

The Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group (CRG), in collaboration with Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies (MAKAIAS), ICSSR and TAFT Foundation, organized a research workshop on Interrogating Forced Migration between 16th and 21st March, 2015.

Session wise report of the Workshop:

Session 1 (Keynote Lecture by Sabyasachi Basu Roy Chaudhury, Vice Chancellor, Rabindra Bharati University, on the theme Birth of a Stateless Community: Rohingya Refugees in India)

India, Basu Ray Chaudhury informed us, is hosting Rohingya refugees who have left Myanmar to avoid violence for quite some time. Both registered and unregistered Rohingya refugees are living in cramped camps in Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Delhi, Jammu and Uttar Pradesh. Their largest settlement is in Jammu where 6000 Rohingyas live in makeshift tents in subhuman condition with no or very little access to food, clean water and medicine. India has no comprehensive policy regarding the Rohingyas. Some of them have been detained under the Foreigners' Act of 1946 and languishing in jails in different parts of India including West Bengal. Basu Roy Chaudhury also explained the historical context of migration of the Rohingyas to the neighbouring countries and discussed the problems they face because of their statelessness. The conditions of precarity that they have to endure because of increased securitization also add to their plight. The lecture was followed by a lively discussion which enquired about the registration process of the Rohingyas in India and their official status.

Session 2 (Participants' Research Papers 1)

This session had three speakers, Madhura Chakraborty, Research Assistant, CRG, Suchismita Majumder, Research Associate, CRG, and Srimanti Sarkar, Researcher, University of Calcutta and MAKAIAS. Chakraborty's presentation contextualised the issue of the Rohingyas within the broader framework of security, territoriality and islamophobia which leads to brand them as a threat to security. Majumder's paper dealt with experiences of Rohingyas in three jails in West Bengal and described their predicaments and survival strategies. Sarkar, on the other hand, presented the issue from the perspective of national security and terrorist networks that the Rohingya community in both Bangladesh and India is alleged to have been implicated in. In the discussion that followed, concerns were raised about the problems of using national security as a framework for analyzing forced migration and information gap in terms of doing research on the Rohingyas both in Bangladesh and India.

Session 3 (Participants' Research Papers 2)

This session had three presenters – Sahana Basavapatna, Lawyer, Supreme Court of India, Kriti Chopra, Researcher, St, Joseph's College, Bangalore, and Suhita Saha, Researcher, Jadavpur University. Basavapatna's paper looked at the refugee situation in urban Delhi, Mewat and Jammu from the perspective of legal rights and within a legal framework of settlements in urban slums. Chopra's paper explored the experience and representation of Rohingya refugees in Hyderabad from primary ethnography of the communities and NGOs (such as COVA and Salamah Burmese Refugee Relief Trust) and newspaper reports and articles. Saha's paper

was presented from a historical perspective looking at the evolution of the Rohingya and Rakhine identities in the Arakan region. The discussion that followed included issues like the specificity of the Rohingyas among other marginal groups in Myanmar, distinction between refugee-hood and statelessness, involvement of various interest groups in providing relief to the Rohingyas, and contrast and conjunction of ethnic conflicts and ethical considerations.

Session 4 (Roundtable Discussion on Rohingya Refugees)

The speakers in this session were Ravi Hemadri, Secretary, Development Research Initiative, New Delhi, Ragini Trakroo Zutshi from UNHCR, New Delhi and Meghna Guha Thakurta, Executive Director, Research Initiatives, Bangladesh. Hemadri talked about the political economy of the Rohingya's existence in India – their occupations, educational possibilities, and rent structures. Zutshi stressed on the role played by UNHCR and civil society organisations in working closely with local administration to enable resettlement of the Rohingyas. Guhathakurta, through three different discursive constructions of the Rohingyas, described the challenges inherent in working for the resettlement of the Rohingyas in Bangladesh. The discussion around the presentations mostly consisted of seeking information and clarifications, such as the exact asylum procedure in West Bengal, to which it was noted that there is no such procedure in place.