

To conclude, many of the presented case studies contested dichotomies that are commonly used in the field: contentious – non-contentious, political – economic, collective – individual. Even if most of the presented case studies explored the margins of the classical social movement theories and often found them too rigid, those theories still provided many interesting approaches to study very different cases of protest.

Silva Lieberherr

Third Conference on Bengal Related Studies for Students and Young Scholars

Halle (Saale), 24.–26. October 2014

The South Asia Seminar of the Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg, in association with the Arbeitskreis Neuzeitliches Südasiens of the DGA and Bengal Link e. V., organized the Conference on Bengal Related Studies for Students and Young Scholars, taking place from Friday, October 24 to Sunday, October 26, 2014. This was the third conference of its kind since its conception in October 2010. The aim was to provide an interdisciplinary exchange of ideas for students and young scholars as well as to bring the current state of scholarly research on the Bengal region into limelight.

The conference's focus on Bengal as a geographical space was equally divided between the Indian union state West Bengal and Bangladesh. The conference papers and topics also suitably corresponded to different aspects of these two geographic entities. Today, Martin Luther University's initiative to maintain the spotlight on Bengal as a region worth studying is one among very few European universities. Besides sharing their research ideas with other young scholars, networking among conference participants was also among the major motives of the conference. The introductory evening of the conference started off with what the organizers termed as "academic speed dating." This mandatory interaction between the scholars helped to shake off the initial inhibition and hence facilitate exchange.

The next two days were involved in lively discussions between scholars both in and out of the conference premises. The disciplinary backgrounds and hence the conference papers of the participants were as diverse as environmental geography, film studies, gender studies, history, literary studies, social anthropology, South Asian studies, and religious studies. They came from within as well as outside of Germany, with their academic expertise ranging from masters, doctoral to post-doctoral level.

The first session of the conference was on urban culture and identity, with speakers Rahul Parson (University of Erfurt), Robert Kegler (Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg) and Sadiq Rahman (University of Hamburg) focusing on its different aspects. Rahul Parson's paper discussed the literary contribution of Calcutta-based Marwari women writers in the development of modern Hindi and how the issues of ethnic identity, class and gender were manifested in their works. Football in Calcutta and its contribution to strengthening identity in urban Calcutta was the central idea of the paper presented by Robert Kegler. Sadiq Rahman talked about the contribution of Bengal and Bengalis to Indian cinema from the late nineteenth to early twentieth century — something which has been overlooked so far in the field of film studies.

The second session of the conference was about gender perspectives in literature in colonial Bengal. Tinni Goswami Bhattacharya's (St. Xavier's College, Calcutta) paper examined the concept of infertility and its literary manifestation in the vernacular texts in colonial period.

Sukla Chatterjee (Heidelberg University), in her paper, presented an analysis of the portrayal of European women in the two novels of Toru Dutt, a prominent female literary figure of nineteenth-century Bengal.

Session three focused on interethnic representations and conflicts. Samiran Mandal (University of Gour Banga, Malda) communicated the cultural practices and lived experiences of the indigenous communities of Sundarbans, in a way to give voices to the subalterns or the Adivasis of that area. Zobaida Nasreen's (Durham University) paper emphasized the everyday forms of violence faced by indigenous women in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and their contribution to peace-keeping in the region which has been ignored so far. The next paper, presented by Nasrin Siraj (Jahangirnagar University, Dhaka), concentrated on the Bengalis living in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. The paper took into account the historical developments and the cultural contexts as an important marker in shaping the notions of citizenship and security.

The fourth and the final session of the day was on economy and labor conditions in Bangladesh. The first paper, delivered by Iris Schultz (Free University of Berlin), explored the role of communication in determining relationship ties and decision-making in the context of the physical absence of laborers from their families. Nahreen Islam Khan's (University of Marburg) paper on the Bangladeshi leather industry addressed the possible scenarios of improvement of the same in terms of hygiene and employees' health concerns, especially in comparison to the German leather industry. The final paper of the day was by Franziska Strich (Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg). She focused on newspaper articles to trace out the historical developments and public opinion about the use of nuclear energy to generate electricity in general with a case study of the Ruppur Nuclear Power Plant.

The second day of the conference started with religion and its historical and current aspects in Bengal. Lisa Wevelsiep's (Ruhr University, Bochum) paper explored the impact of Buddhist activism in Bangladesh with special reference to Buddhist-run NGOs catering to the minorities in the region. Vera Höke (University of Erfurt), in her paper, referred to a well-known nineteenth-century religious society in Bengal called the Brahma Samaj and its connection and exchange with liberal "Western" thoughts. The last paper of the panel, by Somak Biswas (Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi), discussed the Irish missionary Sister Nivedita and her counter-hegemonic interaction across social milieus in Bengal making the discourse of colonial encounter less pervasive.

The final session of the conference featured two speakers, both of which examined visual imagery in colonial Bengal. Apurba Chatterjee's (Uppsala University) paper explained how images of British colonizers in Bengal led to the consolidation of colonial power, with a special focus on their forms, contents and functions. The last speaker of the conference, Elizaveta Ilves (Heidelberg University), talked about the text-image relation in Rabindranath Tagore's "Chitralipi."

The conference was rounded up with a final discussion in which the participants appreciated the need for such an interdisciplinary audience to achieve balanced feedback on the topics discussed. The conference ended with the expectation to reconvene in two years.

Sukla Chatterjee