



**Book Launch and Discussion on Debasish Chaudhuri's book Xinjiang and the Chinese State: Violence in the Reform Period**

**Chair:** Rajiv Sikri

**Panelists:** Amb. Vinod C. Khanna & Dr. T. G. Suresh

**Date:** 7 February, 2018

**Time:** 2:30 pm

**Conference Hall II, India International Centre**

The event began with the formal launch of the book by the author and the panelists. Following the book launch, the author provides a broad overview of the phenomenal changes that took place in Xinjiang since 1990. Xinjiang is of strategic importance to China given its close cultural affinity and geographical proximity with the Central Asian states. The growing Uyghur demand for a separate homeland and the increasing violence in Xinjiang brought this region much national and international attention, probing China to formulate policies to suppress such separatist movements in its distant periphery.

The central argument that the author presents in his book is the shift that took place in the state's execution of minority policies and the factors that influenced such shifts. China's policy towards Xinjiang can be broadly divided into three phases; firstly, the 1990s witnessed recurrent incidences with the Uyghur movement in Xinjiang taking a religious overtone. What followed was the document no.7 that the Chinese Government came up with in 1996, defining Xinjiang separatism as one of the three evil forces. Many scholars mark this a watershed year with major accommodative policies implemented towards the minorities. Growth of religious extremism and terrorist activities in the post-Cold War world adversely affected the situation in Xinjiang. Secondly, encouraged by the international campaign against terrorism after the 9/11 attack China has been employing coercive methods to curb separatist movements and at the same time binding the region with rapid economic development projects. Thirdly, after the 2009 Urumqi riot, campaign against terrorism was vehemently sustained; Xinjiang problem became a global terrorist issue. The years preceding Xi's coming to power saw massive increase of violence in Xinjiang with 2014 witnessing most gruesome violence in multiple counties. China adopted more repressive measures by controlling social, cultural and religious lives of the people through strict surveillance.

In this backdrop the author attempted to unfold two stories, one being that of Xinjiang's and other is the social unrest, social movements and mass movements happening throughout China. The author aims to give a comparative analysis of these movements, as such movements started with demands not being fulfilled and uprisings in Hunan and North East China. The author discusses these movements within a theoretical framework his theoretical formulation is on the basis of modernization in the context of China and certain tentative aspects of conflict theory.

The chair Rajiv Sikri congratulated the author for having written a well-structured book that provides us a lens of the Chinese policies on their north western region of Xinjiang and towards their Muslim minorities especially the Uyghurs. The panelists, Amb. Vinod C. Khanna & Dr. T. G. Suresh also expressed their congratulatory remarks and welcomed an important addition of Indian scholarship on Xinjiang studies. The book with its detailed analysis provides a historical background, theoretical perspective, discussing national question, Uyghur nationalist resurgence, state ethnic policies, regional economy, ethnic resurgence and state response and international factors influencing them.

The event was followed by an insightful discussion by the panelists and the audience present there. The author also addressed several pertinent questions like; What are the problems that the Chinese state is facing in curbing the violence in the region? How does Xinjiang being at the periphery play out for the Chinese government? To what extent does the level of nationalism vary between the Kazaks and the Uyghurs? What is the pattern of governance that Xinjiang operates within? How viable is the CPEC project in developing Xinjiang? Why is China reluctant of Kazaks returning back to their own country? What exactly is the state policy in China on the demographic composition of minority vis-a-vis Hans? What has been the response in Xinjiang regarding the BRI project? Most of the questions and discussion revolved around BRI given the growing interest in economic belt.

The book with its obtainable and detailed analyses is a valuable addition to scholars and researchers of Chinese studies, international relations and politics, security and strategic studies, sociology, social anthropology and ethnic studies. The central thesis that the author presents in the book is on Chinese nationalism and the construction of Uyghur national identity, consequences of economic modernisation in the region, ethnic conflicts and coercive measures, the security and social stability situation in Xinjiang, intensification of violence in Xinjiang under the current leadership, vision of the 'Chinese dream', essential policies and programmes, post-riot fallouts and social contradictions manifest in discourses surrounding development, separatist aspirations, religious fundamentalism and international terrorism.

*Report prepared by Ngipwem Rebecca Chohwanglim, Research Intern, Institute of Chinese Studies.*

## **About the Speaker**

Debasish Chaudhuri is an independent researcher specializing in Chinese politics and society. He is PhD in Chinese Studies and his area of interests include ethno-national movements, political economy of ethnicity, Chinese nationalities policies, political, social and economic developments of Xinjiang and Chinese nationalism. Chaudhuri held positions of Associate Fellow and Research Fellow at the Institute of Chinese Studies and Vivekanand International Foundation. He was Courtesy Faculty at the Center for Asian and Pacific Studies, University of Oregon, USA. He also held teaching and research positions with Department of East Asian Studies, University of Delhi, Centre for Chinese and South East Asian Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University and Institute of Chinese Studies, CSDS.

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