettlement and rehabilitation plans turn into

important issues of enquiry. The mountainous town of Tehri and the plains of Gujarat-Maharashtra-Madhya Pradesh flanked by river Narmada have been witness to ruptures of homes through the protests of villagers against dam construction. Bihar has braced displaced persons during breach of embankments that flooded settlements in the downstream stretches of a river's command area (for e.g. the Kosi flood of 2008). Uprooted population often chronicle the failures of government in terms of development policies, structural measures, poverty, homelessness and recurrence of displacement into the portrayals of their encounters with misery.⁴⁶ This juxtaposition of government efforts and inadequacy of resources in a land where displaced individuals struggle to adjust to economy and environment - has long remained a serious unresolved confrontation which calls for more balanced intervention.

Development projects are always attributed with costs and tasks of preparedness, protection and rehabilitation for avoidance of disaster although displacement in some form or the other is difficult to escape at sites of dam reservoir and multipurpose projects. Rights of local villagers in Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat were affected by the construction of Sardar Sarovar Dam in 2006, as rights went unrecognised in terms of implementation of rehabilitation policies. This stimulated the 'Narmada Bachao Andolan' in 2008, supported by activists, environmentalists, eminent persons and local people.⁴⁷ This project like many other multipurpose projects mirrored fragmentation of community, disruption of societal setup and uprooted kinships.

2.3. Disasters

The Nansen Initiative 2012 emphasises a disaster as 'a serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society involving widespread human, material, economic or environmental losses and impacts, which exceeds the ability of the affected community or society to cope using its own resources'.⁴⁸ UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction in 2009 defined *disaster-induced migration* as the displacement of people as a result of 'a serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society involving widespread human, material, economic or environmental losses or impacts, which exceeds the ability of the affected community or society to cope using its own resources'.⁴⁹

Disaster induced displacements have become natural in large parts of the districts of Malda, Murshidabad and Cooch Behar in North Bengal owing to river bank erosion by rivers Ganga, Jalangi and Torsa. River bank erosion wears away amenities and leads to loss of cultivable plots. Such situations are invited several times by attempts of public and private authorities at large to tame the river course for human uses as well as the unplanned agglomeration and sprawl of human settlements along river banks. The path for development in the form of bridges, dams, barrages, roads also obstructs the natural pathway of rivers, which ultimately find a channel of recourse at the cost of river bank erosion or submergence of their banks during floods. Therefore planning a mechanism of mutual sustenance through the strike of balance between conservation of nature and upholding of the necessity of

human needs for survival becomes significant in order to reduce stress of disasters and replenish resilience against risks and vulnerability to the threats of hazards.

Unrestricted mining and quarrying operations in Uttarakhand and Kerala in 2019 have wreaked havoc in terms of soil erosion, landslide and flood, forcing people to wade through water and move out of their homes – both the states were inadequate in terms of disaster management plans. Floods had led to death and infrastructural damage in Mumbai, Assam and Bihar due to prolonged heavy monsoon rain (the average rainfall had been 37 percent above normal) in 2019.⁵⁰

2.4. Climate

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) includes the concept of climate refugees within its discourses, defining climate refugees and environmental refugees as those people who have been forced to leave their traditional habitat, temporarily or permanently, because of marked environmental disruption (natural and/or triggered by people) that jeopardised their existence and/or seriously affected the quality of life;⁵¹ however, here the distinction between environmental and climate refugee (which are the consequence of different situation) remains unclear.

One major cause of climate induced disaster is global climate change. In India, damage due to weather phenomena like cyclone (Aila 2008, Titli 2018, Phani cyclone 2019), flood from heavy rainfall (Kerala flood of 2018 and 2019) and geomorphological changes such as landslide, earthquake have generated large number of displacements. Reports of Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) in 2013, revealed that the number of people affected by disaster in India were three times in comparison to displacements due to conflicts.⁵²

India has close to 1.5 million internally displaced persons, recognised as persons displaced due to climate change. The World Bank projected that around 140 million people could be counted as climate migrants by 2020 - affected by crop failure, water scarcity and rising sea level.⁵³ The year 2019 recorded 17 percent rain deficit in July 2019. While cities like Chennai reeled the consequences of water scarcity, Bihar and Assam were washed by deluge. India received 'above normal rainfall' one month apart in August 2019, bringing the citizens face-to-face with the vulnerability of Indian settlements to erratic climate. In Chennai floods of 2015, 400 lives had been lost, whereas 4.6 million people had been affected by reservoirs going dry in Chennai in 2019.⁵⁴ Cherrapunji the wettest place in India has been suffering dry spells during winter since last few years. This clearly conveys the shift of climatic conditions from normal. The interplay of flood and dry spell compels one to introspect on the crisis situation woven by consumption pattern and ecological footprint.

An article published in *The Diplomat* in 2018, reports that in 2017, 1,300 people lost their lives while the count of displaced persons was at thousand, because of relentless flooding in India, Nepal and Bangladesh. In the 2017

Mumbai floods, migrant labour population living in squatters were the worst hit with contamination of drinking water inviting water-borne diseases.⁵⁵

Indian population have faced internal displacement in some or the other form, with 67 percent of population affected by monsoon floods in Bihar in 2016 leading to more than 1.6 million displacements.⁵⁶ Rise of water levels in rivers Kosi, Bagmati, Kamka Balan, Gandak, Budhi Gandak and their tributaries had caused floods in Bihar in 2019.⁵⁷ The lives of more than 3 million people have been affected by flood caused by river Brahmaputra in Assam with above 1,30,000 displaced, sheltered in 689 relief camps and 240 relief distribution centres set up by the administrators of the affected districts. The situation has given rise to concerns of risks of vector-borne disease outbreak, like dengue and encephalitis.⁵⁸

Puna and Hyderabad and riverine cities like Varanasi, Lucknow, Kolkata have been bashed by grim scenes of waterlogging,⁵⁹ while parts of coastal states like Gujarat and Tamil Nadu have faced drought, despite 2019 receiving continued rainfall even in the last week of September.⁶⁰ The changing climate and disappearing tree cover should be given importance while planning for economic and social development, especially in the areas of the country that have vulnerable location such as along the coastline, mountains and foothills or are influenced by river dynamics. Disaster preparedness and resilience in regions suffering from climatic disasters need to be stressed as the country inches towards real estate and infrastructural development.

Section 3

3. Hotspots of Displacement in India

The magnitude of vulnerability (to any displacement) is affected by the levels of insecurity faced, loss of community networks, absence of family and the helplessness of failure to reach or settle in locations that are safe. Revolts have always risen in biodiversity and mineral rich tribal areas of India. Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh could be attributed as high displacement states. It has been evident from studies that forested land of southern Bengal, eastern Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, which also comprise the densely vegetated, mineral rich regions of eastern and central India, along with less accessible districts of eastern Maharashtra that have continental location and the coastal plains of India have traditionally been hotspots of displacement due to their potential to serve as home of developmental projects. In efforts to develop and industrialise the mountainous and hilly terrains of India (especially river valleys) the natural regions are transformed into sites of displacement owing to the exploration and tapping of abundant natural resources.

Between the years 1947 and 2000, the proportion of tribal population among the displaced population remained high (around 30 percent). Among the 72 lakh people displaced in the fore mentioned years, West Bengal recorded the highest number of displaced persons - coal mines, dams being

the major drivers of displacement. Bengal was followed by Andhra Pradesh, where thermal power plant projects and coastal schemes played a dominant role in displacement; 17.7 percent of the 72 lakh displaced persons (DPs) were resettled. Displaced from their homeland tribal people from Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha have been impoverished, indebted and have often migrated to the tea gardens of North Bengal and Assam.⁶¹ The indigenous people '*adivasis*' in forested regions of India have had their own battles with the consequences of economic development and infrastructural advancements since the colonial days of early nineteenth century. There are instances of indigenous people like the Savars and Birhors of Purulia being marginalised and turning into 'ecological refugees'. Such marginalised sections of population drown into the depths of societal crises due to destruction of forest cover and loss of agricultural land.

Gender and age also have an impact on the magnitude of vulnerability, woven by needs of migrants and the social fabric or environmental, cultural and political set-up of land. Forcibly displaced people often compose the marginalised or excluded section in urban areas like ghettoised localities or community stratification in slums. Refugees and IDPs in slums of city enhance vulnerability in terms of health risks amplified by prolonged exposure to lack of nutrition and sanitation. There is often inadequacy on the part of the receiving location or the host community of the destination in assuring social protection and recognition of rights of displaced population. Rights on paper are not always realised in actuality, and in many cases remittances become indispensable as social protection for displaced families and refugees.

Bengal deltaic region constituted by the ecosystem of Sundarban stretches across the boundaries of India and Bangladesh. The delta is one of the hotspots of hydro-meteorological hazard such as storms and cyclones. Large stretches of land are damaged by saltwater intrusion (affecting both agriculture and fresh water pisciculture) and the lives of millions are reduced to homeless whenever this estuarine zone is struck by cyclones. The storms break through the embankments polluting and leaving brackish water standing on rice fields while storm surge damages mud houses.⁶² The shrinking islands of Sundarban in West Bengal have forced many to migrate out. Similarly, migrants working as construction labourer in Kerala were pushed back to Bengal to find work as mason, during 2018 Kerala flood. Some of such temporary migrants who keep travelling back to their native land from Kerala during the festival of Durga Puja in Bengal, either had to stay back in Kerala or in the islands of Sundarban in West Bengal caught in the turmoil of climatic hazard. There is at least one case of out migration among 51 percent of the families in Sundarban - Kerala and Tamil Nadu being the preferred destinations.⁶³ This not only cuts out the grim picture of climate migrants losing opportunities of livelihoods but also reveals their struggle of finding alternate livelihood means. Whereas rain and floods have affected the people who migrate for work or reside in states of India other than their places of birth, prolonged droughts in parts of Maharashtra, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu in 2019, had displaced hundreds of thousands and brought the lives of millions to a standstill.

3.1. Special Economic Zones and Mining Industry

India's first Export Processing Zone (EPZ) came up in 1965 in Kandla, while Special Economic Zones (SEZs) were set up after the SEZ Act 2005 and SEZ Rules in 2006.⁶⁴ The significance of Special Economic Zones in the era of globalisation, have led to land acquisition and fall in employment generation due to the inherent nature of mechanisation associated with such hubs. Demand for skilled workers in such zones leaves very few options of sustenance for people who lose land and are displaced, culminating into greater problems for women, who could atleast be found engaged as unskilled workers prior to liberalisation in the 1990s. SEZs have raised accelerated opposition from farmers because of the increasing hardships and dwindling options or choices for economic livelihood and sustenance for farmers. Some of the major causes of distress infuse from concerns raised by farming groups, fishermen, tribal and marginalised communities on the large-scale of acquisition of land coming from real estate boom, inadequacy on the part of resettlement and rehabilitation policies and plans, alienation of local communities from environmental resources and increasing regional disparities.⁶⁵ Studies indicate that farmers who turn landless because of development of SEZs (due to lack of skills required for mechanised jobs), are left with little choice of source of income and access to work, setting them with experience of downward occupational mobility.⁶⁶

Displacement is more dominant in resource and mineral rich rural or tribal areas and in forested land. Mining and quarrying come with fragmentation and loss of forest cover whether they are in areas of deep seated underground pits or open cast workings used for procurement of minerals. India Water Portal states that development of mining in India has displaced more than 2.55 million people from 1950 to 2000. Unrestrained mining in the Bellary mines of Karnataka not only had its impact on water reservoirs in the surroundings but also weathered off the top soil, till unlawful extraction and mining were banned in the area. This in turn affected the lives of 50, 000 migrant labourers who were forced to return to their native states.⁶⁷ During acquisition of land for mining there is one spell of displacement, but displacement recurs when mines are abandoned or closed down, pushing people out from mining towns or colonies of extractive industries.

Section 4

4. Policy Implications

Relocating and rehabilitating displaced persons takes time and involves rebuilding people's lives with provision of resources and means of livelihood, assurance and re-establishment of their cultural and social affiliations, and building upon their ability to psychologically affirm to the changed situation and getting over the trauma of the crisis. Resettlement, according to International Organisation for Migration (IOM), is the transfer of refugees from the country in which they have sought protection to another State that

has agreed to admit them — as refugees — with the status of permanent residence.⁶⁸

Identification of the drivers, impacts and associated risks of urban displacement becomes vital for provision of protection. Estimation of impacts of displacement, capacity buildings for IDPs, initiatives for risk assessment are some of the strategies suggested by IDMC. Assimilation of IDPs into local population may turn up as a more complex proposition than it sounds, as it not only involves creating space for integration but also brings along the contestation of crafting appropriate livelihood opportunities. An article in 'The Wire' highlights that ownership rights of permanent houses built in relief colonies were transferred to 3,000 families who had taken refuge in temporary relief camps during Gujarat riots of 2002 – in this case relief committees, United Economic Forum and NGOs worked together to ensure the efforts saw the day of light.⁶⁹

United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) reports highlight that a minimum of 600 people have been killed while more than 25 million people have been affected by flood due to heavy monsoon rain and over half a million among the victims have been displaced in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Myanmar. In India, over 10 million people and more than 4.3 million children have been affected, across Assam, Bihar, parts of Uttar Pradesh, and other states of North-East. Almost 2,000 schools in Assam had been damaged by floodwaters. UNICEF data released in 2019, states that torrential rain shower, flooding and landslides have killed at least 93 children and put million lives at risk in Bangladesh, Nepal and India.⁷⁰

In 2018, the UN Global Compact for Migration (in Morocco) adopted an agreement that emphasised a common approach to mitigate environmental migration and its major drivers - natural disaster and climate change.⁷¹ It raised concern over the ability of developing countries in adopting technological support for combating climate change.

The mapping of social safety net (SSN) by UNHCR aims at exploring the possibilities of aligning humanitarian cash assistance and SSN in situations of forced displacement for programme design, legal and regulatory frameworks. It targets at establishing social security for forcibly displaced persons through inclusion.⁷² Other than paucity of funds, one major challenge is inadequacy of capacity and tools to adapt to the stress of displacement⁷³ and assimilation of people who have been forced out of in-situ environment. Since the 1951 Convention on Refugees and the 2016 New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, UNHCR has been occupied with outreach of social protection for displaced people in association with governments, private players, development and investment giants and humanitarian organisations in accordance with the 2016 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Although the signing of the Paris Agreement in 2016 has taken India a step closer to the goal of reducing carbon emission, neither the pact nor the UN Summit for Refugees and Migrants fully addressed the direct human cost of the displacement of millions by natural disasters and slow-onset environmental changes. Floods, storm surges, saltwater intrusions and cyclones have pushed millions of people from rural Bangladesh into India.⁷⁴ Weather

hazards trigger ailments such as malnutrition, malaria and diarrhoea which are major killers of children. United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) in 2019 declared that threats of economic losses loom large on countries of Asia-Pacific and India ranks one among them.⁷⁵

Conclusion

Displacement amplifies vulnerability of a person to put up with any situation. Communicable diseases, malnutrition, mortality rate – all record high levels, and application of monitoring tools through intermediations by government agencies and non-governmental organisations becomes essential. The challenges of saving lives after disaster and bringing the victims to the door of safety places demand on States to adhere to humanitarian principles. Planning, design, fund-raising in the preparedness phase and rapid action and participation from local disaster management experts and technicians come into play during occurrence of disaster and in the post-disaster phase. Protection of human rights of those torn apart by the ravages of disaster, often receives insufficient attention in the process of providing them with assistance. Thus, in the course of action, protection of those displaced becomes a serious issue to ponder upon.

The impacts of displacement specific to women mostly remain unattended, thereby marginalising and impoverishing women even more than men. Women and children make up the majority of IDP population; subsequently, facilitating women with opportunities to build their capacity post-IDP crisis is an effort that needs to be handled with care. Women who return home from camps often face stigmatisation. Relief programmes are in a way short-sighted when it comes to the integral role that women play as providers, organisers, producers, and home-managers. There is differential impact of displacement on women due to gendered division of labour that stems from traditional incorporation of men in the network of wage-earning and labour-oriented tasks while women remain in homeland and are left to manage lives on daily basis. This impels women to experience displacement and relocation in a gendered manner.

Despite the provision of relief camps, there is shortage of food, water and medical assistance, which often plague these sanctuaries. For example, many camps in Gujarat following the riots of 2002 were categorised as ‘not up to the mark’ by the then National Commission for Women, proclaiming that compensations and rehabilitations are either inadequate or do not pan out as promised. One of the challenges of urban development comes from the influx of climate migrant in cities which adds to the number of urban poor. Lack of adequate infrastructure and livelihood options for absorption of such rural-urban migrants who turn up in cities presents challenges for urban development. Increased sea level rise in Sundarban, droughts in central India, floods in the basins of Brahmaputra and Ganga have woven large-scale displacements. The deviation of climatic conditions from normal is an important aspect that calls for assessment owing to its disaster-wreaking potential. Capacity building and assurance of the availability of special

provisions for inclusion of those displaced from their own land becomes an intimidating challenge on the part of government. Therefore in the context of the present plight, right to social protection is an essential instrument while addressing issues of vulnerability, more so in case of population subjected to displacement following conflict and persecution which are induced and controlled by humans. Exploitation and abuse in case of gender intensifies the possibilities of displacement. Breaches endure along with hurdles to the deliverance of social protection inspite of the fact that the understanding of the role of social protection in minimising the magnitude of vulnerabilities and reinforcing resilience at national and international level has gained popularity. Many a times while the world is focusing on global displacement trends, protection schemes fail to delve into the seriousness of supporting internally displaced persons, who battle losses unseen or neglected today but are vulnerable to disasters that may turn them into refugee, asylum seeker or international migrant tomorrow.

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Climate Change and Migration: Dialogues with Community Stakeholders in Skardu, Gilgit-Baltistan

By

Noor Sanauddin *

This paper focuses on the major outcomes of dialogues with stakeholders (communities and local authorities) in Skardu, Gilgit-Baltistan regions of Pakistan held between November 02-05, 2019. It draws upon an initial report. It must be stated at the outset that that study was carried out by a consortium of three organisations (Civil Society Coalition of Climate Change (CSCCC), Population Council, and University of Peshawar) and was funded by the South Asia Network for Development and Displacement (SANDD).

Qualitative and quantitative data was collected from male and female community members representing various villages in and around Skardu cities. In addition, a meeting was also conducted with the local authorities in Skardu city. The main purpose of the dialogues was to understand the various drivers of migration and displacement and to explore possible measures which can reduce migration of people from mountainous villages downwards to Skardu and other cities. It was found that there are two major push factors of migration and displacement, namely, decreasing livelihood opportunities in rural villages due to climate change and natural disasters such as floods, and cross border conflict between Pakistan and India which creates a threat to the lives and properties of people living near the border. It was also found that most of the migrants choose to settle in Skardu city which has significantly increased population density in the city, and put pressure on the available services in the city. It was also revealed that the relationship between the migrants and the host communities are largely peaceful, except when there are language or ethnic differences, in which case the local people show resentment towards the migrants. In addition, it was found that people living in the villages almost exclusively depend on agriculture for their livelihood and

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they considered construction or maintenance of irrigation channels for their lands as their most important livelihood issue.

A large number of people are forced to migrate from the hilly areas of northern Pakistan to nearby cities in search of better opportunities of life and livelihood. The trend of migration has been visibly increasing and is evident from the rapid growth of Skardu city. A team of researchers including Ms. Aisha Khan (CSCCC), Mr. Sufyan Kakakhel (CSCCC), Mr. Sabahat Hussian (Population Council), and Dr. Noor Sanauddin (University of Peshawar) visited different remote areas in Skardu and conducted stakeholder dialogues with community members and local authorities. The objectives of these dialogues were to map out the trends of migration and displacement in the area, to identify the various drivers of migration/displacement of people living in the mountainous areas in Skardu, to explore how the local authorities and host communities in Skardu view (and cope with) the issue of migration, and to identify the required improvements in basic services in the villages that can reverse migratory trends.

Research Method

Data was collected by using both quantitative and qualitative tools. A questionnaire was developed to trace different aspects of climate change and displacement. Specifically, the questions were designed to collect data about the drivers of migration, trends and pattern of migration, impacts of migration on the lives of migrants and the host communities, sources of livelihood for the people living in remote villages, relationship among migrants and host communities, and the basic survival needs of people living in remote villages in the mountains. The quantitative data was collected from a total of 24 youths in one village called Sadpara. For qualitative data collection, a total of six Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted (two with women and four with men) representing three communities (villages) of Baltistan, namely Sadpara, Malawa, and Gultari. Each FGD lasted for about an hour and the average number of participants in men's FGDs was 15 while the average of women's FGDs was 50 participants. In total, data was collected from 180 community representatives. In order to understand the views of local authorities regarding migration, pressure on resources and facilities in cities due to influx of people from rural areas, a meeting was also conducted with local authorities in the office of the Commissioner, Skardu. The meeting was attended by Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner, and Senior Minister of GB Government.



Figure 1: Map Showing Administrative Divisions of Pakistan

Major Findings of the Stakeholder Dialogues

One of the main objectives of the research of this paper was to find out why people from rural areas migrate to urban areas of the region. Based on the data collected by this research team, the authors found two main triggers of migration and displacement, decreasing livelihood opportunities due to climate change, and cross border conflict between Indian and Pakistan. These are discussed below.

Decreasing Options of Livelihood

The author and other researchers first visited Upper Sadpara village which is situated near Skardu City in Gilgit-Baltistan. Three dialogues were conducted in this village with three groups – youth, elders and women. The data obtained from elderly men and women of various age is as follows.

This village was one of the hotspots/hubs in Gilgit Baltistan for out-migration. In 1998, there were 250 households in the Sadpara village, and at the time of inquiry only 75 households were left. Moreover, at that time, 15 families were constructing their homes in Skardu city, and once their homes were fully constructed, they would also migrate. The present residents of this village believed that they too would migrate to Skardu city in the coming years if the vulnerability remained. It was found that the main sources of livelihood of these people used to be agriculture and livestock. In the recent years, however, many people have migrated from this village to Skardu city and other parts of Gilgit-Baltistan due to decreasing livelihood opportunities. In

particular, frequent floods have been the major driver forcing people to migrate downwards to urban area. It was known that a devastating flood occurred in 2015 which washed away a significant amount of agricultural land in this village. A number of houses, cattle, motor cycles and other properties of the villagers were also destroyed by the flood. Another misfortune hit this village when the Sadpara Dam was constructed by Government in 2003. The dam provided drinking water to Skardu city. However, the dam took up hundreds of hectares of grazing land of the Sadpara community. People were no longer able to keep livestock as a source of livelihood. In the words of a local, thirty years before the inquiry, they used to have 60 to 80 cattle per household in this village. Today, most of the houses do not have a single cow. The community believed that the construction of Sadpara Dam had increased the timespan and intensity of rainfall and floods, pushing the community to migrate. All the male participants complained that the government had promised to compensate them for the loss of their grazing land taken up by the dam, but so far no compensation had been given. During the author's walk inside the village, 30-40 houses were found which were lying vacant due to out migration.

Livestock was the main source of food production. Thirty years ago, they never bought cooking oil from the market as they used to produce our own cooking oil from dairy and apricot seeds. Nowadays they need to buy cooking oils and other such items because the number of cattle and apricot production had greatly reduced. Reduction of agricultural land and constant threat to the lives and property of people due to floods, coupled with reduced grazing area for cattle had endangered their livelihood in Sadpara villages. Because of this reason most people had migrated to urban areas.

Perception of Young Girls (Aged Less than Thirty)

Young girls in this community wanted to move to cities for the sake of education and employment opportunities. According to these young girls, if education and employment opportunities became available locally, they would prefer to stay in their village. The young girls considered themselves disadvantaged compared to the rest of the world because of lack of education.

Perception of Women (Aged Thirty and above)

The women of Sadpara community also considered education as important for their children. However, most of the women wanted to stay in their village because they believed themselves to be more productive in the village as compared to the cities. They wanted to increase their agricultural activities and demanded access to water for their barren lands. They believed that they could earn income directly from selling agricultural products, and they wanted to increase their livestock. These women reported that they could give education to their children by generating income from these agricultural activities, and by selling livestock. Most of the elder women were uneducated. Not a single woman in the entire village had a bank account.

Perception of Young Men (Aged 20 to 30)

A separate Dialogue was conducted with young men aged between 20 to 30 years. Quantitative data was collected from 24 young men by using a questionnaire. The data obtained from the youth has been presented in the following Pie Charts.

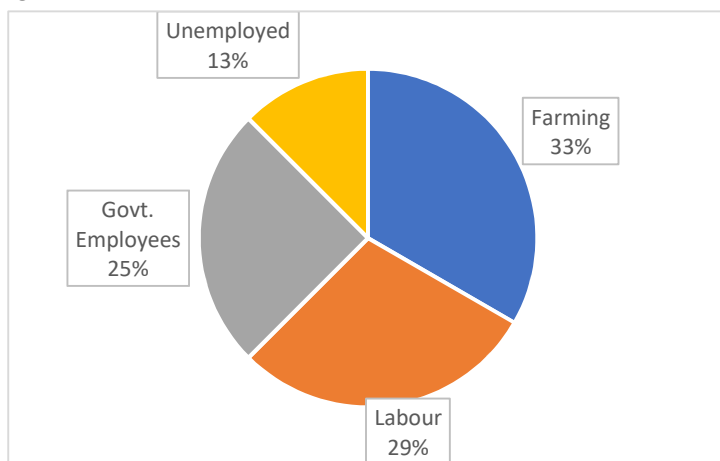


Figure 2. Chart Showing the Employment Status of 24 Youth in Sadpara

As shown in the chart above, most of the youth of this village carried on farming and daily wage labour for their livelihood. About 25% were government employees. Young men went to Skardu city and worked on daily wages (Rs 600 – 1200 per day), but these daily-wage based work opportunities were available in summer only. In winter they mostly remained unemployed and stayed at home. A few earned meagre income from selling potatoes or dry fruits such as dry apricots.

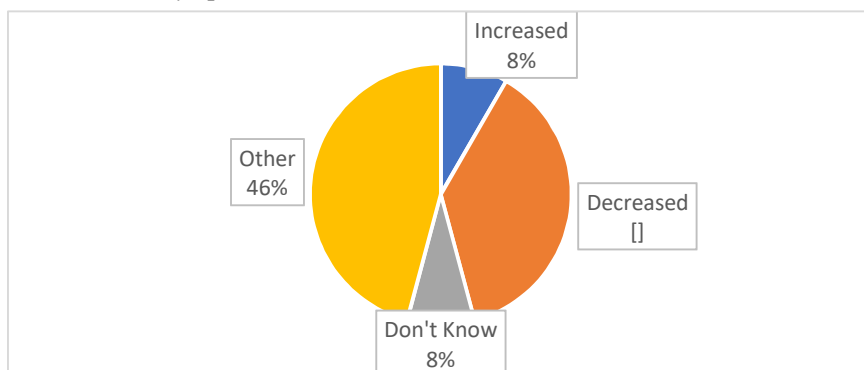


Figure 3. Perception of Youth Regarding Increase/Decreased in their Income Level or Purchasing Power over the Last One Decade

Most of the youth were of the opinion that there was no improvement in their purchasing power due to decreasing agricultural production and inflation in the recent years. They also pointed out that the cost of traveling to Skardu city for work and other purposes was very high and a high portion of their earning was spent by traveling to and from the city.

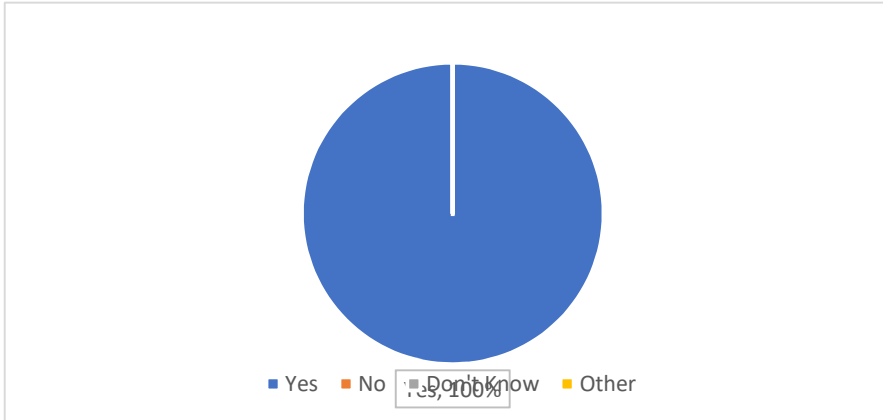


Figure 4. Knowledge of Youth regarding Migration of People from Sadpara to Other Locations

It was asked to the youth of Sadpapa if they know anyone from their village who had migrated to any location in recent years. Everyone confirmed that people have been migrating out of the village.

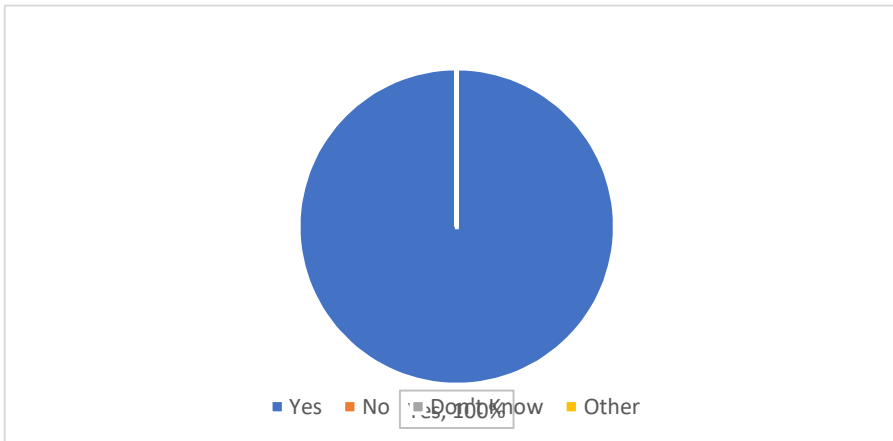


Figure 5. Migration of Family Members / Relatives from Sadpara to Other Locations

This above chart further confirms that 100% of the youth who participated in this study informed that their relatives or close family members have migrated to other locations in search of better opportunities of work, education and health.

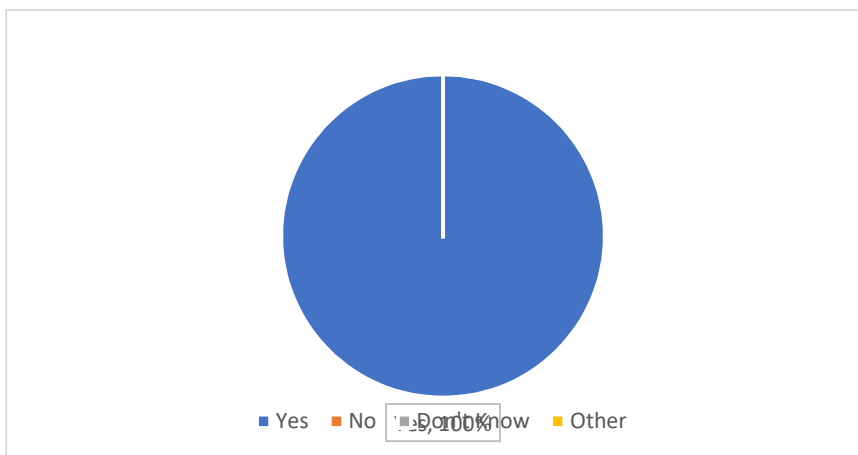


Figure 6. Intention of Youth to Migrate in the Near Future

When asked whether they had ever thought of migrating to another location, everyone answered in the affirmative. On further probing, most of them replied that rich people can migrate because they can afford to buy a house or pay rent and bear other expenses. Poor people cannot migrate to the city as they cannot afford the expenses in the city.

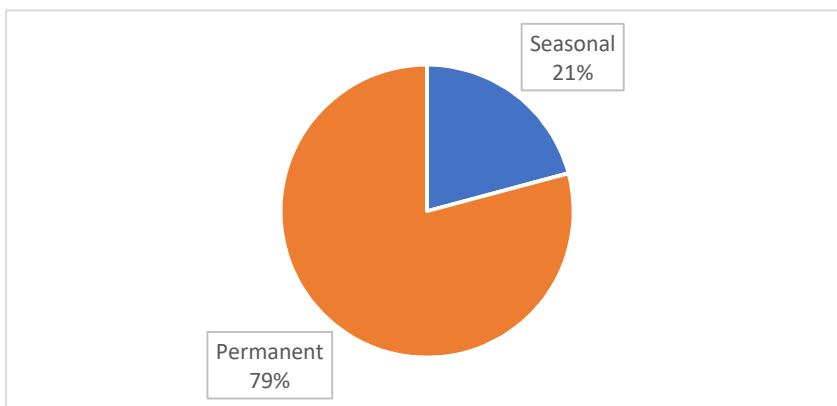


Figure 7. Nature of Migration from Sadpara

According to the youth, most of the migration from Sadpara village is permanent in nature. However, some people seasonally migrate to other areas in the winter but come back in the summer to cultivate their agricultural land in the village.

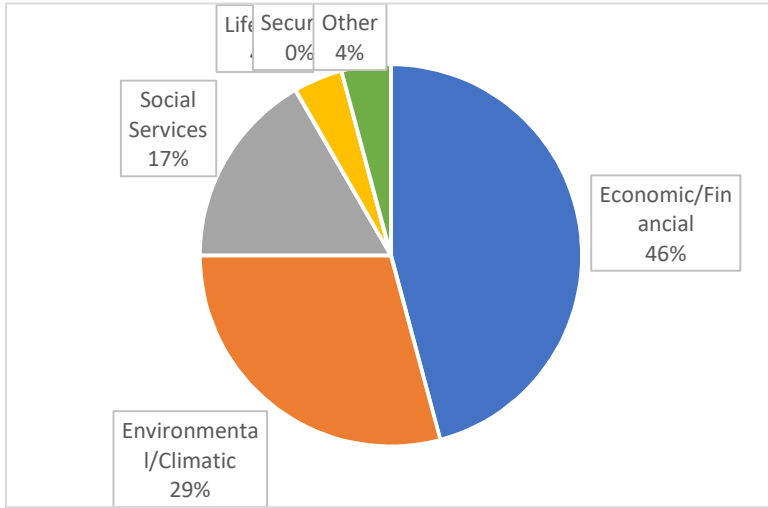


Figure 8. Youth Perception Regarding General Causes of Migration

When asked about the various causes of migration, the youth of Sadpara village mentioned a number of factors. Majority of them (46) cited economic and financial reasons. Another significant factor pointed out by the youth is environmental and climatic conditions and disasters, particularly floods and cold weather. 17% of the youth also regarded lack of social services in the village as a major cause of migration. It may be mentioned that environmental and economic factors are related to each other. Floods and lack of water for irrigation adversely affect the economic activities of the people who are mostly depended on agriculture.

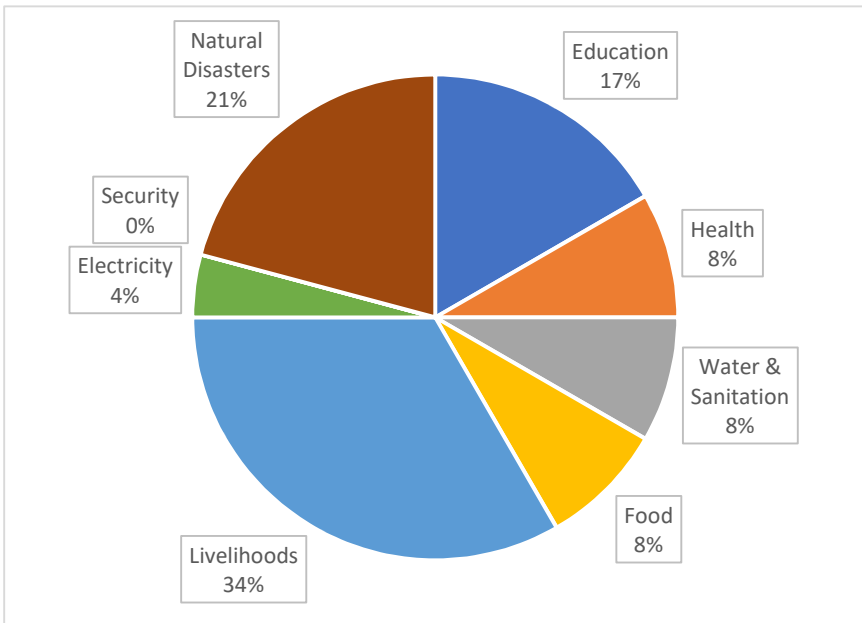


Figure 9. Youth Perception Regarding Specific Causes of Migration

In order to further specify the reasons for migration, the youth of the village were asked to specify the various causes due to which people migrate to other locations. According to them, livelihood opportunities was a major cause. Natural disasters in the village and lack of education facilities were other major causes of migration to Skardu. Some youth mentioned that water sanitation and health issues also caused migration out Sadpara village. It was found that there is a Middle school in Sadpara village but the teachers are usually absent. In the Upper Sadpara where the dialogues took place, there is a primary school run by an NGO (Bushra Inspire). The school is managed by the community in collaboration with the NGO. There is also a medical dispensary in Sadpara but there are no full-time doctors. People of the village need to travel to Skardu District Hospital by private jeep to avail treatment which is extremely expensive (Rs. 25,000 one way).

Dialogues with the Malawa Community

Another community called the Malawa had a similar story. It was found that 120 households have migrated from Malawa and have settled down in Mehdi Abad. The main reason behind this migration was the lack of livelihood opportunities in Malawa. People were especially interested in construction of irrigation water channels which according to them would greatly help in returning to their original village. According to them, an abundant amount of land lay barren due to lack of irrigation. Most people have been forced to migrate and to start working as daily wagers because of scant livelihood opportunities in their native area. Interestingly, these people (120 households) who live in Mehdi Abad were not happy and wanted to return back to Malawa, provided that someone facilitated the construction of an irrigation system for their land. People here were not happy because of a number of reasons. Firstly, they didn't have any skills and could only rely on manual labour for daily wages. Secondly, earlier they had relatively good access to school and health facilities. But after migration, they had no easy access to school and health centres. Girls' education had specifically suffered because there was no middle school in the area for girls. Thirdly, the village where they had settled was surrounded by high mountains on one side and a deep river on the other side. They had difficulty in moving in and out of their village. The bridge on the river was broken and people had to cross the river in boats (and sometimes by swimming) to go for work. They were almost cut off from the surrounding villages. In the words of a participant, *"We have difficulty in going to schools and hospitals, a few of our people have died while swimming across the river."* It was also found that women of the community are suffering as they are living an inactive life – their traditional, agrarian way of life has changed and now they were confined to their homes. According to some participants, women were suffering psychologically due to their confined life and lack of social interaction with the surrounding villages. All of them wanted to go back to their native village provided that irrigation channels were constructed for their agricultural land. They wanted to grow potatoes, peas, carrots and

apricots. They believed that once water was available for their lands, their income could be doubled from agricultural production.

Pak-India Cross Border Conflict

The third community which was contacted during the field work was migrants from Gultari district situated near the Indian border. These people were settled in the suburbs of Skardu City called Shatang. From 50 to 60 percent of the households in Shatang were migrants from Gul Tari, 30 percent were from Sadpara village and the rest were from other places. This was a large community, almost all were migrants from the border areas near Kargil. Most of them had migrated during the Indo-Pak War of 1971, 1988-89 border skirmishes and during the 1999 Kargil War between Pakistan and India. Before 1971, Gultari community residents used to go to Kargil city to get the daily necessities of life, because Kargil was at a shorter distance for Gultari people as compared to Skardu city. After the 1971 Pak-India War, Kargil became a part of India. Thousands of Gultari people had to migrate to Skardu. The Gultari community claims that they have lost many lives due to Pak-India border tensions. The participants of research dialogue said that the forest area of Gultari was full of toy bombs/landmines due to which the villagers could not collect wood from there, which is the main source of fuel. According to them, out of a total population of around 30 thousand, more than 20 thousand people had migrated away from Gultari. The vast majority (90 percent) migrants from Gultari selected Skardu city as their destination, and 10 percent selected other parts of the country. In Khultox (a small village in Gultari), there were around 400 households, now the village was totally deserted due to border conflict.

Other reasons also included lack of diminishing livelihood opportunities in Gultari and the cold weather as Gultari is situated 1000 feet above the sea level. Before border disputes intensified between Pakistan and India, people of these villages traded with people on the Indian side of the border. This is no longer the case. Now they have to travel long distances to Skardu and other urban centers to buy basic amenities of life. The closure of the road to Skardu during winter due to snow further adds to their difficulties. They remain almost completely cut off from the rest of world during winter. Winters in Gultari are extremely cold due to which even a poor family must buy wood costing Rs 40,000 to 50,000 to survive the winter season. Moreover, until recently there was no education, health and power supply in Gultari due to which people decided to migrate to Skardu city.

It was also pointed out by participants that due to increasing tension at the borders, the Government of Pakistan has encouraged these people to migrate to safer areas. The government also promised them 10 Kanals of land and Rs. 50,000/- in cash per household as compensation to resettle them in Skardu. However, according to the people, the government has so far failed to provide the land and cash as promised due to ongoing litigations. According to these migrants, the government has not provided them any help in resettlement. They sold their livestock to buy land and built houses in Skardu.

At the same time those people who remained in Gultari are facing huge challenges. They also want to migrate to Skardu, but they cannot afford to live in the Skardu city. And when a few families are left behind, it becomes very difficult for them to survive, especially during winter when roads remain blocked for several months.

Conflict with the Host Communities

It was also found that these migrants from Gultari are facing issues of accommodation and acceptance from the local/host communities of Skardu. The reasons were ethnic differences and competition over resources. The migrants of Gultari were “Shina” by ethnicity and language and were originally from Gilgit. On the other hand, the host communities in Skardu were “Balti” by ethnicity and language and were originally from Baltistan. Given the historically competitive and hostile relationship between the people of Baltistan and Gilgit (i.e., Balti and Shina) the local Balti of Skardu were not ready to accept the ‘instruction’ of Shina in Skardu. Interestingly, the political elites of Baltistan also played a role in promoting this hostile relationship. The Government of Skardu was not ready to provide domicile to the Shina settlers due to which the Shinas were systematically deprived of government jobs in Skardu. There was a primary school in the areas for girls but no middle or high school. For this reason, about 50% of the girls discontinued their education after passing primary school. People seemed open to girls’ education but because of the long distance of travel involved to middle and high school, people were unwilling to send their girls to Skardu city for higher education.

The second generations of Shina speakers who had been born in Skardu were well educated and vocal about their rights. They had formed an association to demand equal citizenship from the Government and other social services of health and education. According to them, *“We won’t go back to Gultari as we have better life and livelihood opportunities here in Skardu – education, health, standards of living. We must be accepted as citizens of Skardu and we must be given compensation by the government as promised”*.

Response of Local Authorities to Climate Change and Migration

A detailed meeting was held with the local authorities of Skardu to understand the views of the government and district administration towards climate change, migration and displacement. The meeting took place at the office of the Commissioner of Skardu. Besides the Commissioner, the Deputy Commissioner Skardu and Senior Minister of Gilgit-Baltistan Government also participated.

The authorities agreed that the trend of migration towards Skardu city was increasing with the passage of time which had increased pressure on facilities of the cities, especially health education, housing and power supply. According to the Commissioner, the population of Skardu city is expected to

double in the next 15-20 years. Increasing production and waste disposal has become an issue for the city administration. In addition, the authorities pointed out that Skardu was a quite peaceful city but this peace could not be guaranteed with the influx of migrants from mountainous villages; unrest would increase with the passage of time.

The authorities also agreed that there was some resistance from the local Balti population towards the ethnic Shinas who were not easily accepted by the local people. Interestingly, the senior minister seemed to be against the issuance of domicile to Shina settlers on political basis and wanted Shina to go back to Gultari, their original district. According to him, the local people had the first right to jobs and other facilities in Skardu.

In response to a question regarding the pending issue of compensation to displaced communities of Gu Tari and the Sadpara villages, the authorities claimed that they have enough funds but there were political and administrative impediments to the disbursement of funds to the affected people. In addition, there were litigations ongoing litigations over property rights to the grazing land consumed by Sadpara dam.

According to the commissioner, in Baltistan, the GB government has formed small districts like Kharmang and Shigar, but they are not developing accordingly. In these districts, there is an assistant commissioner and a deputy commissioner, but there was no petrol pump in any of these districts. The money that should have been spent on health and education was being spent on constructing offices and houses for Deputy and Assistant Commissioner.

According to the senior Minister, the development budget has increased from 4 billion to 19 billion in the last 4 and half years. The senior minister listed a number of initiatives taken by the government of GB for development of rural areas, such as schools, hospitals, roads, and power supply to facilitate the lives of mountain dwellers.

According to the Commissioner, Skardu city in Baltistan is a magnet which attracts people from different regions. Once these people migrate to Skardu, they build houses and get settled, and they never go back to their origin. Skardu is in a transition. It once used to be a village. Now it's an urban center. In the next 10 to 15 years the population of Skardu would be doubled. Skardu attracts people because there is peace. The crime rate is zero. However, Skardu is rapidly urbanizing. This is putting pressures on health and employment sectors. The District Headquarter hospital is overburdened and most of the patients are from out of Skardu, i.e. from nearby districts. In a survey, it was found that only 30 percent of OPD patients were from Skardu, and the rest were from other parts of Baltistan.

Regarding rural to urban migration, the commissioner of Skardu, however, had a different opinion. According to him, instead of discouraging migration into the city, we must focus on the development of the city. *"Don't pump money into glaciers"*, he said while referring to rural development. It is because rural people will leave these mountains one day and will settle in Skardu and other urban centers in search of a better life style, no matter what you may do for them in the mountains. Instead, *"We should strive to develop*

vibrant cities to accommodate these people; only three cities of Gilgit, Skardu and Chillas can accommodate all the 1.5 million people of GB”.

The Commissioner further elaborated that the Skardu Development Authority (SDA) was working on developing a Master Plan for Skardu city. He urged the Government and the NGOs to invest in the development of vibrant cities, particularly in the areas of municipality, traffic management, street lighting, transport, public parks, and law and order.

Conclusion

Depletion of agricultural land due to floods, coupled with lack of irrigation for agricultural purposes are the main factors which force people to migrate from rural, mountainous areas towards urban areas in Gilgit-Baltistan. The second most important reason behind migration is the constant tension along the border between Pakistan and India which creates threat to lives, livelihood, and movement of people living near the border region. Moreover, a number of villages in the mountains face problems of roads, bridges, education and health facilities. People are forced to migrate to cities in search of better livelihood opportunities. The relationship between the displaced and the host communities is usually normal, except where there are ethnic differences between the two. Protection walls against floods and construction of irrigation channels to provide water for agriculture in the mountainous areas can greatly help in checking the increasing flow of rural-urban migration.

[Acknowledgements: We thank Ekalavya Chaudhury for his editorial assistance.]development. Increased sea level rise in Sundarban, droughts in central India, floods in the basins of Brahmaputra and Ganga have woven large-scale displacements. The deviation of climatic conditions from normal is an important aspect that calls for assessment owing to its disaster-wreaking potential. Capacity building and assurance of the availability of special provisions for inclusion of those displaced from their own land becomes an intimidating challenge on the part of government. Therefore in the context of the present plight, right to social protection is an essential instrument while addressing issues of vulnerability, more so in case of population subjected to displacement following conflict and persecution which are induced and controlled by humans. Exploitation and abuse in case of gender intensifies the possibilities of displacement. Breaches endure along with hurdles to the deliverance of social protection inspite of the fact that the understanding of the role of social protection in minimising the magnitude of vulnerabilities and reinforcing resilience at national and international level has gained popularity. Many a times while the world is focusing on global displacement trends, protection schemes fail to delve into the seriousness of supporting internally displaced persons, who battle losses unseen or neglected today but are vulnerable to disasters that may turn them into refugee, asylum seeker or international migrant tomorrow.

IDPs in Afghanistan: Some Reflections

By

Reza Hussaini *

Introduction

This paper reflects on dialogues conducted with internally displaced persons (hereinafter termed IDPs) at Bagrami-Nassaji Camp in Afghanistan.

The IDPs studied here live in informal camps such as Bagrami-Nassaji and have been displaced mostly due to conflict from their original place of residence. According to International Organization for Migration's (IOM) Data Tracking Matrix there are currently more than 4.5 million Internally Displaced Persons in Afghanistan, a country with a population of approximately 33 million people. Following the US led intervention in 2001, 5.7 million refugees have returned to Afghanistan from Iran and Pakistan. However, it is estimated that 40% of those people were unable to return to their home provinces due to ongoing conflict, and became IDPs. Most of the IDPs in Afghanistan have been displaced by conflict. In recent years, however, people have also been displaced by drought and natural disasters. Unlike those displaced by conflict, in the case of natural disasters, IDPs are usually able to return to their homes. Some IDPs have lived in camps for up to 16 years. A number of the residents of the camps are also Roma (*Jogji*) and nomads.

There are 53 informal IDP camps in Kabul, known as Kabul Informal Settlements (KIS). Some camp residents have been allocated land elsewhere but, for security and other reasons discussed below, prefer to stay where they are. Bagrami-Nassaji Camp is located in Bagram District opposite a textile factory. Bagrami-Nassaji Camp consists of three smaller camps: Helmandi camp, which according to their representatives, has 500 families, Takabi camp, with 230 families, and Kodakestan camp, with 150 families. Altogether, the residents are from Helmand, Kandahar, Kapisa, Nangarhar, Laghman and Kunduz. They have been living in this camp for 3 to 16 years. The most recent arrivals had migrated following the mass expulsions from

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Pakistan in 2016 (which have since dramatically reduced). In Bagrami-Nassaji camp, all the houses are built with mud and the streets are very narrow and congested.

The camp residents are heavily dependent on aid. The male family members work as day labourers (e.g. construction work). They also depend on child labour (e.g. car washing) and begging on the streets. Children also collect rubbish, paper and plastic to meet the necessities of fuel for stoves for heating and cooking.

Ethnically most of the IDPs living in the camps are Pashtuns, a few are Tajiks, but there are no Hazaras in these 53 informal camps in Kabul. This does not mean that Hazaras are not displaced but they prefer not to live in camps. Instead they mostly live in the outskirts of West Kabul, and either rent rooms or stay with relatives who live in Kabul. The camps are more or less organised according to province of origin: Takabi Camp families are mostly from Kapisa, though there are some families from Nangarhar and Laghman. Helmandi camp families are from Helmand and Kandahar, while Kodakestan camp houses families mostly from Baghlan, with a few from Nangarhar as well. The first language for most of them is Pashtu, with some also speaking Dari.

Research Method

This paper focuses on 4 dialogues with 82 Internally Displaced Persons at Bagrami-Nassaji Camp in Afghanistan. The participants include women and men from different age groups, between 14 to 70. Along with the said participants, conversations were held with certain key informants on IDPs, including experts, civil society members, and government officials. The paper draws upon a report compiled from the aforementioned interactions. The method used to conduct the investigation was interviews, led by the present author.

The interviews were conducted with a range of stakeholders. All of the dialogues took place at the Bagrami-Nassaji Camp. The first dialogue was with 7 male IDPs of different ages and originally from Kapisa, Nangarhar and Laghman provinces relatively close to Kabul. Nangarhar and Laghman have a significant presence of the Taliban and has many returnees from Pakistan. These places are densely populated, so some have moved to Kabul. The second dialogue was conducted with 42 women IDPs of different ages (they were originally from the same provinces as the participants in the first dialogue). The third dialogue was held with 16 male IDPs (of the same profile as the first dialogue). The fourth dialogue was with 7 male IDPs originally from Helmand and Kandahar. In addition, I interviewed two teachers working in the Camp with Ashianah (a local Afghan organisation focused on education), and a textile factory official who was resisting the digging of wells on their land.

Following the dialogues, I spoke with four Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) staff who work directly with the IDPs at the camp, with one NRC IDP volunteer, and with a WHO staff member responsible for digging

three wells in the camp. In addition, at the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MORR), I interviewed the Director of Policy and Planning, who is also a SANDD member, a senior Land Distribution official, and the Director of the Research Department. Finally, I conducted an informal interview with field Coordinators of Samuel Hall Consultants who have been working on the issue of internal displacement for 16 years.

Political Structures in the Camp

A serious issue in the camp was identifying appropriate interlocutors. There were no community organisations working in the camp who could run stakeholder dialogues. Ashianah was not really a community organisation, and there were tensions. Conflict resolution in the camp was based on traditional systems, such as holding a *Jirga* (where older men, *Wakils*, and *Khans* sit together to solve the problem). Karim Khan and Ahmad Khan were the official IDP representatives (*Wakil*) in contact with MORR. They had authority and a great deal of influence and respect among the IDPs, perhaps because these two representatives stand firmly against the government, which wants to evacuate the IDP camp. They had not been appointed through an election but they were *Wakil* based on their credibility and influence rooted in tradition (age, knowledge, wealth).

However, their authority was contested by Zemarai Khan, who claimed that he was the representative (*Wakil*) of Takabi Camp. Zemarai Khan was a member of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Islamic Party (which rained rockets on Kabul during the Civil War in the early 1990s but was recently welcomed back to Kabul by Ashraf Ghani) and he was from Nangarhar. He had been living in the camp for 13 years. He had migrated to Pakistan during the civil war and Taliban period, and returned to his home in Nangarhar in 2005. He lived for a few months in Nangarhar until seven former members of his party were assassinated, after which he fled to Kabul.

Observations and Challenges

There are very few indigenous civil society organisations working in the camps, and most of the aid come from outside. This gave rise to a number of challenges, which needs to be addressed if we aim to pursue the kind of community driven development favoured by SANDD and its partners across South Asia.

Recompensing the Participants

The first dialogue with the IDPs was conducted at Enzar Gul's house inside the camp. The seven participants were aged between 19 to 65. The author explained at the outset that there was no money or any other aid to offer. The purpose of the dialogue was to listen to their experiences and together seek a solution to their problems. Many reporters and organisations had visited the

camp and listened to their problems, but this has not led to any significant improvement in their situation. There was a strong distrust towards individuals or institutions who came with claims for aiming to benefit them (especially those who had nothing concrete to offer them).

When the participants understood that the author did not have any concrete aid to offer them, some gradually left the meeting and others became reluctant to talk. After 30 minutes of discussion, 3 people left and after 1 hour, the author was left alone with Enzar Gul. He kept saying that any financial help would be appreciated. He then took the author for a walk around the camp, and pointed out that education was a real problem for the children. Finally, the author had to promise to bring school supplies for children on the next visit.

The author called Zemarai Khan to arrange for the second dialogue with the IDPs. He was requested to invite 16 men and 16 women of different ages. People were invited to discuss their problems and to try and suggest solutions. Lunch was offered for participants, but people preferred cash. They said they would feel uncomfortable eating when their families had nothing. With the cash they could share with their families. After consulting with colleagues, a small amount was given to each participant.

The women's dialogue was conducted separately from the men in another room, facilitated by a female colleague of the author. Once it was announced that money would be given instead of lunch, the number of women increased from 16 to 51. It was a challenge to distribute the limited money among this larger group. Finally, it was decided to divide the allocated money equally between them, so that the participants understood that more people would mean less money.

After what happened in the first and second dialogues, the author decided to conduct the third dialogue in the afternoon after lunch. The third dialogue was conducted at Helmand Camp and 7 men participated. They also asked for help (cash, wood for winter) but their representatives (Karim Khan and Ahmad Khan) mostly focused on the land issue. They kept repeating that in the 2014 Presidential Campaign, Ghani stood shoulder to shoulder with them at one of the campaign meetings and promised them land. They showed a short video of Ghani's speech to the IDPs in 2014 in which he promised to make the IDPs' problems a priority if he was elected.

Managing the IDPs' expectations was difficult. The extreme poverty in the camps meant people wanted to talk and think only about their immediate and basic needs. They expected help from the organisations to meet those needs. For many years, they had been dependent on aid and assistance, and this had shaped their expectations.

Presence of Non-Governmental Organisations and Reliance on Aid

During a discussion an old man listed many international organisations like UNDP, WHO, WFP etc. who provide aid to IDPs. He said that when he was a refugee in Pakistan, he had received more aid than what he receives now in

Afghanistan. At the time of the dialogues, only two NGOs had a regular presence in the camp. None of them provided cash or material assistance. Ashianah was a local Afghan organisation working mostly for education in the camp. They had hired two teachers to for the primary education of children and to prepare them for public school. Ashianah has only two small classrooms, although there are 800 IDP families in the Bagrami-Nassaji camps. They teach 100 students in shifts over 6 hours a day. The community representatives said that they might not allow Ashianah to operate in the locality in future because the quality of education provided by them is low and they taught only a small number of students.

Once, when the Minister of Education visited the camp, he promised to build a school for the IDPs in the camp. But according to the IDPs, Ashianah stepped in and informed the Ministry of Education that they provided primary classes for IDP children, and a school was not necessary. However, we also heard that the promised school had been blocked by the host community because the IDPs were squatting on their land and had no right to stay there. If the MOE builds a school, this would legitimise the camp and it would be impossible to move the IDPs away.

The other organisation with a presence in the IDP camp was the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), an international NGO. It had an office near the camp. It provided social services and worked to raise awareness about IDP rights. NRC has produced a leaflet with instructions on how to register at MORR, how to register for land, and how to get Tazkeras (birth certificates). They provide advice on IDP problems. NRC has created a team of 10 volunteers within the camp. Volunteers report problems arising in the camp, and NRC share the reports with other agencies, who are in a position to help the IDPs to resolve the problems. Other organisations, such as the WFP, were not present in the camps but distributed cash (6900 AF = 100\$) once a year for fuel for winter. However, these organisations had not, at the time of inquiry, been able to solve the basic problems of water, electricity, health, land tenure etc.

One IDP who opposed cash distribution stated that the aid had made people very dependent. It disincentivised them from trying hard to achieve self-sufficiency. The author set up a separate meeting with this man outside the camp. The man remarked that a few others were initially interested to join the conversation, but lost interest when they realised that there was no money involved. He stressed that this attitude is a result of the mentality to depend on aid.

Furthermore, it was pointed out that sometimes people pretended to be IDPs to benefit from distribution of cash and other aids. One of the NRC staffs mentioned that in order to identify the actual IDPs (at another camp), they had to enter the camp at night, since only actual IDPs stayed overnight. Those pretending to be IDPs usually return home at night. According to an official at MORR, pretending to be an IDP has now started to function like a job for some people. However, such claims could not be verified. According to Fariedulla, an NRC community liaison person at the Nassaji Camp office,

there were very few people in the Bagrami-Nassaji Camp who pretended to be IDPs.

Cash and material aid sometimes caused conflict among the IDPs. Most of the conflict was caused by the lack of a transparent mechanism for aid distribution. During the author's first and second visit, two people mentioned that their representative was corrupt and discriminated against them. They said that when the *Wakil* received aid, he distributed it among his relatives and friends.

A Significant Barrier to Change

During my visits to the camp, I asked the IDPs had there been no organisation to help them, what would they do to change their situation. In most cases, the IDPs said they would not be able to do anything to change their status, because they had neither the money nor the power to bring about changes. The IDPs in the camp were unwilling to focus on the long-term scenario, and instead they were more interested on their immediate and short-term needs and problems. They kept coming back to the question of how to access aid.

One contributing factor to this sense of impotence was that the IDPs believed that such a destiny was ordained for them by God. Only God could solve their problems. They pointed out that the government could not solve their problems, rather the government only created the problems.

Problems and Solutions

This section explores the difficulties facing the IDPs and the solutions they seek. Many of the problems are interlinked and can be traced back to the precarity of their situation.

Forced Displacement, Precarity, and an Uncertain Future

Most of the participants emphasised that they were forcibly displaced by conflict and war. Although they were not happy with their current conditions, it was not possible for them to return to their places of origin due to war between the government and insurgent groups like the Taliban and ISIS. While their stay in the camps was protracted, the IDPs still saw it as temporary. One of them said that if they didn't believe their stay to be temporary, they would have built their houses with bricks and not with mud. Each year, the government sends them a letter telling them to evacuate the land. The government kept reminding them of the temporariness of their stay. This was the third camp that these IDPs had created for themselves. They had already been removed by host communities and the government from two other camps they had built earlier. They stated that they had been there for 13 years. They could neither go back to their earlier residences, nor have a stable

life there. Every year a letter comes asking them to evacuate the camp, but they had nowhere else to go.

Disregard for IDPs by Government and International Institutions

In 2014, Ghani came to power, and the International Forces and many INGOs withdrew. From then on, according to the people in the camp, very few NGOs came to this camp to provide assistance. Most of the participants in the dialogue said that the government and international institutions no longer cared about them. No one had paid serious attention to them for years. One of the participants said that their situation was relatively good before Ashraf Ghani came to power. The NGOs were actively helping them. They gave them fuel (wood) and food. People were able to manage their lives with this assistance. The participants mentioned that 43 NGOs were active in the camps earlier, but currently only seven NGOs are active. The author cannot confirm or deny the validity of this claim.

The IDPs were angry at the government. Some of them thought that foreigners were giving money to the Afghan government, but the government was corrupt and did not distribute the money. One representative opined that the government had stopped the agencies/NGOs working in the camp. For example, one organisation offered financial aid for digging three wells in order to ensure the supply of clean drinking water for IDPs. They brought all the requisite machinery for drilling the wells, but the textile factory staffs (owned by the Ministry of Urban Development) did not allow them to drill and prevented them from continuing their work. At the time of this study, there were three wells in the camp, but the water was salty. The IDPs either bought drinking water or asked for water from the host community.

The staff of the textile factory prevented any renovation inside the camp. IDPs were not allowed to build more houses, or install septic tanks. They patrol the camp every day to prevent further construction or improvements. The common belief among IDPs is that the government is the main obstacle to any assistance or development at the IDP camp. The government views the IDPs as squatters and any kind of construction or development in the camp as a means to legitimise their stay.

The author went to the textile factory maintenance office to try and understand the government's view. They explained that the land belongs to the textile factory and hence to the government. The Ministry of Urban Development had plans to build apartments there. No one has the right to build or dig a well there without permission. Government officials said that initially IDPs camped on the land and said they would stay there for a short while. But slowly they have begun to build houses and occupy the land. They argued that the IDPs were trying to expand their area of occupation every day. The government officials thought it was their job to stop them. For this reason, the staff in the textile factory patrolled the camp every day to prevent any construction or renovation in the area. There were tensions in the area and the staff claimed that one of their employees had been beaten up by the IDPs.

They also claimed that the MORR had allocated land for the IDPs in an area called *Gospand Darah*. It was far from Kabul, and they refused to go there. The IDP representatives claimed that the land allocated was far from the city center on the outskirts of Kabul with no facilities of electricity, water etc. and most importantly, with no security, and this was why they didn't go. The IDPs claim that the government should give them land, as promised in Presidential Decrees 109 and 305. They were not going to evacuate the camp unless they were given decent land close to Kabul.

The process of land distribution in Afghanistan is very complicated and long drawn out. The IDPs mentioned that access to land was very important. They believed that corruption and *Mafia* within the government were creating impediments for them from securing the promised land. The IDPs either wanted to return back to their original homes or be distributed land in a safe and well connected place.

Poverty, Unemployment, Crime and Addiction

In all the discussions, poverty and unemployment were identified as the main problems. People also pointed out that they had problems of drug addiction, robbery and psychological issues. The level of income was very low, the average income was 100 to 150 Afghani (less than \$2) per day. Some people were forced to beg in the streets. Many young men had become addicted to drugs which were cheap and easily available. The women participants noted that the men's addiction put more pressure on them. In case of addiction of the male members of the family, women had to find ways to provide and take care of the family. But there were very few/no opportunities for women to earn money.

Some IDP families send members of their families to Iran to work and send money back as a survival strategy, though they have to cope with very difficult conditions in Iran and the constant threat of deportation back to Afghanistan. They generally cross the border illegally and pay the smugglers after they start working in Iran. At the time of the present study, given the devaluation of Iran's currency, it was no longer worthwhile to go to Iran for work, but some young people are still migrating due to lack of alternatives.

The IDPs suggested that one way to improve their situation would be to provide them with technical and vocational training (carpentry, mobile phone repairs, tailoring, welding, etc). There had been tailoring workshops for women, but it did not work well. The women generally registered with the programs for the small amount of money provided and a sewing machine, which they then sold for money.

Education

As noted above, the Ashianah association was working in the camp to provide education for children. They had planned to build several classrooms in the camp, but were stopped by the Textile factory staff. Instead, they rented two rooms from the IDPs to provide the children basic literacy and prepare them

for school. Ashianah also distributed school supplies for students, but when after a while they stopped providing school supplies and snacks and lunch, some of the IDPs stopped sending their children to class. Karim Khan and Ahmad Khan, the camp representatives, strongly urged them to continue sending their children to school.

After acquiring basic literacy in the camp, the children are sent to a government school near the camp, but many drop out. The IDPs pointed out that their children were told by teachers and other students that they smelled bad. However, some civil society activists said the real reason for not attending school was that children are often engaged in domestic work to help their parents or beg to help their families survive. Nonetheless, most of the IDPs seemed very concerned about their children's education and future.

Water and Sanitation

There was a high level of illness due to poor sanitation among the IDPs. Although some NGOs built toilets for the people, the waste water flowed into the streets. The participants said that healthcare was ineffective and dirt and sewage were the primary source of disease. They explained that they wanted to solve the problem by digging out a septic tank, but the government has refused to allow them to do so. Even if they dug out an ordinary reservoir for the waste water, it was not possible to drain it when it was full as the streets were too narrow. And even if it was physically possible to evacuate the well, they didn't have enough money to do it. This was an urgent problem but they didn't know how to solve it.

Fuel

People cannot afford coal, gas or wood, the children are sent to collect rubbish to burn – mostly plastic and paper. But these give off toxic fumes and cause respiratory illnesses for women and children. It is particularly problematic for women who cooked. Most said that it was not possible to use gas because due to the expenses involved. This is another pressing problem for which people have not been able to find a solution.

Host Community: From Collaboration to Hostility

The host community does help the IDPs sometimes, provides them with drinking water, but according to some of the participants and the NRC staff, the majority of the host community have an unwelcome attitude towards the IDPs and are actively hostile. For example, in during a dialogue the participants described how they were turned away from four cemeteries when trying to bury a dead child. The host community told the IDPs that since the IDPs hadn't paid for the cemetery, they had no right to bury anyone there. They said this has happened many times. The IDPs have had to bury their dead far from their present camp.

In addition, the NRC staff mentioned that the representatives from the host community demanded that the NRC should also provide services for the host community. For example, a clinic was opened for the IDPs. But the host community demanded that they would only allow the setting up of the clinic if it also provided services for the host community. According to NRC staff, one of the reasons for the hostility between the host community and IDPs was selective targeting of the aid only for the IDPs.

The host community tends to label the IDPs as savages and criminals. The finger is usually pointed at the IDPs for any crime in the area, in part because they are poor and also because of the high number of drug addicts among the IDPs.

The Perspective of NGOs

From the perspective of the organisations working with the IDPs, the main obstacle implementing development programs in the camps was the attitude of the government. They pointed to the Ministry of Urban Development's opposition to digging wells in the camps for the supply of clean water because of a fear of legitimising claims to the land.

From their point of view, the government's hidden agenda was to put pressure on the IDPs to return to their original homes or to integrate within the host society in a way that did not entail costs for the government. They argued that the government was afraid to give land to the IDPs. Such an instance would increase demand for land and the government does not have the capacity to meet it. On the other hand, the government doesn't want to give them the land currently under their occupation (Bagrami camp) because it has considerable market value since it is earmarked for construction.

According to some civil society activists, corruption, bureaucracy and lack of coordination between the relevant institutions were the main obstacles to land distribution. They argued that the best way to help the IDPs was to establish an advocacy group to support their claims for land. However, some NGOs and experts believe that giving land or housing to the IDPs would not solve the problem. Another problem was that the law required the IDPs to build a dwelling on the land within one year, but this was not possible for them, so if they did access the land, they would have to sell it. The author was also told that the issue of land distribution and aid meant that the IDPs exaggerated the number of families living in the camp from 700 to 850. The NRC staff mentioned that the actual number of families were much lower than that, but the numbers were inflated to lay claims to land and aid, which seemed plausible to the author.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the IDP camps are sites of multiple conflicts between the IDPs themselves, between the IDPs and the host community, between the IDPs and the government and between the IDPs and the NGOs. The conflicts and the extreme poverty experienced by many in the camp make the problems

they are facing difficult and protracted. It is hoped that with civil society activists, and with the support of the SANDD partners, we can help people who are forced to live in these camps and motivate them to think beyond their immediate, and pressing needs to develop plans for the future that would benefit them, their children and the host community.

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Mapping Vulnerabilities in Bangladesh: An Indicative Report Based on Household Surveys and Stakeholders' Dialogues

By

Ruhi Naz *

Bangladesh belongs to what has been described as a belt of 'classic patriarchy', which stretches from northern Africa across the Middle East to the northern plains of the Indian sub-continent. The social structures in this belt are characterised by their institutionalisation of extremely restrictive codes of behaviour for women. What the societies have in common are the practice of rigid gender segregation, specific forms of family and kinship and a powerful ideology linking family honour to female virtue. Men are entrusted with safeguarding family honour through their control over female members; they are backed by complex social arrangements, which ensure the protection—and dependence—of women.¹

The status of women continues to be an area in which Bangladesh lags behind, particularly in regard to the levels of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV). According to the 2011 Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey, 87% of Bangladeshi women and girls experience sexual and gender-based violence in their lifetime. According to the 2015 Human Development Report, Bangladesh is ranked 142 out of 188 on the Gender Inequality Index.²

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Given the above situation of women in Bangladesh in general, the situation is likely to be worse among vulnerable groups. The south-eastern tip of Bangladesh in Ukhiya and Teknaf border areas with Myanmar is an area that has shared a dual history of violent conquests and cultural exchanges from pre-colonial times, a feature which in recent times has made this region more vulnerable to population movements compared to other parts of Bangladesh. The recent history of exclusionary policy of citizenship against the Arakanese Muslims often called “Rohingyas” have led thousands of people from this minority to flee Myanmar and take shelter in Bangladesh. Various waves of refugees have come to Bangladesh since the 1970s, and whereas some have been documented, a large number of people remain unregistered.

The Cox’s Bazar region especially has had a long experience in cross border population movements with Burma (Myanmar). Geographical proximity, porosity of the border, shared religious beliefs and cultural practices, social contacts and exchanges, access to each other’s markets and informal exchanges in commodities have all led to regular and long drawn interactions between the members of the communities that live across the border. The voluntary flows of people have also been supplemented by forced movements when state sponsored policies of exclusion in Burma were accompanied by violence, as evidenced in 1978 and again in 1991-92. It is generally assumed that more than 250,000 people have moved into the southern part of the country from Burma after 1991.³

Currently in Bangladesh there are 32,000 officially registered refugees, living in two refugee camps of Kutupalong in Ukhiya and Nayapara in Teknaf. There is another 50,000 who live in two makeshift settlements near the refugee camps. It is estimated that in addition to the camps and identified settlements there are anywhere between 300,000 to 500,000 Undocumented Myanmar Nationals (UMNs) living across Cox’s Bazar in concentrated settlements or within the local communities (GoB, 2015



Source:

<http://electionbd.com/archive/district.php?dist=CoxBazar>

In order to take cognisance of the undocumented refugees, the Government of Bangladesh in September 2013, adopted a National Strategy for Refugees and Undocumented Myanmar Nationals in Bangladesh, which was presented formally to the international community in February 2014. The Strategy acknowledges the presence of some 300,000 to 500,000 unregistered Rohingya in Bangladesh and their need of humanitarian assistance.

It was in the context of this that Research Initiatives Bangladesh (RIB) carried out a household survey, focus group discussion and in-depth interviews among Undocumented Myanmar Nationals in Bangladesh, in 2016. The purpose of the study was to map the most vulnerable among this migrant population, and to enquire into sex and gender based violence, its prevalence, reasons and possible ways ahead.

The characteristics of the sample depicts their low income status and impoverishment in terms of property or assets which in turn maybe a reason for the majority of households living in nuclear families. Since the resource base of each family is low, there can be an optimum number of people the unit can support. This may be the reason for the statistical dominance of the nuclear family type among UMN. This trend is also significant in relation to the position of women in the family. Although circumstances of poverty drive both the women and men to work for their living, women's relative lack of assets compared to men makes them dependent in the power relationship within the family and especially in negotiations leading to marriage. The implications of this will be further dealt with in the section of SGBV.

The dominant attitude seems more conservative towards women, but it could also be interpreted as being largely protective given the potential risks for women in the locality such as the prevalence of assault and rape. The statistics also indicate that women especially would be receptive to the idea of building more social awareness to the needs of education for their children.

The findings on SGBV reflect the understanding that violence is the actual exercising of or the perpetuation of those oppressive roles which are dictated by the male-dominant values of a patriarchal society. The UMN population in Bangladesh are driven by their loss of nationality and citizenship to steer themselves into assimilation with the dominant community in Bangladesh and customary Islamic marriage practices have helped them in this respect. But marital relations are embedded in power relations and hence the women enter such relations with a disadvantage, subject as they are to the gendered stereotyping of their roles in the family and their dependent relationship with the male that in turn is driven by unequal laws of inheritance and asset transfer ensconced in religious strictures. Such oppressive structures make women lacking the protection of a male guardian (father, husband, son), more susceptible to violence than others in the community. Customary marriage practices in the host population sanctified by religion such as marriage through the Kazi and presence of witnesses, polygamy are often not helpful if any of the parties who are aggrieved want to pursue legal proceedings. The lack of social awareness with respect to fundamental rights of the woman is quite evident in the locality in general and in the case of the

UMN in particular. The concept of violence itself seems to have been normalised in the region to the extent that certain kinds of violence such as wife battering, abduction of pretty girls seem not to affect the general public except for those directly affected. This feeling is fortified by the fact that in Bangladesh domestic violence does not constitute a criminal offence. Justice therefore have to be sought in arbitration which in turn is constituted by inter and intra community power politics and corruption. Only when it reaches the stage of rape or murder in public spaces, does it reach the level of court proceedings or police investigation. But there has been evidence in the findings of the study where the legal system has failed to address such complaints.

Child welfare has to be seen as part of an overall protection strategy of UMN. Children suffer impact of SGBV directly when they are married off at an early age and are ill equipped to handle power relationships in their in-law's house or with their husbands. They face the negative consequences of dowry negotiations which can mean being tortured regularly for non-payment of dowry promises. They suffer indirectly from being deprived of education, not being able to get birth certificates for their children and hence being denied support of essential services like health-care or food. Because of insolvency in the family, especially in families where the male income-earner has abandoned the wife with the children, many have to sell their labour in difficult conditions. Children when un-cared for can be driven into conditions that create juvenile delinquency, truancy and even make them susceptible to the machinations of trafficking and terror networks.

The local context where the study on UMN is conducted, determines much of the larger environmental pressures that UMN have to cope with. Some of these pressures stem from the fact that the region, a borderland between Myanmar and Bangladesh with a coastal access to the Bay of Bengal is a breeding ground for syndicates of human and yabba (drug) trafficking that preys on the vulnerabilities of a stateless population like the Rohingyas. Moreover the influx of refugees and migrants from over the border has been a protracted one that has caused much of the host population to enter into a co-dependent relationship with them. For UMN the push factors has been their oppression and denial of citizenship by Myanmar officials but at the same time the pull factors as expressed by the UMN themselves derives from the fact that the area offers employment opportunities and already established linkages with family and friends who have settled here over the years, in other words an existing back-up of social capital. The uneasy power relationships with the host community have created problems for the UMN from time to time but overall they have expressed their satisfaction over their relationship with the local community. However, the sign of a growing sex trade in the area is causing alarm bells to ring in the host community. The fear is that this will affect the law and order situation of the region in general and degrade and further endanger the position of UMN women in particular. A regular and close watch on aspects of human security in the region must be made and followed up by both governmental and non-governmental actors.

Recommendations for a SGBV program is outlined in two sections: (1) suggestions regarding program components and (2) suggestions regarding advocacy campaigns towards the Government, NGOs and other stakeholders.

The following are the response recommended for the program components:

- Address the needs of vulnerable households: i.e. female headed households suffering from break up of marriage, economic distress and addiction, by offering them psycho-social counselling and employing following and tracking of sensitive cases.
- Develop and upscale SGBV responses in existing units and create new ones. The continuation of “Shanti khana” (literally means an abode of peace and is intended to refer to a psycho-counselling service that is being administered by ACF and MSF in Kutupalong) is a must in Kutupalong and needs to be re-introduced in Leda site.
- Women who have undergone violence and survived it often emerged stronger and with more voice than before. Survivor groups may be formed from these women to help spread information and awareness among other women in the form of peer group consultations.
- Local justice mechanisms should be overhauled: proactive female BMC and CMC members should be engaged. According to a national law called the Representation of Peoples Order, 2008 (RPO) 30% of women are to be represented in every committee central or local of parties and local authority. This principle may be followed in the sites as well.
- Implementing partners may think of employing a lawyer to liaise with local law enforcement agency to take up criminal cases such as rape and murder occurring in the sites and which may be tried in court.
- Address issues like conflict over resource distribution in the sites and regularly monitor places where residents may be at risk, e.g. women’s toilet areas, through neighbourhood watch groups.
- Leadership exists in a layered way in a community. This means that selected representatives are not the only leaders. There are other voices, like Imams, teachers, elderly women and even young educated voices. Male and female joint forums may be formed in which all these voices can be heard on the issue of SGBV.
- Men in authority and in position should also be exposed to gender awareness. Local Union Parishad Members, police force and other officials must undergo training and exposure to success stories in the field of SGBV.
- Men experiencing violence themselves should also undergo counselling as it was found in the study that much of their violent behaviour stems from their own experience of violence.
- Adolescents (both boys and girls, separately) may be brought in as part of a study circle to address SGBV.

- Education of children should also enable them to develop coping mechanisms in which to face the modern world and the risks that it involved.
- Sexual and reproductive health maybe addressed as part of the existing curriculum on health issues
- Livelihood programs should be rolled out as well since safe income sources are necessary to prevent SGBV and also occupy men in meaningful work. In the face of Government resistance to this idea, they may take the form of work therapy for victims of violence. In this way the work will not directly be linked to the marketisation of a product, but it may cater to the needs of those who dwell in the camps e.g. tailoring dresses for children, making soap products for wash and sanitation issues.

The advocacy and campaign may consist of the following:

- Advocate for referral system in seeking justice for UMN's especially in cases of medical tests for rape victims e.g. UMN's should get access to OCC as per law of this country.
- Advocate for more a proactive monitoring of sex-based crimes from the DC and UNO's office. There is already a Prevention of Violence against Women Committee under the broader auspices of the Law and Order committee that sits in a meeting every month to discuss and monitor the situation in the district. Since UMN's are often implicated in the law and order situation it will be good to have partner NGOs of IOM to sit on in these meetings as relevant stakeholders.
- Home-based work for women can be advocated for and local NGOs can be involved in it.
- Public advocacy for dealing with SGBV could be a joint program with host population as local women are also affected by both cultural and security aspects e.g. prevalence of early marriage, multi-marriage, abandonment and non-registration of marriage.
- Possibility exists of forming a local platform on SGBV, which could advocate to GoB for stronger measures related to security.
- A drug awareness campaign is also a need of the region.

In continuation with the research done among the Undocumented Myanmar Nationals, about Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV), broader research agenda was taken up by the Research Initiatives Bangladesh under the aegis of SANDD. SANDD as a network was established in the year 2018 with individuals and institutions concerned with Development and Displacement to work together. The focus of SANDD was enabling displacement affected communities to identify and address the challenges they face. Following on from their work of Sexual and Gender-Based violence among displaced communities, RIB now engaged more centrally with the issue of development induced displacement. The aim of RIB's research under

SANDD has been to develop community driven agendas of development which can mitigate effects of displacement.

The SANDD Network is comprised of members from countries like UK, Srilanka, Afganistan, Nepal, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh who represent the academia as well as organizations with knowledge and expertise on (1) funding sources (2) academic disciplines such as anthropology, demographic research, development studies, economics, gender studies, law, political science and sociology as well organisation like (3) Civil Society Organisations in member countries working on issues of climate change and climate induced displacements, human rights, social development (4) Experts on participatory action research and (5) Government officials - National, Provincial and Local levels. The aim has been to develop a South Asian agenda for research on migration and displacement via a consultative process that includes academics, NGOs, civil society organisations, public sector bodies and most importantly, the communities themselves that experience displacement or are vulnerable to it. With these aims a stakeholder dialogue was convened in Dhaka Bangladesh, where researchers, officials and civil society organisations met with community members over the period of 2-3 days in order to hear the voices of various stakeholders and identify issues of concern to them. The dialogue, like the research delineated above, indicated the multi-pronged research and strategies necessary to address different axis of marginalities in society.

SANDD Stakeholders' Dialogue in Dhaka

In the stakeholders dialogue held in Dhaka, there were altogether 55 persons who took part and the categories of participants included 11 representatives from various organisations working in north, east, west and south zone of Bangladesh. These organisations were working directly with communities who are subjected to various discrimination, deprivation and displacements. Additionally, there was participation of 8 individual experts who have enormous experience on above-mentioned issues as well as on development agenda. We also brought 15 members from respective communities who face the issues of discrimination and displacement. There were participation of few community based researcher, representative of one media house and one visitor from Miami University, Florida, USA.

Methodology/Process

A mixed balance of experts, academicians, organisational representatives and community activists were invited so that both meta-narratives and micro-narratives of displacement could be thrashed out. Five cross-cutting themes were chalked out by the organisers on the basis of existing and ongoing knowledge base of relevant work being done in Bangladesh on displacements. These five themes were Gender; Minorities; Economic Conditions (inclusive of income, land and property); Climate Change and Environment; Citizenship

and Access to Justice. Each of these themes acted as entry points into the discussion on displacement. The following report delineates some of key concerns raised through this multi pronged and deliberative research strategy and the findings and recommendations presented by all concerned.

Plenary Session

In the Plenary session of the Dialogue, the background for formation of SANDD platform and objective of the stakeholder dialogue was discussed, which was to identify affected communities in the country vulnerable to forced displacement. The purpose of the dialogue was to create an environment in which communities work out what they want, what they can do for themselves, and what they need from outside the community (government, international institutions). The objective of this dialogue was to encourage participating members from communities, organisations and experts to think organically about challenges/problems e.g. how they are connected; why have previous solutions not worked out; what is really at the root of a particular problem and so on. It was further emphasised that this dialogue has been arranged between different stakeholders in order to encourage them to identify the short, medium, and long-term challenges the community they work with face or they themselves face which leads to displacement.

Overview of Discussion on Five Thematic Areas

Gender

A concern was raised about the exclusive way of identifying particular communities in Bangladesh by official circles e.g. using the name transgender. It was argued that such definitions left out many other sexual minorities like LGBTQ etc. Discussions emerged about sex workers who are being marginalised only because of their profession. This reflected how the discriminatory practices still continued against them by society and state. Further elaborations were made about people living in remote areas who even after independence up until now is not familiar with the word “rights”. There was a focus on how women are subjected to harassment in public places and within their homes.

The particular way in which the transgender community suffers was discussed. They are deprived of family life, education and face separation from society. Discussions emerged about the difficulty they have in accessing services or facility due to having a name that did not match their appearance. In the discussion there was reflection upon the systematic discrimination that took place against Hijra community by family and state. For this community, displacement occurred first from their own natal family. Many times they came across government officials and people in general who time and again told them that they have no legal rights. They did not get access to respectable

jobs. They did not enjoy property rights in the family. It was stressed that government has taken initiative like providing scholarship for education and providing training on vocational skills. There was a clear enunciation of challenges they faced in their daily lives. It was stated that while going for medical examination they were often stripped naked by authorities in public. Many would take photos and post them in the social media, in a clear violation of their human rights.

Minority

Normally we are used to focus on displacement in relation to land or geographical territory but now there are multi-faceted forms of displacement that occur like displacement from one's culture, displacement from identity. Displacement from land might be a tangible thing but all other forms of displacement holds equal importance in all respect and creates same level of negative impact upon the mind of persons who are displaced. Development induced displacement in an important issue. In the Chittagong Hill Tract linguistic identities of minority indigenous groups are gradually diminishing. Places are being named using the local Bengali terms instead of the original indigenous name. There exists a concern regarding the identity of this community which becomes debatable through 15th Amendment of the Constitution. Indigenous women face regular harassment when they go for cultivation both in the hills and plains.

The plight of Urdu speaking people who were scattered around the whole of Bangladesh but have migrated to different places after independence was discussed. A member spoke about determining the identity of his community in Geneva Camp through filling writ petitions. People living in camps all over Dhaka are subjected to forceful displacement by housing societies in the name of development.

Economic Condition

Land ownership creates a major problem for *indigenous* and religious minority community and leads to various forms of discrimination and displacement. The need was stressed for widespread implementation of laws on land and court directives. It was stated that land issues concerning minorities are not a topic of interest to government since state is not willing to rectify policies leading to displacement of minorities. Attention was given to police atrocities in particular to recent events involving the indigenous Santal community who were evicted from their land. There is a trend of shrinking spaces of civil society in general especially in relation to problems concerning minority population.

Climate and Environment

Climate induced displacement has acquired increasing importance in recent times. Incidences of flood, cyclone which created mass displacement for nearly lakhs of people forced to leave their homes and take shelter in camps was discussed. The government's Action Plan formulated to deal with climate induced displacement was discussed. The aforementioned is an integrated plan by the government focusing on providing services to the displaced people and development through community engagements.

Citizenship and Access to Justice

Displacement and access to justice are interlinked, in many situations. Displacement leads to denial of justice whereas in some situation, displacement takes place due to lack of access to justice. If we want to ensure access to justice to displaced people we must keep in mind certain indicators such as whether the existing national legal structure is supportive of displaced people, and whether mechanisms of justice are available to them, and whether people whose rights have been violated are in a position to demand it. With these focus in mind certain organizations works for slum people who are regularly subjected to eviction and displacement, and that was discussed. The old legal jurisprudence presents a challenge to work within the contemporary situation. There are some laws which are discriminatory in nature and need amendment. Challenges concerning Rohingya community face their own set of challenges because they are denied citizenship and access to other related laws. For these reasons the Rohingyas do not often seek legal remedy. There are many existing administrative limitations concerning citizenship rights of the Rohingya community

Women of the Rohingya community as well as local female inhabitants are subjected to sexual and all other forms of harassment in the Cox's Bazaar region. Such factors contribute to discrimination and displacement.

The challenges faced by expatriate workers were analysed. Sometimes displacements take place through male members of the family. Once these harassed women return to countries of origin, they are subjected to other forms of displacement and segregation from society. People even after spending fortunes get smuggled into other countries and once they return to their home countries, it is difficult for them to get their land and properties back, which is a form of silent displacement. There is a serious need for research on these issues in order to identify how such displaced groups can be provided protection.

The Dalit communities are subjected to various discrimination. There was strong advocacy for promulgation of Anti Discriminatory law in Bangladesh. The way the Dalit identity is included in the Constitution is discriminatory towards their community. It was felt that till the time State mechanism is not in their favour, Dalit communities are going to endlessly

suffer. It was stated that Bangladesh is increasingly becoming too Islamic in its mindset. It was further stressed that Dalit communities are forced to drift away from their actual profession following discriminatory practices.

It was revealed that the Bede (Gypsy) communities were not included in the voter list because they are from the gypsy community who lack permanent address. They have been subjected to displacement for generations. They couldn't live in many places because their living places have been taken up for so called development works by government. They are evicted and displaced on a regular basis. Their economic condition is steadily degenerating. They are one of the most marginalised community in the country.

It was highlighted that the registered refugee community faces several challenges while living in Cox's bazaar camp. They face systematic discrimination due to their identities being mixed up with the newly arriving Rohingyas from Myanmar. They were being regarded as new arrivals by the local administration. Most of the rights they have enjoyed since 1990 since their arrival in Bangladesh are now being violated due to the complex identification process undertaken by the government. Now they are being deprived of basic facility. Their right to movement have also been restricted. They have been living in Bangladesh since the past 29 years. They have so far enjoyed certain restricted rights but now their rights are being violated. They are put into restricted camp with barbed wire and they might have to go through the process of registration all over again like new arrivals. There is serious lack of education facilities for these communities. They do not have secure access to health facilities.

The recently amended Act regarding indigenous community included the names of 50 indigenous communities in March 2019. It was stated that there are many indigenous communities whose names people do not even know and whose houses have been set on fire and whose women were subjected to various harassments by local communities. The Rohingya influx in 2017 has created a lot of problems in Bangladesh especially for the indigenous people of Bandarban (adjacent Hill District to Cox's Bazar) who are threatened because they have become more marginalised. There is a serious threat to the security of women as well. The present situation is making the indigenous people more vulnerable. They are faced with possibilities of displacement due to such threat. It was brought to the notice of audience how an woman from the community was forced to get down from a bus because she belongs to a particular community.

It was pointed out that slum dwellers are always subjected to forced displacement without any relocation in the name of so called development works carried out by the government. They don't have proper legal recourse. They become victim of eviction and displacement due to highhandedness of politicians in the name of development.

Panel Discussion

It emerged through this dialogue that it is possible to develop research guidelines or guidelines for intervening in areas where community members face vulnerabilities. For every displacement we have to look deeper into structural factors. We need to look into facets of minority culture in Bangladesh. State formation has played a big role in creating culture of minority. It is possible to conduct descriptive research through mapping incidences of displacement, discrimination and deprivation. We can also undertake theoretical research in order to look into structural and causal factors for displacement.

The kind discussion that took place in the dialogue meeting were truly an eye opener as there are so many diverse communities brought under the common banner of displacement. This gives food for thought. The meeting brought forth many incidences of systematic discrimination, deprivation and displacement that communities have brought faced and it will help in constituting a collective research agenda. It was emphasised that most of the communities are being discriminated just because they belong to certain ethnicity, religion and culture. This creates division among people. Women live in fear of being harassed at any moment. Their right to live and survive with dignity is challenged. Unfortunately, the state mechanism directly or indirectly support such violence. This points to the need for avoidance of dependence on the state and calls for autonomous thinking.

Violation of human rights, harassment of women and discrimination taking place in the country were discussed. Policy makers in Bangladesh do not maintain connection with community members. They are detached from ground reality and hold meetings in uptown hotels. Proper engagement between policy makers and community members is necessary. Policy makers should focus on discrimination against women who are displaced due to climate induced crisis. The High Court has given an injunction that slum dwellers cannot be evicted or displaced for any development projects by the government without rehabilitation. Voices were raised against development induced displacement, and the role of private sector in such dislocations was highlighted. It was suggested each community should prepare written briefs on their history and specific problems. This can be presented to the policy makers and the international community through the network of SANDD.

Findings and Recommendations

Gender

This group received good feedbacks from the Rohingya community and the Bede community about whom they did not have any prior idea. The focus was basically on what findings the visitor- groups contributed to the issues they had originally chalked out. It was stressed that in the Rohingya community there is more vulnerability as women are not educated. They do not even

know how to sign their names and they lack possibilities of raising their voices. Red flags were raised about the plight of transgender people who have national identity cards in one name but have a different outward appearance. This creates a lot of challenge for the transgender community. It was further added that there is one particular community living in former Indian enclaves who suffer from identity crisis as they have not received national ID cards. The women of the Bede community suffer various forms of harassment including sexual harassment from local people as well government officials. People seem to think that the Bede community is mobile and do not stay in one place for long and lack connections in the locality. Therefore if they complain of abuse it will not be taken seriously. It was further added that during natural calamities when women take shelter in camps, they become subject to several forms of sexual harassment. The need was asserted for effective implementation of laws to deal with the above-mentioned challenges. Simultaneously there was a call for policy reform and dialogue. Law enforcers must be prompt in responding to problems reported by victims. A survey should be done based on respective caste and sect of marginalised women.

Citizenship and Access to Justice

The group focusing on citizenship and access to justice, discussed existing laws and how these laws are discriminatory for many people. They focused on the complex existing legal mechanism to determine citizenship rights and discriminatory practices. Challenges that emerged when government prohibited birth registration in Cox's Bazar for local and Rohingya community were discussed. Slum dwellers also face the same challenges of lacking identification documents. Most of them have not been issued national identity cards which restrict them from accessing justice. They recommended that there must be research on nexus between displacement and access to justice. Attempt should be made to identify loopholes or grey areas in the law which works in the favour of the political establishment. Old laws need to be amended. We must ratify international conventions on indigenous people and refugees for the protection of these communities.

Climate and Environment

Both rural and urban communities suffer as a result of climate change. Long term economic factors also displace people, and they migrate to other places in search of livelihood. Several types of displacement take place due to climate change and environment, for example, one kind of displacement results from sudden natural calamities. Other more long drawn phenomena like drought, rise of saline water also dislocate people. Climate change and carbon emission are causing widespread displacement. Climate change significantly affects the eco system and this in turn creates livelihood problems for fisherman. Sometimes cultivators are affected due to climate change. As a last resort, they sell their land and migrate to the city for livelihood. Often these migrants lack

other professional skills and for them managing livelihood after migration becomes extremely difficult.

Minority

During their group discussion they focused on 3 communities, the Dalits, the Rohingyas and the Indigenous communities. In their discussion one of the prime issue was identification documents for all these communities. Minority communities often face systemic displacements. It was emphasised that there must be a mapping of communities in Bangladesh as well as laws promulgated to give recognition and protection to these communities. Challenges faced by these communities must be addressed in a unanimous way. Areas which are under army control are more marginalised and subjected to widespread discrimination and displacement. Organisations to support such marginalized communities are needed. Research should focus on how to empower these communities.

Economic Condition

There was discussion about the economic wellbeing of marginalised communities. It emerged that most of the Dalit communities have lost their land through displacement. In Bangladesh a large number of people live in anxiety and fear of displacement by the powerful. People of the Dalit communities face discrimination for their culture, identity and profession. The Dalits who pursue higher education often don't disclose their identity for fear of discrimination. Women from these communities are deprived of inheritance rights. Sometimes cultural practices, for example rearing of pigs, become the root cause for loss of livelihood or displacement. There needs to be a state policy on permanent settlement of Adibashi/Dalit communities. The government must come up with a development agenda for the welfare of the Dalits, the transgender community, Urdu speaking people and so on.

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Notes

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Report on a Webinar

“Covid-19 in South Asia: Regional Perspectives on Vulnerabilities and Dispossession”

By

Sukanya Bhattacharya *

The South Asia Network for Development and Displacement (SANDD) brings together scholars and activists working among and with displaced and at risk of being displaced communities in South Asia—groups that have become even more vulnerable during the Coronavirus pandemic due to pre-existing structural inequalities, and forced mobility as well as immobility. As an active member of SANDD, and in continuation of its current research concern about the condition of migrant workers during the Coronavirus induced lockdown, Calcutta Research Group (CRG) organised a South Asian dialogue on conditions of vulnerable and dispossessed groups across the subcontinent.

Following up on its engagements with the condition of the migrant workers during the Coronavirus induced lockdown and their resultant walk back home—CRG sought to locate India’s handling of the Covid 19 pandemic in the larger geographical context of South Asia, to arrive at a region-specific understanding as well to enquire into the commonalities and disparities across the region. Studying the experiences of people in countries like Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal and Afghanistan, as well as the responses of the states is necessary to understand how the entire South Asian region has been battling the pandemic, which specific experience is unique to each country, and what they could learn from the others in terms of mistakes and precautions. On 24th August 2020, Calcutta Research Group hosted the South Asian dialogue: “Covid 19 in South Asia: Regional Perspective on

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Vulnerabilities and Dispossession", in association with the Institute for Human Sciences, Vienna. Paula Banerjee moderated a diverse panel of speakers consisting of Amena Mohsin, Hari Sharma, Saqib Jafarey and Reza Hussaini, who spoke at length about country-specific conditions, but also about lives and livelihoods.

Amena Mohsin from University of Dhaka, Bangladesh, located the Coronavirus pandemic as it played out in Bangladesh, within the urban clusters and their spatial politics. The bigger cities in Bangladesh are more affected by it, due to unplanned urbanisation, governance and development issues. The emergence of the 'New Poor' category is also concerning as the previously vulnerable but non-poor groups are now at risk of going below the poverty line, in a stark increase from 9.4 million to 35.5 million people who now occupy the category.

Families in urban areas depended on remittances for daily expenses even more due to the pandemic with an increase in territorialisation, ultranationalism and stigmatisation. The return migrants were seen as deviants and potential carriers of the virus that reflected how xenophobia is becoming a global problem. The internal migrants consisting of women who work in readymade garment factories also suffered as local government did not provide them with any relief or aid and international orders to those factories were abruptly cancelled, leading to job loss or pay cut. 98% of the internal migrant women workers lost their employment and are in a precarious position as landlords in the city are hostile to them and their families also do not want to take them back due to fear.

Mohsin emphasised the need to question the sustainability of the development paradigm with more research about the informal sector. Violence against women also increased due to lack of social activity and acute financial pressure on households. The indigenous communities of Bangladesh were hit hard due to their remoteness and inaccessibility to healthcare and electricity. Education has also been compromised due to lack of internet and smartphones for most students in the country.

Hari Sharma from the Alliance for Social Dialogue, Social Sciences Baha elaborated about the post-Covid situation in Nepal. With a lockdown imposed in Nepal as well, vulnerabilities of several groups emerged with the lack of internet affecting the education sector as well. The economy was also affected gravely as 28% of the GDP of Nepal is dependent on remittances from migrant workers. In comparison to other South Asian countries the Nepal government did not respond adequately to the plight of the external migrant returnees. Many of these migrants were waiting in other countries to be repatriated after they had lost their jobs, but the Nepal government could not deal with them appropriately. According to him, only South Korea treated the external migrants well and with care. The influence of India as a hub for employment of foreign migrant workers was also seen as many Nepalese migrants walked back home on foot due to India's sudden unannounced lockdown. However, the Nepal government did not take adequate measures to quarantine or conduct health checkups. Due to this mismanagement, the

returning migrants went back home to remote areas and there was deep community transmission even after two months of lockdown.

Covid-19 has also brought on a big humanitarian crisis with the social movements conducted by the civil society becoming restricted due to the pandemic. In contrast, the state became stronger and exerted its draconian control while it increasingly isolated and atomised its citizens with fear. The kind of social cohesion that was seen even after the infamous Nepal earthquakes were not seen during the pandemic as the social movements had ultimately failed to democratise and educate the society. With increasing dependence on the developmental state, the accountability of the state started to decrease. In such a context, Sharma stressed the need for a South Asian conversation on solidarity, empathy and best practices to manage the pandemic.

Reza Hussaini, from the Afghanistan Public Policy Research Organization, spoke of his unique experiences as an Afghan citizen. Covid-19 had hit Afghanistan when it was already undergoing political conflict due to the dispute over the President’s elections. However, the people of Afghanistan also showed high resilience even though their living conditions were steeped in insecurity, displacement, poverty and lack of access to healthcare. The low death rate in Afghanistan due to Covid-19 may have been because of its young demography with 63% of the population being below 25 years of age. However, the available data and figures are also quite unreliable since there is low testing and the health system is quite weak. Consequently, the Afghan workers who migrated to Iran did not undergo any necessary testing or restrictions. The state could not control the movement of the infected people in order to control the spread of the virus. The stigmatisation associated with the virus also forced people to hide which made matters worse. Covid-19 is not a health emergency for Afghanistan but a livelihood crisis. With stable livelihood avenues being disrupted, the United Nations Development Programme predicated a 13% rise in poverty rate despite a severe lack of available data. The migrants who returned also faced loss of employment and worry for the safety of their family. In addition to that, the government and border patrol were incredibly brutal to the migrants who wanted to return.

The ongoing developmental projects in Afghanistan also came to an abrupt halt with a rise in child beggars and hospitals becoming more understaffed with not enough professionals to manage the pandemic. Hussaini also noted a rise of fatalistic thoughts in people as the institutions that are supposed to protect and help them were gradually failing.

The final speaker of the panel was Saqib Jafarey from the University of London, who considered the situation in Pakistan in the light of the concerns raised by the other panelists. Pakistan is faced with a double crisis as the task of repatriating migrants was quite unsuccessful. The dispute between the Pakistani and UAE government about the returning migrants who were infected also exacerbated the situation. Surprisingly however, remittances

went up by 50% during the months of June and July even though a lot of people lost their jobs.

What made Pakistan’s experience during the pandemic quite unique and different from its neighbors was the unique nature of its state where the military and the civil state are enmeshed in a conflictual as well as cooperative structure. Even though the civil state did not want to impose a lockdown, the army forced one upon the nation. Quite differently to the self-proclaimed welfare state of India or Bangladesh, the people in Pakistan do not perceive the state as an institution which delivers social welfare as most of the budget goes towards the military while the civil society and private sector play a big role in education and health. The charitable sector is particularly important for doing social services. A mass exodus of migrant workers (as had happened in India) did not happen in Pakistan due to the civil society and initiatives by charities who mitigated the immediate and urgent problems of the returning migrants.

The geographic composition of Pakistan is changing as a result of the pandemic, the bigger cities are slowly losing their population intensity. A lot of people in Pakistan are already internally displaced due to climatic issues of flood and droughts, which is why there was also no mass exodus. Jafarey ended his talk by contradicting with the view that “we are all in this together” by pointing out the obvious inequalities which already existed and exacerbated due to the pandemic.

A robust question and answer session followed the speeches by the four panelists with the first bout of questions being directed towards Amena Mohsin. There were questions regarding the state of the Rohingyas and how the government responded to the category of the ‘New Poor’. Mohsin pointed out that local authorities in confluence with NGOs such as Doctors without Borders along with the UNHCR were trying to look after the Rohingyas. She was also asked about the response of the trade unions and the state of the LGBTQIA+ community. To that, Mohsin spoke of the trade unions who were quite vocal with demonstrations and protests as they demanded full wages. Along with that, she also spoke of the charities for transgender people and ‘Hijra’ community of the Bangladesh. The sex workers’ network also played an important role in their survival during the trying times.

Next, Hari Sharma was asked about what could be done as a South Asian community, people’s perception of the returning migrants in Nepal. To that, he eloquently laid down the emerging problems of the developmental state with its new ideas of governance that converted its citizens into consumers and robbed them of political agency. The democratic neoliberal state exercises fear instead of sympathy, leading to the creation of a coercive state that is leading towards a humanitarian crisis. In the times when Covid-19 has eroded the rights of citizens by increasing border fortification, Sharma emphasised on the need for an anarchist resistance that encourages local politics and social solidarity beyond borders.

Reza Hussaini was asked some interesting questions regarding the role of US military during the pandemic as well as about the situation of migrant women in the current scenario. He strongly set aside the American notion that the US military was there to “liberate” the people of Afghanistan as the citizens only want to be left alone even as the US government signed a peace treaty with the Taliban without considering the democratic ethos of Afghanistan. He stressed upon the need to build a strong Civil Society as people heavily depended on personal networks instead of the state since the government is not accountable at all.

Migrant women and IDP women are also a vulnerable minority according to him. During the pandemic, these women lost their rights due to economic problems and other rules. With no governmental help, raising awareness about the pandemic becomes futile as most of these migrants and women do not have access to the basic resources such as water and soap that is required to protect themselves from the pandemic.

Responding to questions about the effects of Covid-19 on the climate and militarisation issues of Pakistan, Jafarey delved into Pakistan’s healthcare system and its workings. According to him, centralised contact tracing did not work due to lack of trust and community involvement. The taboo and stigma attached to the patient further isolated them from the social fabric. Due to the overwhelming presence of the military, democratic rights and discourse in Pakistan is also perpetually in peril. In such a context, many human rights and civil society activists face large amounts of threats. The climatic issues in Pakistan are also increasing due to the lockdown and in an increasingly commercialised neoliberal and globalised world.

The discussion and the following question and answer session succeeded in breaking the idea that South Asia in itself is a homogenised region with more or less similar characteristics. Even though the issues of poverty, insecurity, migration remain the same in all these countries – how each state and government chose to deal with the pandemic, how the people reacted to it are all quite unique in their own way. In addition to that, a variety of other factors, such as the military in Pakistan and Afghanistan, the civil society in Nepal and the structure of labour in Bangladesh have also impacted these nations to react in their own ways. While none of the South Asian nations would be praised on a global level for managing the pandemic efficiently with the least amount of threat to human life and livelihood, the pervasive sociopolitical and economic problems that each of them face makes it apparent that a pandemic is just an added crisis to an already ongoing livelihood crisis in the region. With populist regimes gaining currency again due to the pandemic while civil society is being stifled – it is urgent that an immediate cross-border dialogue is conducted that extends from official foreign policy to micro-level discussion that aims at building up solidarity and leads to an exchange of ideas.

The moderator – Paula Banerjee ended the session by quoting author Ana Castillo, “all working for a world without borders and to all who dare to cross

them.” The quote reinforced the notion of a world which would transcend beyond national boundaries and borders, the demarcations becoming surprisingly more relevant than ever during a global health crisis as millions of people struggled to find their place within the unyielding borders.

Regular Features

Colonialism, Resource Crisis and Forced Migration

By

Subhas Ranjan Chakraborty *

“There is no despotism more absolute than the government of India. Mighty, irresponsible, cruel...Money which England takes out of India every year is a serious drain upon the country, and is among the causes of its poverty.”

—John Russell Young, *Around the World with General Grant*¹

“The vision of a tall-masted ship, at sail on the ocean, came to Deeti on an otherwise ordinary day, but she knew instantly that the apparition was a sign of destiny for she had never seen such a vessel before, not even in a dream...”

—Amitav Ghosh, *Sea of Poppies*²

The establishment of *de facto* political control by the English East India Company in Bengal after the battle of Plassey in 1757 inaugurated a period of gradual conquest of the subcontinent leading ultimately to the establishment of direct imperial control after the great Revolt of 1857. When Lord Clive entered Murshidabad, the old capital of Bengal in 1757, he wrote of it, ‘This city is as extensive, populous and rich as the city of London, with this difference— that there are individuals in the first possessing infinitely greater prosperity than in the last city.’ The ‘Plassey plunder’ set in motion a process which witnessed a ‘drain’ of resources/wealth from India. The policies which the metropolitan government would be adopting comes out clearly from the following description: ‘The arrival in the port of London of Indian produce in Indian-built ships created a sensation among the monopolists which could not have been exceeded if a hostile fleet had appeared in the Thames. The ship-builders of the port of London took a lead in raising the cry of alarm; they declared that their business was on the point of ruins, and their families in

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England were certain to be reduced to starvation'.³ Instead Indians were to be reduced to penury and starvation.

The acquisition of *de jure* power by the Company in the form of the grant of Diwani in 1765 by the Mughal emperor marked the beginning of over-exploitation of the revenue earnings by the state. Experimentation with the revenue policy they inherited generally resulted in higher demand and ruthless collection of land-revenue, without always regard to the capacity of land to pay. The revenue settlements subjugated the peasantry to the local despotism of the moneylenders and the *nouveau-riche* landowners. One result was the famine of 1770 in Bengal, described by the English civilian and historian, W.W. Hunter, in following terms

The husbandmen sold their cattle; they sold their implements of agriculture; they devoured their seed grain; they sold their sons and daughters till at length no buyer of children could be found; they ate the leaves of trees and the grass of the field; and in June, 1770, the Resident of the Durbar affirmed that the living were feeding off the dead. Day and night a torrent of famished and disease-stricken wretches poured into the great cities...early that year pestilence had broken out ...⁴

Famines are also products of natural causes, but the point is that there was no let up in the Company's revenue collection. If there was a five per cent remission in 1770, a ten per cent was added in 1771. George Campbell, Lt. Governor of Bengal, worked on famines in British India. He recorded that the drought in 1769 and the famine of 1770 were accompanied by much suffering and great loss of life. At the same time, he noted, 'The British authorities were early alive to the evil, and *much sympathised with it, but always with an overruling consideration for the revenue.*'⁵ (emphasis added)

This decay and devastation can be set against the splendour of the city of Calcutta, which was witnessing great construction activities. This construction and other labour-intensive activities created a sharp demand for labour in Calcutta. Such a demand for various types of labour provided a strong pull for migration to the city and it was here that one witnessed social dislocation early in the colonial period. The famine pushed up the price of rice to a hitherto unknown peak. The marginal wage increase could not be attractive to the labourers to migrate to the city. Workers, therefore, had to be forcefully recruited and sent to the city. The resentment that the people felt is seen in a contemporary Bengali verse of Dwija Radhamohan

The tillers left behind their ploughs
In the field
They left their ploughs and fled
To escape the recruitment of bonded labour.⁶

This is an early example of forced migration initiated by the colonial rulers.

Land revenue experimentations, the basic aim of which was the maximisation of revenues, resulted in burden on the peasants in general. The new structures of tenures forced the small peasants/ agricultural labourers to migrate. To this may be added the process of de-industrialisation, commercialisation of agriculture and the introduction of plantation economy— all of which resulted in enhancing the experience of misery of the

smallest peasants in particular. More than hundred years later Hunter commented that the number of agricultural labourers nearly doubled between 1891 and 1901 (according to census reports). Even in normal times the ordinary agricultural labourers in some tracts earned a poor and precarious livelihood. They were employed on the land only during the busy seasons of the year and in slack times a few were attracted to large trade centres for temporary work. As trade and industries developed, this attraction to towns would increase. At the same time, it was noticed that the peasant in India worked on borrowed capital and that in certain parts of the country the indebtedness of the peasant was economically excessive. 'This feature of the agricultural situation was the product of the last half century' (i.e. the middle decades of the nineteenth century).⁷ Commercialisation of agricultural and de-industrialisation added to the woes of the rural populace at large.

At the end of the nineteenth century, the situation thus was probably worse than at the end of the eighteenth. William Digby wrote an open letter to Lord George Hamilton, Secretary of State for India. He reproduced the letter in his book in which he quoted Hamilton's speech made in August 1900 when he was presenting the financial statement on India in Parliament. Hamilton said that there was a school in India as well as in England which believed that British rule had 'bled India'. He claimed to have searched for, but not found, any fact or figure to support this. The hypocrisy of the statement was exposed by Digby by reference to an earlier statement of Hamilton made in 1875 where he urged that 'as India must be bled, the bleeding should be done judiciously'. Digby wrote the letter 'of my own poor volition, possessing no power or influence... moved wholly by feelings of our common humanity on behalf of a silent, helpless, too-patient, always long-suffering people'. He also challenged Lord Hamilton to 'disproof' the wealth of data about the true impact of British rule that he cited in the book. His conclusion was that India in 1901 was worse off than in 1801.⁸

Famines

A second major and recurrent phenomenon that caused resources to be scarce was famine. While famines were certainly not unknown in the earlier periods, 'we know that they have become frequent since the British came to India'.⁹ The great famines are 'the missing pages—the absent defining moments—if you prefer—in virtually every overview of the Victorian era. Yet there are compelling, even urgent, reasons for revisiting this secret history'.¹⁰ The Famine Commission of 1880 and 1898 noted the recuperative power of the country

It is, we believe, demonstrable that the effects produced by the famine of 1867-8 on the general prosperity of the country have been less disastrous than those of former calamities... The famine of 1770 resulted in widespread desolation of the most affected districts, so that we read of depopulation and ruin, the thinness of inhabitants, many hundreds of villages entirely depopulated... and a complete disorganisation among the landed classes which lasted for many years. The famine of 1803 struck such a blow at the

prosperity of Khandesh and Ahmednagar that even in 1867 traces of its ravages were still visible in the ruins of deserted villages which had been repopulated. In the famine of 1833 so much land went out of cultivation in the Guntur district that even in 1850 the land revenue was only three-fourth of what it had been in 1832. In 1837, in the north western provinces the pressure was so great that the ordinary bonds of society seemed to be broken by it. In 1841 the still deserted lands and abandoned houses in the Etawah district bore evidence to the devastation and waste of life.¹¹

One class which necessarily suffered the most had been the agricultural labourers. Even in the late nineteenth century it was noted by the officials that wages were low and agricultural progress had done little to improve their position. Emigration, it was noted, would temporarily postpone the pressure on soil. There were grain riots in Kurnool, Cuddapah and Bellary in 1876. Popular outbursts against impossibly high grain prices were likewise occurring in the Deccan districts, especially in Ahmednagar and Sholapur. Having tried to survive on roots, while waiting for the rains, multitudes of peasants and labourers were now on the move, fleeing a slowly dying countryside.¹² The Famine Commissioners of 1880 concluded that the remedy for the present ills was the introduction of diversity of occupations through which the surplus population could be absorbed. What the Commission did not mention was the fact that road blocks were hastily established to stem the stick-thin country people from Bombay and Pune, while in Madras the police forcibly evicted about 25,000 famine refugees. Plainly, the movement of large numbers of people was occasioned by the famines in which the role of the free-market policies of the colonial government was quite clear.

Some of the major famines in the nineteenth century were

- 1837 and 1861— affecting North Western Provinces and 13 million people
- 1866-67— Orissa famine and a turning point in the history of Indian famines in the sense that relief was addressed seriously after this. 25 per cent of population died.
- 1873— North Bihar
- 1876-8— Hyderabad, Madras, Mysore, Bombay, Deccan; later it spread to North Western Provinces, Awadh and the Punjab
- 1896-7— North Western Provinces, Bihar, Awadh, Madras, Bombay.
- 1899-1900— Bombay, Madras.

Stated roughly, famines and scarcities have been four times as numerous during the last three decades of the nineteenth century as they were hundred years earlier and four times as widespread.

A commission was appointed under Baird Smith after the famine of 1837. A committee of Enquiry was set up after the severe Orissa famine of 1867. Another Commission under Richard Strachey in 1880 led to the adoption of the Provincial Famine Code of 1883. Yet another Commission was instituted in 1900 under Sir Anthony MacDonnell. MacDonnell noted that people died like flies. The reports of these enquiries reveal the utter miseries the people suffered from in the affected areas. The causes of the famines were attributed to natural phenomena like drought, but it was noted

that people suffered more because of excessive land-revenue demands and export of food grains. This export rose from £858,000 in 1849 to £9.3 million by 1901. The death-toll of the famines was as follows

1800-25— 1 million

1825-50— 400,000

1850-75— 5million

1876-1900— 15 million.

Some estimates would put the death in the last quarter to between 11.2 and 29.3 millions. William Digby, a radical journalist, puts the death toll of the famine of 1876-9 at 10.3 millions and that of the famine of 1896-1902 at 19 millions.¹³ It may be interesting to note that the approximate number of deaths owing to war between 1793 and 1900 was 5 million (an estimate supported by *Friend of India*, May 16, 1901). The total ascertained and estimated cost of the Madras famine was £82,736,500. 'When the part played by the British empire in the nineteenth century is regarded by the historian fifty years hence... the most striking... of all incidents for comment will be the steady sinking of India and its population into a state of chronic famine-strickenness'.¹⁴ It was reflected in the figures of the census. In 1891, the population was 287,223,431. It was projected to become 330,300,945 in 1901, but actually was 294,000,000 thus indicating a loss of more than three million.¹⁵

The improvement in communications, it would appear, did not allow relief to be more effective. One impact of the recurrent and devastating famines was migration to areas of relative surplus or to the urban centres. Indeed, there is contemporary European observation to indicate that there had been a continuous famine for 15 years owing to high prices. Inadequacy of the measures adopted by the government to provide relief meant people had to resort to their own escape routes. This is how the impact of impoverishment was linked to the process of migrations. Indeed, the newly constructed rail-roads, deemed as an institutional safeguard against famines, were, instead, used by merchants to ship grain inventories from outlying drought-stricken districts to central depots for hoarding (as well as protection from rioters).¹⁶ The detailed history of such migration needs to be recorded. Indeed, in order to explain tenets of out-migration, correlations between years of famine and volume of labour exported have frequently been cited.¹⁷

A recent work on the famine of 1896/7 in Bengal has discussed the incidence of movements of people away from the areas of famine.¹⁸ Migration relieved pressure in certain areas by preventing a further fall in wage rates. For example, the author, Malabika Chakraborty, notices large-scale migration in Khulna (now in Bangladesh) to the districts to the south-west and the newly reclaimed areas in the Sunderbans. In these areas sufficient number of labourers could not be found for such works as embankments. Almost all the professional labourers in the affected tracts of Nadia had migrated by January, 1797, to Calcutta, Burdwan, to Malda-Dinajpur and the Sunderbans in search for work. From Jessore (now in Bangladesh), a large number of men migrated to cut paddy in the Sunderbans, and also to serve as coolies and hawkers in

Calcutta. The exodus from Midnapur to new settlements in the Sunderbans was abnormally large in that particular year (1896-7). Parts of Bankura experienced large number of Santhals migrating freely to other districts to work on railways and agriculture. In other parts of Bankura, the Bauri population refused to move and added to the local beggar class.

In Saran, Muzaffarpur, Shahbad and Champaran it was feared that a large proportion of adult male population migrated to lower Bengal and elsewhere earlier than usual. Their families, particularly the weak and infirm, were left without support and were to be dependent only on government relief. This migration left a large number of men and women on relief. The remittance did increase, but it was too small to meet the needs of the families.

The influx from the North-West Provinces into Patna Division was great. Owing to the pressure of population, the Santhals in the Santhal Paraganas were more ready to emigrate in 1896 than in the earlier years. The annual Kol migration from Lohardanga to Burdwan, Hooghly and the 24 Paraganas in Bengal increased greatly during the scarcity of 1896-7. There was also a large volume of migration from Orissa to Calcutta and elsewhere.

The migration of labourers in a way relieved the pressure of population in the affected areas and prevented a further fall in the wages in those areas. But where the proportion of adult male labourers declined sharply their dependants were left without support while people from other districts crowded the local relief works.

Writing on the causes of famines, Rev. J.T. Sunderland argued that the failure of rain or overpopulation was not the cause. 'The real cause [of the famines] is the extreme, abject, the awful poverty of the Indian people.' India is a land rich in resources and her people should have lived in plenty. But, he argued, the cause of its misery was not difficult to find. 'John Stuart Mill saw the answer plainly in his days. John Bright saw in his. The real friends of India in England see it now. The intelligent classes in India see it. It is found in the simple fact that India is a subject land, ruled by a foreign power, which keeps her tributary to itself, not only politically, but economically, financially and industrially and drains away her wealth in a steady stream that is all the while enriching the English people'. The British government, in his opinion, was also the most expensive government with big salaries and big pensions for the bureaucracy.

He concluded, 'America stands appalled at the magnitude and tyranny of her Standard Oil Company. But the standard Oil monopoly is a pigmy compared with England's monopoly in India...It is the stronger nation sucking that of the weaker. It is "Imperialism".'¹⁹

The obscene extravagance of the Indian government under Lord Lytton (called the Indian 'Nero' by an Indian historian recently) at a time when hundreds of thousands were dying had, in fact, been noted by contemporary English observers as well. Sir W.W. Hunter noted in 1880 that there were about forty million people in India who 'go through life on insufficient food'. While the vital kharif crop was withering in the parched fields of southern India, Lytton was absorbed in organising the absurdly expensive Imperial Durbar at Delhi. Digby estimated that 100,000 of the

Queen's subjects starved to death in Madras and Mysore in the course of Lytton's spectacular Durbar. Digby further states

When the part played by the British Empire in the 19th century is regarded by the historians fifty years hence, the unnecessary death of millions of Indians would be its principal and most notorious monument.²⁰

Even Salisbury is said to have nurtured a distrust of officials who 'worshipped political economy as a sort of "fetish"' as well as Englishmen in India, who accepted 'famine as a salutary cure for over-population'. Richard Temple, L. Governor of Madras followed his instructions to the letter and became in India the counterpart of Edward Trevelyan, Permanent Secretary to the Treasury during the 'Great Hunger', who in Ireland was the personification of free market economics as a mask for colonial genocide'.²¹

The famines were, in a way, the product of the world capitalist system. Karl Polanyi believed that the actual source of the famines was the free marketing of grain combined with local failures of income.²²

Millions died not outside the 'modern world system', but in the very process of being forcibly incorporated into its economic and political structures. 'They died in the golden age of liberal capitalism; indeed many were murdered...by the theological application of the sacred principles of Smith, Bentham and Mill.'²³

Forest, Environment

Rapid changes in social relations were accompanied by equally sweeping ecological transformations. The impact of colonialism on ecology engendered a great debate which, in dealing with the history of forests in particular, generally focussed on the period after 1858 as the heyday of British colonialism. From the records of the forest department, these historians tried to reconstruct the history of the forests, the techniques of forest use as they gradually evolved, and the changing pattern of plants etc. With customary use representing a threat to commercialisation of the forests, the state, the records show, was obliged to study and monitor some aspects of agrarian life. Until 1870, as A. Murali says, all forests (twenty per cent of India's land area) had been communally managed; by the end of the decade, they were completely enclosed by the armed agents of the state. British rule, it has been suggested, introduced rapid, widespread and in some respects, irreversible changes which had both ecological and social dimensions. Some historians paid particular attention to the transformation of the existing patterns of resource use and how it might have produced alterations in natural environment. A strong critique of colonial environment policies would show how the British policies were 'socially unjust, ecologically insensitive, and legally without a basis in past practice.' Colonialism, it was argued, constituted an 'ecological watershed' in the history of India.²⁴ This argument has been contested on the ground that the British were not necessarily breaking new grounds in allowing the state to exploit forest resources. State intervention and environmental destruction has an early history even during the pre-colonial period and British forest officials

were not 'as vulgarly commercial' as some historians suggest.²⁵ But, as David Arnold puts it, 'it is all too easy to exaggerate the degree of autonomy scientists enjoyed or to attribute to them present day values and thereby ignore the almost overwhelming power of imperial ethos.'²⁶

A reasonably secure relationship was established from ancient times between arable land which produced the crops and the pasture and woodland which provided so much of the input for food production. British rule, through an interventionist policy, undermined this relationship. Earlier there was a balance between state and subject with regard to access to the fruits of nature, but the British introduced 'new technologies of social control and resource extraction' that altered this balance. Now the peasantry and the forest tribes faced shortages of forest resources. The discomfort was acute, as is evident from the numerous popular struggles against forest management. Contemporary government observations note the radical break that colonial rule made. 'The forests are and always have been subject to commercial and tribal rights which have existed from time immemorial and which are as difficult to define as they are necessary to the rural population'.²⁷

The basis on which Indian forest laws proceeded was that all uncultivated tracts in which private rights had not been acquired, either by the individual or by a local community, were the property of the state. The first Forest Act of 1865 was followed by the Act VII of 1878. The first step in applying law was to discriminate between forest land which is absolutely the property of the government, forests which were state property but burdened with private rights and forests which were the property of private individuals or communities but over which it was expedient to exercise a measure of control.

The Report of the Forest Department in 1874 noted the breaches in forest rules. In 1873-74, only eight cases were detected in which ten persons were involved. These cases were brought before the Magistrates, but only in two cases were convictions obtained. Two further cases were pending.²⁸

Another report noted the 'devastation and waste going on without restriction from firing, cutting, jooming and other causes in the sal and pine forests of Assam, and in the sal and lower mixed forests of Chhoto Nagpur...and the manner in which the Chittagong forests are being denuded by unlimited cutting and jooming, show the necessity which exists for a careful consideration of some practicable schemes for their protection'. What was asked for was an increase in the personnel in the forest establishment so that adequate preventive measures could be undertaken. It would also enable the local officials to exercise better control over the forest resources.²⁹

It thus became necessary to define the limits of the areas to be controlled, and to prepare a settlement record to prevent future encroachment, 'illegal' rights or the growth of new rights. The result was the classification of forests into Reserved, Protected and Unclassed. However, in the areas where the Act of 1878 was introduced, there were only two categories of forests— Reserved and Protected. The major, perhaps the only, consideration was the collection of revenue and forests were to be used for the sake of economic exploitation. The result, however, was that people lost

grazing grounds, dead wood for fuel, gathering of roots and other privileges they traditionally enjoyed. These forest laws created considerable dissatisfaction among the forest tribes in the hills that bound the Godavari Valley. This led to the Rompa rebellion which had to be suppressed by the dispatch of military force from Madras.

Statistics setting forth the results of the application of forest law and regulations are interesting. In 1900 forest cases decided by magistrates numbered 11,270 of which nearly 87 per cent resulted in convictions. These are mostly petty depredations. The forest officers decided most of the other cases which were not brought to the court at all. In 1900, 32,803 cases were so dealt with. These included illegal felling of trees or illicit grazing etc.

On the other hand, the state was now exploiting the commercial possibilities of the forests. In 1901, a total 232 million cubic feet of timber was collected by the government. Big players in the business, like the Bombay-Burma Trading Company of Burma had to sign a contract and pay royalty; small purchasers acted under a licence. Gross revenue in 1901 amounted to Rs1,97,70,000; value of grants to rights-holders and others was estimated at Rs33,70,000.

Hunter noted: 'In the creation of state forests the forester comes in contact with forest tribes who, whether timid or ferocious, simple or cunning, all possess the common characteristic of viewing with immense jealousy any interference with the habits and customs of their primitive life.'³⁰ Most of the forest tribes in fact depend on, in addition to agriculture, hunting, fishing and the collection of forest products. It is evident that with restrictions of large areas over which the tribes are wont to roam, their entitlement to the supply of food which forests could supply was substantially reduced. Thus, forests of South Asia have a wide variety of historical meanings and usages. They served as homes and resources for their inhabitants, as well as of fuel, building materials, famine foods and medicines for neighbourhood people. One could imagine the working of 'a moral economy' involving the local residents and the forests. To the colonial state, they provided a primary source of raw materials and a site for state regulation on a massive scale. While governmental intervention was not unknown in the pre-colonial period, these resources have increasingly been brought under state control. The 'period from 1870 to 1900, in particular, was a remarkably interventionist time, an age of high imperialism.'³¹

The denial of resources to which people were traditionally entitled often caused eviction from their own habitat and migration, in order to look for new sources of livelihood, became one outlet. This is seen in the context of the labour force for the plantations, particularly tea in Assam and the Dooars area. A large number of men were recruited from the forest regions in the Santhal Parganas and Chhoto Nagpur areas. Recently there have been attempts to understand labour migration from the ecological point of view. Environmental crises in the forest belts, inhabited by the indigenous people, make survival extremely difficult and encourage migration. A recent study of such migration in the district of Purulia makes this point forcefully.³² The

forest environment here during the pre-colonial period was capable of supporting many plants and animals and there was 'close relationship between the nature and the *adivasi* (indigenous and tribal people of India) people. With the colonial intervention, from the late eighteenth century onwards a process of transformation started in Purulia. Ecological intervention was the prime factor of this transformation.'

Chronic famines in Purulia in Bengal, it has been argued, had ecological roots. The aggressive colonisation of land by the colonial authorities for commodity production resulted in adapting 'the water management and land tenure system of the *adivasis*' to the purpose of the colonial administration. It resulted in the transformation of the agrarian structure. Significant changes in the patterns of land use produced deforestation to create a huge increase in cultivable land. This, in turn produced soil erosion, reducing soil fertility and causing the silting of ponds. All these led to a reduction in rainfall leading to aridity. Even the traditional forest rights of the *adivasis* were usurped by the government and the landlords. 'The sustainable economy of the tribal people was permanently destabilised and the district became drought prone.... Due to the denudation of forests, people were also deprived of the forest products for food'. Forest resources became the prime target from the mid-nineteenth century.³³

The growing demand of the railway system created a huge demand for logs for sleepers and resulted in pressure on the forests of *Jungle Mahal*. 'The opening of the main line of Bengal Nagpur Railway through Kharagpur, Jhargram (1898) had a profound impact upon the forests of the region. Interior places became more accessible with the introduction of railways. As the forest products could be transported to distant places by the railway there was a sudden increase of commoditisation.'³⁴

The control of forests by the colonial government deprived the local people of their moral economy, as it were. Food supplements were denied, sources of medicine were lost. New management of hydrological sources also led to frequent droughts. 'Thus in Purulia ...the Savars and Birhors became "ecological refugees" due to the destruction of forest ecology. ...They had no alternative but to migrate'.³⁵ Between 1866 and 1906-7, there were recurrent famines, which made the situation worse.

Population & Migration

The volume of migration is uncertain in the pre-census era. It was probably not very large in the eighteenth century. In any case a reliable estimate is difficult to make as there are no systematic records of people who crossed the national border or those who moved from one region to the other. Gail Omvedt has suggested that an examination of colonial migration reveals both the specific characteristics of the colonial working class it produced and the continuing existence of feudal ties of dependence in agriculture. The situation is best conceptualised in terms of the existence within the Indian social formation of feudal (agrarian) and proto-capitalist (mines, plantations, factories) modes of production, articulated in such a way that the main costs

of reproduction of labour power that was sold in the capitalist sector were borne by the non-capitalist agrarian sector.³⁶

There is an old tradition of migration from India to the countries of South-East Asia as well as to Sri Lanka. By the end of the eighteenth century, Indian labourers were found in all parts of South-East Asia, wherever there were British traders.³⁷ The exodus of Tamils to the Straits Settlements started before the beginning of the nineteenth century. Emigration to Mauritius started, according to some reports, as early as 1819, but it certainly started between 1826 and 1830.

Early 1830s in a way mark a turning point. When slavery was abolished in the British colonies in 1834, a new system of slavery, as it were, was inaugurated. This was the system of indentured labour. Indenture has generally been defined as an economically induced migration combined with coercive contractual obligations. Quite plainly this system started with significant recruitment, forcible as it was at the beginning, of labour sent to Mauritius to work in the plantations. Recruitment was through *arkatis*, *duffadars* etc. Coolies were recruited on payment per head. The coercive character of this merchant-controlled 'coolie trade' did produce serious protests leading to temporary suspension in 1839. A second method used later was to use the returnees to entice new recruits. This was increasingly prevalent after the 1840s.

It was part of Britain's general policy to indenture Indian labour, with the approval of the government of India, to her different colonies where labour for the plantations was scarce but in great demand. T. Geoghegan, Under-Secretary to Government of India, Department of Agriculture, Revenue and Communications, wrote a report on migration. The earliest labour recruits, according to him, came from south India. There was a migration to Malaya before the end of the nineteenth century. Tamil immigration to Sri Lanka must have begun quite early. It was probably a continuous process, but a fresh impetus was given to it by the extension of coffee plantations in 1842/3.³⁸

The sugar plantations of Mauritius were not slow to perceive this source of cheap labour. This became systematic after 1834 when slavery was abolished in the British colonies. The main port from where the indentured labour was sent was Calcutta. In the first four years, several thousand were sent to Mauritius. The system of coercive 'coolie trade' was denounced in British parliament by Buxton, Brougham and others. Lord John Russell wrote on February 15, 1840

I should be unwilling to adopt any measure to favour the transfer of labourers from British India to Guiana...I am not prepared to encounter the responsibility of a measure which may lead to a dreadful loss of life on the one hand, or, on the other, to a *new system of slavery*.³⁹ (emphasis added)

As a result emigration was temporarily suspended in 1839. A committee was appointed to enquire into the system. The members included T. Dickens, J. Charles and Russomoy Dutt (secretary of the Hindu College,

Calcutta). They took a serious view of the matter and suggested that either emigration should be suspended or the entire process from embarkation to their arrival in Mauritius should be supervised by the colonial government. Sir J.P. Grant, a member of the committee, did not put his signature to the report. He suggested modalities like appointing a protector for Indian immigrants to eliminate the element of force on unwilling emigrants. British parliament in 1842 rejected the report and approved the proposal of Grant. The ban on indentured labourers being sent to Mauritius was lifted in that year.

This encouraged other colonies also to indenture Indian labourers. Permission was gradually granted to the following colonies

1844—Jamaica, Trinidad, British Guyana

1856—Santa Lucia

1856—Granada

By the 1870s these labourers were taken to Seychelles, the Dutch colony of Surinam, Fiji, Reunion, Honduras, Martinique and French Guyana among others.

It is difficult to make exact estimates of people sent as coolies. One estimate is that between 1834 and 1876, 9.8 million people left Indian shores, but about 7.8 million returned. One estimate suggests that the net emigration to Sri Lanka alone was 600000.⁴⁰

The main port of embarkation during the period 1830-70 was Calcutta with emigrants drawn from Chhoto Nagpur, eastern U.P. and western Bihar. A total of about 342,575 were sent from Calcutta, while Madras and French ports in south India accounted for 159,259. Bombay's share was only 31,761.⁴¹ But another estimate would put the total net migration between 1842 and 1870 from Madras and the French ports in south India to 420,000. The magnitude of the outflow was probably affected by such factors as famines. A significant portion of the natural increase in some of the districts was siphoned off through migration.

British official observations in late nineteenth century did mention the incidence of emigration. Hunter, for example, did not believe migration to be excessive. The exceptions he noted were with regard to tea gardens in Assam and north Bengal.

We may look at some of the figures. The 1901 census noted that Indian immigrants in Sri Lanka were 436,662 in 1901 as against 264,580 in 1891. Hunter found it difficult to enumerate Indians in Nepal, Afghanistan, Tibet and Bhutan. The Census estimate of 208,000 is merely a guess. The figures from other colonies were

British Guyana—125,875

Trinidad—86,615

Mauritius—265,163

Natal—65,925

Fiji—15,368

Jamaica—15,278

Surinam—18,000

St. Lucia—1,200

Martinique— 3,764
 Guadeloupe— 15,276
 Transvaal— 5,000
 Cape Colony, Bantuland and s
 Southern Rhodesia— 4,000
 Zanzibar— 10,000⁴²

The 1921 census of Ceylon shows that 95 per cent of the India-born were born in the Madras Presidency. In Malay, according to the 1957 census, ninety per cent of Indians were from south India (Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam speaking). The proportion of south Indians was small in Fiji and the West Indies, where people from Bihar and UP predominated.

The urgency of continuing the process of importing coolies from India was often seen in the official correspondence. L.H. Mason, Assistant protector of Immigrants, Natal, wrote to the Secretary, Government of Bengal, 'Owing to abundant harvests, the competition in the labour market by the tea plantations and other Indian industries, the number of emigrants despatched from Calcutta during 1876 fell far short of the requirements of this colony, and much injury has resulted to the planting interest.'

The nexus between plantation interests and the emigration of coolies is clear. He requested steps to be taken to appoint a new agent in Calcutta for recruitment for Natal in place of Mr. Firth, whose services are entirely required by the government of British Guyana. A temporary and experimental agency was opened at Madras as well. As a result, three ships left Calcutta in 1876 – *Atalanta*, *Merchantmen* and *St.Kilda*. While a total number of 1154 embarked, fifteen people died during the journey. The protector took satisfaction that the number of death was small and indicated the care taken by the agents. There was plainly little interest in the well-being of the immigrants. The main point was to serve the interest of the plantations. It seemed that the coolies were given land in lieu of the money granted for return passage, thus limiting their option of returning to India.⁴³

Between 1871 and 1930, an annual average of between 240,000 and 660,000 migrated from India. In spite of sizeable return of people, the net migration was probably between 140,000 or 160,000 per annum during the period of 1891-1900 and between 44 and 51 thousand during the lean periods of 1866-90 and 1916-20. The net emigration between 1870 and 1937 was probably 4.3 million (20.4 m emigrant; 16.1 m returnees).

Early years of the indentured system saw a sizeable population of migrants to the British colonies in the West Indies or to Mauritius. After 1866, however, the volume of migration to distant regions in Africa and South America appeared to decline. By the turn of the century, the British colonies in Asia (Ceylon, Burma, and Malaysia) and Oceania (the Fiji Islands) became major receivers of Indian labourers.

Beginning with the 1860s or even earlier alternative to emigration was internal migration within the subcontinent. Labour was required for road and then for the construction of the railway system. More important, however, were the plantations in Assam and North Bengal and Darjeeling. This

attracted between 700,000 and 850,000 recruits between 1870 and 1900. Labour recruited from Chhoto Nagpur and the Santhal Parganas was many times larger than those taken overseas under the indenture system. Faced with an acute shortage of labour and following the failure to depeasantise Assam, the planters had to have recourse to seek labour from hundreds of miles away. They adopted a policy of organised recruitment of labour from tribal/ semi-tribal as well as non-tribal low-caste peasant communities inhabiting an extensive area spread over the Bengal Presidency. These included, in particular, Chhoto Nagpur and the Santhal Parganas, but also the eastern UP, Ganjam, parts of Madhya Pradesh and even Vizag. These recruits belonged to various peasant, labouring, artisan and service groups. Because of the operation of a host of socio-economic forces, they were subjected to 'a complex process of depeasantisation, deskilling and proletarianisation by which this extensive region was reduced to a vast reservoir of cheap labour or labour catchment area'.⁴⁴ The result was forced migration. A statement shows the number of men imported as labour under contract under Act VII of 1877. They were sent to various areas of Assam like Nowgong, Cachar, Seebesagar, Durrang, Lakhimpur, Sylhet, Kamrup etc. The total number sent in the first half of 1877 was 46,687 and the total number sent in the second half of the year was 44,594.⁴⁵

On January 3, 1878, C.H. Joubert, Officiating Superintendent of Emigration, Bengal, wrote to the Secretary, Government of Bengal, expressing his worry about the fate of the coolies recruited in Madras and brought to Midnapur and Calcutta for sending them to the tea gardens of Assam. Those who were rejected on medical examination were not provided with return passage as per Act VII of 1878. The fact of the case was that in 1878, sixty coolies were brought from Madras to the Calcutta depot of Hira Lal Mukherjee. Of them 37 were passed as fit and five were rejected. These five and another 18 dependent on them had to be deported back. The gardens of Dibrugarh wanted them as 'free labourers', but the Act forbade such procedure. Joubert noted, 'It would undoubtedly be better to allow this than to send these persons back to a famine-stricken country'. His statement is a clear pointer to the link between famine conditions and encouragement given to migration. The Under-Secretary of the Government of Bengal, Colmar Macaulay, replied that the recruiters from Bengal were violating the terms of the Act as the persons recruited in Madras were forbidden to be taken beyond the boundaries of Madras. The Act provided for the return of these coolies to the place of their recruitment. He wanted to know the fate of the five Madras coolies.

On March 11, Major R. Beadon informed the Under-Secretary that the five men were kept in the depot of Hira Lal Mukherjee until January 14. They were unwilling to remain in the depot and were discharged as 'unwilling to emigrate'. They were then engaged with M/S Barry & Co. to proceed to Assam as free emigrants.⁴⁶

On August 4, 1896, the district officer in charge of emigration had a detailed correspondence with superiors about the best way to bring the coolies from Bihar to Assam, the route to be followed, and the resting places

to be chosen.⁴⁷ The anxiety is to be seen more clearly in the letter that M/S Sanderson & Co., solicitors, wrote on behalf of M/S John Elliott and co. who were the agents for several tea gardens in Assam, to the Secretary, Government of Bengal, General (Emigration) Department.

We have the honour to address you upon the subject of the recent notification of the Bengal government no. 873, 25 Ultimo (February) prohibiting temporary emigration of all natives of India from the districts of Bengal to Assam owing to the presence of cholera among the coolies in the steamer emigration route from Goalundo to Assam...

The serious daily loss which this prohibition inflicts upon those interested in free labour garden sirdiri recruiting has induced our clients... to go very carefully into the subject, with a view to ascertaining whether this measure for entire prohibition temporarily of emigration to Assam really affords a remedy to the evil.

It then went on to suggest measures which would be likely to mitigate the problem of cholera.⁴⁸ The solicitor's letter would seem to indicate that recruitment was indeed a very lucrative business. Mortality rate was rather high in some years. In 1888, out of a total number of 31,217 immigrants passing through Dhubri, 771 died either at Dhubri, or in the steamer or at the depot. The rate per 1000 was 24.6. This rate fluctuated over the next decade between 10.8 (per 1000) in 1889 to 1.2 (per 1000) in 1890.⁴⁹ A review, it seems, was made in 1897 and a medical officer, Surgeon-Major Campbell was appointed by the Lt. Governor.⁵⁰ The anxiety was probably to ensure that the coolies reached the gardens in good nick.

The hapless tribals in the Manbhum district were forced to look for work and found it either in the garden of Assam or in the coalfields nearby. They were also often duped by the recruiters. In 1900, a year of near famine conditions, the number of emigrants was 65,190. But in other years it could be less. This region became 'the best known gateway of Chotanagpur for the travellers, the push-push (*arkati* or agent) and the coolie.'⁵¹

The coolies, as the labourers in the Assam tea gardens were known, were ignorant, poor, but free men originally, who were tricked by force and fraud to leave his/ her home and to register as labourers under contract in the tea gardens. Once this was done, the labourers were in absolute clutches of the manager. There, far away from the public gaze, they lived virtually as *slaves*. Agents, induced by lucrative remunerations, often kidnapped them or persuaded them to leave their villages under false pretences and brought them to the recruiting depots. The Act XIII of 1859, with a view to eliminate these acts of fraudulence, provided for an agreement or contract with the coolies. But, as the report of the chief Commissioner of Assam indicated, the agreement was of little value to the labourers.

A contract may be enforced under this Act, though it is not in writing, though it is not stamped, though it is not registered... though there is no proof that the labourer understood the terms of the engagement, though the terms may be manifestly unfair. A labourer cannot free himself by redemption, nor can he plead any misconduct of his employer as an excuse for non-performance...⁵²

The grave abuses of the Act obliged Ripon to enact the Inland Emigration Act I of 1882. The Act, however, failed to realise the hopes of Ripon and forced recruitment continued. The horrible condition in which the labourers lived has been chronicled by Ram Kumar Vidyaratna in his *Coolie-Kabini* and by Dwarakanath Ganguly, the Assistant Secretary of the Indian Association, in his reports. Indeed, the report of the Deputy Surgeon-General and the Sanitary Commissioner recorded in 1884 that the death rate was 37.8 per thousand in 1882, but rose to 41.3 in 1883 and 432 in 1884. Infant mortality rose from 19.7 per thousand in 1882 to 44 per thousand in 1884.

A rough idea of the incidence of internal migration can be obtained from the census figures of 1901.⁵³

Province	Population at census in millions	Immigrants (Persons born elsewhere but enumerated in the state)	Emigrants (Persons born in the state but enumerated in other states)
Assam	6.1	775,844	51,481
Bengal	78.5	915,158	870,551
Bombay	25.5	858,799	626,799
Madras	38.63	269,688	713,069
CP	14.62	898,769	570,125
UP	48.5	695,956	1.5 million
Rajputana States	9.7	234,446	900,224

Overall, the available data do not indicate the socio-economic groups from which the emigrants were drawn, but the observations of a number of district collectors suggest that many 'disbanded sepoys', weavers, agricultural labourers and others engaged in low-caste service occupations were among them. A majority of emigrants were from rural areas and from 'overcrowded agricultural districts', where 'crop failure could plunge sections of the village community into near-starvation'. In fact, there was a strong correlation between emigration and harvest conditions. Acute scarcity during 1873-75 in Bihar, Oudh and NW Provinces provoked large-scale emigration through the port of Calcutta. The famine in south India during 1874-8 also resulted in heavy emigration. Conversely, in good agricultural years recruits were not easily available.⁵⁴ It has been reported that road blocks were hastily established to stem the flood of 'stick-thin country people' into Bombay and Pune, while in Madras the police forcibly expelled some 25,000 famine refugees. There is little doubt about the correlation between scarcity and forced migration.⁵⁵

Most of the emigrants probably left their villages for the first time in their lives, and they were not fully aware of the hardships involved in long voyages and in living abroad. Diseases— cholera, typhoid, dysentery— were often rampant in the depots. Mortality among the emigrants was consequently high. Mortality at sea was alarmingly high. Before 1870, about 17 to twenty

per cent of the labourers deported from the port of Calcutta died before they reached their destination. The data for the years 1871-90 of voyages to British Guyana suggest that the death rate on board was about 15 per 1000.⁵⁶

There was another side to the migration stories of which the best known is the tragic journey of a Japanese ship *Komagata Maru* carrying 376 passengers, largely Sikhs, but also Hindus and Muslims, from Hong Kong to Vancouver in Canada. The passengers were not permitted to land as the ship violated the stipulation of continuous journey from the port of departure. The ship was obliged to return to Budge Budge near Kolkata where the passengers were detained and later were fired upon by the police killing twenty of them. This was a time when many Indians were seeking to migrate voluntarily to Canada for a better life. The Empire struck and closed the doors to these hapless immigrants. Yet, many did successfully go to Canada and the USA. Dr. Sundar Singh, one such immigrant in Vancouver, wrote in his paper, *The Aryan*, asserting that 'it was not for the sake of pleasure that Hindus go to settle abroad', rather, 'because of the sword of famine and plague hanging round his neck.' Many Indians emigrated to virtually save themselves from starvation. Padmavati, wife of the Ram Chandra, the leader of the *Ghadar*, told an interviewer much later that, 'if it were not for the British government, the Indians wouldn't be ... labourers doing this work. They'd be home in their own land.' Recently Vivek Bald has unearthed the diaspora of South Asians, particularly from the Hooghly district of Bengal (now West Bengal) to USA in the late nineteenth century. Most of them were artisans-peddlers, uprooted from local markets by colonial government's policies. They managed to go and, despite anti-Asian immigration policies and racism, managed to work in the global market of 'Oriental goods' in the west. They ultimately managed to stay and finally created what Bald calls the 'The Bengali Harlem'.⁵⁷

The overall impact of colonialism was indeed negative. There was no increase in per capita income between 1757 and 1947; income probably declined in the second half of the nineteenth century. It is an abiding irony that the cash crop boom accompanied a decline in agrarian productivity and food security. The great export boom of cash crops benefited the money lenders, absentee landlords, urban merchants and a handful of Indian industrialists. During what constituted, in the imagination of the likes of Kipling and Curzon, the 'the glorious imperial half century' (1872-1921), life expectancy of ordinary Indians fell by a staggering twenty per cent.⁵⁸ Pax Britannica, it would appear, had more victims than long centuries of war.

India was now a part of the capitalist 'world system', but India's increasing integration with world trade produced, in effect, increasing pauperisation. Already in the nineteenth century, liberal and nationalist economists like R.C. Dutt and Dadabhai Naoroji noticed that the benefits of the export boom did not flow to the direct producers. It has been noted by some economic historians that the 'colonial state's spending on public works [was] at a lower rate than underdeveloped countries'.⁵⁹

As Hugh Tinker puts it, the whole indentured labour system and the Indian Diasporas were the consequences of British exploitation. The majority

of Indians who emigrated gained little from their emigration; they exchanged the situation of casual, intermittent, poorly paid labour for a similar situation in the new country.⁶⁰ Massive movements of people, then, were more often than not the product of denial of entitlement to livelihood in the rural areas to the majority of the people.

Notes

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² Amitav Ghosh, *Sea of Poppies*, New Delhi: Penguin India, 2008

³ Philip Meadows Taylor, *A History of India*, London, 1870, p. 216

⁴ William Wilson Hunter, *The Annals of Rural Bengal*, Calcutta: Indian Studies: Past & Present, 1965, p. 21-2

⁵ William Digby, *Prosperous British India: A Revelation from Official Records*, London: Unwin, 1901, p. 123

⁶ Sukumar Sen, *Bangla Sahityer Itihas*, quoted in Atis Dasgupta and Subhas Ranjan Chakraborty, 'The Growth of Calcutta: A Profile of Social Dislocations in the Early Colonial Period', *Social Scientist* 20, nos.3-4, (March-April,1992), p. 45

⁷ William Wilson Hunter, *India and the Indians*, ed. Herbert Risley, New Delhi, 2004, Vol. I, 2, 90

⁸ William Digby, *Prosperous British India: A Revelation from Official Records*, London: Unwin, 1901, Frontispiece. William Digby was a British author, journalist and humanitarian (born in 1849). He moved to South Asia in the 1870s, working first in Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) and later in Madras as a journalist. In India he witnessed the famine of 1876-78 and participated in the work of famine relief. He even wrote a book, *The Famine Campaign in Southern India* (2 Vols, 1878). His other books included *Indian Problems for English Consideration* (1881), *India for Indians— and for England* (1885) and *Prosperous British India: A Revelation from Official Records* (1901). [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Digby_\(writer\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Digby_(writer)) (Accessed on August 2, 2011)

⁹ Hunter, op.cit., Vol. III, p. 475

¹⁰ Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocaust, El Nino, Famines and the Making of the third World*, London-New York: Verso, 2002, p. 8

¹¹ Report of the Commission of 1880, para 84

¹² William Digby, *The Famine Campaign in Southern India, 1876-78*, London, 1900, Vol.I, 7,13, quoted in Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocaust, El Nino, Famines and the Making of the third World*, London-New York: Verso, 2002, p. 26

¹³ William Digby, "Prosperous" *British India*, London: Unwin, 1901, p. 118

¹⁴ William Digby, "Prosperous" *British India*, London: Unwin, 1901, p. 122

¹⁵ Census figures quoted and analysed by William Digby. op.cit., p. 137

¹⁶ Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocaust, El Nino, Famines and the Making of the third World*, London-New York: Verso, 2002, p. 2

¹⁷ Marina Carter, "Strategies of Labour Mobilisation in Colonial India: The Recruitment of Indentured Workers for Mauritius" in *Plantations, Proletarians, and Peasants in Colonial Asia*, edited by E. Valentine Daniel, Henry Bernstein, Tom Brass. London: Routledge, 1992

¹⁸ Malabika Chakraborty, *The Famine of 1896-1897 in Bengal: Availability or Entitlement Crisis?*, New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2004, p. 88, 385ff

¹⁹ *The New England Magazine*, September, 1900, Vol. xxiii, no.1, Boston, Massachusetts, quoted in Digby, op.cit., p. 162-170

²⁰ William Digby, "Prosperous" *British India*, London: Unwin, 1901, p. 118.

²¹ Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocaust, El Nino, Famines and the Making of the third World*, London-New York: Verso, 2002, p.32, 37

²² Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, Boston: Farrar & Rinehart, 1944, p. 160

²³ Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocaust, El Nino, Famines and the Making of the third World*, London, New York: Verso, 2002, p. 9

²⁴ Madhav Gadgil and Ramchandra Guha, *This Fissured Land: An Ecological History of India*, New Delhi, & Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992, Ch.V-VIII

²⁵ Richard H. Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600-1800*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995

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²⁷ Remarks by the Board of Revenue, Madras, August 5, 1871, quoted in Madhav Gadgil and Ramchandra Guha, *This Fissured Land: An Ecological History of India*, New Delhi, & Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992, p. 131

²⁸ Proceedings of the Lt. Governor of Bengal, June, 1874. Annual Administrative Report of the Forest Department by Dr. W. Sclich, Para 136. West Bengal State Archives (Hereafter WBSA)

²⁹ Proceedings of the Lt. Governor of Bengal, June, 1874. Resolution, Agricultural Department Para 8, March 31, 1874, WBSA

³⁰ William Wilson Hunter, *India and Indians*, Vol.3, p. 124

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³² Nirmal Kumar Mahato, "Environment and Migration, Purulia, West Bengal," *Policies and Practices*, MCRG research Paper Series, 2010, p. 1-3

³³ Nirmal Kumar Mahato, Environmental Change and Chronic Famine in Manbhum, Bengal District, 1860-1910, *Global Environment*, p 69-94

³⁴ Mahato, Environment and Migration, Purulia, p. 2; also see Mark Proffenberger and Betsy McGean, eds., *Village Voices, Forest Choices*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999

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³⁶ Gail Omvedt, "Migration in Colonial India: The Articulation of Feudalism and Capitalism by the Colonial State," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 7, no 2 (1980): 185-212

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⁵⁷ S.R.Chakraborty, "The Journey of Komagata Maru: Conjecture, Memory, History," in *Diasporas and Transnationalisms: The Journey of Komagata Maru*, edited by Anjali Gera Roy and Ajaya K. Sahoo. London and New York: Routledge, 2017; Vivek Bald, *Bengali Harlem and the lost histories of South Asian America*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013

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At the Threshold of Dreadful Delight: Migrant Male Sex-Workers and Transgressive Sexuality in Caleb Carr's *The Alienist*

By

Preeshita Biswas *

He could never have turned his back on human society, nor society on him, and why? Because he was—perversely, perhaps, but utterly—tied to that society. He was its offspring, its sick conscience—a living reminder of all the hidden crimes we commit when we close ranks to live among each other. He craved human society, craved the chance to show people what their ‘society’ had done to him. And the odd thing is, society craved him, too.¹

At the heart of my paper is the figure of the migrant, who, as Laszlo Kreizler, the celebrated ‘alienist’ of Carr’s novel, has contended in his aforementioned insidious remark, is seared with the mark of otherness from within the society. My paper explores the representations of migrant male sex-workers at the heart of late nineteenth-century New York in Caleb Carr’s *The Alienist* (1994) in conjunction with the Netflix 2018 eponymous series based on Carr’s novel. Analysing the simultaneous fascination with and abhorrence towards transgressive sexuality of the migrant male figure and his involvement in ‘illegal’ sex-trade, I argue that the body of the ‘deviant’ migrant performed a two-fold function in New York in the late 1890s. On the one hand, it transplanted the social stigma of being a decrepit sexual worker on to the migrant other, thereby externalising the problem of ‘illegal’ sex-work from the heart of the city. On the other hand, the “illegal” migrant sex-worker ensured that the racially ‘impure’ migrant bodies remain contained within the dark underbelly of the city scape. In so doing, what the African-American feminist critic bell hooks has identified as the “white supremacist patriarchal” society of New York sought to prevent the ‘defiled’ migrant bodies from

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contaminating the mainstream city scape with non-Western racial, cultural and sexual degeneracy.²

Importance of Transmedia Narratives in Twenty-First Century Migration Studies

The increasing focus of a proliferating tradition of transmedia fiction, such as graphic novels, period dramas, documentaries and television series, on the experiences and narratives of the migrants in the current decade of twenty-first century, is not an isolated, ahistorical and apolitical phenomenon. On the contrary, one can trace how the ensuing relevance of transmedia literature based on migration narratives is contingent upon and in turn reflects the surging fear of the migrant other in twenty-first century societies. These transmedia narratives serve as an indictment on contemporary societies and offer a commentary on the insidious nature of modern-day politics.

Increasing delineations of migrants in transmedia narratives problematize popular receptions of representations of migrants on twenty-first century literary and cultural landscapes. Emerging from within a world that is being plotted on meridians of recurring onslaughts of xenophobic nationalist policies such as the National Register of Citizens Act of India (2020), and the Reforming American Immigration for a Strong Economy (RAISE) Act (2017) –which sought to reduce the number of immigrants to the United States by curtailing the number of green card holders by half –to name a few, the twenty-first century transmedia narratives are increasingly representing the complexities of migrants' existences on the threshold of indeterminacy and transgression. Netflix series such as *The Alienist* (2018), *Living Undocumented* (2019), and *The Stateless* (2020), represent the multifarious tenets of existing at such a problematic threshold. Though such transmedia narratives are set in historically disparate time periods –*The Alienist* is set in nineteenth-century New York whereas *Living Undocumented* is set in twenty-first century United States –one can argue that they emerge from the fact that the United States is foundationally a nation of migrant settlers, who before they can eventually establish their legitimacy as citizens historically have had to take up illicit trades, such as sex-work, just to survive.

Released in 2018, the Netflix adaptation of Carr's *The Alienist*, locates itself at a critical moment in the modern history of the United States. Under the leadership of Donald Trump, who assumed office of the President in January of 2017, the country saw implementations of several governmental policies that foreground fear and criminalization of migrant bodies in the modern-day American society. In 2017, the American government announced two travel bans, each entitled, "Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States" that barred the nationals of six Muslim-majority countries, namely, Chad, Iran, Libya, Syria, Yemen, and Somalia, as well as those belonging to the countries of North Korea and Venezuela, from immigrating to the United States.³ Furthermore, aggravating the already sensitive issue of the Mexican refugees, the government had also implemented its "Remain in Mexico" policy in 2019, which compelled the Central

Americans seeking asylum in the United States to return to Mexico for an indeterminate period of time while their application are being processed.⁴ Construction of the “Mexican Wall”, increasing deportation of refugees, limiting avenues to seek immigration services, targeting the “naturalised” citizens, separating the children from their refugee parents, and increased deportation of “illegal” migrants to the concentration camps, are but a few of the methods with which the present-day government of United States sought to prevent immigration of the ‘national’ and the ‘racial’ other into the country.

Poised on such a politically turbulent time when America’s persecution of the migrants depicts a steeply rising curve, the narrative of *The Alienist*, which focusses on the New York city during its Gilded Age –when the nation itself had witnessed one of its biggest immigration waves from, what is now known as the “Global South” –in a retrospective way, emerges as a compelling commentary on the migration crisis that the country is confronted with in present day. As such, using both historical and fictional narratives, the series becomes crucial, in understanding the complexities and pluralities of migrants’ existences in the contemporary times. *The Alienist* then becomes a text of warning, and a reminder of the scars that such white heteronormative paranoia about the migrant other leaves behind for generations.

At the core of the narrative of *The Alienist* are the bodies of teenagers belonging to the poor migrant families who were inducted into sex-work partly through coercion and partly through forced consent, because of limited avenues of employment and the extreme penury that these migrant families faced. The text’s depiction of young migrant adolescents, who were not only induced into sex-work, but also abused, incarcerated and then murdered, therefore, mirrors the precariousness of their existences in the contemporary American society. The “Zero Tolerance” policy which was launched by the American government in 2018 allowed the United States’ Immigration officials to incriminate all ‘illegal migrants’,⁵ and forcibly separate young children from their migrant parents at the Mexican border. Though the policy was officially announced as being annulled in June, 2018, in fact, young migrant children are still being drastically severed from their families, even in the present day. John Washington, a reporter with the online news publication *The Intercept*, remarks that:

Children were “forcibly removed from [parents’] arms” or simply “disappeared” while their parents were taken to court. Some of the parents were then taunted and mocked by U.S. immigration officials when they asked after their children. The subsequent shock, terror, and grief was not only expected, but intentional — designed to push parents into giving up their asylum cases.⁶

As is evident from Washington’s observation, the “separation of families” was deployed as a strategy to effectively deter the South and Central American migrants from seeking asylum in the United States, thereby reducing the rate of immigration to the country.

News cycles' perpetual reportage of such malicious incidents, accompanied by the compelling photographs of concentration camps shown in documentary series, created waves of contempt in the pool of readers and viewers, and moved people to protest against such xenophobic and inhumane governmental policies. As a result, what was therefore brought to the fore, was the horror of seeing the bodies of these infants and underage teenagers being cruelly incarcerated. Similarly, it is not too much of a logical leap to assert that *The Alienist*, holds a mirror to the contemporary American society, compelling it to confront the tragic consequences of its vicious and current state policies, through the apparently fictional depiction of abuse, incarceration and mutilation of the bodies of migrant teenagers, who are forced to succumb to 'illegal' trade when left with no other means of survival.

The quasi historical-fictional narrative of *The Alienist* is not new to the American public discourse. In a circular sort of way, both mainstream and right-wing media use these very same imagery and tropes to discuss the illegal immigration crises in the United States of America. Right-wing media frequently peddles in hyperbolic tropes of criminality and moral corruption in its representation of the immigrant, while mainstream media faithfully depicts the destitution of migrants in its presentation of the underage sex and drug trade in border cities like Ciudad, Juárez, and Tijuana and cross-border human trafficking from the south to United States of America.⁷ A 2008 survey conducted by a team of medical scholars in association with the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) in the United States, on the increasing prevalence of HIV among migrant female sex workers (FSWs) who have US clients, in two Mexico-US border cities, concluded that:

We found that more than two-thirds of FSWs in 2 Mexico-US border cities had at least 1 US male client in the prior 2 months. FSWs reporting US clients were more likely to speak English, be younger, inject drugs, have high syphilis titers, and be paid more for sex without a condom, indicating that these women, their clients, and possibly the general population are at high risk of acquiring HIV, and other bloodborne and sexually transmitted infections. Higher risk behaviors were more closely associated with FSWs in Tijuana who had US clients. These data underscore the extent to which the potential for cross-border transmission of HIV, and STIs is a major concern in this border region, which has implications for both countries.⁸

The rising incidence of venereal diseases in migrant sex-workers who have US Clients that the NIMH survey reports, is an issue that has been explored and represented in the narrative of *The Alienist*. The text depicts the collective paranoia of the white supremacist patriarchal society in late nineteenth-century New York regarding syphilis, which was a prominent sexually transmitted disease that plagued the frequent male visitors of the red light districts. Analysing the discursive constructions of the subjectivities of the female sex workers premised upon their hegemonic stigmatization as carriers of syphilis, in nineteenth-century New York and Chicago, J.L. Schatz contends that there lies a tangible link between the fear of syphilis, the methodical persecution of male and female sex-workers and the fear of moral degeneracy as perceived by both the governmental institutions and the regular citizens alike.⁹ As a result, this fear of contagion in turn gave rise to a

collective wave of disgust, hatred, hostility, and violence toward both male and female migrant sex-workers who were determined as the primary vectors of venereal diseases.

Furthermore, transmedia narratives like *The Alienist* draw on the ordinary masses in its pool of captive audience and through the graphic rendition of penury and trauma of the migrant teenagers, the text makes a greater and a more immediate impact on the political consciousness of the ordinary citizens. As a transmedia narrative that depends on both fact and fiction, the text makes this twenty-first century streaming series into a powerful political narrative and becomes a mass platform that affects the contemporary political space.

Transmedia narratives depict not only how the migrant other is often subjected to simultaneous acts of criminalization and abuse, but also how by being denied a right to citizenship, they are further forcefully stripped of their right to live. *The Alienist* problematizes such concepts of 'home', 'alienation', 'belonging', and 'citizenship'. This underlying paradigm of defining who the alien is still haunts the twenty-first century cultural landscape of America, as is revealed in the merciless killing of George Floyd on May 25th, 2020. Floyd's death reopened an already festering wound of how the 'African-Americans' have always been perceived by the white supremacist patriarchal American society as occupying the liminal space of migrancy, and thus the society denies them the right to call themselves as 'rightful' citizens of America. It might be argued that on account of these artificially constructed definitions of, "insider/outsider" and "citizen/alien", and through logical extension, 'migrant' and 'migrancy' based on racial and cultural hierarchies and discriminations, as an African American George Floyd too was forcibly captivated within the domain of alienation. Thus, as an "alien" or a "marginal" to the right-wing definition of an American citizen, the personhood and humanity of Mr. Floyd could be overlooked by a white police officer, Derek Chauvin. Floyd cried out for his home and his deceased mother as he was brutally shown that he do not belong in the white supremacist capitalist patriarchy that forms the normative "text" for what is perceived as "home" and a citizen in right-wing America (better known as the MAGA universe). Thus, within a span of nine horrific minutes George Floyd was stripped of his rights and his American citizenship. This multi-tiered process of isolation not only alienated Floyd, and by extension all minorities (migrants being a large part of this group) from the society, but also from his own self, as he too then begins to consider himself as unrooted from what he had considered to be his homeland. The veracity of this message is further reinforced by the poignant and emotional words of Doc Rivers, the Los Angeles Clippers coach who commented on the issue of racial justice in America in the wake of the shooting of Jacob Blake in Wisconsin:

All you hear is Donald Trump and all of them talking about fear," Rivers said. "We're the ones getting killed, we're the ones getting shot, we're the ones who are denied to live in certain communities. It is amazing to me why we keep loving this country and this country does not love us back."¹⁰

However, the process of deracination goes even a step further. By denying the migrant, a right to citizenship and to belonging to a 'home', it also strips him of his 'right to life'. *The Alienist* is an incisive critique of how migrant bodies are always already treated as defiled, degenerate and criminalized. They are therefore considered as something to be feared and loathed. Subsequently, they are deemed unfit to live in the white supremacist patriarchal city scape, and their persecution in the public sphere is normalized.

In an interview with Media Education Foundation entitled, "On Cultural Criticism, Why Study Popular Culture", hooks deliberates on the role played by popular narratives in effecting an interplay between the mainstream culture and the working class culture from within "the diasporic world culture of ideas."¹¹ hooks observes:

Whether we're talking about race or gender or class, popular culture is where the pedagogy is, it's where the learning is. So I think that partially people like me who started off doing feminist theory or more traditional literary criticism or what have you begin to write about popular culture, largely because of the impact it was having as the primary pedagogical medium for masses of people globally who want to, in some way, understand the politics of difference.¹²

Drawing on hooks' contention that popular culture can play an effective role as a "primary pedagogical medium for masses of people globally who want to, in some way, understand the politics of difference", I argue that popular transmedia narratives can be instrumental in opening an imperative dialogue between politics and literary texts for they emerge as the cutting edge of translation of marginalized experiences. In so doing, my paper posits that as one such transmedia narrative, *The Alienist* exposes an emergence of a new narrative medium surrounding discourses such as that of alternate sexualities of migrant bodies that redresses the lacuna in the field of scholarship in relation to migration and sex-work.

Migrant 'Degenerate' Bodies in Nineteenth- Century New York

"Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"¹³

The Gilded age of the late nineteenth-century American history witnessed a period of rapid economic development, especially in the Northern and the Western United States. Large scale projects of industrialization such as construction of massive railroads and ship-building projects, among others, created manifold employment opportunities, and an increase in wages for skilled labours, which in turn attracted an influx of migrants not only from Europe but also from countries in Africa and Asia. The United States therefore became a beacon of hope and a promise of better future for the incoming migrants. The quote from Emma Lazarus's 1883 sonnet, "The New Colossus" with which I began this section of my paper, reflects how the Statue of Liberty, which was originally built to symbolise the friendship between France and the United States, eventually came to embody the 'American' promise of freedom and prosperity in the eyes of the migrants,

who sailed into the American shores, in the late nineteenth century.¹⁴ Though on the surface, the Gilded age was celebrated as an era of great social prosperity marked by not only a period of economic boom but also several progressive social movements in favour of women's suffrage, abolishment of child labour, promotion of education for the poor, and racial and ethnic parity in the labour market, to name a few. However, historians have commented on how at the same time as the Gilded Age, the normative American consciousness was also being increasingly overcast by an overwhelming fear of the migrant other who was perceived as 'invading' the American society. Acting on this paranoia of invasion and defilement, the majoritarian society deemed it fit to isolate the migrant others in the underbelly of the city scape, and transposed on them the stigma of corruption and degeneration.

That the sex-work conducted by the migrants was a well-established trade in New York in the 1800s is an indisputable fact which has been exhaustively analysed and recorded by scholars and historians alike. Timothy J. Gilfoyle observes that the sex-trade was predominantly driven by 'foreign' migrants, the African-Americans, Native Americans, and the impoverished poor white working-class men and women who predominantly occupied the slums of the city.¹⁵ They were considered as situated in the lowest socio-economic class by the white supremacist patriarchal society of New York. They occupied the state of migrancy because they lacked the right to belong in the white supremacist patriarchal city scape and were therefore, also stripped of their right to citizenship in the process. These figures were then inducted partly through coercion and partly through consent, into sex-work because it was one of the few trades that accepted migrants and people of the impoverished economic sections. With the increasing commercialization of sex, Gilfoyle notes that, "New York's first exclusive, large-scale sex district appeared. From 1850 to the early 1870s, the area bounded by the Bowery and by Canal, Laurens, and Houston streets emerged as the center of the sex business."¹⁶

Though, the proliferation of red light areas throughout the length and breadth of the city led to the formation of lucrative sex-trade hubs as the Five Point, the West Side, Water and Cherry Streets and the Hook,¹⁷ to name a few, by the late 1890s, homosexual sex-work was publicly banned in New York. Under the pretext of policing brothels and regulating the sex trade, the police conducted organized raids to round up 'illegal' migrants who were proclaimed as primary offenders in the sex-trade. However, significantly harsher treatment was meted out to the male sex-workers than their female counterparts. The New York police "monitor[ed] and harras[sed] people they were calling 'Degenerates' (under the larger category, 'Prostitutes') and proclaimed by its own account that "male degeneracy was even worse than female degeneracy because the pervert is constantly seeking convert[s] [the regular heteronormative citizens] to his practice."¹⁸ Edwin Burrows and Mike Wallace also contend that:

Police could and did arrest 'all common prostitutes who have no lawful employment' as vagrants or 'disorderly persons' . . . (in addition) though the police periodically raided Sixth Ward brothels and often hauled in streetwalkers from predominantly immigrant areas, elite brothels were almost never disturbed.¹⁹

Law enforcements and civic 'purity campaigns' therefore targeted any and all male sex-workers who were perceived as a greater threat to the moral economy of the white heterosexual men of the city. As a result, trapped between the push and pull of fascination and revulsion, the figure of the migrant male sex-worker and the sexual, cultural and racial taboos associated with him brought to the fore not only the xenophobic but also the homophobic tendencies of late nineteenth-century New York.

'Saucy Boy, I Already Knew I Must Eat Him': Homosexual Sex-Work and the Male Migrant Body in *The Alienist*

Through a close analysis of the representation of migrant teenage male sex-workers in *The Alienist*, in this section, I show how the narrative exposes the xenophobic and homophobic tendencies of late nineteenth-century New York. The body of the migrant male homosexual sex-worker becomes a site for inscribing racial, and sexual taboo and impurities. On the one hand, such 'deviant' migrant bodies were commodified as sexual merchandise to be exchanged for the monetary profit of the brothel owners, who were often white heteronormative men themselves. On the other hand, by excluding the sexual and moral defilement from their own social realm and casting it on the Eastern other, the mainstream, white supremacist patriarchal New Yorkers ensured that they upheld a 'civilised' and 'chaste' society. I argue that through the representation of the stigmatised, tabooed and exploited bodies of migrant teenage male sex-workers, the text critiques this Western fear of racial, sexual and moral degeneracy in the *fin de siècle* New York.

The narrative of *The Alienist* depicts New York during its Gilded Age, grappling with the issue of concentrated migrant populations that primarily consisted of trafficked sex-workers and unpaid labourers from Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe. Based on Caleb Carr's 1994 eponymous novel, the Netflix series of *The Alienist* chronicles Dr. Laszlo Kreizler's investigation of the murders of several migrant adolescent sex-workers by a white middle-class American male, John Beecham. Beecham was a formal Corporal who was subsequently institutionalised at St. Elizabeth's Hospital, which was a covert governmental asylum for patients with unstable and violent behaviour. In his childhood, he was subjected to rape and perpetual physical and psychological abuse by his parents. Intensely traumatised as a child by the gruesome photographs of disfigured white male corpses killed by the Native Americans (who were not only otherised by the civilized Americans, but also widely feared for their brutality) that his father had forced him to witness, Beecham eventually became normalised into the macabre, violence and murder. As a result, he felt strong sexual gratification when he lured young migrant male sex-workers, and then mutilated their bodies. Kreizler's pursuit of the brutal

killings takes the readers to the shabby quarters of the migrant communities in the slums of New York with all its dirt, filth, and supposedly 'illegal' trades such as smuggling, trafficking and sex-work.

The text brings to the fore how sexual perversion and Eastern and European migrant identities were regarded as being commensurate with each other in homophobic New York of the nineteenth century. Critic George Chauncey observes that:

They [Americans] also attributed both phenomena [sex-work, male transvestism and homosexuality] to immigration. If the British blamed homosexuality on the French, and the French blamed it on the Italians, Americans in this era blamed it rather more indiscriminately on European [non-Western] immigration as a whole, which many feared had introduced foreign immorality to American shores.²⁰

Such attitudes of xenophobia and homophobia that Chauncey speaks of, as dominating the consciousness of the white supremacist patriarchal New Yorker during the Gilded age, is exposed in Beecham's treatment of the migrant teenage male sex-workers throughout the narrative. Beecham is both fascinated and repelled by the 'deviant' bodies of the young migrant male sex-workers that he sees in New York. He specifically targets migrant boys of different racial origins such as Giorgio Santorelli, an Italian migrant, Ernst Lohmann, a German migrant, and Ali ibn-Ghazi, a Semitic migrant who had been sold to the pimp Scotch Ann by his father.

The narrative commences with the murder of the thirteen-year-old Giorgio "Gloria" Santorelli, whose mutilated body is discovered with his wrists tied, legs bent in a kneeling posture, and his face pressed on the steal walkway of a bridge. The narrator, John Moore, who was also a close associate of Dr. Kreizler, gives graphic details of the mutilations that the victim had undergone at the hands of his killer:

The face did not seem heavily beaten or bruised ...but where once there had been eyes there were now only bloody, cavernous sockets. [His genitals] protruded from the mouth...Large cuts crisscrossed the abdomen, revealing the mass of the inner organs...At the groin there was another gaping wound, one that explained the mouth –the genitals had been cut away and stuffed between the jaws. The buttocks, too, had been shorn off, in what appeared large...one could only call them carving strokes.²¹

This detailed description by the narrator foregrounds how the disfiguration of Santorelli's body followed a systematic path –lacerations on his abdomen, to cut out his genitals which are then stuffed back in his mouth. The killer's *modus operandi* therefore seems to reveal an instinctive abhorrence for male homosexuality. The act of inserting the genitals in the sex-worker's mouth suggests the killer's way of punishing the 'deviant' migrant who had engaged in sexually illicit practices. I argue that Beecham's act in placing the mutilated gentiles of the victim in his mouth, so as to symbolize the organs' displacement from their rightful location, is also symbolic of the person and body of the migrants, who are perceived as

crawling through the underbelly of New York, displaced in the cityscape, where they 'legally' and therefore 'rightfully' did not belong.

The narrative foregrounds that the mutilated bodies of migrant young male sex-workers acted as sites of infestation and defilement, thereby challenging the established 'pure' heteronormativity of the citizens in the cityscape of nineteenth-century New York. Mark Seltzer argues that serial killing in public space, which involves "the convening of the public around scenes of violence" and "the milling around the point of impact", creates "a wound culture". It signifies "the public fascination with torn and opened bodies and torn and opened persons, [and] a collective gathering around shock, trauma, and the wound."²² Thus, according to Seltzer, a "wound culture" is formed when "the very notion of sociality is bound to the excitations of the torn and opened body, the torn and exposed individual, as public spectacle."²³ I argue that this "wound culture" creates a liminal space where the binary between the 'normal' and the 'deviant' is dissolved, because, it is the normative citizens who are attracted to the wounds on migrant bodies. The narrator, John Moore, observes that:

Whoever our quarry was, and whatever the personal turmoil that was propelling him, he was no longer confining his activities to the less respectable parts of town. He had ventured into this preserve of the wealthy elite and dared to leave a body in Battery Park, within easy sight of the offices of many of the city's most influential financial elders. Yes, if our man was in fact sane, as Kreizler so passionately believed, then this latest act was not only barbarous but audacious, in that peculiar way that has always produced a mixture of horror and grudging acknowledgement in natives of this city.²⁴

By exposing the abject disfigured body, which is meant to stay hidden, to the public gaze, Beecham makes the onlookers also participate in the process of abjection. As a result, every time Beecham leaves the mutilated bodies of his victims in a public space, he attacks the heart of the city as home. In his infringement of the 'respectable' cityscape, he had also forced the collapse of the racial and sexual hierarchies in nineteenth-century New York society that were reflected in the segregation of the cityscape between racial and sexual 'inferiors' and 'superiors'.

The invasion of social, sexual, ideological, and moral normative spaces by the mutilated corpse of Ali ibn-Ghazi, a Semitic teenage prostitute, fuelled the anxiety of the regular citizens who had already begun realising the gradual degeneration of their sexual, moral and racial identities through their fascination with the sensational news of gruesome serial killings. By situating the murders of teenage male sex-workers at the heart of nineteenth-century New York, the text only establishes a connection between the mainstream white population with the marginalised community of migrants who are graphically depicted as living in abject poverty in slums, and surrendering to 'illegal' trades like human trafficking and sex-work, but also re-inscribes the boundaries of the migrant body along new cultural lines that transgressed racial and sexual binaries.

Moreover, by exercising his power to punish the 'deviant' migrant sex-workers, Beecham begins to consider himself as the great equaliser of

social, moral, racial and sexual piety. However, through this representation of Beecham as a quasi-vigilant figure of the white supremacist patriarchal society, the text exposes the mass hysteria and hostility of the white heteronormative New Yorkers towards the bodies of Eastern migrants. Beecham's intentions behind the murders are made clear in the letter that he sends to Mrs. Santorelli when his serial killings are given imaginative spins by the public. He writes:

My dear Mrs. Santorelli, I don't know as it is you what is the source of the vile LIES I read in the newspapers or if the police are behind it and the reporters are part of their scheme. But I figger it might be you, and I take this occashun to straten you out. In some parts of this world, such as where dirty immigrants like yourself come from, it is often that human flesh is eaten regular as other food is so scarce and people would starve without it. Of course it is usuly children what is eaten as they are tenderest and best tasting, especially the ass of a small child. And then these people that eat it come here to America, dirtier than a Red Injun. On February 19th, I seen your boy parading himself outside the church with dirt and paint on his face. I decided to wait and saw him several times before one night I took him away from THAT PLACE. Saucy boy, I already knew I must eat him. So we went straight to the bridge, and I trussed him and did him quick. I collected his eyes and took his ass, and it fed me for a week, roasted with onions and carrots. But I never had him, though I could have. And he would have liked me to. He died unspoiled by me, and the papers ought to say so.²⁵

The evident cruelty of the act of murder and the details of Beecham's confession, as depicted in his letter, evokes a sense of disgust and horror at the twisted sense of racial and sexual superiority that Beecham projected. Even while confessing his crime, he adheres to his opinion, that he had not sexually defiled the boy, that the boy had died pure, and that it is only the "filthy immigrants", who are sexually deviant. In a later instance in the narrative, Sara Howard, another member of Kreizler's detective team, remarks:

When Beecham had been admitted to St. Elizabeth's Hospital, he had spoken of society's need for laws, and for men to enforce them. Debtors and those involved in illegal activities (even if only tangentially) would certainly have aroused his scorn, and the prospect of harassing them would probably have been attractive.²⁶

His urge to clarify his actions, therefore, betray a deep-rooted sense of fear and anxiety about the sexual and the racial degeneracy that, he was once himself subjected to during his childhood, and that he believed had pervaded the mainstream society of late nineteenth-century New York.

Dr. Kreizler declares at the initial stages of the investigation that "one of the first ways in which we can know our quarry is to know his victims . . ." ²⁷ His proposed method to create a mental profile of the killer collapses the victim-perpetrator binary. Beecham's psychological identity combines the roles of both the victim and the perpetrator as the police interrogation of Beecham's brother reveals. Born as Japheth Dury, he adopted the English alias of John Beecham, after George Beecham, the man who had first befriended and then raped him at the age of eleven.²⁸ Thus, Kreizler's team

concludes at one point that Beecham's wrath "had crossed sexual lines, becoming a sort of hybrid, or mongrel; and it had found its only release in destroying boys who embodied, in their behavior, similar ambiguity."²⁹ While Beecham's victims are normative New York society's 'others'—sex-workers and migrants—he himself is no less a symbol of otherness in being a monster produced by the society that is eager to deny his existence.

The text also shows that these male teenage sex-workers were perversely given female pseudonyms in the line of their occupation, such as Rosie, Fatima, and Gloria, by both their owners and clients, most of who were white Americans themselves. Some of these clients, such as Wilhelm Van Bergen, belonged to the upper echelons of the society. Van Bergen was a former suspect of the serial killings owing to his prolific inclinations for illicit sexual liaisons. Moreover, Van Bergen was a migrant figure himself who frequented the squalid streets of the red-light area in New York, and had also contracted the 'prostitute's disease', syphilis. However, his superior social status had bought him the silence and support of New York's predominantly-male police force, who worked to suppress the serial slaughters of the teenage sex-workers. In episode 4, "These Bloody Thoughts", the former commander-in-chief of New York Police visits the Van Bergens to alert them of their son's misdemeanours. Although he offers a word of caution, he nonetheless gets his exclusive subordinates to sweep the matter of serial killings under the rug—which involved delaying police investigations, deliberate misplacements of victims' files, threatening and physically abusing the migrant families to discourage them from lodging complaints, and arranging a covert and safe passage for Wilhelm outside the nation.³⁰ Such liberties offered to Van Bergen bring to the fore not only how the upper class white male Americans were both repelled and fascinated by the teenage migrant male sex-workers, but also how class division was an important factor in deciding who 'deserves' police protection and who 'deserves' to be thrown behind bars.

Citizenship, Class, Gender and the State of Migrancy

To render *The Alienist* as an evident teleological critique of the white supremacist patriarchal society of nineteenth-century New York would merely signify an attempt to simplistically explain away the text's postcolonial and postmodern rhetoric without engaging in a critical inquiry into the nuances and inherent contradictions of the state of migrancy as inhabited by both the protagonists and the antagonists, that is, the members of Kreizler's detective team and Beecham—in the narrative of the text. Further, a linear understanding of the text would forgo an analytical insight into the heterogeneities, multi-valences, indeterminacies and contradictions inherent in the state of migrancy. Thus at such a juncture, and as a literary reader hailing from post-colonial South Asia, it behoves me to also investigate the fault lines of class, gender, nationality and citizenship that are incorporated in the precarious condition of the migrants' existences in nineteenth-century New York, as depicted in the text. My paper argues that the narrative of *The Alienist*

problematizes the concepts of 'alien', 'alienation', 'home' and 'belonging' by foregrounding the inherent paradoxes in discursive constructions of such aforementioned categories that in turn locate the migrants in the interstices of, on the one hand, a colonially inflected legacy, and, on the other hand, the imperial rhetoric innate in late nineteenth-century New York.

The indeterminacies of the states of migrancy and alienation in the text are exposed by the makeshift team of detectives put together by Dr. Kreizler, to solve the mystery behind the serial killings of young migrant sex-workers. At the very outset of Carr's novel, the definition of an alienist is noted:

Prior to the twentieth century, persons suffering from mental illness were thought to be "alienated", not only from the rest of society but from their own true natures. Those experts who studied mental pathologies were therefore known as *alienists* (emphasis in original).³¹

On an apparent level, this definition of the alienists underscores the 'alienated nature' of those suffering from mental illness, whereas the psyche of the alienists themselves are shielded from the critical lenses of inspection. However, Dr. Kreizler's detectives expose the fallacy of this assumption that it is only the perpetrators with "mental pathologies", and predominantly belonging to the weaker economic section of the society, who serve as markers of alienation within. The team of alienists comprises Dr. Laszlo Kreizler, a German doctor with a home full of misfits and deviants, Sarah Howard, a female police officer, Marcus and Lucius Isaacson, two Jewish forensic experts, and John Moore, an upper-class but profligate sketch artist. Each of the members has faced varying forms of alienation, segregation, and discrimination in their respective lives that had eventually led them to occupy the interstitial space between the states of migrancy and that of permanent belongingness to the mainstream society. Kreizler is alienated from the slew of upper-class privileged doctors because he not only chose to examine the 'perverse' psychological conditions of children who have 'deviated' from the conventional social, cultural and gender norms, but also practiced psychoanalysis which has been consistently frowned upon by the privileged classes of the society. On a similar note, the Isaacson brothers are discriminated against in the New York city police department because they are not only Jews but also practitioners of modern forensic methods of investigation that, according to their conventional colleagues, bordered on the periphery of heresy and lunacy. The only 'regular' member of the team appears to be Moore, a white upper-class American gentleman, and yet, on a different level, he too felt to be alienated from both himself and the society at large. After his brother's death, he had distanced himself from his family, and is shown to be living alone with his grandmother. Moreover, he is ill-at-ease with the idea of getting married and settling down in a traditional domestic life, after his first betrothed had betrayed him to be with another man. As such, he is depicted to frequently haunt the brothels in the red-light area seeking, in Sarah's words, "momentary solace in the companionship of strangers."³² Though his misconducts unapologetically demonstrate his socio-

economic privilege that can excuse his wantonness, however, to some extent they also expose how he had felt as an outsider in the social groups of the upper-class white Americans who looked down on his promiscuity with disdain. Thus, all the male members of Kreizler's team exhibit varying degrees of alienation due to their individual circumstances, on accounts of race, class, and profession.

Despite the different degrees of segregation faced by the male members of Kreizler's team, the chief proponent of disruption of the neo-imperial class and gender based alienation in the narrative is Sarah Howard, who on account of being an intellectual woman is subjected to multiple layers of alienation. Sarah not only faces sexual discrimination and harassment in the New York City Police Department, where she is employed as the first and only woman police officer in the department, but is also confronted with a certain degree of alienation within Kreizler's team of alienists. In episode 1, when Sarah enters the police officers' common room looking for Captain Connor, who embodies the xenophobic, homophobic and misogynist tendencies of the white supremacist patriarch, she is confronted with an unabashed Connor, openly urinating at the corner of the room, but nonetheless fixating a steady gaze at Sarah. When the latter averted her eyes and was about to leave, Captain Connor made a voracious comment from behind, "Come on Miss Howard, we have got nothing to hide here."³³ Such demeaning attitude to a woman colleague combined with several instances of open hostility towards her straightforward conduct of her personhood and her work, ranging from misogynistic comments, to disdainful gaze, to open threat of violation, assault and possible death, expose the phallogocentric paranoia of the an intellectual woman in nineteenth-century New York city.

On a different and yet somewhat similar note, Sarah also finds herself at multiple instances of altercation with Kreizler because of her tendency to break through his aloofness, intellectually interrogate his certain decisions as the team leader and compel him to confront his own fears and weaknesses. In episode 6, "Ascension", Sarah forces Kreizler to reckon with the truth of his withered arm, his ambivalent obsession with father figures, and his utter denial of the presence of an abusive mother figure in Beecham's case of domestic violence. Her relentless pursuit of truth echoes Kreizler's own. When Kreizler felt that his comfort zone is being threatened by the inquisition of an intellectual woman who is determined to pull down his veneer of apathy and aloofness, as if in a defensive manner, Kreizler slaps her across the face to stop her from penetrating his reality.³⁴ Sarah, therefore, brings to the fore the multiple layers of alienation that a woman faced in nineteenth-century New York on account of both her biological sex and intellectual disposition.

The eventual reconciliation of the alienists with their individual circumstances of alienation within their society instils in them a better understanding of Beecham –another alienated figure in their society –so much so, that at one point, Kreizler consciously begins to identify himself with Beecham in the process of understanding the latter's psyche:

His [Beecham's] acts are so wretched, so evil that only if I become him, if I cut the child's throat myself, if I run my knife through the helpless body and

pluck innocent eyes from a horrified face, only then will I come to truly understand what I am.³⁵

This identification with the alienated figure within the society disrupts the categorical binary between the 'alien other' and the 'rightful member' of the society. This differentiation is further dissolved when Beecham realises that he himself is an occupant of the state of migrancy. At first, Beecham had identified the 'deviant' migrant sex-workers as occupying the state of alienation because they are not legal citizens of the white supremacist patriarchal New York, and therefore, do not have the right to belong in the city. However, Kreizler's investigation blurs the hunter-hunted binary as it also reveals Beecham as an alien within the city scape, as he is hunted out on account of his own 'deviant' sexual affinities. Owing to his 'perverse sexuality' and 'mental illness', Beecham is not only alienated from the society of New York, but also from his "own true self". As such, in the narrative, he too is located in the liminal space of migrancy where he had initially situated the undocumented, 'illegal' and 'deviant' migrant sex-workers. The text therefore questions who the alien in the society is. By representing varying levels of alienation as faced by the good detectives, the evil killer and the migrant sex-workers, the narrative shatters the categorical binary between the 'alien other' and a 'regular citizen'. It shows that in a society that is fraught with and fragmented into multiple layers of segregation and discrimination on the basis of race, class, gender, and nationality, every and anyone who refuses to conform to the ideologies of white supremacist patriarchy, is potentially treated as an alien.

The *Alienist* thus represents how the xenophobic and homophobic New York city of the late nineteenth century both exorcized and eroticized migrant bodies as embodying cultural, racial and sexual degeneracies. The figure of the 'deviant' male migrant sex-worker was considered as a threat to the moral economy of the white patriarchal city scape. As a result, the body of the migrant male homosexual sex-worker became a site for inscribing racial and sexual taboos and impurities. The narrative further problematizes the hunter-hunted binary as it questions who counts as 'alien', and who has the 'right' to alienate whom. While the transmedia narrative quiver on the threshold of indeterminate genre designation and between literature and reality, it becomes the perfect metaphor for the twenty-first century migrants who have to constantly negotiate between multiple layers of insecurities, alienation, gossamer selfhoods, fragile national affiliations and inevitable rootlessness. By foregrounding the lost narratives of 'deviant' migrant male teenage sex-workers, *The Alienist* as a transmedia narrative, therefore, represents in its own way the indeterminacies of existing at such dreadful thresholds.

Notes

¹ Caleb Carr, *The Alienist*, New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2006, p. 483.

² bell hooks, "Understanding Patriarchy," in *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love*. New York: Atria Books, 2004, p. 17.

³ *TheWhiteHouse.gov*. "Executive Order Protecting the Nation from ..." 27 January 2017. Available from: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/executive-order-protecting-nation-foreign-terrorist-entry-united-states/>

⁴ U.S. Department of Homeland Security. "Migrant Protection Protocols." 24 January 2019. Available from: <https://www.dhs.gov/news/2019/01/24/migrant-protection-protocols>.

⁵ U.S. Department of Justice. "Attorney General Announces Zero-Tolerance Policy for Criminal Illegal Entry," *Justice News*, 6 April 2018. Available from: <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/attorney-general-announces-zero-tolerance-policy-criminal-illegal-entry>.

⁶ John Washington. "Family Separations at the Border Constitute Torture, New Report Claims," *The Intercept*, 25 February 2020. Available from: <https://theintercept.com/2020/02/25/family-separations-border-torture-report/>.

⁷ S. A. Strathdee, R. Lozada, S.J. Semple, P. Orozovich, P. Pu, H. Staines-Orozco, M. Fraga-Vallejo, H. Amaro, A. Delatorre, C. Magis-Rodríguez, C., and T.L. Patterson, "Characteristics of Female Sex Workers with US Clients in Two Mexico-US Border Cities," *Sexually Transmitted Diseases*, 35.3 (2008): 263–268, p. 2. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1097/OLQ.0b013e31815b0>.

⁸ S. A. Strathdee, R. Lozada, S.J. Semple, P. Orozovich, P. Pu, H. Staines-Orozco, M. Fraga-Vallejo, H. Amaro, A. Delatorre, C. Magis-Rodríguez, C., and T.L. Patterson, "Characteristics of Female Sex Workers with US Clients in Two Mexico-US Border Cities," *Sexually Transmitted Diseases*, 35.3 (2008): 263–268, p. 5. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1097/OLQ.0b013e31815b0>.

⁹ J.L. Schatz, "Stigmatization, Syphilis, and Prostitution: The Discursive Construction of Sex Workers, Disease, and Feeble-mindedness," in *Syphilis and Subjectivity: From the Victorians to the Present*, edited by Kari Nixon and Lorenzo Servitje. London: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2018, p. 44.

¹⁰ Rachel Brown. "Clippers Coach Doc Rivers makes Emotional Comments about Kenosha Shooting," *abc7*, 26 August 2020. Available from: <https://abc7.com/doc-rivers-kenosha-shooting-jacob-blake-clippers/6389310/>.

¹¹ bell hooks, "On Cultural Criticism: Why Study Popular Culture?," in *Cultural Criticism and Transformation*, edited by M. Patierno, S. Jhally and H. Hirshorn, produced and directed by S. Jhally. Media Education Foundation, 1997, p. 2.

¹² bell hooks, "On Cultural Criticism: Why Study Popular Culture?," in *Cultural Criticism and Transformation*, edited by M. Patierno, S. Jhally and H. Hirshorn, produced and directed by S. Jhally. Media Education Foundation, 1997, p. 2.

¹³ Emma Lazarus, "The New Colossus." (1883), in *Emma Lazarus: Selected Poems and Other Writings*, edited by Gregory Eiselein. Ontario: broadview literary texts, 2002, p. 233.

¹⁴ J. Bodnar, L. Burt, J. Stinson, and B. Truesdell, *The Changing Face of the Statue of Liberty*, Indiana: Center for the Study of History and Memory, Indiana University, 2005, p. 91, Available from: <http://www.cesu.umn.edu/sites/cesu.umn.edu/files/statueofliberty.pdf>.

¹⁵ Timothy J. Gilfoyle, *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790-1920*, New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1992, p. 120.

¹⁶ Timothy J. Gilfoyle, *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790-1920*, New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1992, p. 119.

¹⁷ Timothy J. Gilfoyle, *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790-1920*, New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1992, p. 29.

¹⁸ William N. Eskridge, Jr., *Dishonorable Passions: Sodomy Laws in America, 1861-2003*, New York: Viking Penguin, 2008.

¹⁹ Edwin G. Burrows, and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 807.

²⁰ George Chauncey, "Sex, Gender, and Sexuality: Female Prostitution and Male Homosexuality in Early Twentieth-Century America," in *Sexualités Américaines: Regards Théoriques, Réponses Institutionnelles*, edited by Claudine Raynaud. Tours: Presses Universitaires François-Rabelais, 1997, p. 39.

²¹ Caleb Carr, *The Alienist*, New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2006, p. 16; and depicted in Jakob Verbruggen, dir., *The Alienist* (Season 1), Composer, Rupert Gregson-Williams, Performance, Daniel Brühl, Dakota Fanning, et al, Warner Brothers, 2018, Episode 1, "The Boy on the Bridge."

²² Mark Seltzer, "Wound Culture: Trauma in the Pathological Public Sphere," *October* 80 (1997): 3–26, p. 3. Available from: www.jstor.org/stable/778805.

²³ Mark Seltzer, "Wound Culture: Trauma in the Pathological Public Sphere," *October* 80 (1997): 3–26, p. 4. Available from: www.jstor.org/stable/778805.

²⁴ Caleb Carr, *The Alienist*, New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2006, p.139.

²⁵ Jakob Verbruggen, dir., *The Alienist* (Season 1), Composer, Rupert Gregson-Williams, Performance, Daniel Brühl, Dakota Fanning, et al, Warner Brothers, 2018, Episode 4, "These Bloody Thoughts".

²⁶ Caleb Carr, *The Alienist*, New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2006, p. 415.

²⁷ Jakob Verbruggen, dir., *The Alienist* (Season 1), Composer, Rupert Gregson-Williams, Performance, Daniel Brühl, Dakota Fanning, et al, Warner Brothers, 2018, Episode 1, "The Boy on the Bridge."

²⁸ Caleb Carr, *The Alienist*, New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2006, pp. 424-25.

²⁹ Caleb Carr, *The Alienist*, New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2006, p. 461.

³⁰ Jakob Verbruggen, dir., *The Alienist* (Season 1), Composer, Rupert Gregson-Williams, Performance, Daniel Brühl, Dakota Fanning, et al, Warner Brothers, 2018, Episode 4, "These Bloody Thoughts."

³¹ Caleb Carr, *The Alienist*, New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2006, p. 1.

³² Jakob Verbruggen, dir., *The Alienist* (Season 1), Composer, Rupert Gregson-Williams, Performance, Daniel Brühl, Dakota Fanning, et al, Warner Brothers, 2018, Episode 3, "Silver Smile."

³³ Jakob Verbruggen, dir., *The Alienist* (Season 1), Composer, Rupert Gregson-Williams, Performance, Daniel Brühl, Dakota Fanning, et al, Warner Brothers, 2018, Episode 1, "The Boy on the Bridge."

³⁴ Jakob Verbruggen, dir., *The Alienist* (Season 1), Composer, Rupert Gregson-Williams, Performance, Daniel Brühl, Dakota Fanning, et al, Warner Brothers, 2018, Episode 6, "Ascension."

³⁵ Jakob Verbruggen, dir., *The Alienist* (Season 1), Composer, Rupert Gregson-Williams, Performance, Daniel Brühl, Dakota Fanning, et al, Warner Brothers, 2018, Episode 1, "The Boy on the Bridge."

Reflection

Calcutta: Migrant City

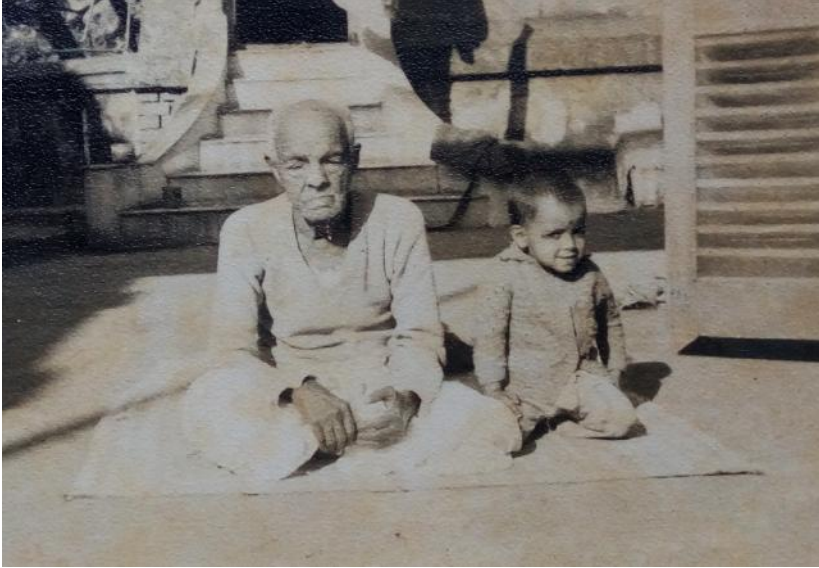
By

Samata Biswas *

In Calcutta, I live at Jorasanko. I have stayed there as long as I can remember, and more often than not, people from other parts of Calcutta and of the country, or even the world, expect to be taken on a trip to the ancestral home of the Tagores, the family of the Nobel Laureate Rabindranath, and other illustrious writers, artists, landlords, spiritual leaders, businessmen. My friend and I were walking down the lane to Jorasanko Thakurbari, a building synonymous with Bengali renaissance and culture: in popular media and discourse. Down the lane we went, our ears filling up with snatches of Bhojpuri and Hindi conversation, or other patois we weren't familiar with, a tiny Kalipujo pandal blaring Bhojpuri songs, a man with a mike declaring all assistance to those observing Chhat, looking at a bunch of hand pulled rickshaws huddled in one corner, and banners written in Hindi. My friend, only half seriously, said, 'This doesn't feel like Calcutta to me'. I replied, 'Oh, but this exactly feels like Calcutta to me'.

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Refugee Watch, 55, June 2020



Debalina and Kamini Mohan Majumder, sitting in front of their room in Bedi Bhavan, where the current Southern Avenue runs. A 'baganbari' or leisure home of the industrialists, Bedis, the huge mansion with marble floors, French windows and mirrored halls became the residence of many refugee families after 1947. Debalina's was one of them. Photo from Majumder family archives, reproduced with permission.

Born in a refugee family at the iconic Bedi Bhavan where her father landed up with his siblings and parents after they reached Calcutta in the aftermath of the partition of 1947, my friend now resides in one of the 'colonies' in the South of Calcutta--one of the many that are identified in the Refugee Colonies map of Calcutta Metropolitan District, this one marked by the name of the quintessential man of that 19th century event- the Bengal renaissance, Vidyasagar. The language spoken in and around her home is Bangla, albeit various dialects of it, and is now the site of prime real estate and speculation.

I have lived here, at Jorasanko, on the line dividing North and Central Kolkata, practically all my life. My parents were both born in Calcutta, and the journeys of my grandparents of both sides were marked more by their choices and less by events outside of their control. Around my home the predominant language is Hindi, and others that I am not so conversant with. Upward mobility here is signified by moving to the South or Eastern fringes of the city, perhaps the same locality that my friend lives in. The distance between these two localities is less than twenty kilometres, but in terms of demography, they could easily be two different states. Yet, they are both, marked by multiple acts of migration. The two of us were walking towards Jorasanko, that seat of the Tagores, which also stands on Chitpore Road, the original Pilgrim's Trail--the trail that devotees followed all the way via Chitreshwari to Kalighat--much before the present-day city of Calcutta came into existence. In his *An Anglo Indian Domestic Sketch* published in 1849, J.

Colesworthy Grant describes Chitpore and Barabazar as a mart 'tailed on to the north end of the China bazar' and occupied and visited by merchants from all parts of the world. They brought in 'articles too numerous to mention', which were 'either sold or bought by natives from the countries where they are obtained, who together with visitors, travellers and beggars form a diversified group of Persians, Arabs, Jews, Marwarees, Armenians, Madrasees, Sikhs, Turks, Parsees, Chinese, Burmese and Bengalee'.¹

This list, although not exhaustive, in as much as the 'native' Bengalis are listed last, and no mention is made of Colesworthy Grants's fellow British, points at a cosmopolitan Calcutta, a city, of migrants. From my friends' family who reached their current home as a result of political divisions to those who came here to seek, fame, fortune or mere livelihood, Calcutta became what she is on the love and labour of all of them.

The quasi-mythical beginning of Calcutta is also a lesson in migration. Job Charnock, founder in 1690, is rumoured to have moored his boat to the venerated Neem tree at Nimtala Ghat. Other trees, equally legendary lay claim to associations with him—perhaps the banyan at Battala or the Peepul at Baithakhana bazar would have sheltered him, while he smoked his hookah and sat on a charpoi, conducting his business with the natives, under their shade. But for what it's worth, after a long and protracted negotiation with the East India company, and many failed attempts, Job Charnock set up the eastern headquarters of the Company in the three villages of Sutanuti, Gobindapur and Kalikata. But, were the British the first migrants to settle in the area, and make the place their own? Sutanuti was already the centre of a flourishing textile trade, controlled by the Seth and the Basaks of Gobindapur, who had themselves migrated there after the decline of the ancient Bengali trading post, Saptagram or Satgaon. Were the British then the first ones to migrate from relatively far away? The Armenians would disagree, and in fact, the Church of Holy Nazareth (set up in 1724) on Armenian Street, bears a tomb marked 1630, which, if indeed true, posit the Armenians as the first settlers in Calcutta, way before Charnock and his men.

Already settled at Saidabad and Chinshurah, by 1707 the Armenians had built a wooden church at Old China bazar street in Calcutta, as well as a wharf, known to this day as the Armenian Ghat. Often clubbed together with the Europeans due to their practicing Christian faith and their fair skin, the Armenians in Calcutta have been the ones to give the city its first Christian church, as well as India's 'first dancing girl' and recording artist, Gauhar Jaan, born Angelina Yeoward. The present façade of the Grand Hotel was built by Arathoon Stephens before a cholera epidemic killed several of the guests, but it is also to this inimitable real estate mogul that Calcutta owes Stephens Court, Queens Mansion and Stephen House. The façade of the Grand Hotel was apparently built to rival that of the adjoining Firpo's—an Italian establishment, with outdoor dining, both of them catering to the American troops and the handful of British, enjoying a night out, to be capped by a film show at the art deco Metro cinema. In real estate, in becoming engineers, colliery owners, contractors, jewellers and goldsmiths—the small yet prosperous Armenian community marked the city scape in significant ways in

the 19th and the early 20th century. The Armenian School and College run mostly with students from Iran now, while community members joke about the Calcutta wealth that is still hoarded in their coffers.

Much talked about, yet few in number, the Jewish settlers in Calcutta also changed the city's architecture like never before. Shalom Cohen landed in Calcutta in 1798, and the Aleppo Jews following him provided a crucial link in a 'chain of trading posts stretching from Shanghai to London'. His son-in-law took himself as a leader of the community very seriously, establishing the Naveh Shalome Synagogue and the Bethel David Synagogue, while the Baghdadi Jews who soon became more numerous, followed up with the Magen David Synagogue, built in the memory of his father David Joseph Ezra, by Elia David Joseph Ezra. Apart from Ezra Mansions and Ezra street and the Ezra ward within Calcutta Medical College, and the Jewish Girls School—the Ezra family also gave Calcutta India's only art nouveau building—Chowringhee Mansions. By 1813 the Jews were numerous enough to have merited a mention in the Original Calcutta Annual Directory and Calendar, and establishing the Hebrew Printing Press in 1814. Today however, of the handful of people who continue to call Calcutta their home, public memory only acknowledges the family run bakery, Nahoum's, just as the only remnant of the Portuguese is the Saldanha bakery.

The Parsis in Calcutta had already founded the Fire Temple in 1839, while Sir Jamshedji Framji Madan, founder of the Elphinstone Film Company made Calcutta his home, founding more than a hundred cinema theatres in India, but also producing or showcasing films such as Bengal Partition Movement in 1905, Satyavadi Raja Harishchandra in 1917, and Bilwamangal in 1917.

With the Chinese, of whom the first one, Yong Achew was granted a 650 bighas of land at what is now Achipur, to plant sugarcane and also to build a processing factory, 110 Chinese came to join him. While till today the Bengali name of sugar is 'chini', Achew's endeavour didn't quite succeed, and after his death many of the workers moved to Calcutta to join fellow Chinese sailors who had deserted the ships they were forced to work in. Quite fast, a vast number of Chinese artisans came to Calcutta, keeping their community and village ties intact, setting up household and village gods, unique cooking styles and took over a vast range of expert activities such as shoemaking, carpentry, dentistry and eventually, restaurants. Interestingly, with the formation of a local branch of the communist party, India's revolutionary freedom fighters found places of safety in the Old China Town of Tirettabazar (named after that Frenchman who also built the French Burial Ground at park Street), alongside a supply of firearms. The Sino-Indian war however treated the Calcutta Chinese as well as those from the rest of India, abominably. Put in camps at Rajasthan, they were naturalised only in the 2000s, by which time the number of Chinese in Calcutta dwindled to less than half of what it was earlier. The Marwari businesspeople in Calcutta date from the early 19th century, making Barabazar and Alipur their homes. Several of these native capitalists rising to national prominence began their journeys in

Calcutta, although Calcutta was indeed the culmination of the arduous journey from Rajasthan that they undertook.

The Labour(s) of Migration

While writing the history of any city, mainstream historiography teaches us names of important people, almost always male, and their contributions. The migrant history of Calcutta needs to be different, drawing on the influences of people who came and lived here, not always people we know about. Migration, in Calcutta as elsewhere, has always been linked to labour. In Calcutta, more specifically, the labour literally required to build a city, to plan its sanitation and conservation, to supply workers to the jute mills and the wholesalers at Barabazar. In 1921, 41.6% people of the Calcutta Urban Agglomeration were found to be migrants, where did they all come from and what were they doing in the city?

Circular migration and the permanence of poverty provides one of the iconic Calcutta images: the hand-pulled rickshaw. A relic of the Chinese, since being able to ride on a rickshaw signified social status, the *tana*-rickshaw today is almost entirely manned by migrant workers. Old and middle aged men, who rent their rickshaws from who in turn get them from the owners—the rickshaw-puller from Bihar, Jharkhand or Orissa is almost inevitably trapped in a cycle of poverty, pulling a rickshaw at Calcutta to send money to their native villages, sleeping in crowded rooms or on the rickshaws themselves, and acting as everything from emergency ambulance to flood relief service every time North Calcutta is in crisis. His counterparts may be met nearby, working in Posta, drawing the ubiquitous ‘thela’—a vehicle named after the action of pushing, the bamboo structure carrying everything from sacks of cement to garlic to pulses to iron rods—the cheap and ‘sustainable’ transportation that probably keeps Calcutta affordable for people like me. They come from villages that have seen a lack of rain, or floods, or from such impoverished regions that the backbreaking labour of Calcutta seems lucrative in comparison. Almost always they are also workers who would have been forced into caste specific occupations back in their villages, but an escape to Calcutta doesn’t change that facet more often than not. Take the case of conservancy workers employed by the Calcutta Municipal Corporation—the setting up of the colonial city also needed a dedicated workforce that would clean its sewers, dispose of its dead and sweep its streets.

Often these migrant workers are those who have been coming and working in Calcutta for generations—at Darbhanga Society grandfather, father and grandson live in the same room, earning money to take back home—the only contact with home being modern smart phones and seasonal trips home, often to help out in the harvest. In a 2016 interview, Chavasa Thurza, a conservancy employee, associated with the Calcutta Municipal Corporation commented, ‘This city is built on the labour of people from Jharkhand, Chattisgarh, Bihar and Orissa...all these conservancy employees you see, all these people in these hovels, sweepers, cleaners, scavengers,

electricians, mechanics, crane operators—these people from the Chhotanagpur plateau have been building the city since the time of their great grandfathers' (personal conversation with the author, 2017). The tannery business originally run by the Chinese and now taken over by other migrant capital, could flourish because of the leather workers who were brought in from villages to carry out this profession--giving birth unfortunately to swear words in Bengali where the name of the caste itself becomes casting an aspersion. Gandhi is credited to have written to the Calcutta Municipal Corporation for housing to be provided for sanitation workers--but in a cruel irony that testifies the caste ridden nature of Bengali society, the lane housing sweepers became soon identified by the profession and avoided by the *bhadralok samaj*. There are several Harijan bastis in Calcutta, that also testify to the origins of sanitation work here, and its links to migration. Places also get marked by the long history of migration and its association with labour—case in point being Surinam Ghat, (ghat: literally a flight of stairs leading down to a river), which was a point of departure for India's indentured labour migrants (from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh or UP and Bengal) to Surinam during late 19th and early 20th century to work as labourers in sugarcane plantations. A 1966 report claims that non-Bengali migrant labour made up 71% of the workforce in Jute mills, 58 in textile, and 73 percent in iron and steel. If migrant labour did not make this city, then what did?

A City of Shelter, of Refuge and of Becoming

The basti or the slum, and the pavement, provide the initial shelters for impoverished migrants, just like it did during the Bengal Famine (of 1942-43 where the rural poor thronged to the city of joy in search of rice. Sealdah station was yet another space, for what Anwesha Sengupta calls the 'railway refugees'. The other is the 'colony'. We began this note by invoking a palatial mansion that had been acquired by the government to house refugees. The colony, especially in instances that the refugees themselves took over abandoned or secluded land and buildings, and established what now are flourishing and upwardly mobile neighbourhoods—while standing testimony to partition induced displacement, also asserting to the resilience of refugees, and the importance of collective action. Bijaygarh and Azadgarh are two such, the names themselves celebrating victory—established through labour and collective action of the refugees in taking over government land, establishing homesteads, market and a club for social welfare activities is merely one of forty such in the South West Calcutta Metropolitan District. Till the aftermath of the Bangladesh liberation war, Bengali refugees to Calcutta moulded, created, recreated and shaped the city both topographically and in spirit, in cuisine, in dialect and in nomenclature.

The 1911 Census claimed that there were only 2 women to 5 male immigrants, only 1/4th of which were engaged in any occupation, whatsoever, outside of home. Of them, 25 of the female workers were engaged in prostitution while 42% were employed in the sector of Domestic work. The link between prostitution and migration is long and well established, now

often invoked in the official discourse of trafficking. But migrant women have also been at the forefront of women's participation in paid employment. From the self-sacrificing Neeta of *Meghe Dhaka Tara* whose family exploits her ability to participate in remunerative labour to the revolutionary Parul Mukherjee who after partition became the headmistress of the colony school, to the Anglo-Indian women—the 'unwitting trailblazer of women's emancipation in the city', a nurse, a secretary and a teacher much before most Indian women were could venture out, to the domestic worker and the ayah who travels everyday along the spiders' web of suburban train network for taking care of middle class city households, and the Malayali nurse who is now almost synonymous to the private super speciality hospitals in the city—the migrant women has played a pioneering role in promoting women's participation in the public sphere. After all, who can forget that the first two women graduates of India, Chandramukhi and Kadambini were both migrants to the city? One from Dehradun and the other from Bhagalpur, carry on their shoulders both the pride and promise of the migrant city.

By way of Conclusion?

So much of this write up concentrates on the 19th and early 20th centuries, the second half of the 20th century being marked primarily by partition refugees from the present Bangladesh. The 21st century is also the time when that lover of Calcutta, P. T Nair went back to Kerala—having once followed in the footsteps of Madhavan, the hero of O. Chandumenon's *Indulekha*, the first novel in Malayalam, who travelled to Calcutta in the 1880s in search of a job and witnessed a man entering a tiger's cage at Alipore Zoological Gardens. Calcutta architecture bears testimony to all the different migrations that it has housed and assimilated—the mansions on Central Avenue and Vivekananda Road housing both the central courtyard native to indigenous buildings, Corinthian cornices, louvre windows and the Marwari jaffrey—the Calcutta baroque. The Islamicate architecture of the mini Lucknow that the last nawab of the kingdom of Oudh, Wajid Ali shah created in Garden Reach is slowly being eroded by forces of history and of politics. A note on the migrant city therefore cannot bypass the current political clime that seeks to define who is a citizen—bringing to the fore once again the claims to the space of the nation state and the ones who are refused citizenship.

Note: This piece was first composed as the concept note for CRG's 2019 short film, "Calcutta: Migrant City", and revisited when we started to work on the next film, about a refugee colony in South Calcutta. The note has been influenced by the different excursions CRG organised for the participants of its Annual Research and Orientation Workshops, where over the course of several years we visited Rajarbat, Metiaburj, Bantala, Kidderpore, Chitpore, Howrah, etc.

Notes

¹ "Burrabazar," WikiVisually, <https://wikivisually.com/wiki/Burrabazar>

Book Review

By

Himadri Chatterjee *

Nasreen Chowdhory & Biswajit Mohanty ed. *Citizenship, Nationalism and Refugeehood of Rohingyas in Southern Asia*; Singapore: Springer, 2020, Pages: 235, Price: INR 1900

The book under review is a welcome addition to the small but growing body of academic literature on the forced migration of the Rohingyas of Myanmar. This volume brings together ethnographies from refugee camps in India and Bangladesh, analyses of media discourse in these two nation states and detailed chapters on the legal instruments that precipitated the crisis in Myanmar. The volume deploys a legal-statist framework in order to explore various facets of the Rohingya exodus and its consequences across three South Asian Nation-States. The primary ground of investigation cover Myanmar, Bangladesh and India.

There is a geographical distribution of concepts and empirical material that may have sprung from the limitations faced by researchers in accessing areas and populations impacted by ongoing conflicts and also various levels of caginess demonstrated by various nation states and their security apparatus. Significant portions of the chapters that analyze empirical evidence from India deal with media discourse on Rohingya refugees. The empirical material from Bangladesh has mostly come from refugee camp-based ethnographies while Myanmar, the origin point of the exodus, is framed within legal discourse. Reflecting upon this distribution may have been fruitful in understanding the nature of these three political territories and their dominant political communities. The ubiquitous presence of NGOs, refugee camp bureaucracy and refugee protection and relief discourse in Bangladesh is part and parcel of international aid politics that has over the last few decades taken over a significant portion of public sphere and civil society discourse in that country. This is an important element of the anatomy of the state in that territory. Similarly, one may comment on the massive growth of 24-hour news

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channels, web-based audio-visual and written news circulation in India that has been a signature element of the current central government regime. The collective effort of the researchers writing in this book have reproduced these dominant tendencies of the larger political communities that they have explored, without extending their legal-statist framework towards understanding this unevenness in the type and source of their empirical material.

The introductory chapter takes up the task of translating complex philosophical terminology into operationalisable, social scientific concepts. The chapter reflects upon and extends Samaddar and Chaudhury's argument concerning 'responsibility'. The fixing of duty and responsibility remains one of the implicit threads connecting the chapters in the volume. The chapter opens up three different facets of the idea of responsibility relating to agentic, consequentialist and ethical understandings. While the first demands an investigation into the causes of the displacement and fixes responsibility on the perpetrator, the second is a futurist notion seeking to deal with the aftermath of forced migration. The third, ethical understanding is expressed as a 'preoriginary openness' that seems to approximate a humanist understanding of alterity. The chapters in the book seem to primarily address the first two understandings of the idea of responsibility. Empirical examples of the third notion of responsibility seem hard to come by, at least in the contexts explored in the studies published in this volume.

The essays explore two distinct modes of 'othering' that has been deployed in the context of state formation in Myanmar – ethnicity and religion. The editors and contributors share a broad consensus that there has been a calibrated deployment of both of these discourses of identity production which has created a hybrid ideological apparatus for excluding and even 'exterminating' the Rohingya population. The chapters also demonstrate two distinct forms of control through which Rohingyas are targeted at home and abroad. In Myanmar there is sovereign violence unleashed through increasingly exclusionary instruments of 'lawfare' discussed by Nergis Caneffe and violence perpetrated by security forces discussed in several of the essays in the volume. In countries offering asylum, enthusiastically or reluctantly, there are governmental machineries of control deployed through camp governance, aid politics etc. A few of the essays document that there are cross-overs of such technologies of control. Kaveri has discussed the Indian context where unexplained fires have consumed Rohingya refugee camps. There is documented evidence of ever sharpening antipathy against the Rohingya refugees in particular. This antipathy and the sovereign power that comes wrapped in it are wielded by faceless mobs rather than the state security forces. The chapters on media discourse in India by Mohanty and Malaviya are significant in explaining the mechanism through which such anger and hostility are produced, intensified and mobilized. The authors mention that these studies are not comprehensive but only initial markers for future direction of research.

The refugee camp ethnographies conducted in Bangladesh demonstrate and add detail to the condition of the refugees and the narrative

of abjection, insecurity and gendered violence within the community that the international press has underlined since 2012. The current volume has added nuance to the discussion by demonstrating the desire for education, gainful employment, language acquisition and changing gender dynamics among the refugees in the camps of Bangladesh. The concluding chapter by Chowdhury and Mohanty speculates that due to the legalised hostility towards Rohingyas in their country of origin and a legal vacuum at the international and regional level, repatriation is not a practical way forward. This population therefore may remain stuck in this protracted refugee crisis scattered over several countries of South Asia for the foreseeable future while facing local hostility and state directed marginalisation. This is precisely the point at which the significance of the chapter contributed by Ahmed, Nawal, Lhamo and Bui can be appreciated. Their study of economic integration of refugees from earlier periods of Rohingya migration to Bangladesh allows us to gauge the possibilities of absorption of the population into the host societies. The earlier Rohingya population has been accommodated in the lower income bracket jobs. Their economic prospects have not become greatly improved. But they have significantly gained in education and language skills. A significant part of the refugee population has also found its space in small businesses. A relatively smaller portion has gravitated to manual work showing a possibility of higher control over their own labour and resources. This is especially hopeful in a context where active networks of trafficking and bonded labour are suspected as operating in the camps.

The volume would have been enriched by ethnographic work in the originating country. In the case of the Rohingya crisis such reportage and documentation has been hard to come by. This might be one of the reasons why the editors have heavily relied upon legal analysis as their primary lens for understanding the issues at the originating end of the migration. With the book by Carlos Sardina Galache being published some of that gap will hopefully be addressed. The book acknowledges that there are connections between the present day crisis and the long history of labour migration, state formation and oppression by British colonisers. There is an implicit necessity for drawing the connections between the economic arrangements of resource and territory in the 19th century and its impact on present day neoliberal context in this region. The growth of the logistical empire, controlled by China, in Arakan has been mentioned as the primary cause for the current Rohingya exodus by scholars studying the political economy of this particular crisis. Without further substantiation through detailed empirical studies from the currently inaccessible ground of the crisis, the choice between frameworks will remain a task of speculation. The interpretative labour of this volume is focused on understanding the law and governance aspect of the Rohingya crisis and in that field it is an important read.

NOTES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

Articles submitted for consideration of publication in REFUGEE WATCH should be around 5,500 -7,500 words. Book reviews can be around 1000 words and review articles can be around 2000 words. Articles will have endnotes and not footnotes. Endnotes should be restricted to the minimum. Please refer to www.mcrg.ac.in for a details style sheet. Roundtables can also be proposed for publication. Enquiries about possible submissions are welcome.

For submission of articles and all other matters, correspondence should be addressed to the Editor, Refugee Watch, Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group, IA-48, Ground Floor, Sector-III, Salt Lake, Kolkata – 700 097 or paulabanerjee44@gmail.com. For book review and review-articles correspondence to be addressed to Samata Biswas, Review Editor, Refugee Watch, at the same address or at bsamata@gmail.com.

Authors will have to submit articles both hard and soft copies (in MS Word). All articles are peer reviewed and it may take 3 to 4 months before a decision is reached on the proposed publication. Contributors will get 2 copies of the journal.

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*See also “**Refugee Watch Online**”(<http://refugeewatchonline.blogspot.com>) for brief news, reports, views and comments on issues of forced displacement.*

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