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Press Release

A report on the one-day programme 'Rethinking Southern Urbanism' Calcutta Research Group and the MMAJ Academy of International Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia

New Delhi, November 9, 2026

On the 8th of October, 2026, the Calcutta Research Group organised a one-day programme on 'Rethinking Southern Urbanism' in collaboration with the MMAJ Academy of International Studies at Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi. Bringing together academics, scholars, and researchers from universities across Delhi and beyond, the programme involved a series of deliberations on the need to critically examine what a distinct 'Southern' urbanism might look like today, one that is attentive to the many contradictions, crises, and possibilities associated with the unbridled urbanisation unfolding across cities of the South.

The programme commenced with a set of introductory remarks from Prof. Bijay Pratihari, Director of the MMAJ Academy of International Studies, and Prof. Ranabir Samaddar, Professor Emeritus, Calcutta Research Group. While Samaddar commented on CRG's decades-long engagement with urban questions through the experiences of marginalised communities such as refugees, migrants, and the internally displaced, Prof. Pratihari expanded the notion of 'Southern urbanism' significantly by bringing in perspectives from African cities.

This was followed by a public lecture titled *'Breathing Together, Differently: Some Thoughts on Cities of the Global South'* by Prof. Awadhendra Sharan from the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), Delhi. The session was chaired by Dr. Ishita Dey, Assistant Professor at the Department of Sociology, South Asian University.

Sharan began his lecture by examining how 'breathing' is associated with the concepts of climate, pollution, disease, and disaster. By charting the evolution of these concepts from pre-colonial and colonial times to the contemporary period, he discussed how their changing meanings, as well as the ways in which they have been conceptualised and managed by successive governments have shaped how the city has come to be ordered. He explored their connections with architecture and the built environment, households and neighbourhoods, urban planning and zoning practices, and public health management. He argued that a 'Southern urbanism' must fundamentally involve thinking through issues of power and difference, and privilege the sensory and the affective as much as the structural and the institutional. On a related note, he discussed how the question of smoke has shaped and reshaped urban spaces – especially cities

like Mumbai and Kolkata – touching upon its relationship with climate, social hierarchies, industrial and vehicular pollution, and sustainable development.

The post-lunch sessions featured two book discussions, on *The City as the Southern Question: Alternative Histories of Urbanisation After Gramsci*, edited by Ranabir Samaddar, Enrica Morlicchio, and Sandro Mezzadra, and *A Manifesto for Our Urban Future* by Ranabir Samaddar. The discussants for the first session were Prof. Nasreen Chowdhory from the Department of Political Science, University of Delhi and Prof. G.M. Shah from the MMAJ Academy of International Studies at Jamia Millia Islamia. It was chaired by Independent Researcher Dr. Sumona Dasgupta. The discussion on the *Manifesto* included a set of introductory remarks by the author, followed by comments on the text by Prof. Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhury from the Department of Political Science at Rabindra Bharati University, Kolkata, and Prof. Amit Prakash from the Centre for the Study of Law and Governance from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. This session was chaired by Prof. G.M. Shah.

These two closely interlinked discussions revolved primarily around examining the meaning of the 'South' in Southern Urbanism. The South was understood not simply as a geographical or locational category, but a relational one, standing as a counter figure or counter power to that of the North, thereby unsettling established North-South binaries. The specificities of the Southern urban experience in the light of contemporary realities such as increasing violence, conflict, and contestation over urban space, escalating pollution, congestion, and urban sprawl, and new forms of precarity in an age of digital governance and increasing algorithmic control were deliberated upon. The discussion was greatly enriched by questions of gender, new configurations of power and resistance, and perspectives on Kashmir.

Overall, the programme provided an important platform for critical and interdisciplinary engagement with the changing realities of urbanisation in the cities of the South. By bringing together diverse perspectives and interrogating established conceptual frameworks, it highlighted the need to rethink urbanism from the vantage point of the South, foregrounding its distinctive histories, lived experiences, inequalities, and forms of resistance. The programme was thus a significant success in fostering meaningful academic dialogue and advancing a critical conversation on the possibilities of imagining more inclusive, just, and context-sensitive urban futures.

Office of the CPRO
Jamia Millia Islamia

RETHINKING SOUTHERN URBANISM

October 8, 2026
MMAJ Academy of International Studies,
Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi

Introductory Remarks
Bijay Pratihari & Ranabir Samaddar

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Speaker: Awadhendra Sharan
Chair: Ishita Dey

Book Discussion
'The City as the Southern Question: Alternative Histories of Urbanisation After Gramsci'
Discussants: Nasreen Chowdhory & G.M. Shah
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Discussion on
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Introductory comments by the author: Ranabir Samaddar
Discussants: Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhury & Amit Prakash
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Some Thoughts on Cities of the Global South
Awadhendra Sharan
Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi





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