

Internship Report

I would like to begin by expressing my immense gratitude to the Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group for giving me this opportunity to intern with them. It was an incredible experience. My tenure of internship was for 2 months, starting from the 6th of February, 2017. The title of my research proposal read "A Study of the Rohingyas in West Bengal – Search for Identity and Remedial Measures through a Gender Lens", and Ms. Sucharita Sengupta was my supervisor for the period of this internship. My interactions with everyone at CRG made this 2 month period an enriching, warm, as well as a fun-filled learning process.

Research Project: For my research on the Rohingyas, I started with CRG's detailed report (and references) on the Rohingyas and Dr. Banerjee's article in Economic & Political Weekly titled 'Criminalising the Trafficked: Blaming the Victim'. From here, I acquired a fair cognizance of the international crisis and began to formulate the structure of my research paper. Intense reading and keeping up with the news update regarding the Rohingyas was a constant exercise over these two months. I consulted news articles from Al Jazeera, The Economist, Independent, The Guardian, The New York Times, BBC News, The Indian Express, and other published reports from Human Rights Watch, Council on Foreign Relations, International Crisis Group Asia Report, and Chris Lewa's works, to name a few. Beyond reading, I was in search of a field in West Bengal, although there is no established settlement of the Rohingyas in West Bengal like there is in, let's say, Hyderabad. Going by CRG's previous reports, and advice taken on which NGOs may possibly offer shelter to the members of this ethnic community, I called the NGO Sanlaap. After a couple of calls, I was fortunate to speak with Tapati di, who directed me towards their Narendrapur home where a young Rohingya girl resided. Fortunately, I was given permission to visit their Narendrapur home thrice, and my interactions with 14 year old Safi greatly contributed to my research.

Library Work: Apart from pursuing my research work, I was engaged in the task of cataloguing a list of books for the CRG library. It was fascinating to come across so many new books, most of them contemporary, and each tempting me to read them immediately. The library at CRG is extremely resourceful, comprising of books and material on a wide array of disciplines – starting from Neuroscience to Agricultural Studies – and is also multilingual – offering books in English, Bengali, French, and Italian. The methodical way of organizing the books makes it easy to locate them in times of need. Ideally, I used to catalogue the books twice a week, but in certain weeks if there were other pressing engagements, I would do it on the next feasible day. At the end of my internship, I was able to complete the number of books assigned.

Research Workshop and Discussions: The other crucial learning opportunities were the research workshops organized by CRG. The first one, titled "Social and Political Mapping of Popular Movements, Logistical Vision and Infrastructure of India", was held on the 6th & 7th of March, which I had attended. I had rapporteured for two sessions on the first day, and one on the second day. From the questions raised during the Question-Answer sessions over these two days, and the comments during the roundtable discussions, I could gather a lot of valuable opinions and insights. Yet another such occasion from where I could learn was the Panel Discussion on "Migrants, Refugees and Statelessness in India", which was held on 6th April, 2017. The panelists of this roundtable discussion were Prof. Ranabir Samaddar, Prof. Paula Banerjee, and Prof. Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhury. Lastly, the conferral ceremony and the memorial

lecture on the occasion of the Fourth Krishna Memorial Award for Women Educationists, Students & Caregivers was another memorable programme. It was organized by the Krishna Trust in association with Calcutta Research Group, and was held on 22nd February, 2017. Awards were conferred to two women social activists, followed by a talk by Dr. Abhijit Chowdhury, and the release of the "India: Social Development Report 2016 – Disability Rights Perspectives" by Asha Hans, Kalpana Kannabiran, and Nandini Ghosh.

Refugee Watch Online: I had written two articles for Refugee Watch Online, both of which were uploaded on the blog. The first article, titled "Bari Jabo Kobe?: Plight of a homeless young Rohingya", documents Safi's journey, both cross-border and personal. A brief backdrop about the Rohingya statelessness issue and the role of the state and the international community is also mentioned. The second article, "Simshar: A Portrayal of Perspectives", is a review of the Maltese film directed by Rebecca Cremona. I enjoyed writing for the blog, enjoyed reading the other articles published, and intend to continue writing for Refugee Watch Online.

Final Research Paper: Due to the lack of much of a field, in my paper I focused mainly on secondary resources and documents to support or oppose my research goals. As outlined in detail in my research proposal, the goals envisioned in my study were, briefly: a) to record the identity challenges of the Rohingyas in West Bengal, b) to document narratives and personal experiences, c) to suggest measures which will alleviate the situation of the Rohingyas. My final paper is divided into two parts: the first is historical, and the second presents the current scenario through the gender paradigm. Part I traces the Muslim presence in the Arakan kingdom from the 8th century which ends with the violence unleashed during and after Operation Dragon King in 1978. It is argued in Part II that the principal strategy used by the state of Myanmar to sustain the Rohingya exodus is systemic rape and periodic sexual assault on Rohingya women. This part is structured in a narrative style, with the aim that is the on-ground reality experienced by women which must play a role in shaping our perspective on this brutal issue. In my conclusion, certain reforms are put forth which could enable the discriminatory 1982 Burmese Citizenship Law tackle the ongoing crisis of statelessness.

Paper Presentation: I presented the paper, which was finally given the title "The Rohingyas: Contextualizing Identity, Gendering Violence, and Redefining the Role of Women in Conflict", on 11th April at CRG. The comments given by Prof. Samaddar and the researchers present helped me immensely to rethink certain aspects of my paper, methodology, format, approach and organization. I sincerely thank all those who were present for their remarks and observations. It will be of invaluable importance in my future research endeavours.

Lastly, I would like to thank everyone at CRG once again for the warm and friendly ambience, where I could approach any one for any guidance I required. I am grateful for the guidance I received from Prof. Banerjee and Prof. Samaddar. I will always cherish working with Anita di, Priya di, Sucharita di, Somdatta di, Ritam da, Snehashish da, Samaresh da, interacting with Ms. Chatterjee and Ratan babu, and the endless cups of tea and coffee Mohan da used to make for us. Working at CRG has been exceedingly rewarding and highly enjoyable. I am very thankful to have been given this opportunity.