

Report

"Fleeing and Staying: A Nuanced View of Bangladesh Refugee Crisis of 1971 ", June 04, 2021

Meghna Guhathakurta's lecture on 'Fleeing & Staying: A Nuanced view of the Bangladesh Refugee Crisis of 1971' was organised by Calcutta Research Group in collaboration with Rosa Luxembourg Stiftung. With Bangladesh celebrating fifty years of its independence also reminds us that it also marks the fifty years of the brutal genocidal realities that went into the making of Bangladesh that started with the Operation Searchlight in Dhaka targeting to cut of the general masses from the rising dissent through the intelligentsia and gradually gripped the nation into unforgettable horrors of mass repression soaked in blood. The resultant was the unprecedented flux of refugees spilling into the neighbouring nation-India who not only hosted the refugees but later played an active role in drawing international attention to the necessity of recognition of the nationhood of Bangladesh and provided support in its liberation war. However, fleeing the genocide does not only involve the cure of cross-border migration but also rests in the plethora of citizens becoming refugees within their national boundaries and the crisis of identity that was similar if not analogous for these masses 'fleeing and staying' Bangladesh. go behind the predominance of the visual that comes across in the reporting of a refugee. It usually consists though are not limited to mass crossing the border, huddled together in the squalor of camps, railway stations, and market places. Dismal scenes of the day-to-day miseries and perilously close to disease and death but also projected are scenes of mass atrocities as root causes which made them play in the first instance retaliation and resistance of the victimised people also capture headlines but stories that are not told or those that blurred lines of/between fleeing or staying behind. Between attaining refugee status and remaining displaced within one's own homeland. Resilience and resistance, the day-to-day stories of survival both inside the camps as well as outside, and the way the dynamics of return or multiple returns are the ones that remained the focus of the discussion with reference to several personal narratives to elaborate the intricate complexity of the crisis from different perspectives. The narratives of Guhathakurta as a member of a war-affected family belonging to a minority community—a family originating in West Bengal whose migratory trend she traced in her *The Family Histories of the Partition*—and other narratives of observers and actors in the crisis like Julian Francis of Oxfam, Freida Brown of the Australian Communist Party, and K.K. Sinha, a radical humanist who died in a motor accident while returning from relief works in a camp; all these are rather unknown stories holds the essentialities of the millions of suffered humanity often reduced to mere statistics. The lived experiences in the nine months to freedom is what went into the making of the identity politics of the Liberation War from individual fleetingness of struggles for survival to culminating into call for identifying the nationhood for Bangladesh.