

**CALCUTTA RESEARCH GROUP**



# **BENGAL-BIHAR DIALOGUE**

On

Migration of populations & ideas/ Languages,  
cultural exchanges & interlinked political histories/  
Borders, border towns, logistics & logistical labour/  
Media and the popular/ Ecology, natural disasters  
& displacements/ Caste, gender & social justice

**29-30 October, Kolkata**

In collaboration with

**Institute for Human Sciences (IWM), Vienna**



This dialogue is a part of CRG's ongoing research and orientation programme in migration and forced migration studies, supported by IWM, Vienna, Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, and several other universities and institutions in India.

Programme Schedule  
**Bengal-Bihar Dialogue**

[A Dialogue Programme on the Issues of Culture, Identity, Caste, Migration, Citizenship, Justice and Media]

Organised by

**Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group(CRG)**

supported by

**Institut für die Wissenschaften vom Menschen (Institute for Human Sciences, Vienna)**

**29 & 30 October 2021 at Ras Manch I, Swabhumi, Kolkata**

**Day 1 (29 October)**

**10.00 -10.30 am:** Registration and Tea

**10.30-11.00 am: Inaugural Session**

**Welcome address:** Byasdeb Dasgupta, , University of Kalyani, Nadia & CRG.

**Participants' Self Introduction.**

**Introducing and Explaining the Purpose of the Dialogue Programme:**

Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhury, Department of Political Science Rabindra Bharati University, Kolkata & Honorary Director, CRG.

**11.00 am – 12.30 pm: Theme I: Migration of populations, and ideas**

**Moderator:** Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhury, Honorary Director, CRG.

**Main discussants:** Sonmani Chaudhary, Centre for Catalyzing Change, Patna.

Shambhu Saran Srivastava, Former Member of Legislative Council of Bihar, Patna

Sabir Ahamed, Pratichi (India)Trust, Kolkata & CRG.

**12.00-2.00 pm: Theme II: Languages, cultural exchanges and interlinked political histories**

**Moderator:** Shambhu Saran Srivastava, Former Member of Legislative Council of Bihar, Patna.

**Main Discussants:** Manoj Tiwari, Educationist, Patna.

Farid Khan, Poet and Writer, Patna & Mumbai.

Biplab Mukherjee, Durbar Mahila Samawaya Committee, Kolkata.

Atig Ghosh, Department of History, Visva Bharati University, Shantiniketan & CRG.

Jishnu Dasgupta, Department of History, Serampore College, Hooghly.

**2.00-3.00pm: Lunch**

**3.00-4.30 pm: Theme III: Borders, border towns, logistics and logistical labour**

**Moderator:** Atig Ghosh, Department of History, Visva-Bharati University Shantiniketan & CRG.

**Main Discussants:** Paula Banerjee, Department of South and South-East Asian Studies, University of Calcutta, Kolkata & CRG.

Sheema Fatima, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai.

**4.30-5.00 pm: Tea**

**5.00 – 6.30 pm: Theme IV: Ecology of rivers and deltas, natural disasters and displacements**

**Moderator:** Jayanta Basu, Columnist and faculty member University of Calcutta, Kolkata.

**Main Discussants:** Sanjib Chatterjee, Development Research Communication and Services Centre, Kolkata.

Dipanjana Sinha, Independent Journalist, Kolkata.

Shatabdi Das, CRG.

Gopal Krishna Toxic Watch, Patna & CRG.

## **Day 2 (30 October 2021)**

**10.00-10.30 am: Tea**

**10.30-11.00 am:** Summary of yesterday's discussion.

**11.00 am-12.30 pm: Theme V: Media and the popular with a special focus to the local medias**

**Moderator:** Rajat Roy, Senior Journalist, Kolkata & CRG. (TBC)

**Main Discussants:** Swati Bhattacharya, Ananda Bazar Patrika, Kolkata.

Seetu Tiwari, Senior Journalist, Patna.

Chandan Srivastava, Jayprakash University,Chhapra.

**12.30-2.00 pm: Theme VI: Caste, gender and histories of social justice**

**Moderator:** Samata Biswas, The Sanskrit College and University & CRG

**Main Discussants:** Anamika Priyadarshini, Centre for Catalyzing Change, Patna & CRG.

Pushyamitra, Author and Journalist, Patna.

**2.00-3.00 pm: Lunch**

**3.00-4.00 pm:** Summarizing the Entire Discussion.

**4.00 pm:** Vote of Thanks.

**This is a tentative schedule subject to last minute changes**

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**\*Structure of the dialogue:** In every session, the dialogue will be initiated by the moderator and the panellists based on the session notes. Following that the moderator will open the floor for a brief discussion on the theme.

### **Thematic Notes for the Dialogue:**

#### **A) Migration of populations, and ideas;**

West Bengal and Bihar have developed as two interconnected regions. Their shared experiences in the colonial past and protracted development under the sceptre of colonial capital resulted in large outflows of migratory populations making the region serve as a large labour catchment area within the operational circuits of the global networks of capital. A trend that continued in the post-colonial times under the influence of the neo-liberal capitalism. With every migration the locale kept on shifting its boundaries distancing itself locus but retaining and creating new local in every destination of mobility. A dialogue between the two states will therefore help us understand the changing patterns of migration and ideas from the vantage point of a comparative and connected framework, and in terms of a *longue duree* structure dynamically evolving in Eastern India.

#### **B) Languages, cultural exchanges and interlinked political histories;**

“Concepts are words in their sites.” A site that reflects itself ontologically, syntactically and sometime move beyond its peripheral normality and becomes reflective in the public sphere when the obliquity of language evolves the comparative political within the genealogy of cultural trends and exchanges involving geographical sensibilities. The inter-regional and global labour circulation from the Bengal-Bihar region serves as an example of creation of shifting localities of cultural performativity as marker or identifier of community distinctively gradually being absorbed in the migrated locale. For instance, ritual practices like Chhat puja in West Bengal or transborder folk performative traditions like Sohar, Bidesia travelling wide to the West and the Asia-Pacific region like the popularised and practiced by generations of migrant Bihari shows the spillage of how the

cultural is political through an increasing reproachment of the symbolic presence in identity formation. The dialogue aims to seek and understand these nuances of cultural exchanges and their relations with interlinked political histories of the two regions in eastern India.

### **C) Borders, border towns, logistics and logistical labour;**

With the unfolding infrastructure projects like the Ganga Waterway, the Amritsar–Delhi–Kolkata Industrial Corridor, and Bihar exploring the feasibility of developing a port facility in Odisha, it is apparent that once again eastern India is all set to become an important centre for trade and commerce. This brings the question of logistics and logistical labour to the forefront. The borders and the border towns like Siliguri, Gorakhpur and others become crucial in this context. As these recent infrastructural projects are all aimed at ensuring a smooth and quick circulation of commodity and labour under the rule of neoliberal capital, it is an opportune moment to rethink the ontology of the borders between the eastern states. It is important to look at how the politics of development has been reshaping the regions by seeking to control and manage the movement of people and commodities surpassing the inter-state borders.

### **D) Media and the popular with a special focus to the local medias;**

Perspectives, perceptions and realities on migration and policies thereafter converge for the public consumption through the prism of the media representation— sometimes stereotyping the categories of narrative and others breaking the normative. The media has constantly (re)figured the body of the migrant either as structural blocks essential in the making of a nation creating a state oriented migration narrative or has challenged its coteries in the inconsistencies of legislative policies that have led to systematic inequality. This feature became even more apparent during the current Covid pandemic when the media was active to bring the migrant as visible category in the cognitive capacities of nation making. The Bengal-Bihar dialogue focuses on the role of the local and vernacular media as a representative voice of the migrant to the common consciousness.

### **E) Ecology of rivers and deltas, natural disasters and displacements**

A successful dialogue between West Bengal and Bihar will also seek to highlight how the fixity of administrative borders has been challenged by natural calamities and ecological disorders. Climate change and natural disasters have become one of the biggest drivers of human exodus besides the violence induced migrations. Both Bengal-Bihar benefits from the intricate network of the natural river systems of the Indo-Gangetic plains increasing the fertility and productivity of the region but the shifting of the river beds and continuous seasonal floods have created a new category of climate migrants living ‘eroded lives’. The rapid utilization of the natural resources has led to rising inequality and gaps in protectionism lay bare the precarity of the livelihood in this region. Through the Bengal-Bihar dialogue we attempt to situate the lives in the hydrosocial cycle of the region within the broader regional history of population trajectories and discuss how the intervention from the

state as well as the civil society aid to produce as well as amend vulnerability within this cyclical yet juxtaposed relation between ecological change/uncertainties and related socio-demographic change.

### **F) Caste, gender and histories of social justice**

Systematic segregation and inequality embedded in the social hierarchies have plagued the life worlds of the citizens in a post-colonial democracy like India through the mechanisms of caste operations and gendering bodies and have thus resulted in an unequal mode of organization of social relations creating regulated structures of social interactions. Both the issues have been the modus operandi in organizing and designing the labour relations and the selective inclusion impacts the differential treatment and wage disparity in labour markets to the point of losing the agency of the individual. The socio-economic realities of the social discrimination of casteism and gendered othering have often become the baseline in the electoral politics. The dialogue seeks to explore the intricate playing of 'othering' through the lens of caste & gender in the Bihar & Bengal & its regional interconnectedness.