

**REPORT**  
**On**  
**CRG Staff Researchers' Workshop**  
**28 January 2022**

The CRG Staff Researchers Workshop on 28 January 2022 was held online on Zoom at 6 PM (IST). It was attended by a total of twenty participants including the resource persons, researchers and other invitees. The moderator for the session was **Ranabir Samaddar**, *Distinguished Chair in Migration and Forced Migration Studies, Calcutta Research Group*. He opened the session with brief introductions of the themes of research undertaken by the four project researchers of CRG namely Ankur Tamuli Phukan, Rajat Kanti Sur, Rituparna Datta and Shatabdi Das.

**“River Bank Erosion, Land and Politics of Identity in Assam”**

**Researcher:** Ankur Tamuli Phukan, *Researcher, Calcutta Research Group, Kolkata*

**Discussant:** Sanja Barbora, *Associate Professor, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Guwahati*

In his presentation **Ankur Tamuli Phukan** brought to light the dynamics of climatic events like flood and river-bank erosion and the components of political, social and cultural imaginations particularly in a volatile social and political context of Assam. The discussion highlighted a seemingly complex relationship between resource sharing, land relationship and articulation of indigenous and migrant identities. **Sanjay Barbora**, the discussant of the presentation stressed upon the importance of addressing the vernacular and English speaking audiences. He added the perspective of theorisation of violence in the context of the Brahmaputra valley. He asked the researcher to think about counterinsurgency and its imprint on land and identity in Assam. He also suggested to the researcher to think about a micro-level social audit of government interventions on irrigation and flood control dating back four decades: the time period of sanction, the beneficiaries, impacts, and maintenance. The study should encompass the areas and people who have benefited from flood control, irrigation projects and the main occupations of people in such areas. **Ranabir Samaddar** stressed that instead of broadening the theme of the research, the researcher might narrow it down to a focused area of research. He also suggested that the researcher may base the research on historical methodology. **Nasreen Chowdhory** emphasised the critical question of methodology. **Amit Prakash** commented that the researcher while studying the theme could draw reference from the social basis of power.

**“Labour Cooperatives in India in the post-globalization era: An analysis of the co-operative movement in West Bengal and Bihar since the 1990s”**

**Researcher:** Rajat Kanti Sur, *Researcher, Calcutta Research Group, Kolkata*

**Discussant:** Arup K. Sen, *Associate Professor, Serampore College and Calcutta Research Group, Kolkata*

**Rajat Kanti Sur** began his talk by mentioning the necessity of building co-operatives in the National Commission of Labour Report in 1969. He explained that the study would focus on how the perception of co-operatives had changed with time and the adverse role of trade unions on it. The study would look into the transformation and changes in the cooperative movement with special

focus on the condition of the labour cooperatives in both West Bengal and Bihar in the 1990s. The proposed study would analyse the emergence of new co-operative movements in the 1990s, with focus on migrant co-operatives in Bihar and sex-workers' co-operatives in West Bengal. **Arup K. Sen** found the research promising and advised Rajat Kanti Sur to narrow down the focus of the research due to time constraints. He said that Sur should choose areas from the different dynamics of cooperatives. The choice of the area of study should be primarily based on the researcher's accessibility to the field. He also suggested that the gradual changes in the ratio of the footloose and permanent labourers should be an important part of the discussion on co-operatives. The discussant also suggested Immanuel Ness' book and Antonio Gramsci's famous writing on "factory councils". **Manish K. Jha** mentioned that the researcher may look at the changes in politics in both West Bengal and Bihar to understand the transformations in the socio-economic position of the labourers. He suggested that the researcher should justify the reason behind the selection of co-operatives in both West Bengal and Bihar in order to analyse the changes. **Amit Prakash** advised the researcher to look into the transformation and shift in the idea of building a co-operative and the political role that co-operatives played in several cases. He asked the researcher to start the study from the 1980s to understand the complexity of labour relations. **Bysadeb Dasgupta** suggested that the researcher could bring-in Marx's idea on class and class struggle while studying the co-operatives. The researcher should look into the debate on ideal co-operatives. The similarities and dissimilarities in the formation of co-operatives in West Bengal and Bihar should also be a theme of study in the proposed research. **Ranabir Samaddar** commented that the researcher should study the association of migrants with new co-operatives. The researcher should try and enquire whether migration has played any role in changing the ideas and nature of functioning of the co-operatives or not. The question whether the co-operatives played a crucial part in building solidarity among the migrants or not should also be studied in the light of the class question of the co-operatives.

### **"Bhootlane Ki Katha": Living in the Coolie Lines and Construction of Dignity, Health and Well-Being 1830-1920"**

**Researcher:** Rituparna Datta, *Researcher, Calcutta Research Group, Kolkata*

**Discussant:** Samita Sen, *Vere Harmsworth Professor of Imperial and Naval History, University of Cambridge, Cambridge*

**Rituparna Datta's** paper proposed for a study to map the design and pattern of the living spaces of the coolies or the coolie lines and linking it with the study of memory, grief, hopes through the trope of health. The study would aim at using biographical and fictional literature and substantiating it with the official reports on emigration and other archival records. The research will be based on the rationale of the living spaces as an extension of fears, anxiety, and hopes, as connoted by Sinclair. The existing literature on indentured mobility focuses on the recruitment processes and living conditions in the plantation colonies and has failed to cover the importance of the role of the architectural patterns modifying the socio-physical bodies of the coolie inhabiting the coolie lines. The study will also try to analyse the role of the location and setting of the coolie lines within plantation estates such as distance from hospitals, sugar factories, court, police station and their effect on the health and well-being of the labourers. **Samita Sen**, remarked that it has often been a tendency to fall into the caveat of binaries of free and unfree servitude that have plagued indentured labour studies. She mentioned that this research may look at labour studies from the perspective of health. Annotating the living spaces of the coolies as clinical space and differentiating it with the nonclinical space requires more justification. The two themes that dominate the study are the

conditions of migration and actual working conditions. Although the instances of duping the coolies in false imagination of plenitude might be applicable to the first generation of the labour migrants; with the subsequent generations of repatriates coming back with stories of horrors, it would be difficult to make the claim of duping the coolies. Here the researcher could take account of the role of choice to migrate and the generational differences. It was suggested that the central focus should be on the positioning of labour within the inferences of health of the coolies.

### “Urbanisation and Climate Crisis: A Study on Kolkata”

**Researcher:** Shatabdi Das, *Researcher, Calcutta Research Group, Kolkata*

**Discussant:** Mahalaya Chatterjee, *Professor, University of Calcutta and Calcutta Research Group, Kolkata*

**Shatabdi Das** spoke about the growing vulnerability of Kolkata and its surrounding areas to flood, inundation and storm surges due to the stresses of climate change and shocks of climatic hazards owing to the deltaic location of the riverine city near the coast. Growth of population, urban sprawl and changing dependencies on wetland ecosystem have been pushing the city towards heightened risk of submergence under circumstances of rising sea level. The study will attempt to look into the trend of demographic and land-use changes and infrastructural development along with the climatic catastrophes (storms, cyclones) from the year 2000 to 2021, in and around Kolkata. The research will also attempt to analyse the pattern of changing dependencies on the wetland and coastal ecosystem services and the impacts of environmental hazards and climate crisis on the population and economy of the region since the closing decade of the last century. The study will explore the designs of plans and policies for making the city resilient to climate change as the cases of water-logging, flash floods following long duration of incessant rainfall and growing number of storms witnessed in the eastern part of the country in recent years. The efforts of disaster management authority, law and governance, and coastal zone management act in combating climate crisis and urban issues, will constitute a section of this study. **Mahalaya Chatterjee** discussed that the paper could examine the options of alternate livelihood opportunities that urbanisation has created in the city and the changing migration pattern as a result of urban growth. The research could enumerate the role of the local government in combating natural events such as earthquakes in the region and the approaches of the disaster management taskforce in disseminating information on prevention and mitigation of hazards in educational institutes. She suggested that the study area could encompass the districts of North and South 24 Parganas with Kolkata as the epicenter of risk. River and wetland management along with canal management could be an interesting part of the research because it would highlight the system of rejuvenation of canals that play an integral part in flood prevention in the city. A comparative analysis could be made of the functioning of the disaster management cell in the city, the delta and surrounding areas. Chatterjee stated that there are ample studies on the occurrence of floods but it should also be important to probe into the causes of flood, significance of land-use changes and the impacts of human interventions in the making of such disasters. **Ranabir Samaddar** mentioned the work by Walter Kalin on climate change induced displacement and international law in the Distinguished Chair lecture series published by the Calcutta Research Group and to also go through the literature available on Bangladesh in reference

to climate disasters. **Shyamalendu Majumdar** also commented on the nature of shift from traditional farming to pisciculture practice in saline water for livelihood, as reported in summaries from Chandna of Bangladesh and discussed that it could add a different dimension to the study if similar context of livelihood patterns were studied in Ganga delta region of West Bengal in India. **Samita Sen** suggested that shrimp farming in Vietnam and other countries of South-East Asia would be good case studies.