

Fellow's Presentation- MAKAIAS

Topic: **CHANGING PERCEPTIONS OF THE HOMELAND IN POST-SOVIET KAZAKHSTAN**

Presenter: **Dr. Suchandana Chatterjee, Fellow, MAKAIAS**

External Expert: **Prof. Purabi Roy, Retd. Professor, International Relations, J. U.**

Date: **05.10.2012**

Time: **3.30 pm**

Venue: **Azad Bhavan, Salt Lake**

Rapporteur: **Arpita Basu, Researcher, MAKAIAS**

Suchandana Chatterjee's presentation was an analysis of the changing perceptions about rootedness and belonging among the Kazakh communities—focusing primarily on the Russians, the Kazakh returnees (*oralmandar*) from Mongolia and the Semirechie Kazakhs (*yerliklar*). The contested notions of homeland that had affected community relationships in the post-Soviet period were discussed in this paper. In her first case study on the Russians in Kazakhstan she had talked about the longstanding presence of the Russians in industrial centres in North Kazakhstan. In the wake of Kazakization, there had been two sets of perceptions: (1) Russians as a beached diaspora (2) 'Myths' of a Russian diaspora. Dr. Chatterjee's second case study on the Kazakh Oralmandar depicted that during the 1990s people of Kazakh descent were invited to Kazakhstan for the building of a new Kazakh nation. She focused on the dominant perception of Kazakh returnees from Mongolia as a diaspora which would effortlessly integrate with their ancestral homeland and co-ethnics in Kazakhstan. She argued that the Kazakhs who were dispersed in Mongolia had nothing to do with the homeland concept of the Kazakh state. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union the Mongolian Kazakhs, positioned between the two nations Kazakhstan and Mongolia, had had other options. Finally, in her third case study based on the Uyghurs, Suchandana emphasized the contradictions of the homeland issue among the Uyghur community in the Semirechie region of south eastern Kazakhstan. She did a comparative study of the Uyghur in Almaty and the Uyghur across the globe. She concluded that the homeland and diaspora were non-homogeneous categories. She observed that the rhetoric of an ethnic homeland had helped

Kazakhstan to reach out to its co-ethnics abroad and homeland dilemmas were juxtaposed with new opportunities like the diaspora engagement in the home.

Discussion Session

The external expert **Prof. Purabi Roy** congratulated the presenter for her beautiful presentation and added valuable comments, observations and insights for the betterment of the paper. She indicated that in looking at identity the presenter had not touched on religion. In this connection she gave a brief note on the religion followed by the Kazakhs. She also pointed out that religion played an important role in community relationships. She also advised the presenter to look into the influences of Armenian literature and religion on the Kazakhs. Prof. Roy advised the presenter to unearth the primary sources where Mirozyan first raised the idea of ‘Kazakhs for Kazakhstan’. She also encouraged Dr. Chatterjee to take into consideration the occupation of the Kazakhs in Mongolia, Germany, and Turkey and to find out the Christian percentage of Kazakhs and their condition during the Soviet Period. She described the Uyghur as a very deceptive nation. She encouraged the researcher to carry on more research on the Uyghur, especially on their language, attitude, religion, and the reasons behind their conversion from Islam to Buddhism etc. Prof. Roy also mentioned that the presenter should incorporate the Uzbek minority issues in the paper.

Comments and observations from the floor highlighted the following issues:

- ✚ Questions were raised on whether the Uyghur considered Kazakhstan as their homeland, or Mongolia.
- ✚ Discussion was carried out on the Kazakhs’ relations with Mongolia.
- ✚ Questions were raised on Tengrism in Kazakhstan.