

## Media fellowships and creative media workshop (2012)

*Outputs Achieved - The quantitative or qualitative deliverables or results of the project activities - i.e. what has actually happened?*

### ***Plan of the Project/Workshop***

The three-day Workshop was planned in a way that would give the participants enough opportunity to get to know the victims of forced migration directly. Enough room was left for theoretical sessions as well as sessions based on practical experiences of the practising journalists. CRG had chosen the Tibetan Self Help Centre at Darjeeling and the Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association at Kalimpong and an indigenous Lepcha village near Lolegaon as two sites for field visits.

Accordingly, it was decided that the Participants (the Workshop as well as the Orientation Course Participants) would reach Darjeeling a day before the field visits, and have a pre-field visit orientation and a Round-Table discussion on “Between the State, Media and the People”. The next day was marked for two field visits by participants, who were divided into two groups. It was also planned that in the evening of the field visits (on return to Darjeeling), an interaction between the participants and the members of local media would be organised. It was also decided that some of the important local dignitaries should be invited to take part in that interactive session.

On the next day, the participants were to visit the North Bengal University (NBU) at Siliguri, on their way back to Kolkata. There the participants would share their experiences of field visits with the students and teachers of the NBU. The next two days were marked for the Kolkata Workshop, which would have presentations on different themes, round-Table discussions and a Special Lecture on the “Myanmar’s Rohingyas and Assam’s Muslims of Bengali Origin: Comparative Perspectives of Exclusion and Statelessness”.

### ***The Participants***

Many of the participants in the Workshop came directly from media world – some were senior, well-known journalists, some were bright young people, prepared to learn new things. Some of them were academics with research interests in media representations of forced migration.

Among the seniors, **Nirmalya Banerjee** is a journalist of repute, presently working with the *Times of India*, Kolkata and has also worked with *The Statesman*, Kolkata for long. He is known for his sincere and objective reporting, especially about India’s Northeast, where he has worked for about seven years.

**Rajat Roy** is a senior journalist and has worked for many Bengali newspapers, including *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, where he has served as News Editor for many years. Although a journalist by profession, he is a social scientist in mind, which is revealed in many of his non-journalistic articles in reputed ‘serious’ journals. Presently he is a media consultant working with Kolkata TV.

**Biswajit Roy** is a senior journalist, at present working with *The Telegraph*, Calcutta. Popularly known as ‘Madhu’ in friend-circles, he is also a serious social activist, who has always tried to represent the voices of the underdogs/marginalised. He is also associated with many radical journals and organisations working for the ‘peoples’ issues.

**Raghab Bandyopadhyay**, a senior journalist, who has worked for decades in Bengali dailies like *Ajkal* and *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, is also known for creative (and ‘experimental’) fictions – novels and short stories – in Bengali. He has also written non-fiction literary texts and has pioneered what can be called social journalism. At

present he edits a Bengali intellectual journal, *Charcha* and runs a publishing house.

**Sohini Majumdar** is an M.A in History from the University of Calcutta. She is currently pursuing an M.Phil in History at CHS, JNU.

**Vikhar Ahmed Sayeed** works with *Frontline*, Bangalore. He has contributed to *The Book Review*, *Biblio*, *Infochange Agenda*, *Deccan Herald*, *Tebelka* and *The Hindu* apart from his regular reportage in *Frontline*.

**Nikhil Roshan** is a photo-journalist working with *The Bengal Post*, Kolkata.

**Sabir Ahamed** is the Research and Advocacy Manager (Minority Rights), SNAP, Kolkata.

**Vishū Rita Krocha** is a journalist with *The Eastern Mirror* of Nagaland. She is also an author and commentator.

**Amitava Das** is a journalist working with the Press Trust of India, India's largest news agency or wire service. His responsibilities include writing and editing news stories and coordinating with the journalists of PTI working in east and north-eastern states of India.

**Chitra Ahanthem** is a feature writer and columnist with the *Imphal Free Press*. She is also a freelance consultant working on documentation and analysis in the HIV/AIDS, armed conflict and gender sectors.

**Subhasish Chatterji** works with the Bengali television channel, Akash Bangla. He has made a documentary on the victims of Aila storm in southern West Bengal.

**Jayanta Kalita** is the Assistant editor, *Seven Sister's Post*, Guwahati.

Besides the above mentioned media activists, there were 19 Orientation Course-Participants who also enthusiastically joined the Workshop, made the field visits, and took part in the discussions. Among them, two Participants especially chose the 'Media Module', and thus made presentations in the media workshop.

The younger of these two was **Debraj Deb**. He is a graduate in Humanities from Tripura Central University, majoring in English and pursuing a PG degree in Journalism and Mass Communication. He has started working in the local media in 2008.

And the other was **Dr. Sudeep Basu**. He is currently working as Assistant Professor at the Gujarat Institute of Development Research (GIDR), Ahmedabad. A sociologist by training, Sudeep's Doctoral dissertation was on refugee diasporas, which involved an in-depth study of a Tibetan refugee settlement in eastern India.

Apart from the above participants, three eminent journalists also joined the Kolkata-Workshop (12 & 13 October) as 'invitees' and actively took part in it.

Among them, **Subir Bhaumik** was with BBC for several years. Very recently he was Editor, *Seven Sisters Post*, Guwahati, and now a freelance journalist and independent researcher. In the journalists' as well as the academics' circles, he is recognised as an expert on the North-eastern region of India. He has edited/written a good number of books and contributed to several journals on this subject.

**Sopan Joshi** has worked in many media organizations in Delhi, including *Tebelka*. He is now a freelancer and also works with Gandhi Peace Foundation.

**Anirban Roy** is a senior journalist, at present Executive Editor, *The Bengal Post*, Kolkata. He has vast experience in the issues relating to India's northeast.

## *Project Activities*

### *(I) Pre-Field Visit Presentations and Discussion*

The Pre and Post Field-Visit discussions took place at Hotel Cedar Inn, a beautifully designed hotel on Jalapahar Road facing the magnificent snow-peaks of Kanchanjungha. Participants reached Darjeeling on 9 October, in the evening. Dr. Anasua Basu Roy Chaudhury, Research Associate, CRG, and co-ordinator of the Orientation Course warmly welcomed the participants. Then, after a brief round of self-introductions, Dr Sibaji Pratim Basu, Faculty, Sree Chaitanya College and Member, CRG (and also Co-Coordinator of the Media Workshop) explained the participants the need and importance of holding such a Workshop. After his brief comments, two papers were presented on Darjeeling (its problems and possibilities as a town of the migrants) and the Lepcha tribe (one of the aboriginal groups of Darjeeling) by Dr. Anup Shekhar Chakraborty and Dr. Padam Nepal respectively. Dr. Atig Ghosh, Research Associate, CRG, and Faculty, Orientation Course was in the chair.

In his paper, Dr. Anup Shekhar Chakraborty described how the British colonial encounter led to the development of the Darjeeling region as a sanatorium and a military depot, an educational centre and a plantations area for tea. Darjeeling as a hill station became a bastion for colonial activity. The British incorporated the natives such as the Lepcha and the Bhutia within the greater colonial framework and the people found them in a new set up merged with the flow of migrants from surrounding regions. Dr. Chakraborty pointed out that after independence the ethnic minorities of North Bengal have been gradually rallying around issue of their identity against the silhouette of 'underdevelopment' and 'step-motherly treatment by the South'.

The prominent ethnic forces in the hills of Darjeeling have been demanding a separate state of Gorkhaland. Since 1980s, Darjeeling Hills for instance, has invited much attention both at home and abroad not just for the natural beauty and tea but also because of the protracted 'sometimes dormant, sometimes active' Gorkhaland movement, which is also interpreted as the triumph of *Gorkha* nationalism over the 'other' namely the Bengali and the state of West Bengal.

According to him, the *push and pull factors* for outmigration from Darjeeling Hills could be identified as additional reason for socio-political unrest in region, which has effected economic development, employment opportunities and educational system in the region. The mobility and the fluidity of the geo-political space gets further complex with the gradual rise of trafficking of bodies and material. Employment opportunities being limited with few private sector and non-governmental initiatives in the North-East region in general and Darjeeling District in particular the geo-political space remained deeply disgruntled.

Dr. Padam Nepal, on the other hand, narrated how, the Lepchas, an indigenous tribe of the Darjeeling region gradually became a 'minority' in its own homeland and slowly pushed almost out of the region. Dr. Nepal's paper discussed several myths of the Lepcha people, who are now mostly concentrated around the Kalimpong hills, about 60 kilometres from Darjeeling. He argued that since the beginning, the Lepchas were averse to work as 'coolies' in tea gardens. To fill this void of labour force, the foreign planters encouraged or allured people from Nepal to come and settle as tea-labourers.

Soon the Lepchas found themselves on a back foot both financially and demographically in the tea-centric colonial economy and administration in Darjeeling and slowly moved towards interior places and Kalimpong region. 'This is', the speaker argued, 'indeed a case of forced migration', although since the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Lepcha language was the official language in the region. He pointed out that the treaty between the king of Sikkim and the British, which transferred Darjeeling to the British, was, besides English, also written in Lepcha language.

Dr. Nepal referred to an interesting myth/story popular among the Lepchas. According to this story, the Lepchas, experiencing the devastating influence of the tea industry, wanted to stall its further expansion, especially in Kalimpong region. To do so, the Lepchas organised a community meeting, in which they decided to burn all the

tea-seeds, given to them by the planters. They also made their land in Kalimpong, so uncultivable that the planters were left with no other choice than to quit from Kalimpong. Thus, according to the popular Lepcha myth (which Dr. Nepal narrated in his paper), Kalimpong was saved from the aggression of tea plantation and subsequent miseries. However, he added that there is lack of deeper insight on the history of displacement of the Lepchas. He emphasized the role of media and intellectuals as crucial in the creation of knowledge and to reconstruct smaller histories.

The paper-presentations were followed by lively discussions. The discussion in this session concentrated on the question of Lepcha identity and their political representation and religion. One of the participants disputed the use of the terminology 'displacement' for Lepchas. According to this argument, Lepchas had been 'outnumbered' rather than displaced. After this discussion, two more papers were presented, first by Sri Biswajit Roy, Senior Journalist, The Telegraph and second, Dr. Sudeep Basu of GIDR. Rajat Roy, senior journalist, chaired this session.

In his highly interesting but contentious paper, 'IDPs in the Cities and the Media', Biswajit Roy sought to examine the link between ethno-religious conflicts/civil wars and forced migration. He critically evaluated the role of the 'mainstream' media in their task of representing these news-stories objectively. The big houses of newspapers and channels take interest, if there is something spectacular and sensational. He gave instance of the recent (2012) Bodo-Muslim conflict in Assam, which triggered anti-North-eastern feeling in the southern India.

He also showed how the media was divided on political lines, especially in contemporary West Bengal. He, for instance, cited the example of Nonadanga shanties/slums, located near the Eastern Metropolitan Bypass, Kolkata, where people, displaced from many places of southern parts of the state, took shelter. However, many of these new settlers were displaced again by the present government of West Bengal. According to Roy, the media in the state is almost divided over this issue: many are tip-toeing the government line for some kind of advantage. In another case he cited the insensitivity of the media about the marginal farmers of Murshidabad and Nadia who had ended up working as porters at Calcutta Port. He also critically discussed about the recent trend of 'infotainment and feel-good journalism'.

Dr. Sudeep Basu in his paper on 'Media, Tibet and Tibetan Refugee Rehabilitation in India' called attention to 'how to understand media as a text'. According to him, in Old Tibet, information and news remained inaccessible, remote and held sacred. It remained buried only to be discovered later by persons known as 'tertons'. However, with exile, this relation between the Tibetans and information changed altogether. He also directed attention towards Tibetan attitude to information today, exemplified in the Tibetan refugees' successful efforts at creating a viable media for dissemination of information in which lies the root of Tibetan exiles' nascent democracy.

He narrated the development of the print-media in Tibetan language since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The first modern Tibetan language newspaper was *Ladakb Kyi Akbar* or *Ladakb News* brought out by a German and Moravian missionary August Hermann Francke in 1904. The occasion was the British invasion of Tibet and Younghusband's expedition to Lhasa. Although, the first newspaper was not a success, another paper, *Tibet Mirror* came out in 1925, was widely read and circulated.

The nature and content of this old-media underwent a sea-change after the establishment of the Dalai Lama's Government-in-exile in India. Mr. Basu examined the contents and effects of some of the representational strategies adopted by Tibetans and non-Tibetans (Western, Chinese, and Indian) alike through the media and other forums centred around the idea of Tibet, Tibetanness, context of exile and resettlement. Since the 1980s, the dominant form in which Tibet has been put forward in Western and exile political and media discussions has involved the image of a zone of specialness, uniqueness, distinctiveness or excellence that has been threatened, violated or abused.

The participants also took part in active discussion after the above paper-presentations. After this session, the arrangements for the Field Visits (which were scheduled in the next morning) were made. The participants were broadly divided into two groups along with the Course-Faculty and resource persons for the Field Visits.

## (II) *The Field Visits*

At about 6.30 in the morning (10 November 2012), the Kalimpong-bound participants started their journey. Through the beauty of ever-winding Himalayan roads that passed beside the unending lines of coniferous ever-green trees and the river Teesta flowing below, the participants braved the heavy early-October showers and reached the Lepcha Museum at Kalimpong (nearly 60 km from Darjeeling) at about 10 am. There, at the doorstep of the two-storey museum, the participants were given warm welcome by two senior men – Lyangsong Tamsang, President of the Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association (ILTA) and the Octogenarian Sonam Tshering Lepcha, the Curator of the Lepcha museum.

The latter, an acknowledged authority on Lepcha culture and the recipient of Padmasree and Sangeet Natak Academy Awards (and many other countless prizes), has built the humble building of the museum and most of the articles/documents were his personal collections. With a grandpa-like toothless smile, S.T. Lepcha showed the participants various musical instruments, war weapons, traditional instruments of prey and production, various uses of woods collected from hill forests and also hand-written Lepcha scripts on hand-made paper and scrolls. He always spoke in Lepcha language, which his friend and the President of ILTA translated into English for the participants. Showing his ‘treasures’ in the museum, S.T. Lepcha claimed the distinctness/uniqueness of Lepcha culture and demanded its protection. He played many traditional Lepcha musical instruments, including a double-barrel flute and sang Lepcha folk songs. He also sang a Bengali song strumming a traditional musical instrument. “We have translated some poems of Tagore’s Nobel-Prize winning Gitanjali to Lepcha. But what about translating Lepcha songs into Bengali?” he asked. (Later, Biswajit Roy, participant and senior journalist, has published, in detail, about this visit in the North Bengal edition of *The Telegraph* on 6 November 2012.)

Lyangsong Tamsang also explained to the participants that the ILTA was *not* after political power but for *preservation* of Lepcha language and culture. He said that last year (2011) in September, the Chief Minister, Ms. Mamata Banerjee had announced her plan to form the Lepcha Development Council (LDC) in the Assembly after *dharnas* (peaceful sit-in demonstrations) by people of the community in Calcutta..

The journalist-participants as well as the Course-Participants asked Tamsang about the *status* of the proposed LDC and more specially its relation with the recently formed the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA), which enjoyed a great chunk of autonomous powers in three hill subdivisions of Darjeeling. But Tamsang firmly maintained that their aim was *not* power-sharing but *protection* of the Lepcha language and culture, which were gradually being pushed on the verge of extinction. The ILTA, he claimed, was working in this direction. From the ‘indigenous’ Lepcha village community to district levels to the central level – the ILTA, according to its President, is a democratic organisation based on consensus.

Of course, he admitted, they lacked in sufficient number to claim power but he also reminded the participants that in the neighbouring state of Sikkim, the Lepchas got sufficient importance and recognition to promote and protect their language, despite being a minority community. Whereas in Darjeeling region, he pointed out, the Lepcha language did not figure in schools as a ‘medium of instruction’ or even as an ‘optional’ language. As a result, Tamsang lamented, the Lepcha children were losing interest in their studies. To check this trend the community are now opening Lepcha-medium ‘night schools’.

After an hour-long interaction with Tamsang and some of his associates, the participants left Kalimpong for a visit to Takna village, near Lolegaon, around 25km from Kalimpong. Few Lepcha families lived in and around this village, and some of them still in their indigenously built houses. A look of the village (from the road) revealed the community’s socio-economic marginalisation. Mostly among the poorest of the poor in the hills, the 48 Lepcha families lived in dilapidated traditional wooden homes. Dependent on cultivation of maize and cardamom on the slopes of the hills and minor forest produce, the residents of this hill hamlet lacked basic amenities such as clean drinking water and medical facilities. The children used to attend a nearby primary school where a mid-day meal was available but most of them ultimately ended as ‘dropouts’. Few families can afford to send their kids to high

school in Padong which is far away because of financial and logistical difficulties. Nevertheless, Penlop Lepcha, a village youth, reflected his own as well as his community's aspirations. The graduate in political science wanted to be a teacher. "I want to serve my people by teaching the new generation about our traditions as well as the modern world in our own language," he said.

There was a simultaneous visit to the Tibetan Refugee Self Help Centre in the morning of 10 October, 2012. A second group of participants along with the resource persons went to this Centre, which was established on 2 October 1959, after China's takeover of Tibet. Situated on the 'Hill Side', a small estate comprising almost four acres was originally leased and subsequently bought from St. Joseph's College, Darjeeling. The architecture and the furniture of the Centre would certainly give the new visitor a 'feel' that it was a 'little Tibet' within Darjeeling. The Centre has emphasized the ideal of self help from the beginning, without which, it claimed in a booklet, no rehabilitation – 'cultural, economic, psychological, social or spiritual' was possible. Production of traditional handicrafts like the Tibetan carpets, wall hangings, copper pots, prayer-wheels etc has been the 'mainstay' of the Centre. Besides, it also gradually opened up other fields of activities such as training the workers, running medical programme and offset pres. In course of time, it has also developed cultural and educational activities. It started, in 1959, with just four Tibetan refugees now there were nearly 700 workers.

The Workshop participants found that most of the workers/members of the Centre were old in age but still dreamt of 'free' Tibet. This was a cause or a dream that bound the old with the new generations. As a community, they were very conscious of their 'refugee' status and did not want to lose it, and thus would not bother much about the Indian 'citizenship' although many of the younger generation wanted to take up the citizenships of the Western countries.

While interacting with the women in the workshop, the participants came to know that the most of next generations also preferred to settle down in camps in South India. Presently, faced with threats or tough persuasions, the Tibetans of Darjeeling did join rallies of the Gorkha Janamukti Morcha. But technically, they had no political rights, especially voting rights because of their 'refugee' status. Even in Darjeeling town areas, a strong presence of the Tibetan Youths could be felt. Some of them were also seen organizing a meeting in Darjeeling. It was very interesting to find, how two different categories of people (Gorkhas and Tibetans) negotiated and lived side by side in a place which was inflicted with identity politics. While the Gorkhas were demanding a separate state and protection of their Gorkha identity, especially in Darjeeling Hills, Tibetan refugees were trying to maintain their uniqueness and their distinct space within the same socio-geographical space. Here lay the juxtaposition: they sometimes allied with Gorkhas, yet, all the times, tried to preserve their distinction. Many participants felt that how one group interacted and negotiated with the other, could be an interesting point of research.

### ***(III) The Post- Field Visit Discussion***

The participants from Lepcha Centre/Lepcha village and Tibetan Centre returned in the evening (10 October). After a very short break they found themselves busy again in an interaction programme with the local journalists. The session was moderated by Amar Rai, Chairman, the Municipality of Darjeeling. Trilok Dewan, Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) of West Bengal, from Darjeeling. The session was structured around two major issues of trafficking and statelessness. At the outset, three of the participants presented their field experiences. The discussions, revolved around revisiting the history of the Lepcha, and the problems of preservation of their culture and language. Although, Rai and Dewan two representatives of the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM) tried to assure the participants that they were trying their best to protect and promote Lepcha culture, after a prolonged interaction they admitted what was done was too little. Regarding the 'alienation' of Tibetan refugees, Rai suggested that the Tibetans in Darjeeling must first decide whether they wanted to keep their refugee status or not. In his opinion, the abundance of the Tibetans (because of national/international help) often created a sense of frustration among the locals.

Another point of discussion evolved with reference to trafficking. Both Rai and Dewan opined that the issue

though crucial, had been ignored in the past and had come to attention only in recent days. The trafficked girls mostly came from very poor families of rural background. The families of the trafficked girls usually kept mum because of shame and perhaps for money and threats. Therefore, the media could intervene and highlight the problems related to trafficking. Similarly, the issue of Citizenship was also a burning problem, especially in India's Northeast and also in Darjeeling. A little discussion was also made on the problems of citizenship in view to Indo-Nepal friendship Treaty. The participants also discussed about porters from Nepal in Darjeeling, 'the unsettled people living in parts of India'.

#### ***(IV) At North Bengal University***

The next day (11<sup>th</sup> October 2012), the participants left Darjeeling before the noon and reached the North Bengal University (NBU) at 5 pm in the evening. The NBU authority, especially the Vice Chancellor, Prof. Samir Kumar Das and Dr. Ranjan Ghosh, faculty, Department of English warmly welcomed the participants. After a short while, a special session on 'Reflections from the Field' was organised by NBU, which was moderated by Dr. Ranjan Ghosh.

At the beginning, Prof. Samir Kumar Das, the Honourable Vice-Chancellor (also a member of CRG) welcomed all the participants with his short speech and shared that media was a way of sensitizing the general public. He asserted that recognizing the importance of the media, NBU has made the presence of media-analysts possible in the Mass communication Department in the University; it focuses on media as an objective and also media as a creative mode to sensitise the mass.

Then the participants shared their field experience. Vikhar Ahmed Sayeed initiated the discussion. He narrated his experience of the field visit to Tibetan Refugee camp on 'Tibetan refugee and rehabilitation'. During his visit to the Tibetan Centre he had observed the following things: a) the camp is entirely self-sustaining; b) the camp provides training in traditional arts and crafts and also runs health program, thus help both Tibetan and other locals; c) since, it was inaugurated by the 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama following Chinese aggression in 1969, it has become a 'National Symbol' for the Tibetans; d) though eligible, Tibetans have not applied for Indian Citizenship, however, many have accepted Western Citizenship.

On behalf of the participants, who went to Kalimpong,, Marco S. Macskovich presented his observations on 'Question of the Lepchas'. Drawing from the conversations with the locals in the Lepcha village he presented how Lepchas moved for the interest of Britishers from the 'present' Darjeeling' and how Lepcha community were organising several dialogues with the local municipal authorities, state and central governments to preserve their identity around their language and distinct culture. After Marco's presentation, Sohini Majumdar, Workshop-Participant, narrated her report on the responses of local media to trafficking in Darjeeling region.

Somen Nag, senior journalist based in Siliguri, described North Bengal as a permanent site of displacement. Different linguistic and ethnic communities struggled here: some to establish their economic, political and cultural hegemony, some to maintain their mere existence. He emphasised the international importance of Siliguri's location and showed how refugees from neighbouring states were settling around the town, changing the demographic and even economic scenario of Siliguri.

#### ***(V) The Kolkata Workshop: (Outputs/ Deliverables)***

After the NBU-session the participants left for New Jalpaiguri station and boarded the train for Kolkata on 11 October, 2012 and reached Kolkata in the morning of 12 October. In Kolkata, the two-day Workshop took place at Swabhumi.

The Workshop began with a public lecture by veteran journalist, Subir Bhaumik on 'Migrants, Settlers and Non-Citizens: The East Bengali Muslims in Assam and Rohingyas of Myanmar'. Prof. Pradip Kumar Bose, eminent Sociologist chaired the session. Here are some excerpts from Bhaumik's lecture:

“When some Indian Muslim groups gathered to protest in a Mumbai park in August against the persecution of the Muslims in Assam and Myanmar little did they know who these Muslims were and whether there was any common thread of history binding them together that could explain their current plight. The protest turned violent and led to a few deaths in police firing but the issue got buried in the Pan-Islamic narrative that the protest organizers were trying to circulate to whip up passions across South Asia. This lecture will seek to find that missing thread of history that binds the Muslims of East Bengali origin in India’s Assam state and the Rohingya Muslims of Myanmar’s Arakan province – about how their ancestors moved out from the eastern borderlands of undivided Bengal into the neighbouring provinces of British and Burmese empires at various points of historical time for reasons of livelihood and trade and how they have shared varying degrees of welcome and hostility in host societies..

“The Rohingyas have been stripped of citizenship rights in military-ruled Myanmar in 1982 and there is no indication that they are likely to get that back in a relative democratic dispensation that now runs the country. The Muslims of East Bengali origin secured Indian citizenship and voted in successive Indian elections in Assam until a powerful nativist movement (1979-1985) challenged their status as Indian nationals. The community which had been once welcomed by the Assamese elite as "Na-Asamiyas"(Neo-Assamese) suddenly found itself dumped as a suspect community, derided as “infiltrators” ,”illegal migrants” and “Bangladeshis”. Since then, these Muslims have been periodically attacked by armed nativist groups, even as their growing numbers and rising influence in local electoral politics have fuelled movements by local Assamese and tribal groups who demand detection and deportation of all of them who cannot conclusively prove their Indian citizenship.

“For the first time, violence against these Muslims in Assam and those against the Rohingyas in Arakans coincided and helped attract some level of global attention to their plight. While looking at the various issues involving these communities in Assam and Arakans, the lecture will seek to explore the various categories that emerge out of migration and how it plays into political systems as far apart as modern democracies and military dictatorships. It is important to look out for the critical threshold – at which point the welcome evaporates into unbridled hostility.”

Subir Bhaumik’s lecture was followed by a lively discussion. The participants posed several critical questions and expressed their opinion. The discussion continued informally during the Lunch.

The next session on ‘Conflict and Displacement in Northeast’ was moderated by Dr. Sibaji Pratim Basu. There were three speakers: Jayanata Kalita, Nikhil Roshan and Chitra Ahanthem.

Jayanta Kalita, from *Seven Sisters’ Post*, briefly shared about the recent conflict in the Bodoland Territorial Autonomous Districts (BTAD) of Assam. The conflicts between two communities created terror and affected some adjoining districts of the area. It was interpreted as a “communal riot” but actually it was a result of absence of a proper land policy. The violence resulted owing to huge influx of illegal immigrants from Bangladesh which resulted in encroachment of vast tracts of land within and outside the Bodoland Tribal Council (BTC) areas. The state government also lacked in effort of protecting the tribal land in particular and forest and char (sandbar) areas in the river Brahmaputra heightened the sense of alienation among the state’s indigenous people. This created communal fury not only in Assam but in cities like Bangalore, Hyderabad, Pune, and Mumbai. The recent “hate campaign” was launched by a section of fundamentalists through internet which created confusion on a multi-dimensional problem. He also touched upon the phenomenology of media narratives. Phenomenology is the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person’s point of view. The views presented by the media were individual experiences of the journalists which were shaped by pre-conceived idea of larger issue. Nikhil Roshan, from the *Bengal Post* started with a slide show illustrating images and context of the images. He explained the plights of the people displaced in the wake of the conflict in BTAD. He showed pictures of burnt grains; ravaged sacred trees; public school turned into camps to explain context of the issues of depleting land due to the changing course of River Brahmaputra alongwith the conflict which resulted due to land disputes. He further mentioned that Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunal) Act or IMDT Act promulgated in 1983 by

the then Prime Minister of India – Smt. Indira Gandhi had added to events of land encroachment by the illegal migrants from Bangladesh.

On the other hand, Chitra Ahanthem, shared about the Inter-ethnic violence between indigenous groups which has led to internal displacement. She highlighted Kuki-Naga clashes in the early 1990's, Kuki-Paite class and Meitei and Meitei-Pangal clashes. The primary conflict involved the fight for statehood. In the course of time, secondary conflicts have arisen out of tensions between various ethnic and tribal subgroups, and as a result of changes in patterns of land distribution. She also highlighted about the gender dynamics; unofficial red light area of Manipur and the HIV vulnerability.

Two main questions were raised during this session. One was regarding issues if there were grey areas or black and white in the context of the study. The other was regarding how in the visual violence gets represented and comes to acquire the quality of a text, where as land becomes the sub-text. While replying the questions, concerned respondents answered that the issues had their grey areas. There are larger communities, each group clambering for their own territory. It's a question of aesthetic choice but the images have accessibility.

The next session, on 'Natural Disasters and Causes of Displacement', was moderated by Rajat Roy, Senior journalist (presently with Kolkata TV). The participants included Subhashish Chatterjee, journalist of Bengali news channel, *Akash Bangla*; Vikhar Ahmed Sayeed, Special Correspondent of *Frontline* magazine at Bangalore; Amitabha Das, journalist from the Press Trust of India (PTI); Debraj Deb. Debraj, journalist, *The Northeast Today* in Tripura and also a Course-Participant.

The session began with Subhashish Chatterjee's presentation. Chatterjee focused on the plight of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), who were displaced in Sunderban areas of West Bengal after the torrential cyclone (2009) – Aila hit the area. While presenting the paper, Chatterjee stated that he had visited Sandeshkhali block after three and half years of the natural disaster to figure out the fate of the Aila victims in Gosaba and Sandeshkhali area. He said that 330 people were killed by the cyclonic storms, over 3 lakh were displaced and around 7,000 people were exposed to the risk of post-disaster diseases. Chatterjee went on to add that the Sunderbans were inundated with 6.1 m of water and dozens of tigers were feared drowned to death while areas of East Midnapore, Howrah were devastated by the storms. The scribe presented a documentary film produced by him on the topic as well.

The second presentation was made by Vikhar Ahmed Sayeed. He focused on the case of rehabilitation of the Nagarhole tribes. While presenting his paper, he referred to the case study on proposed rehabilitation of Nagarhole tribesmen. Referring to a visit to the tribe, Sayeed said that he had reached out to the districts of Mysore and Kogadu in the Southern border of Karnataka, officially known as the Rajib Gandhi National Park (RGNP) near the forests of Nagarhole alongwith the surrounding forests of Bandipur, Madhumalai and other smaller forests. He visited a small village called Kollengere Haadi alongwith main road that runs through the forest connecting Hansur and Kutta in the same timeframe. Vikhar Ahmed Sayeed referred to the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972 and said that the Act had changed the lives of tribesmen living in the forests across the country. He also added that initiation of the Act has affected the lives of a wide array of tribal communities living in Nagarhole. The scribe also said that introduction of the Scheduled Tribes (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act in 2006 has further complicated matters by recognizing the rights of tribes-folk and forest dwellers to possess land inside the forests across India.

The third presentation of the group was made by Amitabha Das, journalist from the *Press Trust of India* (PTI) who spoke on climate induced displacement victims of the Sunderbans. Displaying a cartographic explanation of the impact of climate change and the ensuing result of rise in sea level, Das stated that melting of icebergs of Antartica and Oceania which eventually resulted in rise of sea level, is actually gradually leading towards total submerging of the Sunderbans. He said that victims of the phenomenon at one of the smaller islands of the area had to shift to a bigger island called the Sagar Island which again created a huge economic pressure on the host locality. The scribe added that the Government of India provided rehabilitation benefits to all these climate induced displacement

victims at Manasadweep in West Bengal which has turned out to be a very fertile area with the passage of time. Referring to an erstwhile question raised on media bias on regionality which leads to more focus on issues somewhere and creates deficit of media coverage of issues from somewhere else and said that media has been largely found to avoid covering these issues. However, Das actually repeatedly referred to the displacement victims as refugees which triggered questions among the participants. However, participants mostly spoke on the issue during informal dialogues after the presentation.

The final presentation of this session was made by Debraj Deb. He started with a slideshow of around 20 photographs of Reang IDPs living in Tripura and their plight after a devastating fire hit the relief camps in North Tripura district. He referred to the mass displacement of Reang communities from Mizoram to Tripura in Northeastern India in 1997-1998 and made a case study of media response to the internal displacement. He stated that split presence of the IDPs in Tripura and Mizoram as far as their physical presence and adult franchise rights are concerned have resulted in highly incomplete representation of the issue in local and regional media. The scribe also pointed out that incorporating finances with coverage of certain issues by formulating some sort of coverage promotion policy could be a significant way out of the crisis since media, just like any other business enterprise, is just another industry.

The next session was on 'Issues of Displacement in Social Media'. It was moderated by Dr. Sibaji Pratim Basu, member, CRG. The speakers were Sohini Majumder, research scholar at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi; Sabir Ahmed of SNAP, Kolkata; Vishu Rita Krocha, journalist of *The Eastern Mirror*, Nagaland.

In her presentation, Sohini Majumder delved deep into the post-1947 India, when the country made her 'tryst with destiny' and thousands of people in the two states of Punjab and Bengal were subject to extraordinary violence and displacements. She said that the 'enigma' of independence had disembarked with the enormity and magnanimity of 'partition violence'. Referring to the 'genocidal violence' that accompanied 'moment of rupture' which affected the lives of people who lived through the trauma of violence and the various ways they remembered and conceptualized it. Referring to the Partition, Sohini said that it mostly intended to provide communal right to self determination, was based on the question of territoriality leading to the realization of communal autonomy through territorial sovereignty. She argues that the legacy of partition of India has mostly been the reality of migrants.

She also referred to the onslaught of 'refugees' after they came over into Bengal in conspicuous waves with distinct social composition and stated that while the wealthy elite strata of East Bengal had been successful in re-establishing themselves in West Bengal, it is the lower urban strata and rural migrants who are posing the 'refugee problem' before the West Bengal Government since their influx from 1950 onwards. According to the estimates of the Government of West Bengal 44.5 lakhs of refugees came from East Pakistan to West Bengal over a period of 23 years, from 1947 to 1970.

She also said that the government has failed to address the issue of the refugee issue but what has turned to the most vital instrument of modernization and socio political development is the media. She referred to broadcast media and said that people.

However, she also stated that these immigrants are now successfully using the channels of the mass media like the newspapers and the radio to focus and present in front of the larger public their discourse of their victimization to forge and move a strong public opinion build on public sympathy that is now looking towards the Government for the introduction of beneficiary schemes for refugee rehabilitation. She also argues that the new media has been very useful for the refugee population to reach their voices the house of a wealthy professional in Alipore in Calcutta or the Writers Building or the State legislature from the interiors of Madhya Pradesh or Andaman.

In his paper, Sabir Ahmed presented a case study on how groups of displaced people use new media to organize and pressurize the government on issues of rehabilitation. He referred to the debate on role of new media in mobilizing groups and stated that the social media is affecting the process both positively and negatively. He said

that since people even from the remotest corners of the world are prone to being connected to the World Wide Web through the social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn even in their own language. He said that the public is more prone to participation in citizen journalism these days thus giving immediate access to first hand information of any incident in any corner of the world. However, questions were raised on the issue of how much the issue of accessing social networking site or a smartphone and such gadgets is logical for a person who is physically displaced himself of herself. Ahmed argued that having a small cell phone is actually more than a fancy and is available with most people, even among those suffering from critical displacement crises.

The third presentation of the group was made by Vishu Rita Krocha, journalist from *The Eastern Mirror*, Nagaland in Northeastern India. She made a case study of Kohima town of Nagaland state in the region. Referring to the early hours of the day in Kohima, Rita said that the city presents a disheartening sight with people whom she called 'Miyas' – engaged in manual work throughout the city. She termed the presence of illegal immigrants as one of the intense crises of the state's demography. Rita also said that the state has been long battling with the issue of conflict and illegal immigration, coupled with the lack of proper infrastructure, poor connectivity and communication. Rita went to the extent of saying that development is only beginning to seep in the state, that has for decades together, seemingly, only been portrayed in a negative light to the world outside, more for its nature of conflict.

She referred to the Indo-Naga conflict in the presentation said that a large section of local population which experienced the brutality of Indo-Naga conflict, still remember how their villages were razed to ashes, forcing them to flee to the jungles with nothing but a ray of hope to survive. She says that there are women survivors of the disaster living till today, who live in a traumatized state because they were deeply impacted by the conflict. It is mainly fear of that particular upheaval that continues to disturb and annoy them psychologically beside the visible physical implications.

After the presentations, Dr. Sudeep Basu raised the issue of Social media in the context of Arab Spring, London riots etc. Marco additionally commented on the issue and asked how vulnerable people have access to the social networking sites etc. Questions were raised by Preeti Rani, Vishu Rita Krocha and others as well on the issue. While, referring to the study of migration in the area, Himadri Chatterjee, one of the participants of the Winter Course, also made some critical comments.

Next came the Round-Table Session on 'Reporting Conflict, Development and Displacement in East and Northeast', which was participated by some of the finest journalists. The speakers were Nirmalya Banerjee, Sopan Joshi and Rajat Roy. The session was moderated by Anirban Roy.

Rajat Roy was the first speaker. He started his discourse on the role of reporter in conflict situations. He raised some questions regarding identity of a reporter and he has referred to the past incidences of riots in 1992-93 and illegal labour migration to Mumbai. He highlighted this point by mentioning that identity in different situations becomes paramount to access information. He concluded his talk with an emphasis on the neutrality and objectivity of reporter.

Next discourse by Mr Nirmalya Banerjee was in the context of development and displacement. The main focus of his discourse was on the comparison in the context of journalism in Bengal and North East. He also raised the security issues of the reporters particularly in conflict situations. He further mentioned about the political affiliations which he termed as "*politicization of media*" and stigma attached to it becomes the major obstacle. Third speaker Mr Sopan Joshi related the experiences from different parts of the country to the situations in North East. He raised some questions on indigenouness and remoteness. He mentioned that the major reason for forced migration was violence for livelihoods. He concluded by elaborating on the three main reasons for migration precisely water, drought & famines and market economy of the particular area.

Anirban Roy, Moderator of the Round-Table, also shared some of his experiences while working as a reporter in the conflict-zones of India's northeast and specifically Assam. The Round-Table stirred many opinion and

observations from the fellow journalists present there. The issues of identity and accessibility to the information, mainstreaming of media and the role of vernacular media in conflict situations were also the points of discussion.

## **The Kolkata Workshop: Day II**

After thorough and lively interactive sessions on Day I, the participants were busy to assess the outcome of the Media Workshop, On Day II (13 October 2012). The Day II was mostly reserved for the participants. Most of the participants congratulated CRG for organising such a unique Workshop, acknowledged their gratitude for giving them an opportunity to join it and also talked about the good memories that they would cherish for long.

Most of them felt that although they had attended seminars elsewhere, in which people from both the media and academia had presented papers, they had not seen/experienced anything similar to the present Workshop organised by CRG. It was a seminar, they held, in which the journalists and academics not only shared a common platform, they also shared the experiences of their 'exclusive world' with each other. Again, going together in field visits was also a 'learning experience' for them. The academics saw how their media-friends took interviews and wrote reports. The journalists also experienced how the people from academia try to assimilate their theoretical knowledge with practical field findings. In all, they shared their total experience, read out the Reports on the Workshop, engaged themselves in vibrant discussions, gave their suggestions for future improvements and expressed hope that this would be continued for years to come.

Finally, the Media Workshop came to an end after the distribution of Participation-Certificates by Course Co-ordinator, Dr. Anasua Basu Ray Chaudhury.

Outcome Achieved - Focus on what difference the project has made/change has happened, not activities or outputs.

Outcome/achievement-wise, the Workshop on Media and Forced Migration has been a successful endeavour on many counts.

- The journalist-participants, inspired by the Workshop, have already published a number of news articles on the problems of Lepchas and Tibetan refugees in Darjeeling hills as well as on other issues related to forced migration. Some of these news pieces/articles are:
  - (a) Nirmalya Banerjee has published a report on 14 October 2012 "Cosmetic Changes not enough for Hills", *Times of India*, Kolkata
  - (b) Nirmalya Banerjee has published another report on 6 December 2012 "Community Cauldron boils in Darjeeling", *Times of India*, Kolkata
  - (c) Vishu Rita Krocha has published a feature on 3 November 2012, "Tibetan Refugee Self help Centre Darjeeling – Reality and Testimony of a Dignified Community", *Eastern Mirror* (Weekend Supplement), Kohima
  - (d) Biswajit Roy has published a detailed article on 6 November 2012, "Lepchas Itch for their own Council after Year's Wait", *The Telegraph*, Kolkata

Apart from the above articles, Rajat Roy and Raghav Bandyopadhyay are also writing articles / reports, which would be published in reputed journals/news papers very soon.

- Besides these, five more reports have been submitted. These will be revised, and published in a collection.
- A video archive on Aila cyclone has been submitted as assignment. It has been now sub-titled for wider dissemination.
- The above articles in news papers and the conferences that were held in Darjeeling have had positive impact on the people at large, especially on the people around Gorkhaland Territory Administration (GTA). Very recently, the GTA in a decision-taking meeting (December 2) has taken a resolution favouring the formation of the Lepcha Development Board (*Not Council*) under its wings. The GTA has

also promised to take up the issues of other non-Gorkha indigenous tribal people.

- Plus work is going on producing a compendium of glossary of relevant technical terms for the use of journalists and media activists.
- Finally a full-fledged compendium will come out based on the research/and field visit experiences of the participants, reports, and other assignments by journalists,/activists, and academics. It will also contain the results of interactions with the two victim communities – displaced Lepchas and the Tibetan refugees. This compendium will include the glossary mentioned above. The compendium will be widely distributed among media activists.