REPORT

Annual Planning Meeting
Calcutta Research Group

3 February 2023
Venue: Hotel Sojourn, Kolkata

Schedule

09:30 am-10:00 am: Tea and Registration

10:00 am-11:30 am: Session 1: Review of the CRG Research Activities in 2022
Chair: Mahalaya Chatterjee, University of Calcutta & CRG

10:00 am-10:10 am: Introduction to the Programme by Rajat Kanti Sur, CRG

10:10 am-11:30 am: Review of the CRG Research Activities in 2022 by Paula Banerjee, University of Calcutta & CRG

11:30 am-12:00 pm: Tea

12:00 pm-01:00 pm: Review of *Hand Book on Keywords*
Discussant: Paula Banerjee, University of Calcutta & CRG

01:00 pm-02:00 pm: Lunch

02:00 pm-02:45 pm: Session 2: Presentation of Research Agendas I
Chair: Shyamalendu Majumdar, CRG

Presentation of Research Proposal by Debashree Chakraborty, CRG
Theme: *Literary Imagination of Climate Change and Climate Disasters*

Discussant: Subhoranjan Dasgupta, IDSK (Retd.)

Presentation of Research Proposal by Rajat Kanti Sur, CRG
Theme: *Social Security Measures of Unorganised Labour in Small Industries and Domestic Workers*

Discussant: Arup K. Sen, CRG

02:45 pm-03:30 pm: Discussion on Preparing a Popular Book on the Ports of Migration

Discussant: Subir Bhaumik, Veteran Journalist & CRG
          Kaustubh Mani Sengupta, Bankura University

03:30 pm-04:00 pm: Tea

04:00 pm-04:45 pm: Session 3: Presentation of Research Agendas II
Chair: Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhury, Rabindra Bharati University & CRG

Presentation of Research Proposal by Rituparna Datta, CRG
Theme: *Death in Diaspora: A Social History of Coolie Lives in Mauritius*

Presentation of Research Proposal by Shatabdi Das, CRG
Theme: *Climate Disaster Mitigation in Coastal Megacities of India*

Discussant: Samir Kumar Das, University of Calcutta & CRG

04:45 pm-05:30 pm: Discussion on Research Agendas by CRG's Honorary Researchers

Chair: Arup K. Sen

Themes:
a) *Is Protection only a Legal Matter? Migrant Labour in South and South-East Asia*
Speaker: Paula Banerjee

b) *Platform Economy: A platform for a free fall?*
Speaker: Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhury

c) *Governing the Pandemic: Negotiating Democracy in Our Time*
Speaker: Samir Kumar Das

Discussant: Ranabir Samaddar, CRG

05:30 pm: Vote of Thanks by Shatabdi Das, CRG

List of Participants

Ananya Chatterjee, *Haldia Government College and CRG*

Arup K. Sen, *CRG*

Debashree Chakraborty, *CRG*

Kaustubh Mani Sengupta, *Bankura University*

Mahalaya Chatterjee, *University of Calcutta and CRG*

Nadja Dorschner, *Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung-South Asia*

Neha Naqvi, *Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung-South Asia*

Partha Pratim Sarkar, *CRG*

Paula Banerjee, *University of Calcutta and CRG*

Rajat Kanti Sur, *CRG*

Ranabir Samaddar, *CRG*

Rituparna Datta, *CRG*

Sabir Ahamed, *Pratichi Institute and CRG*

Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhury, *Rabindra Bharati University and CRG*

Samaresh Guchhait, *CRG*

Samir Kumar Das, *University of Calcutta and CRG*

Shatabdi Das, *CRG*

Shyamalendu Majumdar, *CRG*

Subhoranjan Dasgupta, *Independent Researcher*

Subir Bhaumik, *Eminent Journalist and CRG*

Session 1: Review of the CRG Research Activities in 2022

Introduction to the Programme:

Rajat Kanti Sur introduced the session and laid a brief outline of the aims and objectives of the planning meeting. Paula Banerjee discussed the activities of the past year in detail which consisted of both the programme segment and the research segment. The session was moderated by Mahalaya Chatterjee.

Review of CRG's Research Activities in 2022:

Paula Banerjee began by discussing the two major themes on which research began last year – question of migrant labour and climate change – and noted the road map for 2023 would draw from previous year's work which would be substantively carried on this year as well. Banerjee then discussed the activities of CRG's researchers, members and contracted researchers. CRG Researchers Rajat Kanti Sur and Shatabdi Das' respective articles got published in *IWMpost* – Issue No. 129 and Issue No. 130 respectively. Shatabdi Das was a Visiting Fellow at IWM Vienna in April 2022 and for her research she looked at climate crisis in Kolkata as well as the larger Indian context. During her visit and stay at the Institute for Human Sciences (IWM), Vienna, she was able to learn about the different environment conservation methods that are being adopted by in certain European cities like Vienna, and other cities, in the wake of climate change and its effects. Her observations and learning experience have helped her to delve deep into the problems that plague Indian cities and based on that she undertook research, the observations of which have been published in the *IWMpost Issue 130 (2022)*. Rajat Kanti Sur's research on sex co-operatives involving organisations like Durbar has also been published in the *IWMpost Issue 129 (2022)*. Both Das and Sur's papers were discussed and they received suggestions from Samir Kumar Das and Subir Bhaumik who spoke about the various aspects, themes, questions and problem areas that the research projects could raise, detail out and the way to take forward. Apart from this, the staff researchers presented papers in the *Seventh Annual Research & Orientation Workshop and Seventh Critical Studies Conference* (13-19 November 2022). Debashree Chakraborty, Imran Philip and Kaveri presented their research work in the Workshop Modules while Rajat Kanti Sur, Rituparna Datta and Shatabdi Das presented their research papers in the Conference.

Banerjee mentioned CRG members' presentations of ILO Policy Brief on Human Mobility and Climate Change in Egypt; Bharat Bhushan's series of articles on different aspects of migration which have also been published in *RefugeeWatchOnline*; Parivelan K.M.'s series of Podcasts on Refugee Children's Education and noted that he has also been part of another CRG podcast where he talked about his role as a member of the UNHCR. Banerjee further noted that CRG has done a series of podcasts on the theme "Migration Matters" with resource persons from across continents, namely Joris Shapendonk (the Netherlands), Amena Mohsin (Bangladesh) and K.M. Parivelan (India).

There were 7 Contracted Researchers for the year 2022 – 3 of them were RLS researchers and 4 were IWM researchers. The 3 RLS researchers presented the following titles, "Navigating Precarity-Analysing Multiple Narratives of Citizenship in Assam" (Gorky Chakraborty and Samik Roy Choudhury), "Climate Refugees: Health and Livelihood in the Bay of Bengal - India and Bangladesh" (Debojyoti Das and Upasana Dasgupta) and "Mitigating the Impact of COVID and Conflict: Empowering and Securing Futures of Children Belonging to Pastoral Communities in Jammu and Kashmir" (Afreen Gani Faridi). The IWM researchers presented under the following titles, "Pandemic and Governance in Central Asia" (Anita Sengupta), "Politics of Populist Policies" (Santi Sarkar), "Indian Droughts, Drought Policy and Climate Change" (Sohini Sengupta), "Urban Renewal Stage in City's life and Its Impact on Slums and Slum Dwellers" (Ankita Singh and Johnny K.D.) All of them presented their papers in the Conference.

CRG in collaboration with IWM, also invited Amena Mohsin (Univesity of Dhaka, Bangladesh) as CRG Visiting Professor in Kolkata; as Visiting Fellow, Gulzina Daniiarova (Osh State University, Kyrgyz Republic) and Kamal Thapa Khsetri (National Human Rights Commission, Nepal). Mr. Khsetri and Ms. Danniarova could not come down but Mr. Khsetri presented his paper via Zoom in the November Conference. Mohsin's paper titled "The politics of Space: Refugees, Displaced and Stranded" delved deep into the experiences of camps through the lenses of freedom, culture and identity.

Banerjee mentioned about the different programmes that were held during the year. She began with the One Day **Follow-up Workshop** held in June 2022, in collaboration with the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung (RLS), and the Institute of Development Studies Kolkata (IDSK), where select participants from the Winter Workshop of 2021 discussed the progress of their work. The other programmes included the **Summer Camp on "South Asian Labour Migration and Maritime Migrants"** held in May in Kathmandu, the **Media Fellowship Programme** where 4 media fellows (3 under RLS and 1 under IWM) were chosen. They presented their respective work in the **Media Workshop** that was organised in collaboration with the IWM, RLS and Commonwealth Journalists Association-India (CJA-I). The Workshop also saw 12 eminent panellists speaking on various aspects of media representations of migrant labour, climate change, etc. The **Teachers' Workshop** held in September 2022 again drew from the work of previous years and focussed on the discussion of the syllabi prepared by teachers. Apart from this discussion, several teachers from across the country came and discussed about their experiences of teaching migration in classrooms, especially the challenges in classroom education during and after the pandemic phases. The evaluation of the **Seventh Annual Research and Orientation Workshop and Conference** and feedback from its participants in November 2022 in Kolkata, were highlighted. CRG has also been extensively working on caregivers and under the aegis of Krishna Trust, it had organised a **"Dialogue on Caregivers."** Besides this, CRG has continued work in the field of girl child education, recognition of women health workers and educationists. Sunandan Basu (Neurosurgeon, Medica Super Speciality Hospital, Kolkata) had delivered the Ninth Krishna Memorial Lecture, in 2022.

CRG with the support of IWM participated in the **'19th International Association for the Study of Forced Migration (IASFM) Conference' themed on "Global Issues, Regional Approaches – Contexts, Challenges, Dialogues and Solutions"** hosted by the Universidade Catolica de Santos; the Conference on **'Digitised Migrants'** in Istanbul by Koc Unversity; Seminar on '**Climate Change, Conflict and Question of Labour and Migration**' with the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) Mumbai. CRG also organised the Seminar Series on Forced Migration with the University of Vienna and a webinar **"As the West Goes to war, Crafting Peace Today."**

CRG in collaboration with the IWM, supported Dipanwita Saha, a photographer, in her ongoing project on photo documentation of important landmarks of the Calcutta Riots of 1946. The photo exhibition, titled **"Trail of Blood: Calcutta Riots of 1946 and its Aftermath"** was inaugurated at the November Workshop 2022 in Kolkata.

CRG's journal *Refugee Watch*, came up with Issues 59 and 60. Issue 59 was based on the theme of community, region and displacement and Issue 60 came out as a special volume on "Contemporary Politics of War and Displacement: Afghanistan and Ukarine". *RefugeeWatchOnline* also continued to publish regularly. 2 translation works were commissioned by CRG in 2022. The papers of the staff researchers and the contracted researchers would be published as PPs. With the support of the Krishna Trust, CRG has initiated the publication of *Covidkale Bipannata O Sanghati* [*Pandemic, Precarity and Solidarity*] by researcher Sangbida Lahiri. A primary investigative report on *Pandemic and Precarity* is also under publication.

Paula Banerjee spoke about CRG's expansion into South Asian networks and highlighted how these collaborations are getting manifested in the programmes. The importance of making research popular and understandable to the masses is also a thing that CRG has been thinking on. The question of Migrant Labour is one such issue and CRG plans to initiate work on the same. This aspect of the research would be led by Rajat Kanti Sur. She spoke about the various collaborations of CRG with IWM, RLS, KDC and DW Akademie, and also with 360info. Mahalaya Chatterjee, the moderator for the session, gave the closing remarks highlighting the scope and future prospects of taking the research themes forward.

Discussion and Review on *Keywords in Refugee and Migration Studies*

The session was initiated by **Paula Banerjee** who as the introductory remark, noted, "A word is not semantics, it is politics", while drawing reference to what the *Handbook on Keywords in Refugee and Migration Studies* entails – i.e., creation of a compendium of concepts that help to explain the nuances of migration and forced migration in contemporary parlance. She discussed the beginnings of the volume by saying that as the editor of *Refugee Watch* for more than 10 years, she has noticed how the meanings of certain words have shifted or changed over the years from what they used to be. These paradigmatic shifts eventually make one ponder on the need of having a collection of keywords which would better explain the changes and also include the newer theoretical concepts that have emerged in the past few years. One of the driving forces which led to the ideation of this compendium has been the

general understanding that theoretical changes come from the Global North. CRG has always challenged the notion and the current volume is an extension of this challenge whereby, in its sprit, it will reflect the perspectives of the Global South which is also a veritable ground for research and also take into consideration the aspect which will enable the readers/users to view migration and refugee studies through the prism of the postcolonial or the decolonised world. She then talked about the expanse of the framework of the keywords and the collaborations that have been made with researchers from across the globe. Talking about the focus of the volume, she mentioned that its stress is on the Global South perspective. 105 words have been collected, out of which 40 words have roots in India. She noted that the volume has entries like "girmitya", "bidesiya", etc., which not only denote a quintessential South Asian experience but also shed light on forced migration from a different prism and hence the volume under discussion has the capacity to transcend the limitations of a general volume of keywords. She mentioned that the editorial board comprising **Paula Banerjee** and **Priya Singh** along with editorial assistant **Rajat Kanti Sur** have decided to adopt a rigorous approach which would ensure that the volume retains the flavour of the South Asian or Global South perspective. She further noted that the editorial work is in its final stages and that the web publication of the volume is on the way. She mentioned that the project is thriving and would be duly carried forward in the months to come so that future editions could be launched; and a print version of the current edition could be planned.

Ranabir Samaddar, in his discussion, referred to the previous four volumes of Keywords on Social Justice and related themes that CRG had worked on. He noted that those volumes were well received. He mentioned that for undertaking a venture such as this, initiating the conceptual work is important. He also mentioned two predicaments that one can associate while undertaking such work – some of these entries are more descriptive and normative and are not equally attentive to the basic information that should be there. To bring to the attention of policy makers, these entries must have basic factual information and the other trouble, which is more like a requirement is the criteria of selecting keywords. While inclusion of more words is definitely an advantage, it also leads to a loss of the rigour in some ways. In case of this volume under discussion, what remains to be seen is whether such inclusions (as has been planned) lead to a fresh round of thinking to determine its centre. He further referred to critical materials on Keywords like Raymond William's *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* and a few others to illustrate his point. He also mentioned that there would be a lot of challenges but the effort should be toward standardising it. Revising and uploading new content to the already existing corpus of keywords should form part of the exercise.

Samir Kumar Das stressed on the need for having a live lexicon of keywords. He opined that this would add more rationality to the exercise and would widen up the boundaries which might be restricting the volume as it stands presently. He pointed out a few words like "dakhar", "bongal" etc ., and mentioned the problematic associated with the inclusion of such words in a volume on refugee and migration studies as these words do not exactly mean either refugee or migrants, rather prefigure more as pejorative terms. He went on to add that the Global South is a heterogeneous space and is marred with multiple contestations of

ethnicity, race, etc., and hence any indiscriminate incorporation of words might risk the rationale of the exercise. He ended by saying that the volume should be absolutely circumspect about the kind of words to be incorporated. **Subir Bhowmik** agreed with Samir Kumar Das' remark and noted that the volume should focus on the politics of migration as much as it should focus on migrants. As an example to this, he stated that the volume could take into cognizance how migrants are otherised in India's northeast and also elsewhere. **Arup Sen** pointed about universal ideations/categories and how these can have separate meaning or whether these can be interrogated separately in the context of the Global South.

In response to the suggestions, **Paula Banerjee** urged everyone to come up with ideas and advice on the disparaging connotations of certain words; she noted that probably a discussion on the same in the introductory note of the volume would solve the problem. **Ranabir Samaddar** noted that indexing could be another option which would help in categorising the words.

Session 2: Presentation of Research Agendas I

The staff researchers Rajat Kanti Sur and Debashree Chakraborty conducting research under the programme ''Global Protection of Refugees and Migrants" supported by Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung presented their research proposals in this session. **Shyamalendu Majumdar** moderated the session. **Subhoranjan Dasgupta** was the discussant for **Debashree Chakraborty's** presentation and **Arup K. Sen** was the discussant for **Rajat Kanti Sur's** presentations. This was followed by a discussion on the proposed popular book on **"*Routes and Ports of Migration*"**.

Debashree Chakraborty's presentation titled **"Literary Imagination of Climate Change and Climate Disaster"** proposed to look into the effects of climate change – climate disaster, migration, etc., as these have been represented in literature. She particularly talked about the existing relationship between contemporary climate change and colonialism and how postcolonial Indian Literature has explored the same. Since India has been at the forefront of colonialist and imperialistic designs, it has suffered from the brunt of it for the longest time. Her research would focus on looking into literary works which have addressed what could be termed as the foundation of climate change – environmental degradation, deforestation, etc., and seek to understand how these facets have influenced the world around and the subsequent ways in which these changes have been represented in Indian fiction.

Shubhoranjan Dasgupta, in his discussion of Chakraborty's paper referred to Gunter Grass and Amitav Ghosh's works on the human hubris which he termed to be the main cause of climate change. He advised Chakraborty to read Grass's *The Wretched* in order to understand the epistemological substratum of what constitutes the work. He further advised her to read novels like Mahasweta Devi's *Aranyer Adhikar* to understand primeval sanctity of forest and the indigenous people who live and take care of it. He noted that there should not be any advocacy of a fanciful return to an "impossible ilium" in the theorisation of the work. He further advised her to read works of neo-Marxists like Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno and Herbert Marcuse. Samir Kumar Das advised the same to her and suggested reading the

Bengali novel, *Laal Shaluk* and also advised her to think about the process of "subjectification of objects".

Rajat Kanti Sur's presentation titled **"The Need to be Organised: A Case Study on Domestic Workers and Workers in Small Industries"** follows on his previous year's research on four labour cooperatives. His current year's proposal would expand the idea of social security in the unorganised sector. His proposal focussed on two communities—a) The unorganised workers in small factories and the business sector and b) the domestic workers. Citing the ILO declaration on "Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (1998)" and "The Unorganised Worker Social Security Act (2008)", Sur argued that none of the acts were able to ensure social security for the unorganised workers. None of the labour organisations is concerned about ensuring the social security of the workers. Very recently one of the organisations took some initiative. The research would try to prove the role and necessity of making an organisation secure the future of workers. He said that he would also put focus on whether cooperative building would be a viable solution for that or not.

Arup K. Sen discussed Rajat Kanti Sur's proposal. He advised Sur to focus on studying the changes in the patterns of organisations as well as to undertake a study on the alternative initiatives taken in the late 1980s. He particularly referred to the initiatives taken by Shankar Guhaniyogi who helped the unorganised workers in Chhattisgarh. Sen commented that the study should focus on different solidarity initiatives that functioned as alternatives to the trade unions. He advised Rajat Kanti Sur to analyse the role of formal trade unions critically in the contemporary framework of labour studies and research. Samir Kumar Das advised Sur to think about new forms of labour. He gave examples of different initiatives (e.g. Aaya Centres, Car Rentals, App-based Cars, etc.) where the labours are taken as partners. He advised Sur to study the new trends in the partnership business and cooperatives in the light of partnership initiatives.

Discussion on the Preparation a Popular Book on *Routes and Ports of Migration*

Routes and Ports of Migration project aims to look into the trajectory of the evolution or transition of migratory routes from the ports of migration in colonial India to the more arduous land routes or air routes taken by the migrants, especially undocumented migrants and refugees in post-colonial India as nation-states became more anxious in securitising their borders in their attempt to restrict their territorial boundaries to citizens only. Sea and land routes had been perennially important in the case of India due to its unique geographical position that connects India to the rest of Asia and Europe via land routes in the northern territories whereas the peninsular position connects India with the major oceanic routes in South, South-East and West Asia. Thus, India served as both the hinterland and entry point for trade activities and it is the same sea route and the sea-faring trading activities that became the many-headed hydra that bonded India to the long history of colonial exploitation and capital of the Empire-British, French, Dutch, etc. Apart from the despatch of goods and capital, cargoes of humans were sailing through the Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras ports chiefly as labourers and migrants could only depend on the steam power of the Empire to cross the oceans or the Kala Pani to reach overseas destinations as indentured labourers,

lascars, wayfarers and many others to countries like Mauritius, Fiji, Guyana, etc. **Kaustubh Mani Sengupta** proposed to work on **'Calcutta Port Complex and the Story of Indentured Labour.'** The ebb and flow of trading activities, connected with the general political and economic condition of India as a colony of the British Empire, shaped the ways in which the port complex developed in Calcutta. Calcutta Port Trust was officially established in 1870, and it made rapid progress in building additional jetties and streamlining dock logistics and cargo handling. A new phase in the development of the Calcutta port complex took place from the 1880s. This was facilitated by the increase in import trade which brought about a corresponding increase in export trade as well as a greater demand for facilities to accommodate the steamers that were replacing sailing vessels. The Calcutta port also emerged as a crucial entry-point for goods destined for the eastern and northern provinces of the subcontinent. Excellent transport routes, especially railways, acted as a catalyst for trading activities and, despite its unfavourable geographical features, the Calcutta port became the leading centre of trade and commerce for the colonial state in India. Along with the trading activities, Calcutta was also the main port of departure for indentured Indians to the Caribbean during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Indentured labourers were recruited from the vast hinterland of India —stretching from the Chota Nagpur plateau in the west to the region of the north-eastern states of present-day India. Some structures in the port area still bear the story of these migrants. A small pier bearing the unlikely name 'Suriname Ghat' is situated on the eastern bank of the river. Garden Reach was the last stop for the labourers coming from other parts of eastern India before their departure to the sugar colonies. These details provide us with a vivid history of migrant labourers and the central role of the Calcutta port complex in the global network of movements and migrations during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Subir Bhaumik raised the pertinent question of the changing nature of migration: **'Does migration take place any longer as in the colonial times through ports?'** Big ships carrying labour from India to Jamaica as far as the West Indies are part of the colonial legacies. The reason for this shift is the changing nature of the agencies involved in transporting migrants which in the present scenario is both the labour and other stakeholders sans the state involved in the transportation of the migrants. Illegal migrants do not operate through ports any longer due to the strict legal procedures followed at the ports. Unlike the colonial times when the empire itself was a stakeholder in the transportation of human capital as migrants, in post-colonial times, the state proclaims to be champion in safeguarding the human rights and offering protection against any illegal manoeuvring towards trafficking of humans. Hence, seaports have become a less likely choice as operating routes of migration to avoid state scrutiny and policing. To board the ship an illegal migrant has to swim ashore to board the ship which has left the port as the migrant does not have any legal papers to board the ship at the port. The present technological advancements when tracking and tracing encroachments are more easy and sophisticated than their colonial counterparts. For example, human traffickers in Bangladesh do not take migrants on ships anymore. Some actually loan out leaky boats to take the Rohingya refugees from their camps across the seas in South-East Asia, yet they do not go through the ports. They assemble these people at shady points which are beyond the point of any kind of security check and transfer these refugees into bigger

boats or smaller ships to South-East Asia. But due to the precarity of sailing routes and the condition of the ships, many of them sink into the deep sea waters. So instead of ports, the shady beaches or shores along the coastline have become more active over the past decades as a preferred sea route for migration. This changing nature of the sea routes and boarding points of illegal migrants forces us to reconsider the notion of ports of migration and broaden its lexicon beyond just its legal definition of operating within the purview of the state. In view of the difficulties in legalising travel across the seaports, most of the illegal migrants and traffickers find it more convenient to forge travel documents to take either air routes or land routes to travel from India. Many migrants recourse the acquisition of illegal travel documents to go to the UAE. Migrants sell their land and property to purchase fake travel documents to go to the Middle Eastern countries, as they believe the remittances would ease the poverty of the left behind families. So, ports of migration presuppose that most of these migrants formal, legal or illegal are assembled at ports and taken abroad in ships. But unlike the migration from West African nations, in India, migration takes multifarious routes including, sea, land and air routes. There is a need to reorient the lens of migration and broaden the understanding of the transportation of migrants by analysing the mechanics of migration across transnational routes which is a dynamic process with regional variations due to the diversity existing in the ethnic, economic, social composition of the migrants, the varied customs laws existing within the national boundaries and above all, technology now plays a massive role in administering illegal migrations, especially the role of biometric 'Unique Identification' database that has been recently used to track illegal migrants and has aided in tightening the grip of nation-states in checking illegal migration through intergovernmental collaboration. The post-colonial age of migration is much more dynamic with multiple interlocutors involved in illegal trafficking across borders.

The routes and ports of migration in colonial and post-colonial India developed as nodes of migration. The central focus is to see how people set off on their journey of migration from different ports of India. Ports here will substantially and metaphorically be used as an umbrella term for land, sea and air ports of migration. The essence will be to understand as, **Ranabir Samaddar**, points out to see, visualise through, maps, commentaries, etc., and document the 'viapolitics' of migration from India. The project aims to prepare a popular book based on archival research to map the trajectory in colonial India and focused essays based on field research to map the mechanics of migration in post-colonial India.

Session 3: Presentation of Research Agendas II

The staff researchers Rituparna Datta and Shatabdi Das conducting research under the programme **''Justice, Protection, and the Government of the People: A Two-Year Research and Orientation Programme on Protection and Democracy in a Post-Covid World [2021-2023]''**, in collaboration with and supported by the Institute for Human Sciences (IWM), Vienna, presented their research proposals in this session. **Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhury** moderated the session, and **Samir Kumar Das** was the discussant for the presentations.

Rituparna Datta, presented her research proposal titled **"Death in Diaspora: A Social History of Coolie Lives in Mauritius",** and threw light on the fact that the different experiences of individuals in several ways depict the norms of the society, the economy and politics of the time. The lived experiences of the body are essentially biopolitical and biosocial in nature, raising the questions – what does method as a historical tool of analysis mean or culminate to when it comes to death, as there are no trajectories afterwards; can we consider death as a method to reflect on the trajectories lived through the silences of bodies preserved in the passage to the afterlife? Deriving from the concept of 'Border as a Method' of Mezzadra and Nielsen's work, Datta discussed the major objective of the research theme in looking at 'death' as a method to reflect back on the conditions of colonial coolie labour regimes within the capitalist transformations of the overseas plantation economies of the Empire as mortality-morality-sickness were the common conditions accompanying not only during the transit of labour but a constant worry of the Empire in its attempts to sedentarise the population. She went on to elaborate how mortality-morality in the overseas plantation economies can be treated as asphyxiating labyrinths which rest supposedly in between the disenfranchisement of the dual consciousness of reflections of identity as dislocation and relocation and new social beginnings on the one hand and the ever-experimenting apparatus of the Empire to preserve the health of the labourers with the ideal of 'healthy body and hard hands' on the other; and the emergence of refabrication of the sense of autonomy and gaze of the male as an individual in the labour regime and that of the Empire as the paternalistic figure, and, thereby shows the rifts and severance and insecurities in accepting the western medicine system as opposed to the traditional indigenous knowledge of health systems.

Shatabdi Das presented her research plan on the theme **"Climate Disaster Mitigation in Coastal Megacities of India,"** and discussed the limitations and challenges of combating climate crises for the coastal megacities of India, namely Mumbai and Kolkata. She highlighted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the initiatives that global conventions deliberate upon and research point towards, such as protecting settlements from disasters through climate actions, building safe cities, technological inclusiveness and sustainable industrial growth, as ways of combating climate change. The United Nations and global summits lay emphasis on the importance of data requirement, and its assessment for fulfilment of the targets and assurance, strengthening funds and alternative sources of income generation at a time when climate disasters have been displacing more than millions in India. In her presentation Das focused on the geographical location, fragile ecosystems and vulnerable topography on which coastal megacities like Mumbai and Kolkata are in a way thriving. The research will attempt to analyse the changes in population, land-use, migration and livelihood systems and the role of planning by development authorities and urban local bodies, civil society organisations, disaster management authorities and the risks for stakeholders from the impacts of climate hazards.

Samir Kumar Das while discussing the research proposals brought to light the fact that 'method' is already given but the experience is never given, and thereby the tools of understanding the lived experiences become important in case of the coolie lives, both while living, and after death. It was suggested that the context of global cities and policies

formulated and adopted by other cities and the role of capital in combating climate crises and interventions for disaster mitigation, should be studied. The research should aim at understanding climate hazards and policies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries regarding the decades when management for climate disasters was initiated. The study should also try to examine the gaps and absence of civic amenities, and how innovative solutions on climate change that Bangladesh has come up with, in case of Dhaka, may fit into the comparisons with Indian scenario.

Session 4: Discussion on Research Agendas by CRG's Honorary Researchers

Paula Banerjee mentioned that, her research titled **"Is Protection only a Legal Matter? Migrant Labour in South and South-East Asia,"** is the outcome of several years of her engagement with policy issues and the paradigm created for migrant labour that has a simple definition in the context of legal regimes, unlike refugee or protection. The understanding of the concept is that at some point the migrant labourer returns (home) bringing in the connotation of migration cycle for persons crossing international border and within a state. The research will be based on the policy framework that has been created on migrant labourer - severely jarred as a result of the pandemic. When the framework had been created, the notion was accepted that a labourer with rights going from one part of the country to another or to another country retains his or her rights, but in a situation of crisis rights become almost absent. The research will try to make a comparison of the regions of South and South-

East Asia because the problem of migrant labourer in the context of South-East Asia during the long 2020 with its precarious nature - whether climate related issues or environmental disasters or financial disasters or the pandemic, Asia along with the world has witnessed a crisis situation where rights had to be forgone. The study will look into the question of what happens during crisis when a migrant worker (even if he or she has not crossed international border) suddenly becomes shorn of rights, even with the struggle and challenges faced by activists and scholars in their efforts to augment the ambit of legal rights. Can the livelihood options and migrant labourers at large be protected in times of crises, not simply pandemic, at times when the rights of migrant labourers apparently get wiped away – thus, questioning, whether protection is merely a legal phenomenon or protection is designed from the accruement of rights?

Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhury spoke on the research theme **Platform Economy: A platform for a free fall?** – The research aims to look at the platform economy labour. There has been casualisation and informalisation of labour in the neoliberal times in India and other countries of South Asia, but there has also been paradigmatic shift in the management of labour in the recent times with the invention of smart phones and innovation of algorithmic logic and what has come out as a significant pattern is that the platforms created through different software applications, smart phones and other digital support system and the people engaged with or working for the delivery services of such platforms – delivery of groceries at door steps like Blinkit, bigbasket, delivery of medicines like tata1mg, delivery of food items like Swiggy, Zomato, the ride apps like Uber, Ola, Indrive in Kolkata and other cities of India and South Asia; the labourers of such platform economies are mostly declared as independent

partners. The question that arises is whether such labourers are independent and what does the word 'partner' then mean in such cases? The research question tried to hint at the fact that such workers are neither independent nor partners. The objective of the research will be twofold- one, to interact with some of the platform economy labourers, particularly with two or three companies with which they are associated, may be food delivery mechanism, and ride giving app-based company, and their expectations and perceptions regarding adjustments and readjustments of their working conditions (with the almost exclusion of women workers from the delivery sector). The second, the existing legal mechanism available in India as well as some of the other countries in South Asia to find out what kind of legal protection mechanism within the legal framework supports the employment of such workers, and the research in this context will try to look at case laws if any, along with the precarious nature of working conditions of platform labourers.

Samir Kumar Das presented his research proposal on **"Governing the Pandemic: Negotiating Democracy in Our Time."** The research aims to find out the implications of social governance and the state of democracy. In a recent research on the state of democracy in the world, one major finding that has come forth is that all major democracies of the world have been in decline, and not just during the pandemic but before. In the context of CRG's theoretical contribution and research on pandemic, Samir Das highlighted that a serious call for redefinition of democracy is on the way. The term social governance essentially shuttles between the frameworks of complementarity and being compensatory to the state in some ways. Social governance has three major implications on democracy and these will be formulated in the form of research objectives that will look at the following: i) social governance has the potential of breaking out to different sites, thus the site of control of a democracy no longer remains only confined to the auspices of the state and its institutions. There has been a proliferation of democratic sites in different parts of the country with multiple centres of governances, sites of democracy compounding and shifting to different locations instead of just one; ii) the initiatives of a variety of solidarity groups and multiple lines of solidarity that came into play during the pandemic and through protest movements – raising the question whether such solidarity can be subsumed under the discourse of global justice, or the framework of national justice, showing that justice other than the global or national context, exceeding beyond the territorial boundaries may be called border justice; iii) the forces that draw migrants through the routes of mobility to reach different parts of the country, compelling scholars to understand the organisation of governance and ordering of society, destabilisation of administrative divisions and organised responses, overcoming ethnic divisions.

Ranabir Samaddar, discussant for the session, mentioned that the three themes of presentations drawing reference from the pandemic and post pandemic time synergised into the continuing research on long 2020. He highlighted that 'Do laws protect?' was one of the questions raised and the supposition reverberated through the three presentations. The disjunction between rights and protection – rights in the liberal way of thinking are an end in itself, because an individuation comes from rights, but protection does not always come with rights, though the two are intertwined. Protection materialises through laws, but rights are

insignificant if they are not grounded in law – thus envisaging the term 'the right to protection;' and while protection is situated in law, there is a disjuncture between protection and right when the society is faced with a crisis situation like Covid or war. Ranabir Samaddar discussed Charles Tilly's essay 'where do rights come from?' while speaking on the conviction that rights normalise life, and how rights are produced through different situations, series of bargaining, and then institutionalised at different levels. The research collective should aim at asking 'why are rights disrupted in a crisis?' Rights are not meant for situations of eruptions. In times of war the laws are silent. The role of crisis would be important in the enquiry, that crisis disrupts normalcy and ends rights and the parallel ideas of protection become active in times of crisis whereas rights suspended during war like situation or crisis, brings protection into play in the absence of normalcy. The economy being turned into a platform and the categories of work fading and in the neoliberal time an economy survives on the facet of addition of flexibility to the functioning of an economy, is another area of study; while in case of social governance, the debate that arises happens to be - is populism a form of governmentality; with opinions that - populism is the latest form of governance, most effective, an institutionalised democracy survives as a populist form of government during crisis.

The programme concluded with the vote of thanks delivered by Shatabdi Das, Researcher with the Calcutta Research Group.