

## **Peter Grbac**

### **His Internship Report ( May 2014-July 2014)**

#### **Words of Thanks**

The past few months in Calcutta have been both academically productive and personally rewarding. I am incredibly grateful for the support offered by both the support and academic staff here at the Calcutta Research Group. Their encouragement, lively discussions and debates, good food, and good company have sustained me and this project since my arrival. In particular, I would like to thank Dr. Ranabir Samaddar who not only encouraged me to take up this research topic but proved an invaluable resource and mentor as I sought to learn more about the 1971 refugee influx and refugee movements to India more generally.

#### **Research Project**

My research tells the story of the Indian state, namely the way in which its articulated policies on the 1971 refugees shaped, on the one hand, the state's understanding of refugeehood and its response towards refugees, and, on the other hand, the refugees' own understanding of this label and the implications the policies had on their sense of belonging and identity formation. Through an analysis of the decisions taken by the Indian state, the labels administered, and the bureaucratic institutions established, this paper explores the tension between the notion of charity and the notion of rights (Samaddar 2010 114) by asking: On what grounds did the Indian state justify repatriation as the only viable solution to the situation of the 1971 refugees?

#### **Methods**

My response to this question emerges from hundreds of public documents that I collected over my three month stay in the city. I carried out extensive archival research at the Bangladeshi High Commission Library as well as the National Library. My sources consisted mostly of newspaper articles (encompassing both domestic and foreign sources), political speeches, political memoirs, secondary academic research papers, and firsthand research reports gathered by foreign aid workers stationed in the refugee camps.

#### **Research Direction**

This paper proceeds in three sections. In the first section, Articulating the 1971 Refugee "Problem," I outline the demographic data pertaining to the refugee influx and highlight the gendered, religious, and class dimensions of the refugee population. In the second section, Analyzing the 1971 Refugee "Problem," I examine the concrete challenges that gave rise to the articulated "problem" - employment, public health, and law/order - and analyze how these issues call into question the nature of citizenship, the allocation and distribution of social entitlements, and the capacity of the state to exercise authority and legitimacy. In the third section, Conceptualizing the 1971 Refugee "Problem," I situate the refugee influx within three different conceptual frameworks - the legal, the historical/political, and the managerial - and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each framework. I then propose a fourth conceptual framework, that of access, as a new way to think through the 1971 refugee influx and the state's response.