

# URBAN & ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM

YOUTH MEET 2025  
A REPORT

Rotary  
Club Of Darjeeling



**CIFAR**



Institut für die Wissenschaften vom Menschen  
Institute for Human Sciences



## **YOUTH MEET 2025**

### **URBAN AND ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM**

27 MARCH 2025, DARJEELING, WEST BENGAL, INDIA

Organised by

Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group

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Website: [www.mcrpg.ac.in](http://www.mcrpg.ac.in)

In collaboration with

Institute for Human Sciences (IWM), Vienna

Canadian Institute for Advanced Research (CIFAR)

Rotary Club, Darjeeling



**CIFAR**



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*The Youth Meet was organised by Calcutta Research Group in collaboration with Institute for Human Sciences (IWM), Vienna as part of its programme on “Refugees, Migrants and Urban Justice 2024,” Canadian Institute for Advanced Research (CIFAR), and Rotary Club of Darjeeling. The views expressed by the panellists, speakers and participants do not represent the institute organising the event*

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## Acknowledgements

The Calcutta Research Group (CRG) is thankful to the Institute for Human Sciences (IWM), Vienna, for the support and collaboration in organising the Youth Meet on “Urban and Environmental Activism” on 27 March 2025 in Darjeeling, West Bengal, India, and CRG also thanks the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research (CIFAR) for their active support in organising the “City Lights” public lecture as part of the Youth Meet programme. CRG expresses gratitude to the Rotary Club, Darjeeling and Gymkhana Club, Darjeeling for having generously extended their help as local partner organisations in formalising and hosting the programme.

It is with the encouragement of Ranabir Samaddar, Samir Kumar Das, Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhury, Subhas Ranjan Chakraborty, and active participation of Amar Rai, Samata Biswas, Sibaji Pratim Basu, colleagues at CRG, young participants, school teachers, graduate fellows who made the dialogue relevant. Our warm gratitude to Roshan Rai for agreeing to deliver the public lecture on water and waste management in Darjeeling and sharing his insights, and Darjeeling Ladenla Road Prerna (DLR Prerna) NGO, Loreto Convent School, Darjeeling and Southfield College, Darjeeling for joining the programme.

This one-day Youth Meet designed in the form of a public dialogue held on 27 March 2025 was second in the series organised as part of the programme on “Refugees, Migrants and Urban Justice 2024” and is part of CRG’s ongoing programmes on migration and forced migration studies conducted in collaboration with several organisations, institutions and universities in Indian and abroad. CRG thanks Rituparna Datta, Rajat Kanti Sur and Poushali Basak for the documentation and preparation of this report for the Youth Meet 2025.

## Preface

The Calcutta Research Group (CRG) in collaboration with the Institute for Human Sciences (IWM), Vienna, Canadian Institute for Advanced Research (CIFAR), Rotary Club of Darjeeling organised the one-day Youth Meet designed as a dialogue on “Urban and Environmental Activism” on 27 March 2025. CRG with the support of IWM, Vienna, and other organisations has been organising Youth Meets and Dialogues since 2021 as a platform for exchange of ideas on issues of migration, development, protection and other relevant themes affecting daily life today adversely. In 2024–2025, the focus of the dialogue had been the impact of urban process and cities as centres of constant change, through developing new social relations, neighbourhoods becoming more closeted, rapid urban growth impacting the climate, etc. With the aim to explore the interconnections of urbanity in everyday life and activism, CRG organised the second Youth Meet as part of the 2024 research programme on “Urban and Environmental Activism” on 27 March 2025, focusing on different aspects of urbanity. This Youth Meet was focused on the towns and cities of the Himalayan region such as Darjeeling, along with the changing nature of environmental issues triggered by urban expansion in cities like Kolkata and industrial cities in the coal producing regions of India. As a hill town, Darjeeling with its colonial origin has developed into postcolonial metropolis with ever increasing number of tourists going to the hills with mystic pull of the majestic mountains and the sacred Kanchenjunga. While this booming tourism is a crucial economy of the mountains, the challenges that come with it has amplified affecting the natural environment of the hill ecosystem. In general conception we take city as an isolated category contained in itself separated from its immediate surroundings. However, the reality is opposite, cities are not separated but integral to everything surrounding it. In Darjeeling like any other hill towns/cities, gravity decides the living system, be it managing the flow of water, role of forest in stabilising the fragile mountain slopes and any change or intervention in altering the natural slope or gradients of the mountain slope affects the life of the residents not just on the hills but also those living downhill. Adverse climatic conditions, due to faulty infrastructural policies has further aggravated the vulnerability of the region to natural disasters and climatic changes. The Youth Meet discussed on pressing issues of water crisis in Darjeeling hills and lack of the national and subnational policies in understanding the springs as source of water and role of community in managing and monitoring water usage. The roundtable discussion on hazards, ecology and activism focused on the fissures in social identity and relations due to climate change—how communities, media, administrations gets pitched against each other percolating slow violence that just doesnot remain limited to those affected by climate change. Mental heath issues, public health, and vulnerability as social concept was discussed at length with reference of case studies from Asansol, Silchar, Kolkata, Darjeeling-Kalimpong region. Young participants from schools and colleges actively voiced their daily challenges faced due changing climate or water crisis in the region. It also highlighted that the ability to speak about vulnerability and express opinion about remedial measures is in itself a privilege as many communities does neither have the opportunity nor the vocabulary ro express their vulnerabilities and is often accepted as a neutral occurrence.

## Participant's Profile



**Amar Singh Rai** is an Indian politician. He has been involved in welfare work and administration of the Darjeeling for a long time. He is associated with the Rotary Club, Darjeeling, Gymkhana Club, Darjeeling and Planters Association, Darjeeling. He is well known for his community engagement and philanthropist activities.



**Anamika Sharma** is a Project Manager with DLR-Prerna in Darjeeling, an NGO working on various social development issues. She has been involved in projects focused on menstrual health and hygiene, sustainable waste management, and community development. Anamika's work with DLR-Prerna has been highlighted in interviews and social media posts, showcasing their efforts in breaking taboos and promoting menstrual dignity.



**Debashree Chakraborty** is a Researcher at Calcutta Research Group. She has previously worked as a Junior Research Fellow at the Department of English, Assam University. She has also worked as a Research Associate in an ICSSR sponsored Major Research Project and has taught at the Department of English, Gurucharan College, Silchar. For her Ph.D thesis, she has worked on Climate Fiction. Apart from environmental humanities, her research interests include the intersections of climate change, migration, partition in cultural studies.



**Priscilla Giri** is a research administrator with DLR Prerna, leading a research program TeaLeaf (Teachers Leading the Frontline) Mansik Swastha in Darjeeling, India. Experienced in project designing, implementation and evaluation. She has worked with the schools in rural communities in Darjeeling for the past eight years and involved in the mental health program for five years.



**Rajat Kanti Sur** is a Researcher and Programme Associate at the Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group. He earned his PhD from the Department of South and South East Asian Studies, University of Calcutta. His areas of interest are Social History, Urban Studies, Social and Cultural Anthropology, and Performance Studies. He published in both Bengali and English. Some of his articles were published in reputed journals and edited books. Rajat's current work is based on the Social Security Policies for the Women Migrant Workers in Colonial and Post-Colonial Calcutta (1881-1951).



**Roshan P. Rai** is a development practitioner with DLR Prerna, Darjeeling-based NGO. He works on issues of environment and social equity in the Darjeeling Himalaya. His work with small farmers at present focus on local food cultures, water and climate change. He is part of the core team of Zero Waste Himalaya and has partnered with local urban bodies, communities and educational institutions in promoting sustainable waste management practices. The team has been undertaking peer educators training and campaigns like the Plastic Freedom Challenge in the Darjeeling and Sikkim.





**Samaresh Guchhait** has been associated CRG in multiple administrative capacities. His research interest lies in aquatic life, biological sciences, environmental changes. He has a passion for photography and runs a publication house dedicated to bringing voices from the periphery.



**Samata Biswas** is Assistant Professor at the Department of English, The Sanskrit College and University and Member of Calcutta Research Group. Her research interest lies in body studies, migration studies, media and popular culture. She is editorial board member of the blog Refugee Watch Online.



**Shatabdi Das** is a Researcher at the Calcutta Research Group (CRG). She was Junior Visiting Fellow at the Institute for Human Sciences (IWM), Vienna, in Austria, in April 2022, under the 'Europe-Asia Research Platform on Forced Migration'. She is currently doing research on urban and environmental issues and climate crisis. She has previously worked as Junior Research Fellow at the Centre for Urban Economic Studies, University of Calcutta and has also taught Geography at PG level in Sarsuna College, Kolkata (affiliated to the University of Calcutta). Shatabdi has been working with CRG since 2018 on research projects on migration studies, borderlands, displacement, environment and climate change.



**Sibaji Pratim Basu**, a well-known political scientist and political commentator from West Bengal, teaches Political Science at Vidyasagar University, Midnapore. He is a Member of Calcutta Research Group. Some of his publications include: The Poet and Mahatma: Engagement with Nationalism and Internationalism; an edited volume called The Fleeing People of South Asia: Selections from Refugee Watch; a co-edited volume called Politics in Hunger Regime: Essays on the Right to Food in West Bengal and also an edited book, Forced Migration and Media-Mirrors.



**Swamy Mick** runs the Nataraj Gurukul in Dhajea Busty in Darjeeling Hills based on the principles of universal brotherhood and worked towards sustainable development in the Himalayan region.



## Programme Schedule

### Urban and Environmental Activism

Youth Meet

Organised by Calcutta Research Group

In collaboration with

Institute for Human Sciences (IWM), Vienna,  
Canadian Institute for Advanced Research (CIFAR)

27 March 2025

Venue: Gymkhana Club, Darjeeling

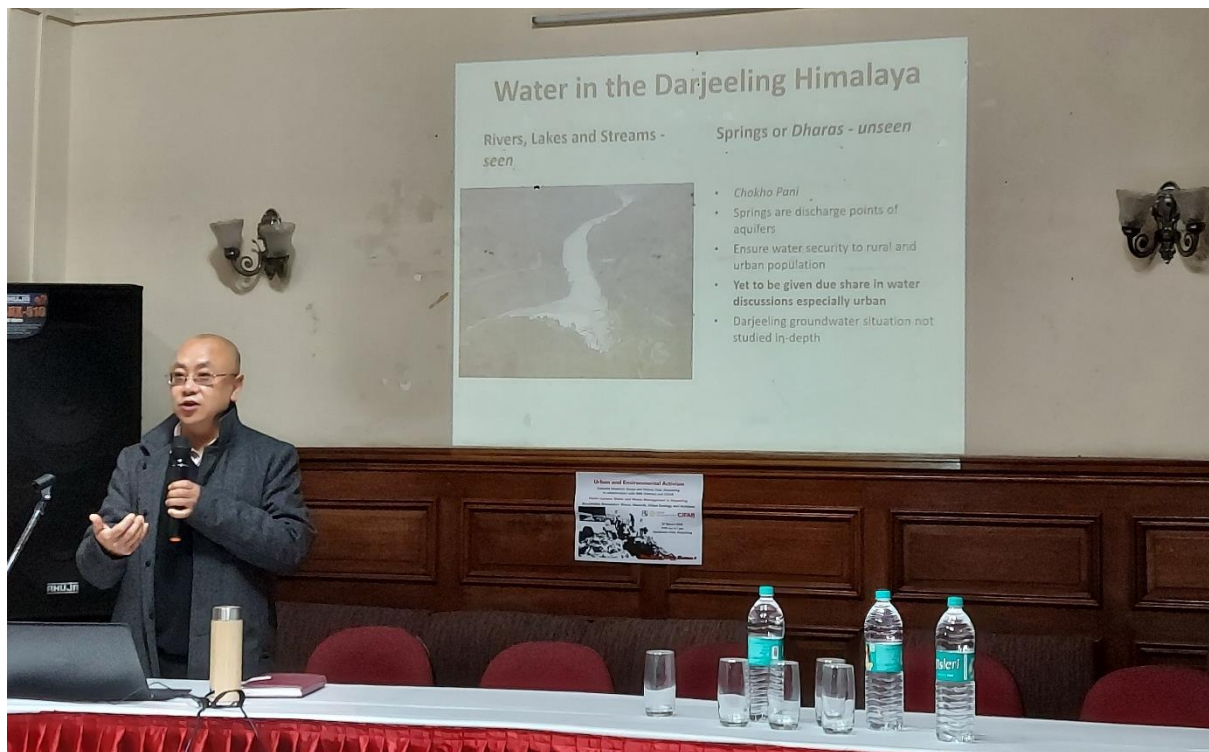
- 9:30 AM-10:00 AM: Registration**
- 10:00 AM-10:15 AM: Welcome Address and Introductory Remarks**  
**Amar Singh Rai**, Rotary Club Darjeeling
- 10:15 AM-11:30 AM: Public Lecture:**  
**Water and Waste Management in Darjeeling**
- Chair: Amar Rai**  
**Speaker: Roshan Rai**, DLR Prerna
- 11:30 AM-11:40 AM: Introducing Calcutta Research Group**  
**Speaker: Sibaji Pratim Basu**, Vidyasagar University and Calcutta Research Group
- 11:40 AM-1:00 PM: Roundtable Discussion:**  
**Rivers, Hazards, Urban Ecology and Activism**
- Moderator: Samata Biswas**, Sanskrit College and University and Calcutta Research Group
- Speakers:**  
**Shatabdi Das**, Calcutta Research Group  
**Samaresh Guchhait**, Calcutta Research Group  
**Debashree Chakraborty**, Calcutta Research Group  
**Anamika Sharma**, DLR Prerna  
**Priscilla Giri**, DLR Prerna  
**Swamy Mick**, Nataraj Gurukul
- Discussion by Local Environmentalists, Students, and Participants
- 1:00 PM-1:05 PM: Vote of Thanks: Poushali Basak**

## Discussion

The one-day youth meet on “Urban and environmental Activism” was planned as a youth dialogue with action oriented participatory approach with active involvement of students, practitioners, professionals and activists in understanding the problems and challenges of urban development in the hills of Darjeeling. The programme had two distinct sections: a public lecture and a panel discussion. The programme commenced with an opening address by **Amar Rai** discussing the importance of community based ecological preservation technique and methods of natural resources in Darjeeling towards a sustainable living and how Zero Waste Himalaya policy has over the year transformed in an integrated Himalayan ecological preservation and waste management spearheaded by DLR Perna in collaboration with different institution—how mountains, especially Darjeeling, has become both harbinger of modern urbanity and consequently becoming the victim of policies and development practices standing at the crossroads of culture, food, water and tourism as the main industry in the region where waste management and garbage disposal has become a consequential challenge in the hilly topography of the hill town. Waste itself becomes a category of dispossession and disposability affecting the everyday livelihood.

The **public lecture on “Water and Waste Management in Darjeeling”** delivered by **Roshan Rai** was part of “City Lights” lecture series organised by CRG in collaboration with CIFAR and was dedicated as the Third Dipankar Basu Memorial Lecture. The lecture began with the understanding of what do we mean by clean Darjeeling more of a question as over the years the demography of Darjeeling has increased in numbers also deepening the cracks in waste management of the city. Darjeeling, in common parlance has remained equated to European romanticism of a hill town and thereby limiting its broad geographical spread of a district and confining it to a limited imaginary of a city mostly the Chowrasta Mall section that has been effectively preserved as heritage zone with limited vehicular traffic offering it a space restored in time. While district Darjeeling gives a variegated topography of hills, valleys and plains, the city Darjeeling essentially a romantic imagery of Empire and its bygone days and limited in its concept as a summer treat for tourist. It is this difference in perspective as well as operational topography of the city and its district that both water and waste has gravitationally affected the populace depending on its living area. Designed as a colonial retreat, access to natural resources like water, first to the colonial regiment and then to the peripheral natives still continues to administer the water management of the city. Different layers of urbanization of Darjeeling have remained contextual as to who lives in which part of Darjeeling and thereby defining the access to water and role of conservancy in waste management. The gaze of Darjeeling as a mountain city, as the hilly waters from the Kanchenjunga, and administrative steps to build tanks to bring equity in access to water both defines and defies the natural property of flow of water and its access. Despite being a water rich region with higher precipitation, glacial water, rich monsoons, what causes the region as a zone of perennial water crisis. So, is the crisis real or arising out of failed strategies? The problem lies in seeing water as a tangible resources available in the rivers, available from rain but we fail to recognise the diversity of water in its notion, availability and usage, whether it is sacredness, purity, and cleanliness that is represented by *Chokho Pani* that is part and parcel of life in the hills and water that is available from the springs. It is a felt experience of community that Chokho Pani is used for rituals and as well as daily necessities. It is the sacredness and divineness of this spring water or Chokho Pani that is believed to be inherently clean and one, therefore, does

not ask where the water comes from. In the national and subnational policy framing this lack of understanding that hill people live coterminously with the spring water as the source and cycle of



*Roshan Rai delivering the public lecture on "Water and Waste Management in Darjeeling"*

livelihood and not just reservoir system of sustainable water management as practiced in the lowlands or non-hilly areas that the understanding of crisis takes different shape in the national gaze which is always a river shed based approach and never a spring based water management approach. The postcolonial political economy of autonomy and mobile demography is deeply embedded in the managing the water crisis in the hills. Water supply in postcolonial cities are centrally managed. In Darjeeling, the main source of water supply is the Senchal Lake, an artificial water body built in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to cater to the needs of central Darjeeling city, i.e., Governor's residence and 5km of its surrounding periphery. A lake built to cater to 3,000 in colonial times still feeds the city with its inflating population of nearly 300,000 including the mobile population like migrant workers, daily transporters, tourists and others. The Senchal Lake channelises water from nearly thirty springs in its reserve. So, while lake as the reservoir is considered as the source of water, in reality it is the springs that feeds the Lake and keeps it replenished. Hence it is necessary to conserve the forest region of Senchal Sanctuary and areas beyond it to keep the viability of the watershed of Senchal. With the larger changes in precipitation pattern, environment and climatic changes, shifts in agroforestry, the tapping of the springs is adversely affecting its water catchment areas. Springs despite being semi-perennial sources of water are dependent on monsoons when the springs overflow with water and from the winters to mid-summer, i.e., December to May when the spring water freezes and thawing takes time that the concept of crisis becomes more reflective. Water management in Darjeeling is entirely a gravity-based system as usual of any hill urban centres. Thus, the fundamental lack of understanding that tapping the Senchal through efforts like Jal Jeevan Mission will only worsen the condition unless efforts are made to preserve the source, i.e., rejuvenating the springs. So, a wired mesh of pipes

circumbulates the city of Darjeeling in its snaky motion. Apart from the locals, it is difficult to distinguish between a water pipe and a sanitation pipe. It is the same gravitation that channelises the flow of water, also administers the direction of liquid waste from the city. Apart from the Senchal, residents also depend on other non-piped sources of water or piped water from springs. So, it is common sight in the periphery of Darjeeling to see tapped lines running from the springs or people selling water piped from the springs. The first step in resolving the water crisis in Darjeeling is to understand that not everyone depends on Senchal Lake for water supply. When one looks at citizenship through the lens of water, then one can see the hierarchy of right and access to water that involves economic capacity to access or buy water, infrastructure like roads, or availability of land acreage to build home reservoirs to store water. The whole system of access to water and exclusion from the centralised water system is dependant on the landscape and the network of springs and gravitational relativity of Senchal. The water runs on the altitude along the ridge line. As water and sewerage line runs simultaneously there are increased chances of contamination causing public health crisis especially in lower reaches of Darjeeling in the western and eastern sectors. There are ninety odd springs that provide water to Darjeeling and sheer visibility of the water source at the national level with its aquifer led approach does not recognise these springs as source of water. National policies fail to see the lived experiences of the mountainous landscape that does not seek water from underneath but communally manages the spring water by limiting the amount of water sharing from a particular spring based on seasonality of availability of spring water to ensure everyone has an equal access to water.

**Sibaji Pratim Basu** introduced the institutional legacy of CRG and its academic engagement in border and migration studies. It was followed by **a roundtable discussion on the theme of Rivers, Hazards, Urban Ecology and Activism**. The session was moderated by **Samata Biswas**. **Shatabdi Das** detailed on the concept of vulnerability emphasizing on social characteristics and configurations used by communities to face the challenges of physical environment and climate. Vulnerability also refers to the susceptibility to the negative socio-economic environment and the degree to which a community is capable of coping with resisting and recovering from the impacts of specific environmental events together with influences of differences and access to resources, infrastructure and policy interventions. Vulnerability is therefore not a static concept but varies both spatially and temporally. Environmental vulnerability encompasses climate change impact and ecosystem damages as well as pollution. An understanding of the underlying causes of increased social vulnerability in spatial outcome is important in from the perspective of superimposition of the concept of vulnerability to environmental degradation to changes and hazards of various places. The relationship between wellbeing and various forces that modify natural settings and drive climate change as well as human responses to sudden and slow onset of changes becomes significant in the context of ripple effects of fragmented and degenerating ecosystems. Climate change forces people to adapt to a number of deteriorating modification of resources. Vulnerability is a multidimensional process and keeps altering not only the surroundings but also the conditions that aggravate hazard. The dynamic social approach to vulnerability is most likely to improve mitigation, adaptation efforts but resource access, governance, culture and knowledge among others together interact with the components of vulnerability. Consumption of resource, waste handling and the ways in which resource remnants are left to either decompose or to reuse, affect and modify the ecosystems. Therefore, protection, management and conservation of environment with information, training

and knowledge sharing, traditional, local and technical, perception of to be affected population and participation of stakeholders become crucial. She explained the case with reference to the coal mines of Asansol-Durgapur region where indiscriminate coal mining and sand mining have left dry stretches along the Barakar river. **Samaresh Guchhait** elaborated on the interrelations between the East Kolkata Wetlands and the urbanization of Calcutta/Kolkata. With the rapid liberalization of the Indian economy, there has been a change in direction of the economy from its dependency on natural resource based production like agriculture, mining, fisheries, etc., to growing tertiary industries and service sectors accelerating the process of urbanization and industrialization, growing population in the cities to cater to these service sectors that pose a constant threat leading to the overconsumption of natural resources, loss of agricultural lands due to rapid urban growth or illegal encroachment. Using the Fuzzy Analytical Hierarchical Process (FAHP) to understand the geospatial change in the East Kolkata Wetlands and transformation of the wetlands to aquaculture, eutrophication and pollution distance from the road, waste dumping, population growth are the main factors responsible for the deteriorating health, quality and environment of East Kolkata Wetlands. The majorly affected regions of this Ramsar site were the southwest, northeast and northwest of the wetland which are connected with the eastern side of Kolkata. This area surrounded by settlements, infrastructure development projects resulted in wetland fragmentation, waste dumping and sewerage management in this region. From 1991 to 2021, the total wetland has shrunk from 65.295 sq. km. to 41.997 sq. km. affecting significant loss of biodiversity of the region. Salt Lake City and Rajarhat Newtown are the two main satellite auxiliary cities built as an extension of Kolkata mainly on the wetland areas. The proposed ideal of creating a smart city with a green ecosystem for all socio-economic group in reality the actual natural ecosystem of the wetlands. The demand of residential and commercial spaces in the already congested postcolonial Kolkata, the East Metropolitan Bypass offered the lifeline for a breathable space for expansion. Potential profits aligned to the ideal of sustainable economic and industrial development led to the relocation of the tannery industries to a new exclusive zone in Bantala for the prevention of environmental pollution caused by more than five hundred tanneries in Tiljala, Tangra and Topsia. This constant remodification of the wetland surface area has increased the vulnerability of the wetland population vis-à-vis of Kolkata as the natural water drainage system channels have now become landlocked and floods have become more frequent phenomenon. The increased population pressure and demand of natural resources, lack of monitoring of the sewerage and untreated effluents from the leather industry zone have led to the significant rise in biohazards in the wetlands, indirectly affecting the natural produce, water systems of the wetlands and the consumables produced leading to significant public health crisis. **Anamika Sharma** spoke on the necessity of sustainable menstrual health and hygiene. She has been associated with DLR Perna NGO working water, sanitation and hygiene in tea plantations. While working in the tea plantations on public health, sanitation and hygiene, the problem of menstrual health and menstrual waste management posed a serious challenge. Menstrual health has always remained a hush word even in urban centres and in closed communities living in the tea plantations the barriers of gender and access to space posed an even serious threat. The first step was build community awareness about menstrual health within community and most importantly amongst the menstruators about the regular hygiene products, their role in daily life as well as their climatic impact if not managed or disposed properly. Majority of the tea plantations belong to the age category of being an active menstruator. With bare necessity to maintain normal WASH



programmes, menstrual health takes a backfoot. The workplace being the hill slopes for tea bush growth, the facility of toilets is either absent or remotely located. The lack of access to basic facility like clean water and privacy is also a way depriving the menstruators of the fundamental right to healthy living. Although recent governmental initiatives have led to increased numbers of toilet in the community villages, but its role, availability and access to menstruators in work and daily life is still limited. The knowledge gap about menstrual health and related diseases between the first time menstruators or even the non-menstruators were vividly apparent. It is important to bridge this knowledge gap and create a space free discussion about menstrual health and challenges to move toward a sustainable health policy. DLR Prerna had been running instructional campaigns about menstrual health in the Darjeeling and Kalimpong hills amongst the tea tribe, in schools and colleges trying to raise awareness about the awkward silences that affect the life of the menstruators. It has been their constant effort to raise awareness about menstruation as a normal



*From left to right: Samata Biswas, Samaresh Guchhait, Shatabdi Das, Debashree Chakraborty, Anamika Sharma and Priscilla Giri at the Roundtable discussion on "Rivers, Hazards, Urban Ecology and Activism"*

biological process and increase the acceptance of menstruation as a normal bodily function in the society. While handling menstrual waste products one has to be cautious about the dignity of the waste workers as well as the menstruators. The way menstruations is portrayed in media has also helped to change it in positive direction to some extent.

**Debashree Chakraborty** talked about the impact of the urban floods in Silchar, Assam. In 2022 Assam and Silchar received unprecedented rainfall. During the pre-monsoon showers the largest horseshoe lake of Silchar Mahishabeel becomes the largest reservoir of rainwater and habitations in this region remain submerged in the stagnant flood waters for four to five months, i.e., from May/June to October/November. But in 2022 Mahishabeel reached its capacity in March itself. The residents informed the Municipal authorities to take administrative action. In face of governmental inaction, the residents cut open the dyke that separates the Mahishabeel from the

river to drain the excess rainwater. Afterwards the municipality did not take any action to repair the dyke. Hence with the onset of monsoon rains, and Assam and Barak valley receiving the highest amount of rainfall, the Barak River overflowed and the horseshoe lake in absence of the dyke was unable to control the flood water from entering the urban areas of Silchar. This incident of climatic change coupled with administrative negligence in draining out the excess rainwater from Mahishabeel or repairing the dyke was portrayed as a deliberate act of harm by the Muslim residents of Mahishabeel on the people of Silchar. Silchar, a cosmopolitan city, developed in post-Partition years to accommodate refugees from East Pakistan. Over the years, communal and ethnic identity had taken strong roots in the region making Silchar a difficult place for negotiation. Once the communal angle was added to the flood situation in Silchar, the news suddenly took a face in the national media—narratives of floods as a natural calamity was replaced by the sensationalization of communal tensions in Silchar. Climate change is always talked about from the lens of quantifiable data driven technology in measuring the impact of climate change in a region, but what falls through in this overtly technological focus is the micro-effects of climate change with fissures in social relations, identity politics and everyday lives. It is important to look climate change as a driver of change in the ways societies are formed and constantly modified.

**Priscilla Giri** who has been working with DLR Prerna on youth mental health in Darjeeling shared her field experience of negotiating a dialogue on mental health which often is either overlooked or not talked about being considered as taboo equated to mental disability. The multiple vulnerability of living in the hills affect differently based on faultlines of community, gender, place of residence, socio-economic status etc. The changing rainfall pattern in Darjeeling has increased the propensity of seasonality of natural disasters. These sudden changes in the natural landscape causing immense loss of life and property affects the mental health of the affected. Also, certain kind of dependence on natural resources like water from the springs decides the social hierarchy and effects it leaves on the family members catering to these needs of the family. These stressors are often taken in its literal value of change in climate and its micro effects especially on mental health coping strategies are neglected. Mental health is not an isolated discipline, but a living experience interconnected to the everyday experiences of not just the self but also the immediate environment in which it is placed. These interconnections are often overlooked, and experiences of disaster or marginality are not considered and remains relatively limited to the logic of causality. With DLR Prerna, she has been trying to develop activities with school teachers to deal with the mental health challenges faced by children not only in schools but in every walk of life which in turn affects the community at large.

**Swamy Mick** spoke about his experience of living the American dream as an American citizen and then coming to India and setting up schools for children of tea plantations in Dhajea Busty in Darjeeling invoking the pedagogy of a sustainable livelihood. Sustainability is an interconnected logistical pattern of living. A change in this logistical cycle has ripple effect globally like global warming is a unanimous phenomenon with differential effect across different geographical region. The current consumer capitalist of living in opulence has started generating easy disposable waste affecting landfills, marine life, increasing pollution etc. The effective way to slow this irreversible process of global climate change and related vulnerabilities is to found in understanding that less is better than more and prioritise necessities of want over necessities of desire. The excess or the lure of surplus of capital growth is fast consuming the natural resources.






*Participants at the Youth Meet on “Urban and Environmental Activism,” 2025, Darjeeling*


## Urban and Environmental Activism

Calcutta Research Group and Rotary Club, Darjeeling  
In collaboration with IWM (Vienna) and CIFAR

**Public Lecture: Water and Waste Management in Darjeeling**

**Roundtable Discussion: Rivers, Hazards, Urban Ecology and Activism**





**CIFAR**

**27 March 2025**  
**9:30 am to 1 pm**  
**Gymkhana Club, Darjeeling**

*City Lights Public Lecture 6*

*Poster of Youth Meet on “Urban and Environmental Activism,” 2025*