




City as the Southern Question
Conference on 13-14 November 2024, in Kolkata

A REPORT



Calcutta Research Group
Canadian Institute for Advanced Research (CIFAR)
Institute for Human Sciences (IWM), Vienna
University of Naples Federico II
Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	1
Preface	2
Programme Schedule	3
Pre-Conference Roundtable	9
Conference Sessions	11
List of Participants	36

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Calcutta Research Group (CRG) is thankful to the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research (CIFAR), the Institute for Human Sciences (IWM), Vienna, University of Naples Federico II, Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, and several other universities and institutes in India and abroad, for the generous support and collaboration in organising a pre-conference panel titled ‘Urban Solidarities and City-Making’ on 12 November 2024, followed by the Conference on ‘City as the Southern Question’ on 13-14 November 2024, in Kolkata. CRG expresses gratitude to Ranabir Samaddar, Sandro Mezzadra and Enrica Morlicchio for their enriching inputs and insights in taking ahead the sessions of the writers’ workshop which has been an integral part of the conference this year as well as the contributing authors of the upcoming book volume ‘City as the Southern Question’ for participating and presenting their research in the conference. CRG thanks all scholars, academics and resource persons who have presented their research, participated in the deliberations of the sessions and added insightful conservations to the programme, with their valuable suggestions, discussions, ideas and experiences. CRG is grateful to Shyamalendu Majumdar, Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhury, Senior Colleagues, CRG Members and Staff Members for the cooperation, support and team work in making the conference a success.

PREFACE

The Conference “**City as a Southern Question**” was organised by the Calcutta Research Group (CRG) on 13-14 November 2024 in Kolkata, in collaboration with Canadian Institute for Advanced Research (CIFAR), Institute for Human Sciences (IWM), Vienna, University of Naples Federico II, Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung and several other universities and institutes, was conceptualised to re-situate and revisit cities in the South in a rapidly globalising, urbanising world and to re-investigate the North-South relations. This conference designed as a writers’ workshop had presentations of research articles by the contributing authors of an upcoming edited book volume titled ‘City as the Southern Question’ (Routledge, forthcoming). The contributing authors as well as editors presented their research and participated in the discussions both online and in physical sessions in Kolkata. There were also presentations by participants selected from a pool of 100 odd applications received through a call for proposal earlier this year.

The central theme of the conference engaged in a discourse encapsulating a world grappling with uncertain challenges, exacerbated with threats of climate change, disease outbreaks, diminishing resources etc. it becomes crucial to study cities for what they are becoming now. The important rise of global Southern cities calls for the attention of scholars and public policy analysts working on Southern histories and their global significance. Taking from Antonio Gramsci’s unfinished note, “Some Aspects of the Southern Question” (1926) known simply as “The Southern Question”, the Conference aimed to shed light on the geopolitical context of the Mediterranean region, now referred to as the Global South. While the Southern cities are now integral part of world capitalism, yet, they carry the marks of Southern globalisation and the lineage of the colonial time. Large Southern urban concentrations are islands of industry, services and development – working at the same time as giant branches of Northern corporate capital and determining the grotesque, unbalanced structure of Southern economies. Their role as logistical hubs, which is why they are often port cities, is therefore no accident. The Conference attempted to unfold the myriad facets of Southern urbanisation, from port cities, steel cities, trading towns, railway towns to smart cities, tourism hubs, capital and logistical cities.

The Conference aimed at discourse on cities and the questions that need to be asked and thought of by taking into consideration Gramsci’s ‘The Southern Question’, extended through sub-themes such as Transitioning City and Expanding Urban Worlds; Work, Entrepreneurship, Urban Economy; Conflicts and Protests in Urban Spaces; Urban Planning and Urban Future(s); Urban Health; City, Refugees, Migrants and the Stateless; Urban Violence and Justice; City, Climate Change and Sustainability; Representations of the City in Literature, Films, Plays and Popular Culture; Making and Unmaking of Cities, and more.

PROGRAMME SCHEDULE

12 November 2024

5:30 pm - 7 pm- Pre-Conference Roundtable: Urban Solidarities and City Making

Speakers: **Joyce Liu**, *National Yang Ming Chiao Tung University (NYCU), Taiwan*
Sevasti Trubeta, *University of Applied Sciences Magdeburg-Stendal, Germany*

Moderator: **Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhury**, *President, Calcutta Research Group, and Professor, Rabindra Bharati University, India*

13 November 2024

9:30 am–10:00 am: REGISTRATION

10:00 am–11:30 am: Inaugural Session

Chair: Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhury

10:00 am–10.15 am: Welcome Address

Speaker: Shyamalendu Majumdar, *Director, Calcutta Research Group, India*

10:15 am–10:45 am: Introduction by Conference Participants

10:50 am–11:30 am: Introducing the Conference

Speaker: Ranabir Samaddar, *CIFAR Fellow, and Distinguished Chair in Migration and Forced Migration Studies, Calcutta Research Group, India*

11:30 am–12:00 pm: TEA BREAK

Parallel Sessions 1A & 1B: 12:00 pm–1:30 pm

Session 1A: Room 1: Transition from a Postcolonial City to a Maximum City [Hybrid Session]

Moderator: Byasdeb Dasgupta, *Professor, University of Kalyani, and Member, Calcutta Research Group, India*

Presentations

1. The City and Its Margins: Making and Re-imagining of Slums and Work from Bombay to Third Mumbai

Manish K. Jha, *Professor, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, and Member, Calcutta Research Group, India*; **Mouleshri Vyas**, *Professor, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, and Member, Calcutta Research Group, India*

2. The Calcutta Improvement Trust and the Southern Urban Question, 1910s-1960s

Ritajyoti Bandopadhyay, *Associate Professor, Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER) Mohali, India*; **Iman K. Mitra**, *Assistant Professor, Shiv Nadar University, and Member, Calcutta Research Group, India*; **Kaustubh Mani Sengupta**, *Assistant Professor, Shiv Nadar University, India*

3. Port City to Portray the Image of a Country: A Critical Study of Chittagong Port City, Bangladesh

Muhammad Faridul Alam, *Professor, University of Chittagong, Bangladesh*

Session 1B: Room 2: Work, Entrepreneurship and Urban Divides

Moderator: Mahalaya Chatterjee, *Professor, University of Calcutta, and Member, Calcutta Research Group, India*

Presentations

1. Functional or Cultural: Urban Belonging in Contemporary Platform Economies

Tanushree Kaushal, *Doctoral Fellow, Geneva Graduate Institute, Switzerland*

2. Navigating Urban Inequality: Water Supply in State Interaction in Rangpuri Pahadi, Delhi

Yogita Agarwal, *Doctoral Fellow, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India*

1:30 pm–2:30 pm: LUNCH BREAK

Session 2: 2:30 pm–4:00 pm: Documentary Screening: ‘Calcutta, A Migrant City’

Chair: Samata Biswas, *Assistant Professor, Sanskrit College and University, and Member, CRG, India*

Moderator: Iman Mitra, *Assistant Professor, Shiv Nadar University, and Member, Calcutta Research Group, India*

4:00 pm–4:30 pm: TEA BREAK

Parallel Sessions: 3A & 3B: 4:30 pm–6:00 pm

Session 3A: Room 1: Expanding Urbanising Worlds [Hybrid Session]

Moderator: Paolo Novak, *Senior Lecturer, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, UK*

Presentations

1. Organised Chaos or Induced Disorder? Reading Beirut Through Its Contradictions

Christine Mady, *Lecturer, Aalto University, Finland*

2. With Gramsci in the Southern Park: Moments of Hegemonic Green Planning in Athens

George Kandyli, *Senior Research Fellow, National Centre for Social Research, Athens, Greece*; **Penny (Panagiota) Koutrolidou**, *Associate Professor, National Technical University of Athens, Greece*; **Fereniki Vatavali**, *Architect-Urban Planner Applied Researcher, National Centre for Social Sciences, Athens, Greece*

3. Same but Different? Logistics Workers and Employment Conditions in the Mediterranean Port Cities of Naples and Marseille

Andrea Bottalico, *Researcher, University of Naples Federico II, Italy*; **Enrica Morlicchio**, *Professor, University of Naples Federico II, Italy*

Session 3B: Room 2: Conflicts and Protests in Urban Spaces

Moderator: Arup Sen, *Member, Calcutta Research Group, India*

Presentations

1. Merapani Town: A Bordering Space Growing in the Disputed Space of Assam and Nagaland

Chiranjib Boruah, *Doctoral Fellow, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Guwahati, India*

2. Who Buys? Who Sells? Understanding the Changing Contours of Property in Kolkata

Sreya Sen, *Assistant Professor, Vellore Institute of Technology, Vellore, India*

3. “Michhil” Migrants in the Making of the Urban: Ethnography of a Migrant-Led Protest March in Angamaly, Kerala

Johns Thomas, *Doctoral Fellow, South Asian University, New Delhi, India*

14 November 2024

9:00 am-9:30 am: REGISTRATION

Parallel Sessions 4A & 4B: 9:30 am-11:00 am

Session 4A: Room 1: Representations of the South Asian City I

Moderator: Abhijit Roy, *Professor, Jadavpur University, India*

Presentations

1. Exploring Urban Margins: (Re)Presentations of Resilience in Mathangi Subramanian’s A People’s History of Heaven

Amrita Talukdar, *Research Scholar, Indian Institute of Technology, Patna, India*;
Priyanka Tripathi, *Associate Professor, Indian Institute of Technology, Patna, India*

2. Calcutta in Films: Representing the South Asian City

Sukanya Mitra, Assistant Professor, Loreto College, Kolkata, India

3. Refugees and the History of an Urban Fringe: Namasudra Refugees in North 24 Parganas

Aditi Mukherjee, Assistant Professor, GITAM University, Visakhapatnam, India

Session 4B: Room 2: Representations of the South Asian City II

Moderator: Moderator: Nasreen Chowdhory, Professor, University of Delhi, and Member, Calcutta Research Group, India

Presentations

1. Calcutta and Birth of Theatre

Shyamalendu Majumdar

2. City as a Character in Contemporary Indian Fiction

Debashree Chakraborty, Researcher, Calcutta Research Group, India

3. Calcutta Biologigraphies

Rituparna Datta, Researcher, Calcutta Research Group, India

11:00 am-11:30 am: TEA BREAK

Parallel Sessions 5A & 5B: 11:30 am–1:00 pm

Session 5: Room 1: Belonging to the City [Hybrid Session]

Moderator: Subhas Ranjan Chakraborty, Member, Calcutta Research Group, India

Presentations

1. Creation or Gentrification? Downtown Marseille as a Site of Conflicting Public Reasons of Space

Sami Everett, Research Fellow à la Faculty of Asian and Middle East Studies à Cambridge, Aix-Marseille Université, France; Pierre Sintès, Architect and Professor, Aix-Marseille Université, France

2. Governing Religious Diversity from Above and Below: Marseilles 16th Century to the Present

Arundhati Virmani, Faculty, School of Advanced Studies in Social Sciences, EHESS, Marseilles, France; Jean Boutier, Directeur d'études (Prof.) Emeritus, EHESS, Marseilles, France

3. Barbonita to Sex Workers: The “Dirty” History of Commercial Sex Life in Kolkata

Paula Banerjee, IDRC Chair, Asian Institute of Technology, Thailand, and Member, Calcutta Research Group, India; Rajat Kanti Sur, Researcher, Calcutta Research Group, India; Sangbida Lahiri, Assistant Professor, JK Lakshmipat University, Jaipur, and Calcutta Research Group, India

1:00 pm-2:00 pm: LUNCH BREAK

Parallel Sessions 6A & 6B: 2:00 pm-3:30 pm

Session 6A: Room 1: Becoming a Southern City in a Globalised World [Hybrid Session]

Moderator: Joyce C.H. Liu, *Professor/Director, International Center for Cultural Studies, National Yang Ming Chiao Tung University, Taiwan*

Presentations

1. Continuities between the Financial and Refugee Crisis: Management and Resistance, Notes from Athens

Olga Lafazani, *Marie Curie Post-Doctoral Fellow, Department of European Ethnology, Humboldt University, Berlin, Germany*; **Thanasis Tyrovolas**, *Doctoral Fellow, Department of Sociology, National and Kapodistrian, University of Athens, Greece*

2. The Southern City and the Capitalist Fantasy and Realities of a People-Centred Economy

Arnab Bhattacharya, *Doctoral Fellow, Gran Sasso Science Institute, L'Aquila, Italy*; **Ugo Rossi**, *Professor of Economic and Political Geography, Gran Sasso Science Institute, L'Aquila, Italy*

3. What is the “South” in Southern City?

Niccolò Cuppini, *University of Applied Sciences and Arts of Southern Switzerland*; **Sandro Mezzadra**, *Professor, University of Bologna, Italy*

Session 6B: Room 2: City, Climate and Infrastructure

Moderator: Arundhati Virmani, *Faculty, School of Advanced Studies in Social Sciences (EHESS), Marseilles, France*

Presentations

1. Melting Cities: Reading Heat Waves as Embodied and Gendered Phenomenon in Urban Living

Deepshikha Dasgupta, *Academic Associate, Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Calcutta, India*

2. Stories of a Traffic Circle: Can System’s Thinking and Assemblage Be in Conversation for a Southern Mobility Justice

Alokeparna Sengupta, *Associate Professor, O.P. Jindal Global University, Sonapat, India*

3:30 pm–4:00 pm: TEA BREAK

Session 7: 4:00 pm–5:00 pm: Making and Unmaking of Cities

Moderator: Ranabir Samaddar

Presentations

1. Buildings Communicate

Paolo Novak

2. Ghost Towns of Bengal

Shatabdi Das, Researcher, Calcutta Research Group, India

Closing Session: 5:00 pm–7:00 pm

Chair: Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhury

5:00 pm–6:00 pm: Book Release and Discussion by Achin Chakraborty, Professor, Institute of Development Studies Kolkata (IDSK), and Member, Calcutta Research Group, India

The Long 2020: Reflections of Epidemiological Times

Edited by Subhas Ranjan Chakraborty, Paula Banerjee, and Kaustubh Mani Sengupta (Springer, 2024)

6:00 pm–7:00 pm: Remarks and Distribution of Certificates by H.E. Katharina Wieser, Ambassador of the Republic of Austria to India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka, Austrian Embassy, New Delhi, India

7:00 pm–7:10 pm: Remarks by Participants

7:10 pm–7:15 pm: Vote of Thanks: Debashree Chakraborty

******This schedule is tentative and subject to last minute changes. The schedule timings are mentioned according to Indian Standard Time (IST).**

PRE-CONFERENCE ROUNDTABLE

The roundtable discussion on 12 November 2024, titled "**Urban Solidarities and City-Making**," served as a prelude to the conference "City as the Southern Question." Moderated by **Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhury** from Rabindra Bharati University, India the session began with an introduction to the dynamics of urban solidarities and the concept of "city-making" through the lens of the "city as a southern question." The roundtable featured two lectures by **Joyce C.H. Liu** from National Yang Ming Chiao Tung University, Taiwan and **Sevasti Trubeta** from University of Applied Sciences, Magdeburg-Stendal, Germany, each examining a specific case study within the context of migration. The case studies were Kaohsiung in Taiwan and the island of Lesbos in Greece.

Joyce C. H. Liu's lecture addressed several areas, including the question of 'the south', the paradoxical trajectory of Kaohsiung as a port city, the geopolitics of the 'south', the disappearing voices of the lower class, and the city's efforts to amplify marginalised voices through community collaborations. Liu argued how North and South are ideologically, geographically, and politically constructed. Dominance is not only economic but also cultural and sociological. Through her analysis, Liu positioned Kaohsiung as a microcosm of broader global dynamics, especially in its capitalist redefinition of "southern" boundaries. She first addressed the ideological portrayal of the South as stagnant and uncivilised, perpetuated today through internal colonial structures. Liu then provided a historical overview of Kaohsiung's strategic importance in Japan's imperialist history. During this period, Japan envisioned an "idealised south," a region imagined as a land of promise that aligned with colonial ambitions. Kaohsiung was a key industrial and military hub due to its shipbuilding industries, oil refineries, and cement industries, serving as a military base during the Pacific War. Kaohsiung's inclusion in the first island chain facilitated its economic contribution to war efforts, infrastructural development, and export processing zones. Liu highlighted how spatial segregation in Kaohsiung reflects the city's class divisions and racial hierarchies. Kaohsiung was historically a city of aboriginal people. Over time, specific segregation of elite, middle-class, and labour districts emerged, alongside dispossession. The present-day 'coolie system' is linked to successive waves of migration. Finally, Liu discussed efforts to amplify marginalised voices in Kaohsiung, citing examples of artistic collaboration between artists, students, and migrant communities. One project discussed was a collection of songs by Indonesian fishermen, exploring themes of love, loss, and marginalisation. Concluding her talk, she reflected critically on how racial and spatial segregation in Kaohsiung has become normalised, creating citizen and non-citizen categories that reinforce and perpetuate exclusion.

Trubeta's presentation centred on the island of Lesbos, Greece, examining solidarity and invisibility in response to refugee movements, particularly following the so-called refugee crisis of 2015. She drew on Gramsci's theory of the southern question and postcolonialism to frame Lesbos as a marginalised site within global border regimes. Trubeta began by describing the ideological relationship between the North and the South, wherein the South is frequently seen as inferior and crisis-prone. In her research, Trubeta focused on the growing

mobilisation of solidarity movements on the island. For example, local resistance to border regimes manifested in "mourning marches" and organised protests eventually led to the closure of the PAGANI detention centre. Furthermore, in response to a hunger strike by minors, Villa Azadi was established as a refuge for unaccompanied minors. Finally, Trubeta discussed PIKPA, a self-administered accommodation for refugees that briefly operated before being shut down. She examined the southern question in relation to borders, insularity, and marginalisation. Trubeta employed auto-ethnography as her methodology, reflecting on her own role as both an insider and outsider during her time on Lesbos from 2009 to 2015. She recounted her evolving role in the complexities and shifting identities of activists, locals, and researchers engaged in solidarity efforts. Her multiple roles as researcher, teacher, monitor, and witness to the occurrences in local society proved enriching. After the summer 2015, Lesbos became a central site of the refugee crisis, attracting activists and volunteers from diverse backgrounds who were involved in rescue and crisis work. She also reflected on the research process and how her role as a researcher evolved. She concluded by discussing how invisibility is both a strategy and a condition employed by migrants and activists.

In the Q&A session that followed, reflected on activism in Lesbos and the situation on the island deemed a 'crisis' and whether there was a quantitative threshold, such as a specific number of refugees. Trubeta explained that the number of refugees increased dramatically during 2015, but the refugee question is not solely about numbers; rather, a crisis highlights a situation of exception that requires management. Trubeta added how activists strategically engage through NGO collaborations with faith-based groups, helping activists avoid arrest. Liu elaborated on how migration influences Kaohsiung's urban geographies and whether Taiwan considers itself part of the Global South. In conclusion, both emphasised the importance of amplifying the voices of marginalised individuals, including migrants, fostering a broader understanding of the "city as a southern question" as it unfolds in diverse urban and island contexts.



Pre-Conference Roundtable

CONFERENCE SESSIONS

DAY 1: 13 NOVEMBER 2024

Inaugural Session

The session opened with **Sabyasachi Basu Ray Choudhury** initiating a self-introduction of the conference participants. **Shyamalendu Majumdar**, Director of the Calcutta Research Group, then delivered a warm welcome address. This was followed by **Ranabir Samaddar's** much-anticipated introduction of the conference theme, "**City as Southern Question.**" In the inaugural lecture, **Ranabir Samaddar**, Distinguished Chair in Migration and Forced Migration Studies in CRG and CIFAR Fellow, explored the historical and theoretical nuances of Antonio Gramsci's concept of the "Southern Question." He underscored how Gramsci's analysis of the socio-political and economic disparities between Northern and Southern Italy in the early 20th century remains highly relevant for understanding contemporary social transitions, particularly in the Global South.

He started by providing historical context and emphasising that Gramsci's exploration of the Southern Question was not merely a localised Italian concern but a template to analyse broader social inequality, colonial relations, and national identity questions. The Southern Question, which arose after the annexation of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, addressed the deep-seated economic and cultural disparities between Italy's industrialised North and the agrarian, underdeveloped South. In his analysis, Gramsci noted the severe marginalisation of Southern peasants, who lived in conditions of powerlessness and alienation. Their desperation often manifested in forms of resistance that were criminalised by the state, such as banditry and sabotage. The Southern peasantry, according to Gramsci, existed outside the domain of the law, lacking both legal recognition and moral individuality. Samaddar noted that these conditions created a rift between the urban centres in the North and the rural South, perpetuating a cycle of mistrust and exclusion.



Inaugural Lecture by Ranabir Samaddar

Samaddar argued that many scholars have mistakenly isolated Gramsci's prison writings on hegemony and common sense from his earlier works on the Southern Question. In reality, Gramsci's exploration of Southern Italy was foundational to his later theories. The Southern Question served as a crucible for developing Gramsci's ideas on hegemony, where he argued that the revolution must involve an alliance between Northern industrial workers and Southern peasants to achieve genuine social transformation. Gramsci saw the Southern agrarian bloc as comprising a disaggregated collection of social classes, including large landowners, rural intellectuals, and impoverished peasants. This fragmentation prevented a unified class consciousness, which, in Gramsci's view, was necessary for revolution. Samaddar emphasised Gramsci's belief that intellectuals—both Northern and Southern—had a crucial role in bridging the gap between these disparate groups to form a coherent revolutionary movement.

Samaddar extended Gramsci's analysis by examining the role of Southern cities like Naples as contested spaces where capitalism and democracy were in constant tension. He noted Gramsci's observation that Southern cities, unlike their Northern counterparts, were not driven by industrial capitalism but rather functioned as hubs of agrarian wealth and informal economies. The Southern cities, with their blend of modern urban elements and feudal remnants, became symbolic of the unresolved contradictions between capitalist development and social backwardness. Gramsci critiqued the idea that Southern cities could be simply transformed through liberal economic reforms. Instead, he argued for a deeper understanding of the socio-political structures that upheld the existing power dynamics. The cities of the South, in Gramsci's view, embodied the duality of being part of a unified nation-state while simultaneously being marginalised within it. This duality extended to issues like land ownership, migration, and intellectual labour, all of which were mediated through complex social relations. Samaddar highlighted the continued relevance of Gramsci's analysis in today's global context, particularly in understanding the dynamics of Southern cities outside Europe. He noted that many of today's mega-cities in the Global South—such as Lagos, Kolkata, and Manila—reflect similar contradictions between urban growth and socio-economic exclusion. These cities are marked by a precarious balance between rapid modernization and the persistence of informal economies, mirroring the historical conditions Gramsci described in Southern Italy.

The lecture also drew parallels between Gramsci's concerns about intellectuals' roles in the revolutionary process and the challenges faced by contemporary intellectuals in addressing issues of inequality in the Global South. Samaddar argued that the proliferation of educational and ideological state apparatuses, as described by theorists like Louis Althusser, has altered the nature of intellectual labour. This shift raises questions about whether contemporary intellectuals can still mediate between the marginalised and the ruling classes. To conclude Samaddar reflected on Gramsci's Southern Question's implications for present-day urban governance and social movements. He noted that while socioeconomic conditions have transformed significantly since Gramsci's time, the fundamental issues regarding inequality, marginalisation, and social cohesion remain. The Southern Question is not just a historical inquiry but a living framework for understanding how capitalism continues to shape and reshape social relations across geographies.

Session 1A -Transition from a Postcolonial City to a Maximum City

Byasdeb Dasgupta from University of Kalyani, India, opened the session by highlighting the complex evolution of postcolonial cities into "maximum cities," emphasising the interconnected themes of urban development, socio-political struggles, and economic shifts.

Manish K. Jha and **Mouleshri Vyas** from Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, began their presentation titled **“The City and Its Margins: Making and Re-imagining of Slums and Work from Bombay to Third Mumbai”** with an overview of the southern question as it applies to Mumbai, proposing that this concept is defined by scale, density, and the persistent housing crises rather than a straightforward North-South divide. Mumbai, with an anticipated population of 25 million in 2024, epitomises the contradictions of a maximum city where prosperity and poverty coexist within strikingly high population densities. Slum areas, housing 60% of the population, face densities up to seven times that of the broader city. Jha explored the city’s resilience in the face of significant turmoil, including gang wars, terrorist attacks, and communal violence between 1929 and 1936. However, he emphasised that this resilience narrative often overshadows deeper, systemic inequalities.

They framed the southern question through the lens of relations by centering the discussion on housing, redevelopment and the resettlement of populations and exploring how Southern capitalism aligns with Southern landlordism. Tracing Mumbai’s urban history, Jha recounted the emergence of chawls during the industrial boom driven by textile mills. He discussed the formation of the Mumbai Improvement Trust in 1898, created to address issues of housing, urban squalor and described how its activities laid the foundation for modern cycles of dispossession under neoliberal policies. Jha used the Dharavi Redevelopment Project as a case study to illustrate how contemporary redevelopment projects symbolise a state-market alliance that prioritises capital accumulation over community welfare. Despite these challenges, he argued, the city continues to be a critical economic and social hub, offering livelihoods to diverse populations.

Mouleshri Vyas expanded on these themes by focusing on the real-life impacts of redevelopment on local communities. She argued that redevelopment projects often overlook the complex social fabrics of informal settlements, which have developed incrementally over decades through significant community investment. She emphasised that while the Dharavi Redevelopment Project, one of Asia’s largest slum redevelopment plans, aims to provide in-situ housing for residents, more than half of the area is designated for commercial use. This dual focus on community and commerce raises questions about long-term sustainability and inclusivity. She highlighted the economic and industrial significance of Dharavi, describing it not just as a residential area but as an industrial centre supporting waste recycling and other small-scale manufacturing activities. These industries have historically provided employment and contributed to the city’s economy. However, urban planners and policymakers often fail to acknowledge this dual role, viewing residents merely as occupiers rather than as contributors to a complex urban ecosystem. She traced the history of the Koli fishing community and other artisan groups, such as the potters from Gujarat and Tamil Muslim leather workers, who migrated to Mumbai and developed economically significant hubs like

Kumbharwada. Vyas also discussed the shift in the 1990s from state-led redevelopment initiatives to privatized projects, noting that this change brought new challenges related to land acquisition, legal battles, and ecological concerns.

The speakers highlighted the massive scale of the Dharavi redevelopment project, which is a key reason it draws significant interest from investors and politicians. Further they argued that over the past 20 years, several infrastructure projects have been developed in the city. For instance, the Mumbai Urban Transport Project established a framework for the large-scale relocation and resettlement of thousands of families from one area to another. This initiative plays a crucial role in the broader conversation about urban transformation, slum clearance, redevelopment, and formal housing. The main incentive for residents willing to relocate is the promise of secure housing in exchange for their current homes, along with certain amenities.

Ritajyoti Bandopadhyay from Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER), Mohali, and **Iman K. Mitra**, and **Kaustubh Mani Sengupta** from Shiv Nadar University, Noida, presented a paper on “**The Calcutta Improvement Trust and the Southern Urban Question, 1910s-1960s**”, focussing on the role of Calcutta Improvement Trust (CIT) in shaping urban space in Calcutta from the 1910s to the 1960s. Drawing on Gramscian insights about historical shifts, the speakers argued that the CIT, established under the 1911 Calcutta Improvement Act, aimed to modernise the city through focus on public health and commercial expansion that often displaced existing communities and exacerbated socio-economic and ethnic divides. The influx of refugees during and after World War II, especially following Partition, significantly altered the city's landscape.

The speakers described how collective encroachment (*Jabardhokal*) emerged as a form of resistance, where refugees occupied unused or privately owned land, transforming it into habitable space. This process contributed to the decommodification of property, enabling urban growth that did not conform to typical capitalist models.

The speakers highlighted that while the CIT's plans focused on wealth generation through the commodification of urban land, the refugees' actions—marked by community-led encroachment—resulted in a unique form of urbanisation that defied capitalist accumulation. By the 1950s, government negotiations sought to balance public and private interests, but these efforts often failed due to inflated land prices and political complications.

The presentation concluded by contrasting colonial and post-colonial approaches to urban planning, noting that while the CIT represented a mode of governance rooted in colonial values, post-independence urbanisation reflected a shift towards community-driven space-making. The speakers concluded by reflecting on how the refugee crisis and encroachment redefined property relations in Calcutta, paving the way for community-led urbanisation that defied typical capitalist logics.

Muhammad Faridul Alam from Univeristy of Chittagong presented on “**Port City to Portray the Image of a Country: A Critical Study of Chittagong Port City, Bangladesh**” focussing on Chittagong’s significance as a strategic economic hub. Chittagong, located in southeastern Bangladesh along the Bay of Bengal, handles 92% of the country’s international trade and plays a crucial role in the national economy. Alam detailed the historical development of the port, noting that while post-independence nation-building was slow due to political instability and military coups in the 1980s, the country eventually adopted outward-looking economic policies to spur growth.

The presentation emphasised the importance of ports for economic development, comparing Chittagong’s capabilities to those of successful regional hubs like Singapore. While Chittagong has significant advantages, such as river connectivity and its role in energy supply, it faces numerous challenges, including high population growth, limited infrastructure, and inefficient management. Policy recommendations included enhancing managerial capacity, reducing procedural delays, and implementing performance indicators to increase revenue and operational efficiency. Alam concluded by arguing for a strategic plan that considers geopolitical factors to maximise the port's role in regional trade and economic growth.

Samaddar raised the question about the influence of the Mackenzie report in Dharavi’s redevelopment. He also raised questions about the role of political parties in the complex ecosystem of Dharavi. From my perspective, some local political parties seem to function more effectively in Dharavi than the national parties do in larger cities like Mumbai or Kolkata. It appears that these local parties can address specific community needs better than the national parties, which often do more harm than good in these inherently conflict-prone areas.

In response, Jha and Vyas discussed how the McKenzie report, though being over two decades old, has significantly influenced policy making, life in Mumbai throughout the 21st century. It's interesting to consider how we perceive Godrej as a company. Growing up, many of us associated Godrej with cupboards and almirahs in our homes, as well as tables and chairs. In Mumbai, Godrej is also recognised as a major builder. This shift occurred because the company owned thousands of acres of land, which became valuable for real estate development when it was no longer necessary for manufacturing. Now, both RK Studio and RK Houses are owned by Godrej. This trend of large corporations entering the building sector is noteworthy. For instance, Adani was not widely recognised as a builder until recently, yet it has now been awarded the largest redevelopment project in the world.

The session concluded with a synthesis by Byasdeb Dasgupta, who appreciated the thought-provoking questions and responses. He highlighted the importance of examining urban transformation through the lens of grassroots resistance, community agency, and environmental sustainability, and urged for continued dialogue on these pressing issues.

Session 1B - Work and Entrepreneurship in Urban Economy

The session was opened by **Mahalaya Chatterjee** from University of Calcutta, and a Member, Calcutta Research Group, India. The opening statements were followed by participants' presentations.

Tanushree Kaushal, Doctoral Fellow at the Geneva Graduate Institute, Switzerland, delivered a talk titled “**Functional or Cultural: Urban Belonging in Contemporary Platform Economies**”, where she presented her exploratory research on platform regulation and their transformative impact on urban landscapes. Drawing on her ethnographic fieldwork in New Delhi and Kolkata, she began by examining Delhi’s iconic auto rickshaws—a vital component of the city’s transit network. With over 120,000 registered vehicles, auto rickshaws offer quick and accessible transportation to areas often inaccessible to other vehicles, making them a hallmark of Delhi’s urban mobility. Despite their utility, auto rickshaws evoke mixed reactions from users and residents. They are frequently criticised as unregulated and inefficient, particularly when compared to app-based taxi services like Uber, which have driven a significant shift toward (digital) *platformisation*.

Kaushal further delved into the dynamics of informalisation and formalisation of services, highlighting how urban spaces increasingly operate as both material and immaterial arenas where notions of citizenship and belonging are negotiated. For instance, she discussed how Uber introduced new legal categories and redefined labour, tethering it to the imperatives of platform capitalism. This transformation underscores the interplay between regulatory frameworks, urban mobility, and the evolving hierarchies of belonging in platform-driven economies.

The second panellist, **Yogita Agarwal** from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, presented her paper titled “**Scarcity and Survival: Hydraulic Infrastructure and Water Access in Rangpuri Pahadi, Delhi**”. Her research examines the hydraulic infrastructure in informal settlements to understand the city’s treatment of long-term migrant residents and the politics surrounding water access. She investigates how migrants navigate and negotiate with urban authorities to secure a regular water supply.

Agarwal’s study focuses on Ruchi Vihar, where migrant slum dwellers face acute challenges accessing water, particularly during Delhi’s intense summers when they rely on Delhi Jal Board tankers. She began with a historical review of Delhi’s hydraulic infrastructure, analysing the current water system and the roles of government bodies and planning documents like the Master Plans. Her fieldwork highlights how women disproportionately shoulder the burden of water collection, often acting as “infrastructure” themselves by physically transporting water—a situation shaped by patriarchal norms and urban planning processes. This labour affects their health, behaviour, and daily lives, compounded by limited employment opportunities. Agarwal also explored the political dimensions of water governance and proposed further research into women’s participation in local politics to address everyday issues and improve urban water management.

During the session, Tanushree was questioned on whether she had examined past legal judgements or parliamentary discussions on order and governance, and whether any comparisons were drawn with legislative practices in regions such as Africa or Latin America. Additionally, she was asked to expand on platform capitalism in India, particularly in relation to recent labour strikes in the US and Europe, and whether similar labour organising exists in India. Yogita faced questions about her methodology, field observations, and how migrant families without proper documentation navigate their challenges, including the role of informal networks. The session concluded with the moderator emphasising the inescapable role of informality in addressing the Southern question in India and its deep ties to social reproduction, as highlighted by both papers.



Presentations in Session 1B

Session 2 - Documentary Screening: ‘Calcutta, A Migrant City’

Moderator **Iman Kumar Mitra**, from Shiv Nadar University, Noida, introduced the films in the series, *Calcutta: A Migrant City*. The three-part series examined the complex and multifaceted phenomenon of migration in Calcutta, exploring the social, economic, and cultural transformations the city experienced over the decades because of its role as a key destination for migrants from various regions within India and neighbouring countries. Through a combination of personal testimonies, expert interviews, and archival footage, the series offered a detailed exploration of how migration has shaped the city’s identity, infrastructure, and social fabric. The first film narrated how Calcutta’s capitalist class was composed of Armenians, Jews, and Parsis. Once the railways were constructed in the late 19th century, migrant workers started arriving in the city. It captured the struggles and aspirations of migrant communities who have come to the city in search of better opportunities, shelter, and livelihood from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal itself, as

well as neighbouring countries like Bangladesh. It emphasised the role of migration in shaping the city's unique social and cultural fabric, which is a blend of diverse communities, languages, and traditions.

The third part of the film, called the 'City of Transit', showed the critical role that Calcutta Port has played in shaping the city's development as a migration hub. The port, which was a central part of British India's colonial economy, acted as a crucial gateway for migrants arriving in the city from across India and beyond. The film highlighted how the port facilitated both trade and human migration, bringing labourers, traders, and refugees to the city. In many cases, migrants were sent to Calcutta as part of larger networks of labour migration, with many working at the port or in related industries such as warehousing and transportation. The documentary also touches on the history of refugee migration to Calcutta, particularly after the Partition of India in 1947. The city became a refuge for thousands of displaced people, many of whom had fled from East Pakistan (Bangladesh).

Iman Mitra started the discussion on the idea of Calcutta as a cosmopolitan city. The two films showed how the city is a place of transit, an example of a migrant city and a destination for people from diverse backgrounds. According to Mitra, Calcutta could be framed as a cosmopolitan city in the 1920s, characterised by its openness to various cultures and communities. However, after the partition of India, this cosmopolitanism is often said to have disappeared, or at least the narrative suggests that it did. Despite this shift, the core of the city was never purely Bengali; it has always been shaped by the influx of different communities. After Partition, there was a reverse migration of Muslims returning to the countryside, partly due to Hindus claiming properties in Calcutta belonging to Muslim citizens. This highlights both internal and external migration dynamics. A recent study in Greece explored the history of migration, raising fascinating questions about how migration challenges nationalist ideas. Nationalist perspectives often argue that people should be born, live, and die in the same place, in their homeland. However, migration tells a counter-narrative: cities are constantly shaped by the arrival of people from different places over centuries. This challenges the notion of a fixed "homeland" and reinforces the idea that cities are built through the movement of people. This counter-perspective shows the importance of untangling the multiple histories of migration.

The terminology used around migration is often divided: "cosmopolitan" is typically used for upper social classes, while "migration" is often associated with poorer populations, but, what about the term "post-migration"? This term is often overlooked. There is a need to normalise the idea of migration as a permanent and evolving feature of urban life. Given that migration is a constant and defining characteristic of many cities, how necessary is it to continue labelling populations as "migrants"? Is migration simply becoming the norm, and if so, how do we rethink the terminology? According to Mitra, there is still a need to use the term migration as it enables us to explain the multiple histories of a city, which is what the two films attempt to show. According to him, almost all migration is forced migration, where migrants are driven by economic and political motivations.

Session 3A - Expanding Urbanising Worlds

The session was moderated by **Paolo Novak**, Senior Lecturer at SOAS, UK.

The first speaker, **Christine Mady** from Aalto University, Finland, presented a paper titled “**Organised Chaos or Induced Disorder? Reading Beirut through its Contradiction.**” The presentation explored the spatial disorder and chaos in Lebanon’s capital city, Beirut, through the pre-war, war, and post-war periods. It aimed to discern between the structural causes and failures of urban planning and the coping mechanisms that have emerged amidst a prolonged state of instability in Beirut.

At the first level, the framework drew on Gramsci’s *Southern Question* to explain the multi-scalar contradictions in Beirut’s context, stemming from structural histories as well as local everyday life. In 1888, Beirut expanded through its port, the third-largest in the Mediterranean. The city’s nuclei formed around civic and religious infrastructure, and a population influx followed with new planning projects, including a pine forest, corniche, schools, and universities established by missionaries. The presenter proposed a three-level framework for analysing Beirut’s urban metamorphosis:

1. **The Southern Question** (Gramsci, 2005),
2. **Tactics and the Everyday** (de Certeau, 1984; Lefebvre, 1991), and
3. **State of Exception** (Agamben, 2005).

The presentation examined historical planning in Lebanon (1943–1975), beginning with French colonisation, which focused on the city while neglecting the hinterland. This led to spatial disparities at the metropolitan and neighbourhood scales. The civil war (1975–1989) brought demographic changes, such as the emergence of demarcation lines and population segregation, as well as the rise of polycentres within the metropolitan area and an increase in informal settlements. This resulted in a ‘polycentric city’ that lacked cohesion and was characterised by a ‘patchwork’ of urban shrinkage and growth. The alarming contrast between contemporary, luxurious real-estate developments with high-rise buildings and neglected heritage structures was also highlighted.

Mady emphasised abnormalities that have become normalised and widely accepted, such as the alternative provision of typically public goods, including water, electricity, security, and transport. Her third framework focused on the protracted *State of Exception* (1999–2014), manifested through a weak state and planning institutions that normalised the suspension of laws and emergency governance. In the post-war context, neglect of public goods and services persisted, while securitisation adapted to ongoing instability. Nonetheless, demonstrations and efforts to reclaim public spaces—such as those in 2005 and the solid waste protests in 2019—indicated the emergence of bottom-up pressure.

The presenter further elaborated on shock events from 2019–2024, which led to further displacement. The three-level framework, applied across the three time periods, explained the intersectionality of structural, natural, and human factors contributing to disorder and chaos at different spatial and temporal scales.

The presentation concluded by reflecting on the potential for generational shifts to foster a sense of civic belonging in Lebanon's limited land, with promises of equitable distribution, inclusive decision-making, and improved planning processes.

The second paper, titled **“Gramsci in the Southern Park: Moments of Hegemonic Green Planning in Athens”** was presented by **Fereniki Vatavali** and **George Kandylis** from the National Centre for Social Sciences in Athens, Greece, and **Penny Koutrolikou** from National Technical University of Athens. This presentation focused on the design of parks in the city of Athens as a component of shifting hegemonic projects concerning the Greek nation-state and the development of a shared understanding of the future of the Greek capital. It aimed to reflect on the following questions: How do institutional arrangements envision and plan urban parks? How are these visions or imaginaries situated within the social and political aspirations of a “modern,” “European,” or perhaps “quasi-European” Southern/Southeastern metropolis?

The park in question was Pedion Areos in Athens. Two critical moments in the city's history were highlighted as particularly significant for its urban development. The first was the 1920–1930 interwar period, during which Greece's borders were settled through the Treaty of Lausanne, leading to a broader European project of modernisation. The second was the 2000–2010 period, when Athens experienced economic growth and significant immigration, particularly around the 2004 Olympics, followed by a sudden economic crisis and stagnation. Both periods were crucial to the trajectory of the city and, consequently, to the history of the urban park Pedion Areos, which began operating in the first period and was rehabilitated and rebranded in the second.

Drawing from the Gramscian notion of “civil society,” in which intellectuals play a key role by actively engaging in practical life as constructors, organisers, and permanent persuaders through various institutions, the presenters explored how public discourses shaped by intellectuals—politicians, journalists, planning experts, and institutional actors—have influenced urban greening initiatives. The research examined the social functions of urban parks in Athens, the aesthetic values and imaginaries embedded in their design, the forms of social organisation they foster, and how these interact with political visions at local and national levels. It also considered how the public is perceived, who is included or excluded, and under what conditions.

The analysis revealed that, during the first period of urban greening, the aim was to promote a bourgeois ideal for urban gardens. Ironically, nearly a century later, the focus of urban greening remained on revitalising the deteriorating urban core, but this time under a civilising mission. This mission involved closing Pedion Areos, which had become a space associated with homelessness, marginality, migration, and drug addiction. The park was closed for years as part of a plan to reinvest in the space and reintroduce it with commercialised recreational activities.

The presenters concluded by reflecting on how plans for parks are deeply intertwined with and reflective of broader hegemonic visions regarding urban space, the role of the city within

the national territory, and even the content of national identity. They argued that in both periods, urban greening efforts were not only about revitalising the city but also about creating grey zones of spatial inclusion and exclusion. A degree of coercion was evident, complementing consent—not only through policing but also through administrative measures that imposed both physical and virtual boundaries. Ultimately, the plans for Pedion Areos exemplify hegemonic visions that tie the city to the concept of national identity and its role within the territorial framework of Greece.

Final paper of the session “**Same but Different? Logistics Workers and Employment Conditions in the Mediterranean Port Cities of Naples and Marseille**” was presented by **Andrea Bottalico** and **Enrica Morlicchio** from University of Naples Federico II, Italy. This presentation focused on how the logistics revolution has shaped and transformed the port cities of Naples and Marseille. The flow from sale to ordering, production, shipping, and circulation has become increasingly seamless. The concept of ‘port regionalisation’ highlights the decentralisation of port functions within a regional network, where efficiency stems from high levels of integration with inland transport and distribution systems. In recent decades, the logistics revolution has driven the transformation of ports from single, fixed spatial entities into networks of terminals operating at multiple scales. This shift has also led to a growing disconnection between cities and their ports. Over time, activities such as loading and unloading goods have been relocated away from city centres and areas frequented by tourists. In Marseille, for instance, the industrial port is now located 60 km away from the city. Through a comparative analysis of Naples and Marseille-Fos, the presentation examined spatial reconfigurations and the labour conditions of logistics workers. It reflected on the impact of global production networks and the constraints imposed by institutional frameworks. Gramsci’s socio-historical perspective was particularly relevant here, linking labour processes and workforce composition to broader systemic issues, thereby re-igniting the ‘Southern Question.’ The overall conclusion was that global logistics operates within a highly hierarchical system, where there is a complex interplay between global logistical demands and local labour conditions. Time and speed have come to outweigh considerations of proximity and physical space, profoundly reshaping both port cities and their socio-economic dynamics.

There was discussion on the role of desire in imagining urban spaces, planning, and greenery, alongside a parallel question about the role of time in city life. In Beirut, for instance, desire may reflect aspirations to align with Western or Arab nations. The question of time highlighted issues with linear development processes that avoid reflecting on the past. The presenters responded that the logistics revolution has altered perceptions of time, shifting the valuation of goods from weight to speed. This drive for faster production has exposed infrastructural issues, often relying on informal systems where infrastructure is underdeveloped. In the case of the park, the goal has been to sever ties with the Ottoman and Classical pasts. Time, they noted, is central to urban planning and often used to align with Western ideals. A participant observed that a unifying theme across the presentations was porosity—the fluid boundaries between park and non-park spaces, logistical and non-logistical zones, and across the Mediterranean, representing a shift from time to space.

Session 3B - Conflicts and Protest in Urban Spaces

The session on **Conflicts and Protest in Urban Spaces**, moderated by **Arup Sen**, presented three insightful papers that explored the socio-political dynamics of urban development, conflict, and protest across different regions of India. The session featured presentations that shed light on how urban spaces are shaped by conflict and resistance, and how marginalised groups engage with urban structures to assert their rights and identities.

Chiranjib Boruah from Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Guwahati, presented on "**Merapani Town: A Bordering Space Growing in the Disputed Space of Assam and Nagaland**" focussing on the town located at the disputed border between Assam and Nagaland. Boruah explored how the agrarian economy of the town has contributed to its growth as an important trading hub, despite its location in a conflict-prone area. The town's significance stems from its role as a vital crossing point for the trade of essential goods, such as food items and forest resources, between Assam and Nagaland. Using Henri Lefebvre's theory of spatial production, Boruah explained how the town's development has been heavily influenced by the ongoing territorial conflict, which stems from the flawed border demarcation when Nagaland was created in 1963. This conflict led to the displacement of indigenous Assamese-Naga communities, who sought safer locations away from the border. In their place, migrants from Northern India moved into the town, establishing businesses and controlling the local economy. Boruah argued that although the Nagas hold large tracts of agricultural land, the Assamese emerged as the dominant economic force in the town over time. They gained control through their superior capital, trade networks, and commercial knowledge. The paper noted that while Merapani has economic potential, historical conflicts have prevented the creation of a more inclusive and cooperative socio-economic environment.



Presentations in Session 3B

Sreya Sen from Vellore Institute of Technology, Vellore, presented a paper titled "**Who Buys? Who Sells? Understanding the Changing Contours of Property in Kolkata**" that explored the evolving property relations in Kolkata, since the 1990s, when the city underwent rapid transformation driven by large-scale infrastructure projects such as flyovers, highways, and bridges. The Left Front government, which ruled the state until 2011, played a key role in driving these changes, encouraging public-private partnerships and large-scale real estate developments. After the political shift in 2011, when the Trinamool Congress (TMC) came to power, the dynamics of property relations in Kolkata further evolved. Sen's fieldwork, conducted between 2017 and 2018, focused on how these transformations affected the middle class, real estate developers, and local residents.

One of the key observations in her paper was the illegality involved in land conversions, such as the transformation of wetlands along the Eastern Metropolitan Bypass for real estate construction, often in violation of the Ramsar Convention. Sen emphasised that while property is often considered an economic and political commodity, it also has significant social dimensions. The restructuring of Kolkata's urban space reveals how the interplay of state policies, economic capital, and political power can shape social relations in the city. She argued that the changing property dynamics are reflective of broader shifts in urban governance and class power, as the middle class increasingly gains control over urban development through real estate investments and political alliances.

Johns Thomas from South Asian University, New Delhi presented on "**Michhil Migrants in the Making of the Urban: Ethnography of a Migrant-Led Protest March in Angamaly, Kerala**" that examined the experience of migrant workers in Kerala, particularly in Angamaly, a rapidly growing urban area. His paper focused on a migrant-led protest march organised by construction workers from the Murshidabad district in West Bengal. This protest was significant because it marked the first time that migrant workers in Kerala had mobilised in such a way to demand better working conditions. Kerala has become a prominent destination for migrant labourers, who play a critical role in the state's urban development but often face poor conditions, discrimination, and exclusion from the benefits of economic growth. Thomas argued that the protest was not just an economic demand but also an expression of ethnic identity, as migrant workers from West Bengal faced significant xenophobia from local communities.

The state's response to the protest was a key focus of Thomas's analysis. He explored how the police and media reacted to the workers' attempts to mobilise, highlighting the challenges faced by migrants in gaining visibility and support. The paper contributed to broader discussions on migration, labour rights, and the right to the city, particularly in rapidly urbanising regions of the Global South. It underscored the need to recognise the vital role of migrants in shaping urban spaces, even as they remain marginalised from the benefits of urban development.

For Chiranjib Boruah, a participant critiqued the theoretical framework used in his paper, suggesting that the research could benefit from a stronger focus on agency and mobilisation. In response to Sreya Sen, one participant raised questions about the role of citizens in shaping

the real estate market and suggested that Sen explore the impact of the closing down of factories in the southern parts of Kolkata, which could offer further insights into property dynamics. Regarding Johns Thomas, participants questioned the focus on Gramsci's theory and suggested that the paper would benefit from a more historically informed analysis of the social and physical spaces involved in the migrant workers' protest. They also recommended that Thomas explore the legal disputes surrounding migration and labour rights to provide a clearer understanding of the protest's political implications.

DAY 2: 14 NOVEMBER 2024

Session 4A - Representations of the South Asian City I

Abhijit Roy from the Department of Film Studies at Jadavpur University, India, chaired the session. **Amrita Talukdar** and **Priyanka Tripathi** from Indian Institute of Technology, Patna, presented a joint paper titled “**Exploring Urban Margins: (Re)Presentations of Resilience in Mathangi Subramanian’s A People’s History of Heaven**”. Their work examined Subramanian’s novel, an ethnographic study set in Bengaluru, which followed five girls resisting the demolition of their slum and challenging capitalist aspirations tied to urban development. Bengaluru, a major IT hub with 597 slum areas, faced increasing demolitions driven by neoliberal policies aimed at attracting affluent residents and aligning with capitalist land market goals. Employing the framework of slum narratives, both literary and cinematic, the authors highlighted the resilience, agency, and creativity of slum dwellers. These narratives critiqued developmentalism, challenged the notion that urbanisation benefits all sections of society, and stressed relational autonomy—encompassing feminist solidarity and interdependence.

The second panellist **Sukanya Mitra** from Loreto College, Kolkata, presented on “**Calcutta in Films: Representing a South Asian City**” which examined the depiction of Kolkata across two key periods in Bengali cinema, tracing the city’s evolving social and urban landscapes. The first part of the paper explored mid-20th-century representations (1950s–60s), focusing on the housing crisis exacerbated by the Partition and the influx of middle- and lower-middle-class migrants. Films from this period portrayed struggles to find accommodation, the sharing of resources, and the persistence of ties to rural origins, reflecting the city’s transformation from colonial to postcolonial.

The second part shifted to the 1990s and beyond, highlighting the impact of neoliberalism and globalisation on Kolkata’s urban landscape. Representations from this era showcased new urban spaces such as shopping malls and Rajarhat’s New Town, which embodied rising middle-class aspirations and growing inequalities. Mitra connected these cinematic portrayals to Gramsci’s concept of the “southern question” framing Kolkata as a marginal yet essential site within the global geography of power. Ultimately, the films underscored a persistent search for home and belonging, even amidst globalisation and the dominance of social media, challenging linear narratives of progress and modernity.

The third panellist **Aditi Mukherjee** from GITAM University, Visakhapatnam, India, presented a paper entitled “**Refugees and the History of the Urban Fringe: Namasudra Refugees in North 24 Parganas**”. She explored the experiences of Dalit East Bengali refugees and their perpetual state of displacement. Initially recognised as displaced persons by West Bengal authorities, their status gradually eroded over time. Drawing on Ananya Roy’s concepts of informality and displaceability, Mukherjee examined how the constant threat of displacement shaped the lives of these refugees, perpetuating their unsettled existence.

The study contextualised the Namasudras in colonial Bengal, highlighting how caste, while often absent from formal politics, played a significant role in organising social life within refugee settlements. Post-Partition, relief efforts ranged from temporary camps to "permanent liability camps," revealing the state’s intention to confine refugees rather than fully integrate them. Second, the field site—an ex-camp area in North 24 Parganas—illustrated how refugees, once tasked with labour-intensive projects like canal digging, were left in precarious conditions without proper rehabilitation. Third, Mukherjee critiqued the state’s inconsistent regularisation plans, where only a fraction of families received land titles after decades, enabling clientelistic politics and maintaining displaceability. Finally, she addressed how the informal state’s erasure of refugee histories—through developments like Salt Lake and Lake Town—disconnected identity from the nation-state, reflecting broader patterns of marginalisation.



Presentations in Session 4A

Session 4B - Representations of the South Asian City II

Shyamalendu Majumdar, Director, Calcutta Research Group, presented a paper titled “**Calcutta and Birth of Theatre**”. This research traces the development of Bengali theatre and the simultaneous growth of Calcutta city and the emergence of different economic classes. The paper explores how Bengali theatre developed alongside Kolkata's growth and how it depicted class relations and marginalised groups in the city. Majumdar recounted how Kolkata's emergence began with the villages of Sutanuti, Kalikata, and Gobindapur, where the East India Company, under Job Charnock, transformed the area into a commercial hub. As migration increased, Bengali traders and artisans consolidated wealth and power, shaping the city's socio-economic landscape. This shift was marked by the adoption of European cultural forms, including theatre, which played a significant role in defining Kolkata's evolving identity. Bengali theatre, initially influenced by European models, gradually became a medium for political expression. From its origins in elite entertainment, it evolved into a tool for social and political commentary, reflecting colonial resistance and class struggles.

The second speaker, **Rituparna Datta**, researcher at Calcutta Research Group, in her presentation "**Calcutta Biologigraphies 1947-1951**" addressed the rhetorical question: *How does a city desire to write its biography?* Drawing on Sartre's idea that an author does not impose their intent but leaves space for the reader's interpretation, Datta introduced a new methodology where a city becomes a person, writing through its own senses, sensibilities, and experiences. By viewing a city as a disembodied self, reassembled by its people, she proposed that a city's biologigraphy could be achieved by combining the processes of biologics and biography. Biologics, in this context, refers to the lifeblood running through the city's veins—the differential demography that gives the city its distinct character. Biography, on the other hand, highlights the complexities of urban life, presenting the unique honeycombs of lived experiences. A city's biologigraphy is thus a "form within a form." It is impossible to write a city's story without considering its agents—its people. Biologics, as Datta explained, becomes a social acronym for the interconnectedness of urbanisation, with a fluid, yet thick viscosity, moving in definite directions and leaving deposits that take on an autonomous character. A city, she argued, is more than just "surface colonialism" or entrenched social conditions; it carries the "deep histories" of its evolution. Any biography of Calcutta, therefore, must view the city as both an aesthetic whole and a complex web of human and social existence, where one feeds into the needs and emotions of the other, shaping the reality of the present.

Debashree Chakraborty, a researcher at the Calcutta Research Group, presented a paper titled “**City as a Character in Contemporary Indian English Fiction**” which focused on the growing importance of cities in Indian English fiction. Cities have evolved into montages of life and times, becoming characters in their own right that can be analysed and understood through the lenses of time and space in which they are set. Contemporary fiction continues to explore the city as a character by examining how cities have changed and what they represent for the people living in them. Rapid shifts in economic and social dynamics have transformed cities into sites of interrogation, as diverse groups of people increasingly become part of

urban spaces and stake their claims. The paper, through selected novels, explored how urban Indian society has been changing since the liberalisation of the economy in the early 1990s and how this transformation has impacted the Indian urban landscape over the years.



Presentations in Session 4B

Session 5 - Belonging to the City

The session was opened and moderated by **Subhas Ranjan Chakraborty**, Eminent Historian and Member, CRG. The session began with the paper titled **“Creation or Gentrification? Downtown Marseille as a Site of Conflicting Public Reasons for Space”** co-authored by Sami Samuel Everett and Pierre Sintès, from Aix-Marseille Université. Sami Everett presented the paper based on the Downtown Marseille—namely the neighbourhoods of Belsunce and Noailles—situated squarely between the poorer, post-migrant, and politically disenfranchised northern districts in supposed perpetual crisis due to the drugs trade and gang warfare and the more wealthy and stable southern districts of Marseille. The author highlighted the fact that downtown Marseille is the battleground for the city's soul and, in many ways is resonant with the structural dynamics of Gramsci's Southern Question a hundred years on. In particular, echoes of the Southern Question are present in the determination of the centralised powers in the French North tending over the past decade towards a fascistic populism to finally unpick the cohesion of a strongly anchored Southern revolutionary Left (Gramsci 1926 Congress theses) that has continued to develop in the context of Marseille's chronically underfunded postcolonial context. This context and the contingent racialised politics is a crucial change from the 1920s which the authors have dealt with in the paper. Bringing the work of local ethnographers (and founders of la Marseillologie) Carreno, Hayot and Lesme (1974), Émile Temime (1985), Alain Tarrus (1995) and Michel Peraldi and Michel Samson (2006) up to date, the authors focussed on two key sites of these geographically bounded crossings specifically through an analysis of the

built materiality of these dynamics and the traces that they leave in public space in terms of morphological urban transformations including within the histories of those monuments that mark the territory, colonial and not, formal and not (see Gallichio and Sintès 2020).

The first presentation was followed by a joint presentation by **Arundhati Virmani** and **Jean Boutier** (EHESS, Marseille) on “**A Mediterranean Hub: Immigration and Religious Diversity in Marseille.**” The authors examined the dynamics of religious diversity from three angles. One is from the perspective of the history of immigrants that trace the waves of immigrants in Marseille, second, they made a close examination into the contemporary religious geography of the city and how religious plurality has not produced segregated neighbourhoods or ghettos on the model of other cities. On the contrary, it has made for a multitude of places of worship spread across the city. Finally, the authors called for focussing particularly on the experiment launched by the town council in the early 1990s that aimed at strengthening inter-religious dialogue between the leaders of different religious groups, an experiment that is currently unique in France, despite similar attempts in other major towns in the country. The analysis investigated why the experiment succeeded in Marseille and has continued uninterrupted for over 30 years, while similar experiments in other French cities have failed. The authors asked: Is one of the reasons for the success of this experiment not to be found in the cultural origins of the people of Marseille, anchored in a vast Mediterranean world and its extensions? This is different in other French cities. Both in the light of France’s laic commitment and realities of immigration, this empirical study of Marseille proposes a reflection on whether the Mediterranean city is an exception, a model or a fluke.

The final research paper in the session titled “**Barbonita to Sex Workers: The ‘Dirty’ History of Commercial Sex Life in Kolkata**” was presented by **Paula Banerjee** from AIT, Bangkok, **Sangbida Lahiri** from JKLU, Jaipur, and **Rajat Kanti Sur** from CRG, Kolkata. In this presentation, the authors explored the evolution of brothels and prostitutes therein, into sex workers in the imagination of a southern city or Kolkata. They discussed the presentation from the British period to the present times in a city’s imagination of its brothels and sex workers and reflected upon the real contests fought by these sex workers for the right to belong in and to this southern city. The authors argued, with independence and incipient decolonisation new tensions and new contests arose over prostitution. Just after nine years of Indian independence prostitution created a major contest over citizenship and became a subject of offence as borders were created and migration in large numbers continued. In this context, women emerged as subjects of state formation thereby subjects of control. With the city’s evolution and consciousness of rights, prostitutes became sex workers through dramatic shifts and turns. They tried to take their destinies in their own hands and the present-day cooperative of the sex workers is a case in point. The authors argued that the paper is not about victories or victimhood of these women but about their evolution as a necessary subject of the southern city. In this context, the final paper will explore laws, political debates, health issues and consciousness of rights in the evolution of sex work and its influence of making Kolkata an emblematic southern city. The paper therefore is about biopolitics from below and the southern question.



Presentations in Session 5

Several important points came up during the discussion. Suggestions came for all three papers of this session. Comments were about the self-projection and visual imageries of a southern city and the role of tourism and the tourist business. The comments about consulting crime reports by the Criminal Investigation Department, as well as the crucial shift or displacement of sex workers in urban planning, were a few of the critical comments made during the session. The chair concluded the session with thanks to all the speakers.

Session 6A - Becoming the Southern City in a Globalised World

The session was opened and moderated by **Joyce C.H. Liu**, International Centre for Cultural Studies, National Yang-Ming Chiao Tung University, Taiwan. The session began with a paper titled “**Continuities between the Financial and Refugee Crisis: Management and Resistance, Notes from Athens**” presented by **Olga Lafazani**, Post-Doctoral Fellow at Humboldt University, Germany, and **Thanasis Tyrovolas**, Doctoral Fellow at the University of Athens, Greece. The authors highlighted the lack of research connecting the two crises in the study and aimed to revisit the relationships between them. Their analysis explored the critical question: Who has the power to frame an event as a crisis and subsequently manage it? The presentation noted that the economic recession in Greece became apparent between 2007 and 2009, spurred by the global financial crisis of 2007–08, structural deficiencies, and limitations imposed by Eurozone regulations. The crisis deepened in 2010 with the signing of the first Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Greek government and the Troika—the European Union, the International Monetary Fund, and the European Central Bank. From 2009 onward, under Troika supervision and austerity measures, Greece was increasingly portrayed as an inept state: unproductive, overly dependent on the public sector, and economically unsustainable. The rapid development of the prior years was retroactively characterised as a “bubble.” A moralising narrative emerged, framing Greeks and their system as rife with tax evasion, clientelism, and corruption. This management of the financial crisis, the presenters argued, laid the groundwork—in terms of practices, logic, discourse, and

infrastructure—for framing the arrival of refugees as another “crisis” to be managed using similar neoliberal and colonial paradigms. As with the financial crisis, the “refugee crisis” was overseen largely by international institutions rather than the Greek state. Despite substantial financial assistance from the EU relative to the number of refugees stranded in Greece during these years, the allocation of funds followed a colonial logic characteristic of global humanitarian operations led by international NGOs. This logic was ad hoc, project-based, donor-driven, and short-term, reflecting the dominant patterns of refugee management. The most striking example was the establishment of refugee camps as the primary accommodation model, implemented hastily and without serious consideration of alternative solutions.

This was followed by a presentation from **Arnab Bhattacharya**, Doctoral Fellow & **Ugo Rossi** from L’Aquila, Italy who presented their paper, titled, “**The Southern City and the Capitalist Fantasy and Realities of a People-Centred Economy.**” Their presentation was an exploration of the role of urban ideology in capitalistic expansion. The presentation focused on two cities, Kolkata and Naples to stress the facets of Southern Urbanism and the Southern Periphery of the Capitalist Geoeconomic Centre. The presentation showed how in different ways in Naples and Kolkata the state mobilises civil society organisations that act as facilitators of informal (and cheap) labour recruitment in deprived urban environments with high concentrations of poverty and different forms of social disadvantage. In Naples, the current local art and culture projects for urban regeneration purposes employ jobless young people as a cheap labour force within a rhetoric of economic rejuvenation and human capital development in a long-deprived and crime-ridden district of the historic city. In Kolkata, the human capital rhetoric turns forgotten and untouchable populations into a disposable workforce in platform services and maintenance services such as logistics and cleaning. The presentation stressed that the hegemonic human capital discourse in the Southern city leads to the incorporation of subaltern urban populations into the subtle neoliberal machinery of surplus value extraction in today’s global capitalism.

The final presentation of the session was delivered by **Niccolò Cuppini**, University of Applied Sciences and Arts of Southern Switzerland and **Sandro Mezzadra**, at University of Bologna, “**What is the “South” in Southern City?**” explored the role of Southern cities in global political and urban transformations. They emphasised that these cities are central to social struggles and uprisings, often driving movements that challenge global relations of power. The speakers examined various movements in the Global South, from Latin America to the Middle East, noting how these uprisings have influenced similar mobilisations in the Global North, shifting the traditional North-South dynamic. They also analysed the evolution of the terms “South” and “Global South,” focusing on Gramsci’s concept of the “Southern Question” and its global implications. Cuppini and Mezzadra discussed how the South, once seen as peripheral, is now central to global political discourse. This shift reflects broader transformations in urbanisation, where Southern cities, shaped by colonial histories and global capitalism, have become key agents in global urban development. They proposed the concept of “planetary urbanisation” to describe the diverse urban changes driven by financialisation and platformisation, particularly in Southern cities, which often lead global urban trends. The urban struggles challenge global capitalism and highlight the

interconnectedness of local and global political movements. Overall, Cuppini and Mezzadra argued that the Southern city is not just a product of global forces but an active player in shaping the future of urbanisation and global politics.

The discussion questions centred on exploring the concept of a transurban approach to understanding Southern cities within the broader framework of planetary urbanisation, particularly how this perspective transcends conventional boundaries of urban analysis. They also considered the role of the platform economy within urban development frameworks, examining its implications for governance and economic restructuring. A recurring theme was the evolving role of the state in urban transformations, as highlighted by the presentations. While recognising cities' increasing agency in shaping their futures, the questions that were explored were - whether cities can truly achieve autonomy or whether they remain fundamentally tied to state structures, emphasising the tension between emerging urban protagonism and the enduring influence of the state in shaping urban landscapes.

Session 6B - City, Climate, and Infrastructure

The session moderated by **Arundhati Virmani** opened with a presentation on **“Melting Cities: Reading Heat Waves as Embodied and Gendered Phenomenon in Urban Living”** by **Deepshikha Dasgupta** from Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta. Dasgupta argued how climate change discourse highlights global inequalities, with the Global North contributing most greenhouse emissions, while the Global South endures its harshest impacts. In Kolkata, rising temperatures and frequent heat waves severely impacted city life, compounded by urban factors like dense population, reduced green spaces, and urban heat islands. While climate science often focuses on physical phenomena, this paper advocates for an interdisciplinary approach to understand heat's social dimensions, especially its impact on different genders and social classes. The study examines how Kolkata's residents, particularly women, navigate heatwaves in their daily lives. By focusing on the intersection of class and gender, the research tried to understand how caregiving roles, cooking, and other domestic responsibilities shape women's experiences of extreme heat. The study centres on "thermal inequality"—the ways that heat disproportionately affects marginalised women, while access to cooling measures, like air conditioning, often remains a privilege for the more affluent. This class-based access to Air Conditioners (ACs) illustrates a deeper climate inequality that exacerbates social divides in Kolkata. Through interviews with women from diverse households—including homemakers, working professionals, and domestic helpers—the research captured how heat impacts different aspects of their lives. Heat becomes not just a physical but a social phenomenon, entangled with identity, daily routines, and public and private spaces. The paper argues that India's climate policies often overlook these nuanced, embodied experiences of vulnerable groups, focusing instead on broad environmental goals without addressing specific needs at the intersection of gender and class. Future research could further explore sensory aspects of heat, such as the social perceptions around bodily smell and labour under extreme temperatures. Ultimately, this paper calls for climate policies that consider the lived realities of vulnerable urban populations, emphasising that cooling access in heat-stressed cities is increasingly not a luxury but a necessity.

The paper titled “**Stories of a Traffic Circle: Can System’s Thinking and Assemblage Be in Conversation for a Southern Mobility Justice**” by **Alokeparna Sengupta** from O.P. Jindal Global University, India, advocated for a systems-based approach, which moves beyond conventional, vehicle-centred road planning, and explored how socio-cultural factors influence road safety governance. In India, the post-independence era and economic liberalisation, especially under the New Economic Policy (NEP) of 1991, promoted an automobile-centred urban planning model that symbolised economic aspirations. However, despite this car-centric development, a significant proportion of the urban population still depends on walking, cycling, and public transportation. The 2011 Census shows that 46.5 % of urban Indians walk to work, with pedestrians and motorcyclists being particularly vulnerable. In 2022, pedestrians accounted for around 33 % of road fatalities in India, highlighting a profound need for inclusive road safety approaches that consider all road users. The paper examined whether applying networked relations and assemblage theory can expose the shortcomings of a vehicle-focused approach in India, where non-motorised and public transportation modes are essential for many. Using concepts from Bruno Latour, such as assemblage theory and “science in the making,” the study introduces a systems-oriented perspective to road safety. This view seeks to reframe infrastructure to better serve the diverse mobility needs in Indian cities, especially for marginalised groups. Fieldwork conducted during the second wave of COVID-19 in a small city in Uttar Pradesh offered a spatial lens for analysing governance, design, and operations of transport spaces. These spaces, such as footpaths and roundabouts, reveal how social interactions, economic disparities, and power structures influence mobility. The study’s field notes, complete with vignettes and graphic descriptions, document how pedestrians, cyclists, and motorcyclists navigate urban roads, often in the absence of a robust public transport system. By applying a southern perspective on mobility justice, this research contributes to road safety scholarship, challenging the Global North’s vehicle-centred approach. It underscores the need for urban infrastructure that accommodates diverse transit needs, advocating for policies that prioritise safety and inclusivity across all mobility forms.



Presentations in Session 6B

Session 7 - Making and Unmaking of Cities

The session was chaired by **Ranabir Samaddar** who briefly introduced the two panellists mentioning their affiliations and publications as well. The first speaker **Paolo Novak** from SOAS, UK, presented his study “**Buildings Communicate**” specifically referring to asylum seekers’ reception centres. Through photographs from his field work in the Fiastra Abbey natural reserve, in Macerata, central Italy, Novak spoke of buildings occupied by the EU between 2015 and 2020 to welcome asylum seekers, under the coordination of the Red Cross. Novak specified how the place is not in the south, nor an urban setting, but rather rural. However, he referred to Gramsci’s ideas of space, scale, periodisation, temporality and how the subaltern classes are protagonists in the making of their own history. Buildings communicate, as constitutive elements of cities, these structures represent particular trajectories of urbanisation (long history, conflicts, struggles). Every building is unique, and reveals spatial, temporal maps where social relations can be traced. Novak shared two key sources that explain how buildings mirror their surroundings and inhabitants. First, he mentioned the concept of frontier architecture of occupation by Weizman, highlighting how the EU border occupies buildings for visibility. Secondly, how political relations shape architectural forms, referring to the expression of social totality, and the perception of space and place by Lefebvre.

Furthermore, his research investigated to what extent buildings communicate, what kind of maps can be traced, and whether the information is legible. During his ethnographic experience in central Italy for five years, he could trace at least four maps. The first two maps showcased the existing organic dependence between the Global North and Global South: one map showing the reception centres, where the EU border is and controls migration; the other map showing the dispossession and ruins of places, where migrants’ journeys started from, which revealed the long trajectories of coloniality of migration and asylum. In the other two photos, impacts of national development and national building through infrastructures for segregation, marginalisation emerged. In the attempt to emphasise resistant practices, biopolitics and autonomy, Novak adapted Lefebvre’s spatiology with different literature, among which Black Literature as well. He concluded that more maps can be traced, and that buildings ultimately do not communicate. These are rather points in floating geography, a scale without scale, where multiple temporalities exist and the space is destabilising.

Shatabdi Das, researcher at Calcutta Research Group, spoke on “**Ghost Towns of Bengal**” while discussing insights from the field study in Asansol-Durgapur industrial-urban corridor, constituting the second largest urban agglomeration of West Bengal, after Kolkata Metropolitan Area and also housing one of the oldest coal mining belts of India. Das introduced her work with an outline of the phases of industrial development and urban growth in the mining region and underscored the factors that culminated into decline of industrial production and the gradual closure of a number of industries. The speaker contextualised the concept of ghost town both in terms of global urban phenomena as well as the variations created by regional geography. The three broad sections of the report were elaborated. The first section discussed urban growth in Asansol-Durgapur region. Shifts in the dominance of the sectors of economy and demographic attributes were underlined, along

with the growth of railway colonies and towns of different tiers that contributed to urban growth in the region, as well as growth of Census Towns. In the other two sections Shatabdi elaborated the processes that go into the making of the abandoned industrial and coal towns in the study area. Through a collection of around 25 photographs, she brought out the plight of life remaining in the ghost towns and the problems and daily struggles that both people deserting the declining towns and those staying behind grappled with. The study discussed the cases of four industrial townships of closed heavy manufacturing industries located in and around Asansol and Durgapur that are in ruins at present. There was also discourse on two abandoned coal towns of the Raniganj coalfield. The presentation ended with reflection on the urgency of urban planning for sustainable development in a region prone to environmental problems.

The moderator of the session, Ranabir Samaddar, remarked on how the city is never completely made, it is a process of making and unmaking. He invited the audience to reflect on how much wealth is destroyed, referring to the industries being shut down and the ghost towns in Asansol-Durgapur. Then, Samaddar elaborated on the idea of space, pausing on the metaphysical frame.

The Q&A session followed with a debate sparkling especially on how buildings communicate, the audience raised questions about what meanings buildings carry for asylum seekers, and whether buildings can convey a gender perspective as well. Participants also wanted to know more about how buildings transform, and how the different versions and experiences over time can be read. Furthermore, questions arose about the meaning carried by buildings like refugee camps, that are projected as spaces of exception, where rights are violated, isolation and marginalisation prosper.

Das's remarks added to the conversation how the degradation of these towns pushed people to move, among which some were workers at the industries, or in the service sector that existed around. Novak clarified that his attempt is to bring out the tensions between the bordering function of buildings and subjective experience of asylum seekers. He also mentioned how the transformation of buildings has an impact for both those who live inside and around.

Closing Session - Book Release and Discussion

The conference ended with a book release “**Long 2020: Reflections on Epidemiological Times**” edited by Subhas Ranjan Chakraborty, Paula Banerjee, and Kaustubh Mani Sengupta. The session was opened by the chair, **Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhury**, who introduced Achin Chakraborty from the Institute of Development Studies Kolkata (IDSK) and Member of Calcutta Research Group India, as the discussant for the book. **Achin Chakraborty** began the book discussion with a mention of the collaborative efforts. He observed that the chapters offer a variety of perspectives, unified by a shared methodological focus: exploring "the long 2020" and reflecting on epidemiological times. This focus emphasises the qualitative dimensions of time—its duration, temporality, and our perceptions of the past and future.

Chakraborty drew attention to striking parallels between the COVID-19 pandemic in India and previous crises, such as the Spanish flu, highlighting shifts in knowledge production and governance technologies over time. He stressed that the book examines these changes while discussing state capacity, adopting a political lens rather than a purely managerial one. Connecting the book's themes to contemporary realities, Chakraborty noted that, despite the pandemic, public health spending as a percentage of GDP remains disappointingly low, defying expectations. He underscored the necessity of addressing political economy issues at the policy level and advocated for continued writing and reflection, even in a post-COVID world.

Following Chakraborty's remarks, the book's editors shared their insights. **Paula Banerjee** emphasised the importance of viewing time as cyclical and expressed gratitude to Ranabir Samaddar for inspiring the book's concept. **Subhas Ranjan** echoed her sentiments. Finally, **Kaustubh Mani Sengupta** reflected on the challenges of editing the book, particularly the effort to connect critiques of the Anthropocene and other topics in the introduction. He expressed hope that readers would gain an understanding of how the CRG collective navigated those prolonged years.



Closing Session - Book Release and Discussion on “Long 2020: Reflections on Epidemiological Times”

The conference came to a close with the certificate award ceremony for the participants of the Ninth Annual Research and Orientation Workshop on Global Protection of Refugees and Migrants. The certificates were awarded by Honourable Ambassador Katharina Weiser (Ambassador of the Republic of Austria to India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka) who spoke about the prospective collaborative endeavours between several institutes.

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