

Partitioned Urbanity: Refugee Politics and Planning in Kolkata

*Thesis submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University in partial fulfilment of
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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation entitled "**Partitioned Urbanity: Refugee Politics and Planning in Kolkata**" submitted by me for the award of the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy** of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. The dissertation has not been submitted in part or full for any other degree of this University or any other University.


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INTRODUCTION

On 21st October 2005, the Supreme Court of India delivered a judgement that brought alive the significance of the Partition of 1947 as a foundational event for the nations of South Asia. In the case of Raja Mohammed Amir Khan Vs. the Union of India¹ the court ruled that the property of Raja of Mahmudabad which had been held by the custodian of enemy properties in India since the Partition, had to be handed over to the sole surviving heir of the Raja. The heir, as a citizen of India, could not be qualified as an ‘enemy’ as his father had been while migrating to Pakistan during the 1947 Partition. The court admonished the bureaucrats occupying the property as their quarters for their high-handedness.

This judgement brought with it a flurry of cases by Muslim citizens in India whose ancestral properties were being held by the custodian at the time. The Congress government passed an ordinance specifying that the court cannot overturn the categorization of property as ‘enemy property’ thereby temporarily suppressing the issue.² In 2010 the issue became a major parliamentary debate between the BJP and the Congress since the government at the time had attempted to replace the ordinance with an amendment bill providing for the return of vested property if the claimants could prove that they were citizens of India by birth.³ The discriminating clause that would validate return of vested property introduced a distinction in the hierarchy of

¹ Raja Mohammed Amir Khan Vs. Union of India, Civil Appeal 2501 of 2002, <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/922705/>, (accessed on 12th July, 2017)

² ‘Bill on enemy property is the next Shah Bano: BJP’, *Hindustan Times*, 21st August, 2010, <http://www.hindustantimes.com/delhi-news/bill-on-enemy-property-next-shah-bano-bjp/story-eGhaKj2ER5hOZNZKh1IERM.html>, (accessed on 12th July 2017)

³ The enemy property (amendment and validation) bill, 2010, <http://www.prsindia.org/billtrack/the-enemy-property-amendment-and-validation-second-amendment-bill-2010-1365/>, (accessed on 12th July 2017)

citizens for the applicants where the birth of the heir on Indian soil validated the return of the ‘enemy’ into the fold of the nation. Even this limited possibility of returning vested properties, however, did not sit well with the BJP which saw this as evidence of Congress pandering to the Muslim community.⁴

The debate kept simmering through the regime change at the centre and with the coming in of the current BJP government in 2014, a new amendment bill was tabled and passed in 2016 which expanded the definition of ‘enemy’ in the enemy property act to the legal heirs of the original evacuee and nationals of ‘enemy countries’ even if they had changed their nationality.⁵ In the context of the making of these laws the enemy country had first been Pakistan and later China. Much of the properties seized under these laws were owned by emigrating Muslim and ethnic Chinese citizens of India. Most of the property under the direct care of the custodian was vested after the first war with Pakistan. The total quantity and valuation of such properties was not quite clear at the time of this debate. Immediately after the passage of the bill in 2016 there were investigations into the valuation of ‘enemy property’ currently held by the custodian. A staggering amount of 1.04 lakh crore was presented to the parliament as current valuation of such properties in March 2017.⁶

The amount of wealth signified by these properties, though staggering, does not encapsulate the political energy generated by such debates. On the heels of this declaration in the Parliament, a BJP MLA in Maharashtra demanded the demolition of Mohammed Ali Jinnah’s residence in Malabar hills and the construction of a cultural centre in its place.⁷ Incensed by the crude demand

⁴ Ibid, ‘Bill on enemy property is the next Shah Bano: BJP’, *Hindustan Times*, 21st August, 2010

⁵ Enemy property (amendment and validation) bill 2016, <http://www.prsindia.org/billtrack/the-enemy-property-amendment-and-validation-bill-2016-4212/>, (accessed on 12th July 2017)

⁶ ‘Total valuation of enemy property in India 1.04 lakh crore: Government’, *India Times*, March 28th, 2017, <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/finance/total-valuation-of-enemy-property-in-india-rs-1-04-lakh-crore-government/articleshow/57874900.cms>, (accessed 12th July 2017)

⁷ ‘BJP MLA demands Jinnah house in mumbai to be demolished, calls it enemy property’, March 28th 2017, <http://www.indiatimes.com/news/india/bjp-mla-demands-jinnah-house-in-mumbai-to-be-demolished-calls-it-an-enemy-property-274396.html>, (accessed on 12th July 2017)

made by the BJP MLA Mangal Prabhat Lodha, the Pakistan Foreign Office retaliated by renewing its claim to the Jinnah house as a historic monument to the father of the nation of Pakistan.⁸ The economy of land and people is intertwined with prerogatives of administration, considerations of wealth and competitive politics at every level of representation and the entire complex picture is coloured by the event, memory and process of Partition. The persistence of Partition as an event and as the marker of certain governmental mechanisms is central to the deliberations in this thesis.

The above description flags three realizations that the research presented in the following pages will try to substantiate. Firstly, the project of Partition is a persistent reality of political engagements in South Asian nation states. Secondly, legal and administrative instruments evolved out of the reality of managing the fall out of Partition continue being a key element of governmental activity in India. Thirdly, the instruments of governance evolved out of the reality of Partition not only persist across time but actually evolve and spread across the space of the national territory and determine the dynamics of wealth and population distribution. These three realizations have been pursued across the pages of this thesis.

The spatial location of the work is the city of Kolkata which has one of the longest and most layered histories of migration due to the massive periodic influx of population. Firstly, the state of West Bengal received refugees from East Pakistan after the 1947 Partition, especially following the Barisal riots of 1950 and later the Hazrat Bal riots of 1964. The second major influx took place during the language movement and the Liberation War in present day Bangladesh from the late 1960s till 1971.⁹ The history of this refugee influx has overtime accumulated a large body of literature around it. In the next section I

⁸ 'Pakistan claims Jinnah's Mumbai house as its property, Demands that India should give it back', *Times of India*, 31st March, 2017, <http://www.indiatimes.com/news/india/pakistan-claims-jinnah-s-mumbai-house-as-it-s-property-demands-that-india-should-give-it-back-274645.html>, (accessed on 12th July, 2017)

⁹ For a detailed analysis of the distinctions between 'Partition in the west' and 'Partition in the east' see Subharanjan dasgupta, Jasodhara Bagchi, "The Problem", *Seminar*, Issue 510, February 2002, <http://www.india-seminar.com/semframe.html>, (accessed 10th July, 2017)

will summarise the main trends and genres within Partition studies and try to locate the different sites, both conceptual and physical, which have been focal points of scholarship.

Changing sites of Partition history

The significance of the Partition of 1947 in the history of state making in South Asia is well underscored. The retelling and evaluation of the event, the processes leading up to it and studies of high politics of the time formed the main stay of discussions in early scholarship concerning Partition.¹⁰ For these authors, apportioning of the blame for the Partition and its immense tragedy was an important exercise. For many scholars the apportioning came to mean the identification of communal divisiveness with Muslim League politics and the politics of unity and secularism with the Congress.¹¹ Early scholarship closely followed texts produced by various government officials and leaders from the time of Partition and the analysis of these texts substantially informed the structures of explanation.¹² To identify this as an early trend, however, is not to say that this is an exhausted analytic that has somehow been relegated to the background of historical investigations into Partition.¹³ The 'civilisational' framing of the Hindu-Muslim divide¹⁴ remains important not only for

¹⁰ As an example of studies of high politics one may see Percival Spear, *India, Pakistan and the West*, London: Oxford UP, 1958 and Mushirul Hasan, ed. *India's partition: process, strategy and mobilization*. Oxford University Press, USA, 1993. For a comprehensive study of different genres of history writing animated by the event and process of Partition see Pankhuree R. Dube, 'Partition Historiography', *The Historian*, Volume 77, Issue 1, 2015, pp. 55- 79

¹¹ For a detailed representation of this process see Asim Roy, "The High Politics of India's Partition: The Revisionist Perspective," *Modern Asian Studies* 2, 1990, 385–408

¹² Officials and leaders had started writing about the Partition, its costs and cause since the late 1940s. Some of the main texts that are considered treasure troves of description of political competition and bureaucratic process are P. Moon, *Divide and Quit* (London, 1961); G. D. Khosla, *Stern Reckoning* (New Delhi, 1949); V. P. Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India* (Bombay, 1957); M. A. K Azad, *India Wins Freedom* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1960)

¹³ The works of Ayesha Jalal is especially important in relation to these analytics. Her work has been central to the re-evaluation of the blame often attached to Jinnah and Muslim League. See Jalal, Ayesha. "Secularists, subalterns and the stigma of 'communalism': Partition historiography revisited." *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 33, no. 1 (1996): 93-103 and Jalal, Ayesha. *The sole spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the demand for Pakistan*. Cambridge University Press, 1994

¹⁴ David Gilmartin, 'The Historiography of India's Partition: Between Civilization and Modernity', *Journal of Asian Studies*, Volume 74, Issue 1, 2015, pp. 23-41

historiography but for present day politics as well as we saw at the very beginning of the introduction. The study of high politics at the level of provincial governments and regional formations created a different lens for explaining the events of 1947 by delving into the various sources of communal politics that stretched back into the early 1900s. These studies began the process of localizing the issue of political analysis to the province thereby infusing the field of study with some amount of plurality.¹⁵ This can be seen as the first change in the site of studying Partition – from the national to the regional.

These studies however, remained limited to investigations in a narrowly defined arena of politics contained within representative organizations of the colonial state assemblies and the lives of regional notables. This period of Partition historiography produced some remarkable texts but Haimanti Roy has pointed out a rather widespread flaw with the literature of this period which she sees in continuation with the first generation of scholarly works Partition which focused on the National level discourse. She has named it the “communalism-nationalism” binary.¹⁶ This binary, she argues, offered simplistic explanations and causes for the Partition by reproducing a colonial narrative of existing fault lines between communities.¹⁷ Roy found Chatterji’s reading of elite constitution of Bengali communalism a rather limited reading of the politics of the period and the characterization of agency of the rest of the Bengali population as a quick and insubstantial shift. It is important to note that there was a simultaneous proliferation of hindu communal politics among historically disadvantaged groups as well, which had till then been largely inimical to the political consolidation of the Hindu gentry. Sekhar

¹⁵ See Shila Sen. *Muslim Politics in Bengal, 1937-1947*. New Delhi: Impex India, 1976. Also, for a detailed investigation into the politics of provincial representative bodies see Bidyut Chakrabarty, *The Partition of Bengal and Assam, 1932-1947, Contour of Freedom* (London: Routledge, 2004)

¹⁶ Roy, Haimanti. "Citizenship and National Identity in Post Partition Bengal, 1947-65." Unpublished PhD submitted to University of Cincinnati, 2006, pp 6-8

¹⁷ In the case of west Bengal she marks out the work by Joya Chatterji as the primary support for this form of argument. Ibid, Roy, Haimanti. "Citizenship and National Identity", p 8 also see Chatterji, Joya. *Bengal divided: Hindu communalism and partition, 1932-1947*. Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Bandyopadhyay has noted the increasing co-operation between Namasudra groups and the hindu communal groups in this period.¹⁸

Scholarship based on the 'lived experience' of Partition among the displaced populations later came up as a critique of the high politics based studies of the event of Partition. These studies were also central to building a layered and variegated understanding of the refugee population. This literature brought together an image of Partition that lengthened in time and affected different portions of the population differently. The experiences of women refugees at the eastern and the western front of Partition demonstrated the incredible differences in the register of violence and politics while also underlining the importance of memory in understanding Partition.¹⁹ In recent times, especially in relation to the question of caste there has been a re-evaluation of refugee rehabilitation in Western India.²⁰ The political narrative of refugee struggle in eastern India has also gone through a significant transformation with the increasing importance of Namasudra politics in recent years.²¹ These accounts argue that the hierarchies of caste and class were re-produced and in the case of Eastern India, exacerbated by the Partition. This transition in the focus of historiography is what I call the second change in the 'site' of Partition scholarship. The first site of Partition historiography was the life of great men, the statesmen and politicians of the day, representing religious, territorial and political interests of millions of people. Alongside them there were the imperial officials tasked with administering the division of territory and people while

¹⁸ Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *Caste, Protest and Identity in Colonial India: The Namasudras of Bengal 1872-1947* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1997).

¹⁹ Urvashi Butalia *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*, Penguin, New Delhi, 1998; Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 2007 and Datta, Nonica. *Violence, martyrdom and partition: a daughter's testimony*. Oxford University Press, 2012. Chakraborty, Gargi. "Coming out of partition: Refugee Women of Bengal." (1999).

²⁰ For a detailed history of caste differentiation within the refugee population in Delhi see Kaur, Ravinder. *Since 1947: partition narratives among Punjabi migrants of Delhi*. Oxford university press, 2007.

²¹ The differences in leadership and mobilization between the Namasudra refugees and upper caste refugees in West Bengal has received increased scholarly attention recently. See Bandyopadhyay, Sekhar. "Partition and the Ruptures in Dalit Identity Politics in Bengal." *Asian Studies Review* 33, no. 4 (2009): 455-467.

presiding upon the negotiations between the leaders of the two hostile communities. The specificity of the second site is that it allows us to think locally and intimately about the aftermath of partition instead of offering historical causal explanations to an event that has already taken place. It allows us to delve into the processes through which it keeps recurring as a decisive moment of everyday politics.²² These studies located the narrative of Partition in the intimate space of families and the localized presence of the displaced persons in camps and colonies. In the next section of the introduction I will focus on a particular strand of this second genre of literature in which the ‘site’ of Partition studies has been the cities most affected by violence and demographic and economic transformations brought about by Partition.

Partition and Urbanity

Partha Chatterjee has argued that the “domestication of the East Pakistan refugee into the social fabric of Kolkata” is one of the most significant stories of urban history in the last century.²³ Though the depth of that domestication has recently been challenged by the political mobilization of Namasudra refugees²⁴ at the limits of the city, the importance of the city of Kolkata as a ‘text’²⁵ of the history of Partition, does seem to hold true. The refugee inflow in the east, as we have briefly noted earlier, has been very different from the West Indian situation where it took place as a single intense period of violence and population transfer. The process has continued very much into the present day with some of the most intense episodes of refugee influx happening in the years corresponding to the Bangladesh liberation war in the early 1970’s. Refugee influx and the politics of the various refugee organizations demanding shelter

²²Veena Das, *Mirrors of Violence: Communities, Riots and Survivors in South Asia* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990), Ian Talbot and Gurharpal Singh, eds., *Region and Partition: Bengal, Punjab and the Partition of the Subcontinent* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Suvir Kaul, *Partitions of Memory, The Afterlife of the Division of India* (New Delhi; Permanent Black, 2001).

²³Partha Chatterjee, ‘A Postscript from Kolkata’ in *Comparing Cities: The Middle East and South Asia*, (eds.) Kamran Asdar Ali and Martina Rieker, OUP, 2009, p 322

²⁴See Sinharay, Praskanva. “A new politics of caste.” *Economic and Political Weekly* 47, no. 34 (2012): 26-27 and “West Bengal’s Election Story.” *Economic & Political Weekly* 49, no. 17 (2014): 11.

²⁵Chatterjee, Nilanjana. “The East Bengal refugees: a lesson in survival.” *Calcutta: The living city* 2 (1990): 70-77

and rehabilitation has been closely paralleled by the shifting grounds of state rehabilitation policy.²⁶ The preponderance of left wing refugee activism of this period has been marked as the cause for the rise of the left in the later years in West Bengal.²⁷ This has effectively meant the growth of several concentrations of formal and informal refugee habitations – camps and colonies – in various parts of the ‘Kolkata Urban Agglomeration’. Much of the territorial growth of the Kolkata city has come through the inclusion of the peripheral or suburban areas that were originally occupied and inhabited by the refugee population. Both the political-economic and the social outfalls of the long history of refugee settlements have attracted scholarly attention over the last two decades.²⁸

The importance of understanding Partition as a determining event in the life many of the important cities in South Asia has been marked by a number of scholars. In the case of Partition in Western India, Talbot’s work has been immeasurably influential in marking the economic, demographic and political processes that led to the slow impoverishment of Amritsar and the transformation of Lahore.²⁹ Ravinder Kaur’s study of Delhi has taken the inquiry forward by demonstrating the reproduction of caste and class hierarchies in the activities of rehabilitation governance.³⁰ She has argued that the untouchable castes were very often left out of the stories of Partition violence and also the narrative of displacement and rehabilitation which produced further exclusion of this group from the legitimate demands of

²⁶ One of the earliest and most comprehensive texts that gives us a detailed understanding of the various interactions and parallels between refugee organizations, state level politics and government policy is Chakrabarti, Prafulla K. *The marginal men: The refugees and the left political syndrome in West Bengal*. Lumière Books, Calcutta, 1990.

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ See Pradip Kumar Bose, ed. *Refugees in West Bengal: institutional processes and contested identities*. Calcutta Research Group, 2000. Nilanjana Chatterjee, *Midnights Unwanted Children: East Bengali Refugees and the Politics of Rehabilitation*, (unpublished theses, submitted to Brown University, 1992) and Joya Chatterji, ‘Dispersal and The Failure of rehabilitation in Bengal’, *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 5, 2007 along with the same author’s *The Spoils of Partition*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007

²⁹ Talbot, Ian. *Divided Cities: Partition and its Aftermath in Lahore and Amritsar 1947-1957*. Oxford University Press, 2006.

³⁰ Kaur, Ravinder. *Since 1947: partition narratives among Punjabi migrants of Delhi*. Oxford university press, 2007.

citizenship of either of the two nations.³¹ The insights developed by these works have given shape to the idea of looking at partition as an extended process that leaves its mark across time and in the production of specific types of refugee habitations at the peripheral spaces of the cities and of urban governance. In the case of Kolkata, the story of Partition and its effect on the city has become closely associated with discussions on 'informality', state policy, land politics and transformation of the agrarian frontier of the city. In recent times these connections have been explored by Ananya Roy.³² She has argued that the patronage networks of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) settled refugees in the fringes of Kolkata through a process that she named "informal vesting"³³. She limited her work on the refugee colonies of the Bangladeshi refugees since she found diversity in occupational and income profiles along with various levels of informal rights built up since the 1960s which marked these settlements out from the more precarious non-refugee settlements of internal migrants.³⁴ In contrast, the work by Antara Datta takes cognizance of the specificity of the citizenship discourse in the period between 1947 and 1971 and recognizes the three distinct phases and categories of migrants who came to West Bengal erstwhile East Pakistan. The first set of migrants coming between the Noakhali riots of 1946 and the closure of refugee camps in 1958 were identified as 'old migrants' and a significant portion of this population was given rehabilitation within West Bengal and allowed to register as citizens. The second group of refugees who migrated between 1964 and 1971 were called 'new migrants' and were given conditional rehabilitation only if they agreed to leave West Bengal for the distant rehabilitation colonies in the Dandakaranya Development Authority area in Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Orissa.³⁵ Refugees from the second period did not quite enjoy the

³¹ Kaur, Ravinder. "Narrative absence: An 'Untouchable' account of Partition migration." *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 42, no. 2 (2008): 281-306.

³² Roy, Ananya. *City requiem, Calcutta: gender and the politics of poverty*. University of Minnesota Press, 2003.

³³ Ibid 159-163

³⁴ Ibid 238

³⁵ Datta, Antara. *Refugees and borders in South Asia: the great exodus of 1971*. Routledge, 2012 pp 128-129

level of patronage that would rescue them from the precarious position that a violently displaced and property-less population surely faces in the absence of organised state care. Joya Chatterji has in fact argued that the politics of refugee rehabilitation at the state policy end was characterized primarily by a cavalier attitude towards the articulation of demands by the refugees. Datta has argued that the natives of the city and the government were not keen on allowing the refugees to settle in or near the city. Most of the work in this thesis is aimed at understanding the destiny of this refugee population and the precarious space of livelihood and shelter that they created out of their shattered lives.

Partition, Space and the problem of urban segregations

Marcuse and Kempen have used the trope of Partition in a general sense while talking about spatial hierarchies and separations under the conditions of capitalist production in an increasingly globalized world.³⁶ Their use of the term resonates with the broader theme of spatial inequalities and the forces of the market and state that structure them. The idea of Partition in their work relates back to literature of criminality, ethnic and religious ghettoization and the pushing away of the urban poor from the city core. The riddle they wanted to solve was whether the state has retained its strength in terms of addressing and/or producing various form of spatial separation with greater or lesser degree of autonomy from the market. They conclude that the state remains an important locus not only for actualising market directives but also to at times go against its grain.³⁷ They discuss and distinguish between three forms of Partition of cities that the state helps reproduce. These are drawn along lines of culture, functional efficiency and lines of power.³⁸ In the preceding sections i have discussed the inter differentiation of the refugee mass that has been commented upon by the authors in the field of Partition studies. In this thesis I

³⁶ Peter Marcuse and Ronald Van Kempen, *Of States And Cities: The Partitioning of Urban Space*, OUP, New York, 2002

³⁷ Ibid p 263

³⁸ Ibid p 264-265

will demonstrate the ways in which hierarchies of political, economic and legal spaces are produced in the city of Kolkata in the interactions between various arms of the state and the refugee population.

This thesis is, very broadly, an investigation into the production of ‘social space’ in Kolkata where the legal and economic inhabitation of the refugee is traced as an important node. ‘Social space’, as Lefebvre reminds us, is a collection of interrelationships, simultaneity and encompassment.³⁹ The thesis attempts to construct a comprehensive history and ethnography of the refugee population and the deeper interrelationships that structure the current condition of their inhabitation. This inhabitation, the thesis contends, is hierarchically arranged across four registers: caste, occupation, legal citizenship and spatial stability. The primary research interest of the thesis is the contemporary politics, space making and subsistence of the lower caste refugee population which has in recent times become the prime agent of demands for citizenship rights and also a significant presence in terms of migratory urban labour. Their lives and labour at the periphery of Kolkata is the basic concern of this research.

The proposed research attempts to bring together two strands in the history of post-independence Kolkata- (a) refugee rehabilitation and (b) urban development and planning. Instead of studying only rehabilitation department documents to construct the narrative of post-Partition Kolkata this work proposes to study the archives of urban planning alongside the rehabilitation department reports in order to offer an amalgamated story. Through this connected history this project will attempt to capture the details of three important processes:

1. The changes in spatial hierarchies in the city and within urban governance policies while adapting to population flows.

³⁹ Lefebvre, Henri. *The production of space*. Blackwell: Oxford, 1991, p 73

2. Shifts in the construction of the migrant population within the discourse of governance.
3. The historical dynamics of encompassment of the lower caste refugee population into the informal urban labour force in the city of Kolkata.

METHODOLOGY

Several scholars like Pradip Bose, Prafulla Chakroborty, Joya Chatterji and Dipankar Sinha consider the task of domestication of the refugee masses already completed. One of the few notable exceptions in this field of arguments is the work of Ranabir Samaddar who has situated the question of ‘Partition’ and refugee politics as a continuing process albeit mediated by the state’s ‘ambiguous hospitality’⁴⁰ which allows limited negotiations for a slow integration of the population into local politics and economy. This project attempts an opening up of this consensus to further probing and also to point at a longer process of negotiations and contestations between the refugee population and the city. In the process the project will sketch the outlines of lower caste refugee politics and mobilization at the urban periphery. Most of the research concerning refugee movement by the authors mentioned above is based on the early Left Wing political organizations of the refugee movement created in the 1950s. In this thesis we will primarily discuss the political organizations created by the Namasudra political organizations and various small block level committees of migrants in the periurban areas of Kolkata. If the post-colonial growth and development of the kolkata metropolitan area appears largely determined by refugee rehabilitation, the use and control of refugee labour and informal settlements, then ‘Partition’ should be reinterpreted as an ongoing process as well as part of the rationality that keeps structuring the city’s spatial character and governance.

⁴⁰ Samaddar, Ranabir. *Refugees and the State: Practices of Asylum and Care in India, 1947-2000*. SAGE Publications India, 2003.

The project follows crucial convergences of the refugee crisis and the Infrastructural crisis of the city of Kolkata. Terms like ‘dispersal’⁴¹, ‘de-densification’⁴², ‘housing’ and employment informed the functional imagination of both urban space and the refugee population as represented in the policy discourse. Two important periods when the concerns of urban development and refugee rehabilitation seem to have come together in the city’s past are the periods between 1950-60 and 1966-1981. These two periods will be studied in close detail.

The ethnographic part of the study will derive from questions and concerns from the documentary history of the conjunction between the refugee problem and the crisis of urban development and its object of study will be the refugee population at the fringe of the city in the contemporary period. The research bases itself on documentary history and an image-intensive ethnographic archive to characterise and describe the spatial and economic processes that are foundational to the recent transformations of the areas marked by both refugee settlements and urban development.

Following this we take up the contemporary spaces of refugee settlement and urban development at the fringe of Kolkata city to locate a ‘residual’ portion of the refugee population, as they were named in the ‘Review Committee’⁴³ documents, in the transitional zone between the urban and the agrarian at the borders of the city.

The ethnography will be based in villages in the suburban district of North 24 Parganas which along with being the second most urbanised district in the state also happens to be the location for several refugee rehabilitation areas and the location for recent development projects. This district lies between the core of the Kolkata urban agglomeration and the international border separating

⁴¹ For detailed discussion of the term see Chapter 2 of this thesis

⁴² For detailed discussion of the term see Chapter 1 of this thesis

⁴³ Committee of Review of Rehabilitation work in West Bengal, *Residuary Problem of Rehabilitation of Old Migrants in West Bengal: Nature and Magnitude*, Ministry of Labour, Employment and Rehabilitation, New Delhi, 1967

Bangladesh and India. Over the years a large migrant population made up of old and new refugees have come together in this space to create new villages and colonies which characterise the periurban spaces of Kolkata. These are areas lying at the fringe of spaces brought only recently under urban administration. These spaces are representative of urban transformation of the countryside but in this case it is also inhabited by a population that is deeply implicated in the history of the original territorial foundations of the Indian nation state. This connection allows us to reflect upon a long period of transition from the agrarian to the urban for particular spaces and populations in interaction with particular portions of the state policy discourse.

North 24 Parganas is an important district in the history of refugee rehabilitation. A 1987 list of colonies collected by the Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation Directorate records that the highest number of squatter's colonies were set up in this district between 1951 and 1971.⁴⁴ The initial 101 colonies in the district grew rapidly due to the settlement of the late migrant population. This district also has a high incidence of Government Sponsored Colonies (urban-155 and rural-81).⁴⁵ It is also the district with the most number of undeveloped Government Sponsored Colonies.⁴⁶ It contains the largest number of the 998 group of squatter's colonies. A 1995 list provided by a senior UCRC activist located 138 new refugee colonies in this district⁴⁷. For this group of colonies regularisation has remained incomplete for over a decade

The ethnography will attempt to bring together a narrative of the journey of this population through the camps, colonies and various rehabilitation spaces along with the details of occupational shifts and political participation. Along with institutional participation or activities organised by political parties, the ethnography will attempt to document and analyse the importance of local community and religious organizations like clubs and *Matua* groups in order to

⁴⁴ Government of West Bengal, Manual of Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation Volume-I, Government of West Bengal, Kolkata, 2000, pp 116-124

⁴⁵ Ibid, pp 54-61

⁴⁶ Ibid, pp 273-275

⁴⁷ Anil Sinha, *Poschimbonge Udbastu Uponibesh*, Privately Published, Kolkata, 1995, p

generate a thicker description of popular politics in the area and dynamics internal to the community. This becomes specifically necessary in order to underline the specificity of this portion of the refugee population as a lower caste population. The caste specificity of this population is an important lens through which one can also begin to assess the caste nature of the Left political field in West Bengal. While a large number of studies have presumed an obvious and organic link between the Left political parties and the refugee population, the history of the lower caste refugee population presents a different narrative in terms of both the segregation internal to the refugee population itself and the reproduction of caste marginalities within the left political organizations. The study attempts to argue that caste boundaries have been reproduced in terms of a spatial distribution at the fringe of the city historically mediated by the rehabilitation apparatus and Left political parties. This already existing spatial reality is now being rearranged by urban development initiatives thereby embedding the effects of migration marked by the Partition and Liberation war in contemporary urban spaces.

This research aims to make certain invisible thresholds and limits visible in terms of spatial and sociological categories. It proposes to approach this task by taking the figure of the East Pakistan refugee out of the familiar narratives of left political assertion and see it first as a governance category defined within a long period of planning and rehabilitation. This does not mean that the figure of the refugee is reduced to the governance category defined in the state policy narrative. This shift in lens allows us to construct a different ground against which we can situate the figure of the refugee as a subject of urban politics. The research aims to spatialise the refugee mass and thereby differentiate it into its various constituent fragments and then write the stories of diverging destinies. In this process one can begin to see the always incomplete nature of the event and the act of 'Partition'. We can then begin to set forth the outlines of 'Partition' as a recurring practice of governance through distributions, segregations and economies of space and population.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions outline the inquiry in the proposed research.

1. What have been the effects of 'Partition' on the spatial spread and growth of the Kolkata Metropolitan Area?
2. How has the refugee population been accommodated in the spatial and economic reality of the city?
3. How does the refugee population negotiate with the contemporary development discourse in the city of Kolkata?
4. Is there a characteristic specificity of refugee labour, settlement and politics in relation to the post-independence spread of Kolkata City and the rise of urban informality?

The questions asked above define an empirical field of inquiry that can give rise to formulations on five important sets of issues: Firstly, the narrative framed by these questions will bring out the importance of 'Partition' as a lesson and concept in governance rather than as an event marking the foundations of religious violence, trauma and the fundamental incision of communities.

Secondly, the refugee flow into Calcutta gives us an interesting situation for studying a case of voluminous in-migration in a region of declining industrial importance. This situation makes the direct political-economic explanations of migration unviable thereby allowing us to look for a different set of survival strategies, governance mechanisms and political negotiations that are not immediately captured within the dynamics of labour migration.

Thirdly, instead of thinking of urban informality as an automatic outcome of a global regime of flexible capital and footloose capital producing footloose labour, we can draw out of this research a different possibility. In this story we

can see the shape of a contingent moment of mass migration and economic slump where the ‘right to the city’ is articulated against a background of constantly shifting imperatives of state policy.

Fourthly, this narrative allows us to situate the question of caste and the various routes of its reproduction in contemporary urban space, mediated through the history ‘Partition’ in the case of Kolkata.

Fifthly, in the theoretical framework of governmentality, ‘sedentarization’ is an important move towards functionally defining population groups. In the research work defined above we will encounter descriptions of contemporary itinerancy or at least multiple dislocations that allow us to make a connection between ‘circulation’ and ‘governmentality’.

CHAPTER DESCRIPTIONS

The thesis contains five chapters. The first chapter is a study of perspective planning in Kolkata and the planning imagination that structures the production of suburban spaces in the city. This is aimed at defining the basic structure and historical evolution of the peripheral spaces as target of development. The chapter progresses taking the perspective plan from each decade as its primary text. The files and plans consulted in the chapter were collected primarily from the office library of the Kolkata Municipal Development Authority (KMDA) in 2013 during the first stage of field work. At the time I also had several informal conversations with the younger associate planners in the department. There was a significant difference in my communications with the young architects and planners from the Indian Institute of Technology campuses and the older generation of bureaucrats. These young planners helped me navigate a new system of documentation that had made the office library somewhat redundant in their eyes. Many of the plan documents in the post 2000 period did not actually exist in printed copy. Especially the contributions by the various municipalities towards the Vision Plan 2025 document were available only as word documents. The earlier format of creating Outline development Plan

(ODP) and following it up with a Detailed Development Plan (DDP) had been discontinued for the municipalities under the administration of the KMDA. These files and inputs for the Vision plan coming from the 33 municipalities under the administration of this body were available as word files in the computers of the young assistant planners. A few of them were kind enough to pass on the plan documents developed by some of the peripheral municipalities like Kalyani, Madhyamgram and Barasat. These files were used primarily to create documents for consultancy meetings with the Department for International Development (DFID, United Kingdom). My description in the last sections of the first chapter derives heavily from these documents. It is important to note here that the secrecy around documentation of development projects in Kolkata has been noted by several authors including Ananya Roy, whose works plays an important reference throughout this thesis. The chapter structures the various spatial imaginations from the 1950s onwards and takes a specific look at the perspective plans coming out of the erstwhile Calcutta Metropolitan Planning Organization, KMDA and the State Planning Board to assess the continuities and divergences in the spatial imagination of the periphery by the planning authorities at the centre of the metropolis. In the last section of the chapter a specific municipality is taken up for discussion which has an important link with refugee resettlement in Kolkata and also a uniquely intriguing place in the recent history of suburban planning. This is the municipality of Barasat at the north eastern limit of the city. It is the district headquarters of the district of North 24 Parganas. In the preceding section I have discussed the importance of this area in the scheme of refugee rehabilitation. This section of the chapter demonstrates the precarious standing of this municipal organisation in relation to the planning machinery while underlining the strategic importance of its spatial and demographic location.

While the first chapter deals primarily with the planning imagination of space at the urban periphery, the second chapter studies the refugee population and its construction in the rehabilitation policy discourse. It begins with a description of various policies of dispersal of the refugee population between 1950 and

1971 and ends with an overview of the process of vocational training, employment and wealth generation that the Government, at both state and central level pushed for in various different ways. The chapter is built primarily upon two sets of documents. The details of the central government schemes were taken from the annual reports by the department of Refugee Rehabilitation from 1950 to 1982. These annual reports are one of the only continuous documentations of schemes and expenses of refugee rehabilitation in India, though of somewhat undulating quality. More specific to the West Bengal context was the collection of reports produced by the Committee of Review of Rehabilitation Work in West Bengal. This committee had produced twenty two reports on the situation of refugee rehabilitation in the state in the early to late 1970s. The committee had been formed at the insistence of the central government which wanted to take stock of the 'residual' work of rehabilitation in the state and close up shop as quickly as possible after approving a number of swift solutions to complex problems. The documentation specific to the refugee crisis in West Bengal thins down considerably after the committee was dissolved in the late 1970s. The last of the reports discussed in this chapter were developed by the West Bengal government in the 1980s. The two primary sources were the Refugee Rehabilitation Committee report which was created with the help of the left wing refugee activists under the leadership of Samar Mukherjee in 1981 and the Camp and Homes Screening Committee Report of 1989. The chapter describes the process of dispersal of refugees to various corners of West Bengal and also to the remote corners of the national territory like the Dandakaranya colonies and the Andaman resettlement colonies. The chapter discusses the creation of categories like squatters and deserters for the refugee families and individuals who attempted to escape the camps and rehabilitation colonies. The second part of the chapter focuses on the labour discourse surrounding the refugees from the early 1950s to the late 1970s. The primary issue addressed in this section is the slow loss of occupational identity among a large section of lower caste refugee agriculturists. The chapter follows government reports on

occupational aptitudes, desires and transitions of this population in order to trace out a possible route for this population in order to situate the ethnographic exploration of labour in refugee settlements in villages in the periphery of contemporary Kolkata.

The third chapter takes its cue from the second chapter and takes up the questions and clues generated from it to design an ethnographic investigation of the labour processes that we encounter in Namasudra settlements at the edge of Kolkata city. The ethnography is designed around a sample carved out of settlements and families that I came to know through the political organisations of the Namasudra refugees who are currently agitating for citizenship rights. The ethnography covers a series of periurban Namasudra refugee settlements clustered around the Barasat Municipality which supply daily wage labourers not only to the Kolkata metropolitan area but to growing urban areas across the national territory. The villages have a high incidence of migrant labourer households where male members often work in the peripheries of other cities like Kochin, Mumbai, Goa, Hyderabad and Bengaluru. Due to the political circuit through which I was introduced to the settlements, my sample ended up being homogenously from the refugee Namasudra community. This chapter focuses on the changing nature of occupation and village topography while locating businessmen from within the community who have risen to the level of contractors and promoters and their relationship with the labourers coming from their own community. Most importantly the chapter focuses on the transition of this population from mixed occupations to informal wage labour over the last several decades while weaving it together with their migration pattern through rehabilitation spaces in and around camps and colonies. As the very first map of the area provided in the chapter shows, the village is in the shadow of a number of government sponsored and squatter colonies of older refugee settlers in the area. The class difference between the village and the refugees of the old settlements is quite stark. The chapter however argues that links of patronage with the older refugee population originally helped the refugee families in the villages gravitate to this area. It will be however, wrong

to assume that the population in the village are made up of entirely new immigrants from Bangladesh. The sample shows that there is a significant presence of families which had migrated to India in the late 1950s and late 1960s. There were several families with experience of short stays in refugee camps in the 1960s and 1970-71. There were also several refugee families who had deserted their government colony plots in Madhya Pradesh and Chattisgarh to migrate towards Kolkata in the late 1970s and 1980s in the search of better livelihoods. This chapter creates the primary connection between the historical and ethnographic investigation contained in this thesis.

The fourth chapter delves into the politics of mapping/unmapping, settlement formation and the transformation of the state apparatus in relation to spatial management over the last three decades. The material in this chapter is derived from interviews and interactions with bureaucrats from two departments. One set of interactions were with the various levels of the land governance bureaucracy which is institutionalized in the West Bengal Land and Land Reform organization. This is the primary arm of revenue administration and maintenance of land titles in the state of West Bengal. The second set of interactions was with the land surveyors, rehabilitation officers and clerical staff in the department of Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation across its several offices in Kolkata, Barasat, Barrackpore and Kalyani. This chapter situates the refugee as an important piece in the arrangement of land governance in periurban Kolkata due to its tense history with land titling and vesting as has been discussed in relation to Ananya Roy's work in the earlier sections of the introduction. The first several sections of the chapter deal with state cartographic practices in terms of the specific technological engagements of the department of revenue with new technological transformations of the state and the refugee as an issue of governance at the level of land titling and the building of new urban infrastructure. The last section of the chapter discusses the understanding settlement patterns by the refugee communities themselves in the refugee village of Netajipally that we had become acquainted with in the

third chapter. In this section we discuss map making by the refugees themselves as an index of space production from below.

The fifth and last chapter of the thesis is aimed at doing two things, firstly it attempts to locate the valance and evolution of the refugee figure in contemporary national politics and its transformation into the category of the 'illegal immigrant' since the Citizenship amendment of 2003. The discussion at the level of national politics is followed by a discussion of the construction of the immigration debate in West Bengal as an all party narrative where all of the parties, from the left, right and centre participated in the making and maintenance of a spectre of illegal immigration through practices of detection, arrests and pushback that has increasingly alienated the lower caste migrants living at the edge of the city. Following this discussion the chapter turns to the organizational and mobilizational politics of the Namasudra refugees at various scales and spaces of agitation. This section of the chapter is based on daily interactions with activists from a number of local committee formations of the Namasudra refugee population. The organisations include the Joint Action Committee for Bengali Rfugees (JACBR), Association For the Refugees in India (AFRI), All India Refugee Front (AIRF), Namasudra Bikash Parishad (NBP) and Nikhil Bharat Bangali Udbastu Samannay Samiti (NIBBUS). The discussion in this section is oriented around two primary inquiries. Firstly the chapter attempts to delve into the organizational practices to understand whether the anatomy of mobilization at the urban periphery, within a spatially, historically and sociologically hardened community is different or in any sense autonomous from mainstream and metropolitan forms like the political party. Secondly, the chapter attempts to situate the inner community politics and dynamics of small organizations to demonstrate how different scales of organization become active at different scales of agitation represented by the locality, the provincial capital, Kolkata and the National capital, Delhi. The aim of this chapter is to critically evaluate the concepts of party-society and community which have been at the centre of debates on political organization in contemporary West Bengal.

PARTITIONED URBANITY

In conclusion, the thesis will attempt to bring out the conceptual and historical importance of the 1947 Partition as an event in the life of the city of Kolkata. The thesis aims at underlining a gap in the Partition literature which it seeks to address. It is the contention of this work that a political economic history of the 'Partition' has become increasingly important for understanding issues of governance, development, labour and shelter. The research will try to situate 'Partition' as a concept rather than as a name for a historic event. The many Partitions, inequalities and movements across space are here marked by the history of the event of 'Partition'. Partitioning or the act of dividing is one of the fundamental ways of economizing space in the discourse of urban planning. These divisions mark functional and economic thresholds which then define social boundaries as well. These divisions therefore come to define thresholds between castes, communities and classes. In the case of Kolkata many of these divisions came to be in the aftermath of the 1947 'Partition' and became permanent features of the city's geography due to the peculiarities of the governance discourse.

The task of the thesis is to move away from thinking about Partition either as a historical event or in terms of immediate outcomes over the decades after the event. The question that is dealt with here is how daily Partitions work in the city of Kolkata in the spaces where refugees are to be found. The refugee is the site of this study. The focus of the study is in tracing the population that falls through the cracks of rehabilitation policy but remain in its shadow. The thesis tries to sketch the aspects of Partition that not only recur but define the everyday existence of economy and society.

Chapter One:

Post-1947 Urban Planning in Kolkata: Perspective Planning and the Refugee Fringe

Consolidating the Urban Periphery in Kolkata

After the Partition of 1947, planned extension of the city of Kolkata into its hinterland had started with the Kalyani Township (recently renamed *Samriddhi* in April, 2015) in 1950. The township had been planned in 1947 for a ‘middle-class’ population of 60,000 in order to ‘de-congest’ the older neighborhoods of Kolkata.⁴⁸ The project was taken up for execution alongside a project of ‘Refugee Rehabilitation Township’ in Fulia near Ranaghat.⁴⁹ The land for the project had been partially consolidated during the Second World War, when it was requisitioned for military use under the provisions of the ‘Defence of India Act’.⁵⁰ More land was added to the already requisitioned area and a township of 12,606 acres was planned for the urban middle-class. The projected population capacity of the new project was assumed to be 2,50,000 in 1951. The requisitioned parcel of land was bound by a railway line laid by the military for supply cars during the Second World War. The area immediately

⁴⁸ West Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings, 1951, Vol. 3, Num. 1, p 3.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ WBLA, 1951, Vol 4, p 393.

beyond the railway line was earmarked for brick kilns by the government in order to fulfill the preliminary demand for building material in the future township. By late 1950, a group of 551 East Pakistani refugee families took over this piece of land, developed the land autonomously and began growing paddy, horticultural products and even a minor quantity of jute.⁵¹ Soon there were confrontations between the refugee families and the brick kiln contractors. There were reports of minor violence and an accidental land slide caused by large scale digging by the contractors which damaged the homes built by the refugee families.⁵² Following this there were reports of eviction of the refugee families alongside government claims that the refugee families had been rehabilitated elsewhere after allotting 1/3rd acre agricultural land per family.⁵³

A rather rigid border was maintained by the state, a border marked by specific forms of infrastructure.⁵⁴ The refugee population was actively dispersed to the urban periphery while being kept away from specific areas. The difference between two townships in the same district and alongside the same sub-urban railway network becomes starkly visible in the story of the foundation of Kalyani Township. This township would go on to become one of the primary centers of growth marked in the Basic Development Plan published in 1966. This document encapsulated much of the transformation already wrought as a narrative of planned ‘future’. The future metropolis, described in the Ford Foundation funded planning document, presented the picture of a ‘Bi-polar’ city with two counter-urbanizing magnets to the north and south of the city of Kolkata dispersing the city’s population and de-congesting it.⁵⁵

⁵¹ WBLA, 1951, Vol. 3, Num. 2, 191-192.

⁵² Ibid., 193.

⁵³ Ibid., 192.

⁵⁴ I am alluding here to the process of spatialization and control over labouring populations highlighted in Mezzadra Sandro and Brett Neilson, *Border as Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor* (Duke University Press, 2013).

⁵⁵ Calcutta Metropolitan Planning Organization, *Basic Development Plan 1966-1986* (Calcutta: Government of West Bengal, 1966).

The government of the time also brought about large scale transformations in land governance with a host of new laws concerning eviction, acquisition and protection of property. Following the example of Delhi's 'Government Premises Eviction Act' of 1950, the West Bengal Government had introduced the 'Eviction of Persons in Unauthorized occupation of land Bill' in 1951⁵⁶ in order to curb the 'squatter colony' movement in Kolkata which would later become one of the primary platforms of communist mobilization.⁵⁷ The act allowed the government to evict refugees from 'unlawfully' occupied land without the need for rehabilitation. Simultaneously the government introduced the 'Evacuee Property Act of 1951' with an eminently short deadline for return and registration, and included the absurd clause that a person would only be given the chance to return and claim lost property if they had crossed the border, thereby effectively cutting off the claims of those who had hidden themselves elsewhere within the country.⁵⁸

These developments determined the flow of the refugee population and directed it towards certain spaces of rehabilitation while keeping them away from others. Simultaneously, these measures severely undermined the hold of the minority community over their property holdings. In the early 1960's one of the pioneering studies of population distribution in the city of Kolkata stated: 'refugees are now settled in nearly all Bengali residential wards ... It is also significant that 'many of these wards were formerly inhabited by Muslim labourers and artisans'.⁵⁹

⁵⁶WBLA, 1951, Vol. 3, Num. 3, 123.

⁵⁷ See Prafulla K. Chakrabarti, *The Marginal Men: The refugees and the left political syndrome in West Bengal*(Lumière Books, 1990).

⁵⁸WBLA, 1951, Vol. 3, Num. 1, 257-285.

⁵⁹Nirmal K. Bose, *Calcutta, 1964: A Social Survey* (Calcutta: 1968) cited in Debjani Sengupta, "The Partition of Bengal: Histories and Fictions, 1940s to 1960s" (PhD diss., Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, 2010).

The Question of Stagnation in Small Towns and Congestion in Kolkata

In his seminal text of 1975 Sunil Munshi marked out the particularity of the problem faced by the KMD as the stagnation of small towns in the region and the over-concentration of urban population in the core metropolitan area.⁶⁰ The nature of stagnation in the small towns that he marked out was particularly intriguing since he made a distinction between population growth and actual urban growth. Most of these towns had received a sizeable refugee population after the 1947 Partition but they were, in his analysis, not functional parts of the urban region of Kolkata. Their economies were not arranged in a proper hierarchy of production complementing and supporting the central metropolis. This contributed to the underdevelopment of the Kolkata Urban Agglomeration in his opinion.⁶¹

By the 1960s there was a sizeable population of refugees in the Kolkata Metropolitan Area. After the first decade and a half of migration into the city, the refugees formed a significant presence in 16 wards in the north eastern, eastern and southern quarters of the city.⁶² The class and caste distinctions among the refugees was by then already resulting in spatial segregation as well since the first set of upper caste refugees settled in squatter settlements while the scheduled caste refugees gravitated towards the outskirts of the city while trying to make a living as service labour.⁶³

⁶⁰Sunil Munshi, *Calcutta metropolitan explosion: its nature and roots*(New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1975), 97-99.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Nirmal K Bose, *Calcutta 1964: A Social Survey* (Calcutta, Lalvani Publishing, 1968), 33.

⁶³Ibid.

Year	Pucca House	Bustee House	Total houses	Population	Population Per House
1921	44721	5283	50004	885815	20.06
1931	62140	5750	67890	1196734	16.8
1935	66819	5485	72304	----	----
1941	71488	5067	76555	2070619	27.5
1945	75303	4803	80108	----	----
1951	7800	54308	82314	2520921	31.00
1961	-----	118413		2914412	24.6
1964-65	89912	2425	121691	---	--
1971-72	130794	2456	133250	3141180	23.5

Table 1: (Source: Calcutta: A Study in Urban Growth Dynamics)⁶⁴

We can see in the above table the evolution of the housing situation in Kolkata through decades of heavy migration from East Pakistan (Bangladesh, after 1971). We can infer from the above table that there was a significant hike in the number of houses and the density of occupants in the early 1950s. The rate of increase in the number of houses in Kolkata, between 1951 and 1961 is probably the most decisive indicator of what the Partition of 1947 was doing to the city during the first decades of independence. The density of settlements was increasing and their quality was changing swiftly. It was noted with a degree of alarm at the time, during the census of 1961, that only 45.3% of houses in Kolkata had brick-lime or concrete roofing, which points to the fact that majority of houses were constructed using mixed building material with temporary roofing. What was striking to the observers of the city in that period was that these conditions did not only temporarily prevail but became the rule within the town area itself, alongside the transformations well underway on the fringes of the city.⁶⁵

The refugee working class and scheduled caste groups apparently did not compete in the same labour market as the already available Oriya and Bihari migrant labour in the organised sectors like Jute mills, docks or railway yards. They tried to fill a different occupational niche in more precarious jobs. The educated or skilled among the middle classes of the refugee mass gravitated towards small chemical and engineering workshops, pharmaceutical production

⁶⁴Murari Ghosh, Alok K. Dutta and Biswanath Ray, *Calcutta: A Study in Urban Growth Dynamics* (Calcutta: Firma K L, 1972).

⁶⁵Murari Ghosh, Alok K. Dutta and Biswanath Ray, *Calcutta: A Study in Urban Growth Dynamics* (Calcutta: Firma K L, 1972).

or mercantile offices. Observing the parcelling of caste, linguistic and communal groups into near homogenous spatial and occupational groups, an anthropologist of the city argued that Kolkata had developed a “rural arrangement”; a situation that was classified as an immature or imperfect urbanization.⁶⁶

Alongside the city its immediate hinterland was also going through a significant change at the time. Satyesh Chakraborty's⁶⁷ work on spatial demographic breakdown gives us a sense of the main temporal fluctuations in population percentage in various regions of the Calcutta conurbation. He divides the Calcutta Urban Agglomeration (CUA) into three distinct zones: a) the Calcutta city, b) surrounding municipal towns and c) rest of CUA. The last category is a mixed bag of non-municipal urban areas and panchayats included in the census and later the CMDA. It is this last category that invites close scrutiny and reveals an interesting trend. Between 1941 and 1951 the percentage share of Calcutta city in the total population of the CUA dropped by 2%, the share of surrounding municipal towns grew by 0.1% while the share of this last category, the mixed spaces ranging from panchayats to non-municipal urban areas rose by 2%. This was the demographic distribution in a decade in which the CUA saw an estimated population growth of 10,50,000. Even more interestingly, in the decade between 1971 and 1981, the category (c) areas saw a 7.6% increase in their population share which was much more than the increase in population share of category (a) region or Calcutta city proper. Both these decades witnessed Partition and Bangladesh Liberation War induced migrations. Both these events were accompanied by significant cross-border migration. Chakraborty draws out this detail as a significant part of his argument, it is also amply clear that other scholars have taken these population movements and demographic changes as significant determinants of the nature

⁶⁶ Bose, *Calcutta 1964*, 83.

⁶⁷ Satyesh C. Chakraborty, “The Growth of Calcutta in The Twentieth Century,” in *Calcutta The Living City*, ed. Sukanta Chaudhuri. (Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1990), 1-14.

of the hinterland areas of Kolkata.⁶⁸ Ranabir Samaddar, in his study of trans-border migration to West Bengal from Bangladesh, looks at the same region, which includes fringe areas of the CUA, and argues that the populations and the settlement patterns of the area are heavily determined by long cycles of migration back and forth which are in turn caused by border violence and religious tensions in the two countries.⁶⁹

The growth and concentration of refugee population in the fringe areas of the city, especially the areas between the international border with Bangladesh and the city of Kolkata, gave rise to a rather peculiar situation. Let us take the case of Nadia for example. Its rate of urban population growth before Partition was as low as 2.58% as against the corresponding national growth rate of 9.27%.⁷⁰ In the 1941-51 period, immediately after the Partition, the quantum of migration into the district was 30% of its original population.⁷¹ The migration changed what was primarily a Muslim majority district into an overwhelmingly Hindu majority district.⁷²

Though the inflated and heavily criticised census of 1941, to an extent, provides spurious data, it is important to take a look at the population transfer in this district due to two reasons. Firstly, it housed one of the largest and oldest refugee transit camps of West Bengal, the Ranaghat Coopers Camp. The camp was the site of some of the earliest refugee mobilizations in West Bengal and also has been one of the main focus areas for historians of Partition like

⁶⁸Nilanjana Chatterjee, "Midnight's Unwanted Children: East Bengali Refugees and the Politics of Rehabilitation" (PhD diss., Brown University, 1992) and Joya Chatterji, 'Dispersal and The Failure of rehabilitation in Bengal', *Modern Asian Studies* 41, no. 5, (2007). , along with the same author's *The Spoils of Partition: Bengal and India, 1947-1967* (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2007). , adequately demonstrate the point being made about the two decades in question. They present a complex and layered narrative of the refugee influx and the journey of the refugee groups in creating new settlements in the urban fringe of Calcutta.

⁶⁹ Ranabir Samaddar, *The Marginal Nation: Transborder Migration From Bangladesh to West Bengal*, (Sage, 1999).

⁷⁰Ratan Khasnabish and Nirmalendu Nath, "Urban Growth without Urbanization," in *Urbanization, Migration and Rural Change: A Study of West Bengal*, Ed. Biplab Dasgupta, (New Delhi. A. Mukherjee and Co., 1988) 360.

⁷¹Ibid., 360.

⁷²Subhasri Ghosh, "Population Movements in West Bengal: A Case Study of Nadia District, 1947–1951," *South Asia Research* 34, no. 2 (2014): 113-132.

Subhasri Ghosh and T. Nakatani.⁷³ In fact, this district has probably received most attention from Partition historians, after Kolkata. Secondly, it allows us to revisit the place we had started this chapter from, Kalyani. The township of Kalyani is situated in this district and the Cooper's camp refugee transit centre was within its influence area. This district was considered an example of false urbanization or an area of "urban growth without urbanization" due to the sudden spike in urban population growth in the area following the migration of 1941-51. The area in fact showed an urban population of 78.96%⁷⁴ thirteen years after Partition, which, compared to the pre-Partition quantum of urban growth in the area was nothing short of surprising. Subhasri Ghosh notices in her work that there was a shift in the logic of enumeration between the forties and the fifties, and that the later census exercise would map the population along an urban-rural divide. She primarily takes it as a challenge for standardizing her data rather than as a sign of changed demographic and spatial arrangements.⁷⁵ The immense and sudden concentration of urban population created a number of towns in the district. Many of these, like Gayeshpur, were outcomes of township building activities by the rehabilitation department while others grew automatically. Ghosh notices this briefly but considers it peripheral to her task in the article. The transformation of the rural hinterland after Partition was not, however, unique to the border districts. Similar changes have been demonstrated for non-border districts like Medinipur as well where small townlike Salboni and Ghatal showed major transformation after a serious influx of refugee families from East Pakistan in the early 1950s.⁷⁶ Equally significant, with 96% growth of the urban population in the 1950s, North Bengal was entirely transformed by Partition migration.⁷⁷ Growth of such

⁷³Tetsuya Nakatani, "Away from home: The movement and Settlement of Refugees from East Pakistan in West Bengal, India," *Minamijakenkyu*, no. 12 (2000): 73-109.

⁷⁴Ratan Khasnabish and Nirmalendu Nath, "Urban Growth without Urbanization," in *Urbanization, Migration and Rural Change: A Study of West Bengal*, Ed. Biplab Dasgupta, (New Delhi. A. Mukherjee and Co., 1988) 360.

⁷⁵Subhasri Ghosh, "Population Movements in West Bengal", 116.

⁷⁶Sachinandan Sau, *Ghatal: A Case Study of a Rural Town*, 514.

⁷⁷Manas Dasgupta, "Urbanization in North Bengal," in *Urbanization, Migration and Rural Change: A Study of West Bengal*, ed. Biplab Dasgupta. (New Delhi. A. Mukherjee and Co., 1988), 318.

urban concentrations was thought of as false urbanization primarily because of an analysis of employment patterns which showed a strong bias towards the tertiary sector and with the nearby metropolis of Kolkata also reeling under industrial slow down the tertiary sectors of the dependent towns suffered severely.⁷⁸

Refugee Squatter's Colony Movement

While the refugees at the urban fringe were slowly being pushed through the painful process of integrating into a weak and failing tertiary sector – the refugees in the core area of the city were building the movement that would become the mainstay of Partition and refugee history in Eastern India. The history of the refugee movement and the history of the successful Left wing mobilizations in later years will become progressively inseparable.

The history of UCRC is intimately linked to the refugee colonization process in Calcutta region. ...The refugee squatter issue did not get resolved easily. It was along drawn collective struggle and recognition was gained through political bargaining under the leadership of UCRC.⁷⁹

The intimate link mentioned in the quote above has been appreciated and criticised in equal portions. It has been argued that the Left wing parties instrumentalized the refugee population by capturing and controlling the United Central Refugee Council (UCRC) which had originally started as a multiparty front organization.⁸⁰ In recent times another criticism of the glorious history of the UCRC has come up from scholars engaging with the history of scheduled caste refugees who were primarily housed in government

⁷⁸ Ratan Khasnabish and Nirmalendu Nath, "Urban growth without urbanization," 369-370.

⁷⁹ Arun Deb, "Rights of Refugee Squatters," in *Refugees in West Bengal*, ed. Pradip Bose, 69.

⁸⁰ For the earliest expression of this argument see Prafulla K.Chakrabarti, *The Marginal Men: The Refugees and the Left Political Syndrome in West Bengal*, (Calcutta: 1990).

camps.⁸¹ Possibly in reaction to these criticisms a new strand of history writing in West Bengal is now beginning to re-articulate the history of 1950s and 1960s in terms of a connected set of social movements. The refugee movement increasingly seems to be a set of nodes and hooks that connect with other movements, like the food movement⁸² and the tram fare movement,⁸³ which were taking place at the time.

The foundation of the squatter colonies between 1950 and 1954 was the most significant moment for UCRC.⁸⁴ Its first important political event was held at the Wellington square on 18th February, 1951 against the eviction act of 1950 which had sought to forcibly remove refugees from plots of land captured by them for collective settlement.⁸⁵ An amendment to the act was successfully negotiated and it cemented UCRC as the primary representative political body of the refugees. Refugee activists who were part of the UCRC in its early days saw the period leading up to its formation as chaotic and the foundation of UCRC as the first step into organized politics.⁸⁶ The rise of UCRC heralded a massive refugee squatters' movement towards forced occupancy. Across 'Jadavpur, Tollygunje, Calcutta Corporation Ward no. 97, 98, 99, 100, Haltu, Dhakuria, Garia, Talinalla, Behala and other places, where big landowners "had amassed land for price speculation", the success of the squatters' movement was considered an important intervention.⁸⁷

The political success of the movement was so profound that it affected the language or the form of representation that the state used to address the refugees after that point. Increasingly, instead of speaking of the refugees as

⁸¹Anasua Basu Ray Chaudhury and Ishita Dey, *Citizens, Non-citizens and in the Camps Lives*, (Calcutta: Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group, 2009), accessed on February 12, 2017, <http://www.mcrg.ac.in/pp21.pdf>.

⁸²Sibaji Pratim Basu, "West Bengal: The Food Movements of 1959 and 1966," accessed on July 17, 2017, http://www.mcrg.ac.in/RLS_PML/RLS_PM/RLS_PM_Abstracts/Sibaji.pdf.

⁸³Anwesha Sengupta, "A Study of Anti-Tram fare Hike Resistance and Teachers' Movement," accessed on July 17, 2017, http://www.mcrg.ac.in/RLS_PML/RLS_PM/RLS_PM_Abstracts/Anwesha.pdf.

⁸⁴Anil Sinha, *Paschim Bange Udbastu Uponivesh*, 16.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, 15.

⁸⁶Tushar Sinha, *Maranjoyee Sangrame Udbastu*, 17-36.

⁸⁷*Ibid.*, 18-19.

discreet families or individuals there was a move towards addressing them as an aggregate of colonies from pre-1950 or post-1950 list of refugee settlements in the West Bengal Legislative Assembly.⁸⁸ This movement cemented the settlement pattern of the refugees in the Kolkata Municipal District and by the early 1970s, 68% of the refugee population in West Bengal had come to be concentrated in the three districts of 24 Parganas, Nadia and Kolkata.⁸⁹ As at all stages, there were problems with the quantification of this population and the census records varied significantly from the records prepared by the Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation Department.

DISTRICT	CENSUS 1971	REHABILITATION DEPARTMENT 1973
CALCUTTA	2,87,000	9,00,000
24PARGANAS	5,74,000	8,95,950
HOWRAH	42,000	1,01,305
HOGHLY	93,000	1,04,219

Table 2: Concentration of Refugee population in 1971;Source: Pranati Chaudhury⁹⁰

From the above table it is amply clear that a substantial refugee population had come to settle at the fringe of the Kolkata Urban Agglomeration by the mid-1970s. The precarious situation of these settlements naturally invited government intervention which had already demonstrated severe hostility towards the population through attempts at eviction and the practice of keeping the political actors from the population at an arm's length.

Having set the context I will examine the urban planning discourse in Kolkata starting from the first perspective plan to be published in 1966. In the next section we will see various planning imaginations of the urban periphery expressed in the decadal perspective plans of the city of Kolkata.

⁸⁸Pranati Chaudhuri, "Refugees in West Bengal: A study of the growth and distribution of refugee settlements within the CMD," (Kolkata: CSSSC, 1983), 8.

⁸⁹Ibid.

⁹⁰Pranati Chaudhuri, "Refugees in West Bengal: A study of the growth and distribution of refugee settlements within the CMD," (Kolkata: CSSSC, 1983), 10.

The 'Bi-polar Model': The 'Basic Development Plan', 1966-1970

After the postcolonial transition, the 'Basic Development Plan' (BDP) was the first detailed planning exercise carried out in the Kolkata Urban Agglomeration, which was known as the 'Calcutta conurbation', in 1966.⁹¹ The writing of the plan document was driven by two different ideological projects coming together at a key moment in history. Firstly, the plan attempted to foreground the systematic underdevelopment of the area following partition and the refugee issue as its constitutive ingredient. Secondly, it was a moment of translation of American planning ideology in the city of Kolkata through the Ford Foundation's funding project.⁹²

It was an exercise in regional planning that marked Calcutta as the urban centre of Eastern and North-Eastern India. The plan envisaged the conurbation as the central point in a large industrial belt with a mineral rich hinterland. In this regard the city was found wanting.⁹³ It was seen as reeling under multiple kinds and levels of crisis. The population was found too densely concentrated around the Central Business District creating a deficit in housing, health and transport infrastructure and the document prescribed sustained planning to right the wrongs. The report mentions two important problems: a) an overlarge hinterland formed by the four states of Assam, Bihar, Orissa and West Bengal and b) massive in-migration set off by the 'Partition', according to the report, which produced 'rural slums at the heart of the city' and 'intolerable' density of population that resulted in infrastructural breakdown.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Calcutta Metropolitan Planning Organization, *Basic Development Plan 1966-1986* (Calcutta: Government of West Bengal, 1966).

⁹² See Tridib Banerjee, "US Planning Expeditions to Postcolonial India: From ideology to innovation in technical assistance," *Journal of the American Planning Association* 75, no. 2 (2009): 193-208. Also see Tridib Banerjee and Sanjoy Chakravorty, "Transfer of Planning Technology and Local Political Economy: A Retrospective Analysis of Calcutta's Planning," *Journal of the American Planning Association* 60, no. 1 (1994): 71-82.

⁹³ Calcutta Metropolitan Planning Organization, *Basic Development Plan 1966-1986*, 2-3.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 11-15.

In order to de-densify the city core the report sought to build counter-magnets to draw away some of the population pressure from the old city. Of the 490 square miles area of the conurbation of Calcutta comprising of 3 municipal corporations, 31 municipal towns and 32 non-municipal towns, one notified area authority and 450 rural *mouzas*⁹⁵, the report found 300 square miles of *unbuilt* or sparsely built land.⁹⁶ Of this unbuilt land 104 square miles were low lying or marshy land and the rest 196 square miles were buildable but widely fragmented. Only two pockets of substantially consolidated and buildable land were found around the areas of *Kalyani* and *Bansberia*.⁹⁷ This was an important precursor to Kolkata's development and it gave rise to a 'bipolar model' for extending Calcutta along an axis joining Kalyani-Bansberia growth centres in the north and the existing urban centre to the south. This 'experimental design' for planned extension was undertaken primarily because the planning agency believed that, left to its proclivities, the growing population was liable to build 'slum like' conditions and perpetuate them in the absence of formal infrastructure, which would later burden the government with the cost of improvement. The authors of the report also believed this model to be an experiment in determining what constituted shelter and the essential basis for 'community formation' so as to design other more efficient forms of planned settlements.⁹⁸

In order to examine the outcome of such a planning exercise we can start by taking a close look at the Kalyani centre of growth which we had begun this chapter from. The town was designed as a counter-magnet for de-densifying Kolkata and creating a new destination for urban/municipal development. First of all, the model came under fire in a now famous seminar on Kolkata and its crisis, brought together by Jean Racine in 1978.

⁹⁵Calcutta Metropolitan Planning Organization, *Basic Development Plan 1966-1986*, 5.

⁹⁶*Ibid.*, 16.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*

⁹⁸*Ibid.*, 56.

How do you analyse Kalyani? It was completed in 1955 with an investment of nearly Rs. 10 crore for a population target of 2,00,000. Even in the 1971 census, the population did not cross 21,000. So what is the value of this investment? What is the return? The recent policies might have created some growth of population there, but all the same, it has not crossed 40,000 to 50,000 yet. So we make investments for planned towns in which people do not go. This is not the way of solving the shelter problems of the poor Calcuttans.⁹⁹

The 2011 provisional census data shows the population of the Kalyani municipal area as 100,620.¹⁰⁰ The comments cited above were made in 1979 against the backdrop of the devastating flood of 1978, which starkly brought out the contradictions in the city already underlined by political violence, infrastructural crisis and heavy migration following the Bangladesh war. Kalyani, then as well as now, remains shy of its projected population by almost 50% even after fifty-seven years.

There is a case in contrast to the spectacular failure of the Kalyani-Bansberia Centre. The Salt Lake City project was another major development project mentioned in the BDP. Built on the low lying eastern marshes of the city, the settlement grew slowly. It also invited criticisms in the seminar, although they were not as severe as Kalyani. Due to its closeness to the city and the completion of the Eastern Metropolitan Bypass project, Salt Lake city went on to become a major success by the mid-1990s. The work began from 1960 under the 'Salt Lake Reclamation Board' to fill a marshy area of 3.75 square miles in order to accommodate 2,50,000 people costing the government Rs. 38 crores. Another two square miles were to be added to this original section in the next

⁹⁹ Sudhendu Mukherjee, "At which rate are we trying to solve the shelter problem?," in *Calcutta 1981: The City, Its Crisis and the Debate on Urban Planning and Development*, ed. Jean Racine (Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1990) 417.

¹⁰⁰ Census of India, *District Census Handbook: Nadia*, (2011), accessed on July 12, 2017, http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011census/dchb/1910_PART_B_DCHB_NADIA.pdf.

plan period to add another 2,00,000 people to the population capacity.¹⁰¹ With a population of 218,323¹⁰² in the latest census, Salt Lake City under the administration of the Bidhan Nagar municipality enjoys a far better standing than the Kalyani centre. This success is also somewhat marred by the fact that the project took nearly thirty years to begin to approach the goals for which it was designed. Scholars and professional urban planners criticised the project and saw it as a failure till the early nineties.¹⁰³ The architect who had originally designed the Salt Lake masterplan visited the city twice after the completion of the project and commented that the area remained a ‘sleepy town’ till the early nineties.¹⁰⁴ He also pointed out that the government had made revisions to the original plan like decreasing the ratio of ‘group housing’ in favour of individually plotted bungalows.¹⁰⁵ It may be argued that the abandonment of ‘group housing’ contributed to the slow growth of the project.

In the succeeding decades, we will see, the periphery receded and then came back in focus in relation to political and economic shifts in the region. The failure of Kalyani and the slow growth of Salt Lake must be underlined as important reasons for the indecisive stance of the planning discourse on the utility of peripheral development.

The ‘Muti-Nodal’ Strategy: Perspective Planning in Kolkata, 1971-1980

The 1971 development perspective plan was the first one written by the newly formed ‘Calcutta Municipal Development Authority’ (CMDA), which later became the premier organization for development planning in the city. This plan envisaged several ‘self-contained’ urban units fulfilling specific service

¹⁰¹Calcutta Metropolitan Planning Organization, *Basic Development Plan 1966-1986*, 143.

¹⁰²Census of India, *District Census Handbook: Kolkata*, (2011), accessed on July 12, 2017, http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011census/dchb/1916_PART_B_DCHB_KOLKATA.pdf.

¹⁰³Asok Mitra, *Calcutta on the Eve of Her Tercentenary*, (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1990), 99-107.

¹⁰⁴Subhro Saha, ‘Planner rues loss of Group Housing’, *The Telegraph*, April 21, 2008.

¹⁰⁵Ibid.

functions.¹⁰⁶ Moving away from the ‘bipolar model’ of the Basic Development Plan (BDP), the new perspective plan elaborated a multi-nodal strategy for spatial growth. The focus was on a functional distribution of new urban centres across the metropolitan region according to a hierarchy of services to be provided by these centres. The plan imagined the city as a ‘multi-cellular organism’ with a crucial qualification. ‘Commuting’ to the CBD for employment or ‘satellite growth’ was discouraged.¹⁰⁷ New urban centres were planned in two tiers around the CBD. These were termed as ‘major centres’ and ‘metro sub-centres’. The report identified all growth centres as twin centres. Along with Kalyani - Bansberia, it named Serampore - Barrackpore, Bally-Dankuni - Dakhineswar, and Baluria-Budge Budge as centres of growth. Kona, on the west bank of the river Hoogly, and Salt Lake, in the immediate vicinity of the city, were meant to further balance the population in the CBD. Abandoning the idea of a north-south axis of extension, the plan proposed to build metro sub-centres ‘Kona’ and ‘Salt-Lake’ to activate an east-west axis of extension. In order to achieve it, the report proposed projects like the ‘Eastern Metropolitan Bypass’ link and new crossing points across the river Hooghly through Princep ghat and Sovabazaar.¹⁰⁸ There was no significant acceleration in the development of the residential projects taken up by the government almost a decade before this plan was written. The abandonment of the ‘bipolar’ model and the imagination of an east-west axis may be interpreted as a sign of the state agency’s frustration with the slow growth of Salt Lake and the near failure of Kalyani.

¹⁰⁶Calcutta Metropolitan Development Authority, *Development Perspective and Investment Plan 1971-80*, (Kolkata: Calcutta Metropolitan Development Authority, 1976) 37.

¹⁰⁷*Ibid.*, 57.

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*, 37-40.

Perspective Planning in the Early Days of the Left Front Government, 1981-1990

The 'Perspective Plan' of 1981 made a break from the precepts of BDP by shifting its focus to the 'deteriorating' centre.¹⁰⁹ In 1977 the state of West Bengal witnessed an important regime change. The Left Front government, with the Communist Party of India (Marxist) at its helm, wrested political power from the Indian National Congress. The language used in the new perspective plan for the development of Kolkata exhibited the importance of this change. Whereas the Basic Development Plan had marked out 'Partition refugees' as the immediate cause of Kolkata's woes, the new plan document argued that the 'unplanned and chaotic' changes in land use in the metropolitan region were the outcome of 'the profit motive of Industrialists' and "the greed of land speculators". The polemical language – rejecting the BDP as inadequate and denouncing 'opportunistic traders'- makes it a testament to the regime change from Congress to the Left Front in West Bengal.¹¹⁰ Later in the chapter we will attempt an exposition of the last days of this regime and the anti-land acquisition politics that triggered its demise. The significance of the 1981 report is that it considered the development of the Kalyani - Bansberia centre highly inadequate compared to the expenditure on infrastructure. It found similar quantum of growth in areas without structured Government expenditure.¹¹¹ Accordingly, the report revised the 'spatial structure' of the 1971 plan and reiterated the significance of the 'centre'. The idea was to functionally distribute urban centres, allowing only limited mobility for specialised services. The service catchment for each settlement area therefore was not imagined as self-sufficient but as a unit in systematic dependence on the centre.¹¹² Ironically, the report termed this as 'decentralised

¹⁰⁹Calcutta Metropolitan Development Authority, *Perspective Plan and Action Programme for the Calcutta Metropolitan District*, (Kolkata: Calcutta Metropolitan Development Authority, November, 1981) 226.

¹¹⁰*Ibid.*, 227.

¹¹¹*Ibid.*, 228.

¹¹²*Ibid.*, 233.

development'¹¹³ and as the new regime's solution to the problem of resource distribution between planned peripheral settlements and the CBD. From this report onwards, there came a slump for almost a decade in developmental initiatives for the periphery, while the city core was accorded priority. This trend seems to be specific to Kolkata as the 1980's are seen by other scholars as a time of intense focus on the growth of urban peripheries in cities like Bengaluru.¹¹⁴ Other scholars and commentators like Batra¹¹⁵ and Shaw also see the 1980's as the beginning of the new era of *peripheralization* in India, both in terms of national policy and specific cities.

The Re-emergence of The Periphery: 1991-2000

In November 1990 a new Perspective Plan for Calcutta was prepared and published by the West Bengal State Planning Board instead of the CMDA.¹¹⁶ The new plan attempted the extremely contradictory task of bringing together the political rhetoric of the 1981 document with the policy of de-densification and investment into infrastructure in the peripheral settlements. It seems the prioritization of the 'centre' took a backseat for two reasons. Firstly, the maturation of long term settlement patterns at the fringes perhaps forced the government to attend to the unplanned growth at the peripheries. The second reason is a possible change in the regime's stakes in land and development politics that led to a search for new areas of urban extension. The report iterated the immediate necessity of structuring a desirable 'rural-urban continuum' through infrastructural development of central villages and small towns at the peripheries of the urban agglomeration.¹¹⁷ The possibility of a 'chaotic urban agglomeration' was cited as the reason for the adoption of a

¹¹³ibid., 237.

¹¹⁴Rolee Aranya, *Globalisation and Urban Restructuring of Bangalore, India: Growth of the IT industry, its Spatial Dynamics and Local Planning Responses*, accessed on September 3, 2009, (http://www.isocarp.net/Data/case_studies/255.pdf).

¹¹⁵Lalit Batra, "A Review of Urbanisation and Urban Policy in Post-Independent India", in *Working Paper Series*, (New Delhi: Centre for Study of Law and Governance, Jawaharlal Nehru University, 2009) 27.

¹¹⁶State Planning Board, *A Perspective Plan For Calcutta: 2011*, (Calcutta: Government of West Bengal, November 1990).

¹¹⁷State Planning Board, *A Perspective Plan For Calcutta: 2011*, (Calcutta: Government of West Bengal, November 1990), 67.

larger canvass of development through regional planning. The periphery at this moment was thought in loose terms as a catchment area, for ‘overspill population’ from the metro-core and migrants from other regions. Continuity with the earlier discourse was the stated desire to reduce daily commuters to the metro core and create relatively self-sufficient settlements at the periphery.¹¹⁸ Self-sufficiency in this context meant a settlement that had a sustainable, productive economy and enough local employment to keep commuting population to a minimum. In an interesting move the new plan took up once again the possibility of creating a ‘new metro centre’ it had formerly rejected.¹¹⁹

In 1998 the state government acquired 3070 hectare land in the Rajarhat panchayat in North 24 Parganas district under the authority of the West Bengal Housing and Infrastructure Development Corporation (HIDCO). The emergence of this authority has been interpreted as a marker for the State government’s interest in real estate development and the IT sector boom.¹²⁰ The authority was set up in 1999 and the state government owned shares worth Rs. 14.75 crore in the company.¹²¹ The Rajarhat project was framed as a residential space rather than industrial township meant to generate employment. This residential use, the government argued, would bring both prosperity and shelter for a large cross section of classes through ancillary development.¹²² This aggressive marketing of a primarily real estate development project by the state, Samaddar argues, meant that the space for reintegration of the population displaced by land acquisition was ‘foreclosed’ by the nature of the project. Later there was a shift from the 1999 project plan, which had allotted 50.6% of 3075 hectares of land for residential use; in 2006-7

¹¹⁸Ibid., 64-75.

¹¹⁹Ibid., 81.

¹²⁰Ishita Dey, Ranabir Samaddar and Suhit K. Sen, *Beyond Kolkata: Rajarhat and the Dystopia of Urban Imagination*, (New Delhi: Routledge, 2013).

¹²¹Bureau of Applied Economics and Statistics, Development and Planning Department, *Economic Review*, (Kolkata: Government of West Bengal, 2009-10).

¹²²Dey, Samaddar and Sen, *Beyond Kolkata: Rajarhat and the Dystopia of Urban Imagination*, 25-26.

the total project area grew to 3779 hectares and 4% was marked for the use of IT sector exclusively.¹²³

The Rajarhat project was hailed as a success story for the planning regime of the Left Front government due to two reasons: firstly, for some scholars it was a success story of 'Public Private Partnership' in development administration¹²⁴. Secondly, it represented the delayed maturation of opportunities offered by the 2002 deregulation of the housing sector.¹²⁵ It was characterised as a 'late start'¹²⁶ by scholars like Annapurna Shaw when compared to peripheral development in other Indian cities. Critics of the project and the model of development followed by the Left Front government sharply differ from the above arguments. It has been argued that the spatial heterogeneity of third world cities impedes 'gentrification'. The urban planners in the third world therefore, attempt to bypass the 'squalor' concentrated in the old urban centres, by creating enclaves of IT sector industry and high-end housing in the scale of New Towns.¹²⁷ This 'bypassing' seems to have a satirical subplot since Rajarhat sits at the very end of a desolate arterial road connecting it to the city core.¹²⁸ This bypassing achieves two things, firstly it provides the new IT based economy with space where it can imagine its new materiality of malls, glass front highrises and residential enclaves without having to negotiate the complex legal and political situation of the old city core and secondly it excludes the politically entrenched and vocal sections of the urban poor and the residents of older informal settlements from participating in the new economy in any capacity.

¹²³ Xianming Chen, Lan Wang and Ratoola Kundu, "Localizing The Production Of Global Cities: A Comparison Of New Town Development Around Shanghai And Kolkata", *City and Community*, 8, no. 4, 433-465.

¹²⁴ Sanjay Mitra, "Planned Urbanisation Through Public Participation: Case Of the New Town Kolkata", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 37, no. 11, (2002): 1048-1054.

¹²⁵ Annapurna Shaw, "Metropolitan restructuring in Post-liberalized India: Separating the Global and The Local", *Cities*, 24, no. 2, 148-163.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Kalyan Sanyal and Rajesh Bhattacharya, "Bypassing the Squalor: New Towns, Immaterial Labour and Exclusion in Post-colonial Urbanisation", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 46, no. 31, (2011): 41-48.

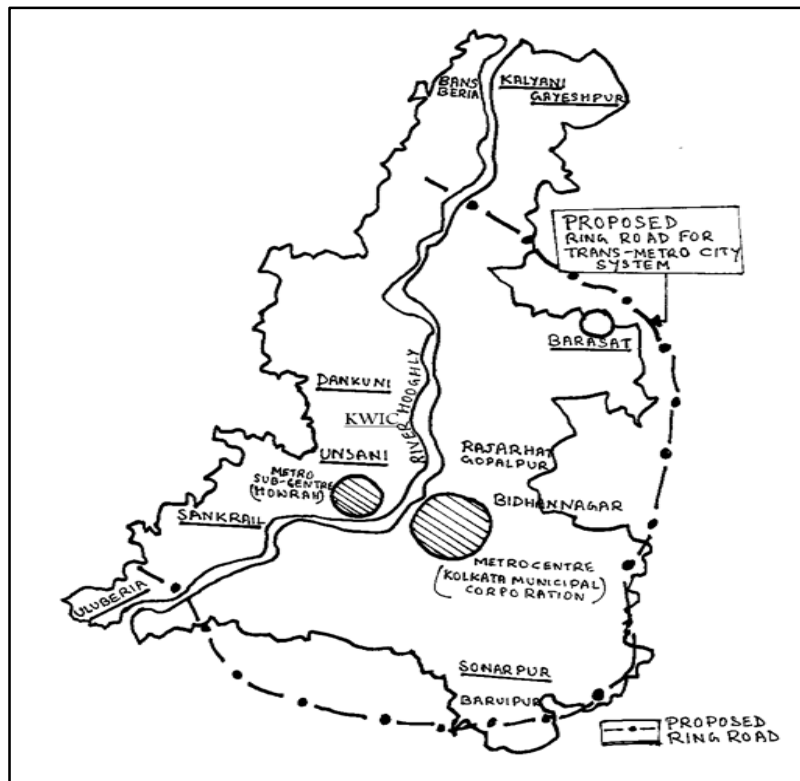
¹²⁸ Ishita Dey, Ranabir Samaddar and Suhit K. Sen, *Beyond Kolkata*, 2-3.

The interest in peripheral settlement building or development at the peripheries of Kolkata received a new fillip from 2000 onwards, converging with a new IT policy of the state government coupled with its interest in real estate. This turn became highly publicized under Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee as the Chief Minister. The state government's IT newsletter of September 2005 named West Bengal as the "hinterland" per se that South East Asia was looking for"¹²⁹. The newsletter announced several projects like industrial and health cities, Logistics Hub, two wheeler factory, Dairy Development Centre, 85 km 'Expressway' from Barasat to Baruipur, strewn across the peripheral districts of Kolkata, like the North and South 24 Parganas.¹³⁰ The re-framing of Kolkata within the global networks of production, land speculation and other modalities of capital flows begins to become clear from the above declaration. The relation between Kolkata's move towards becoming the 'hinterland of South East Asia' and the corresponding interest of the state government and the international investors in Kolkata's hinterland finds a clear expression here, with the 24 Parganas (both north and south) frequently cited in terms of development projects.

¹²⁹Department of Information Technology, *West Bengal IT Newsletter*, (Kolkata: Government of West Bengal, September, 2005) 1.

¹³⁰ Department of Information Technology, *West Bengal IT Newsletter*, 1. This trend has been mirrored by other cities in the same period. Information technology became a national economic phenomenon driving the urban restructuring process.

The 'Vision' of The New Metropolis: The New Spatial Structure of the Periphery, 2001 Onwards



Map 1: Map showing the centres of growth demarcated by the Vision 2025 Plan. The locations have been compiled from the City Development Plans of 2006, 2007 and 2012.

The Vision 2025 plan, the most recent perspective plan for Kolkata, was written between 2001 and 2007 with the help of the 'Department for International Development' (DFID) of the United Kingdom. It was a costly and massive exercise that produced a long term perspective document along with sectoral plans on transport, sewerage, water supply and environmental development. The final draft of the plan document identified a set of major and minor centres of growth like the perspective plans discussed above.¹³¹ Kalyani-Gayeshpur, Barasat-Nabapally, Rajarhat-Gopalpur, Dankuni and Uluberia came to be mentioned as the new major centres of growth, while West Howrah-

¹³¹Kolkata Metropolitan Development Authority, *Vision Plan 2025 (Draft Final, for official use only)*, Calcutta Metropolitan Development Authority, Central Library, R-1095.

Unsani, Sankrail-Abada and Sonarpur-Baruipur were categorised as the minor centres for future growth.¹³²

Along with Rajarhat, Dankuni and Uluberia were marked for industrial development and Sonarpur-Baruipur was earmarked for becoming the district headquarters of the South 24 Parganas, promoting it to the level of a municipal township with major administrative functions. Sankrail-Abada was marked out for industrial development as it lies in a connecting zone between South Eastern Railway freight corridor, Kona expressway, National Highway 2 and the Bagjola drainage channel.¹³³

West Howrah-Unsani was to be the site for the ‘Kolkata West International City’ (KWIC) township project which the report claims to be the first township project built entirely on foreign direct investment (FDI). This was a project with three partners, CIPUTRA Group and the Salem group from Indonesia and Universal Success Enterprise (USE). The project had a similarity as well as a difference with the Rajarhat project. The report stated that (a) the “township will be developed mainly for residential purposes with foreign flavour”, while (b) the state government fulfilled only two functions. It facilitated the transfer of land to the Indonesian firm and built infrastructure to support the township. Real estate development was left to the private firms.¹³⁴ The centrality of the residential purpose and its ‘flavour’ targeted upper-middle class consumers, like Rajarhat. But, unlike it the state government decided to skip the real estate development while transferring land and building infrastructure. Drawing on the information in the Draft Plan, it is interesting to take note of the land and its status in different growth centres mentioned above. While some urban centers were developed on acquired land, others were developed on land owned by the KMDA.

¹³²ibid., 8-1- 8-2.

¹³³ibid., 8-1 – 8-7.

¹³⁴ibid., 8-6.

Name of 'Growth Centre'	Status of land for development	River Bank (Ganga)
Kalyani-Gayespur	On already acquired land	East Bank
Barasat-Nabapally	**	East Bank
Rajarhat-Gopalpur	on acquired land	East Bank
Sonarpur-Baruipur	To start with, projects could be taken up on vested land	East Bank
Dankuni	Area has been identified after feasibility study	West Bank
West Howrah-Unsani	On KMDA land	West Bank
Sankrail-Abada	----	West Bank
Uluberia	----	West Bank

Table 3. Land acquisition Status of Projects Source: Vision 2000-2025 (Draft), KMDA Central Library

The above table shows that immediate land acquisition was not the only modality for development projects at least as represented in the draft report. The only two projects that mention acquisition are Kalyani and Rajarhat. The land in Kalyani was acquired in the early 1950's and the Rajarhat land was acquired in 1998. Development projects were also taken up on land already owned by KMDA or vested land lying un-distributed with the government. While the state agencies were completely in control of the development of Rajarhat, in KWIC they attempted to decrease their involvement by transferring the land and the major efforts of building infrastructure to the private companies handling the project.

It is important to note here that the KWIC project also stalled by 2008 and since then there has been a string of protests by buyers from all over the world

against the private firms that handled the building of infrastructure and residential units.¹³⁵ In recent times the problem has become increasingly exacerbated as the present government continued to transfer land to the private firms while turning a deaf ear to political protests.¹³⁶

As we have seen, Kalyani failed to attract any substantial population to itself over six decades, despite planned intervention in infrastructure. Other satellite towns created through the 1960's and 1970's like Kasba, Baishnabghata Patuli and Bansberia also proved to be slow in attracting settlers. The first spate of planned satellite towns thus failed to ease the pressure on the city core. The comparative fortune of the two projects in Salt Lake and Kalyani offers an interesting insight. The Salt Lake project was meant to be a middle and high income housing area and it attracted a population with the wherewithal to arrange transport, lease plots and generally compensate for the time taken to build infrastructure. Howsoever slowly, the project area received a sustainable population and became a viable settlement in the process. Kalyani was meant to be a project serving a wider cross-section of classes and a self-sustained centre of growth. But the lower-middle and the working classes could not afford to access an area distant from the metro-centre. The target population did not have the wherewithal to relocate and the project limped on, feeding government apathy, slowing down infrastructural growth and discouraging the target population further. Simultaneously the refugee population which would have automatically moved into the project and given it a lease of life was kept away from it and forced to move farther away from the city.

To conclude this section we can claim to have arrived at a broad understanding of the decadal shifts in the way the relation of the centre and periphery has

¹³⁵ Manish Basu, "Kolkata West Homebuyers Seek Bengal CM's Intervention in Row," *Live Mint*, May 20, 2011, accessed on October 5, 2014, <http://www.livemint.com/Politics/45OfjeQ9MhDEHjMS0Uf7TL/Kolkata-West-homebuyers-seek-Bengal-CM8217s-intervention.html>. Also see Staff Reporter, "Bungalow Buyers in a Bind," *The Telegraph*, June 3, 2011, accessed October 5, 2014, http://www.telegraphindia.com/1110603/jsp/calcutta/story_14063728.jsp.

¹³⁶ Ajanta Chakraborty, "West City project in legal trouble," *The Times of India*, February 21, 2013, accessed October 5, 2014, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/kolkata/West-City-project-in-legal-trouble/articleshow/18603401.cms>.

shifted in the planning of the Kolkata Urban Agglomeration. The focus of the planning regime constantly oscillated between centre and peripheral spaces, while a set of technical and biological metaphors like ‘anti-magnets’ and ‘multi cellular organism’ proliferated in the discourse. The plans before the 1990’s, attempted to structure peripheral spaces for economic diffusion and de-densification of the core. Faced with infrastructural crisis, the early Left Front government reversed the gears, in order to consolidate the metro core. Peripheral development was minimised to service towns, shifting development resources from the periphery. However, the trend again shifted in 1990s and peripheral development became important in the new Perspective Plan written by the State Planning Board. This tendency seemed to bear fruits in the most recent planning exercise, as the Left Front government announced a slew of peripheral development projects of both industrial towns and residential complexes with foreign investments.

From 2000 onwards the Left Front government initiated a host of new projects that included the creation of new towns in the periphery of Kolkata and several new industrial centres based on information technology, automobile industry and chemical industries. At least three such projects came under much public scrutiny when the new development policy faced severe resistance from the people dispossessed by the land acquisition process supported by civil society organizations. These three projects were the Tata ‘Nano’ automobile factory project in *Singur*, the chemical hub project of the Salim Group in *Nandigram* and the *Salboni* Jindal Steel Work SEZ project. All three were linked to the broader processes of industrial and residential peripheralisation that were meant to trigger growth in a stagnated, ailing and debt ridden state, as well as to de-densify Kolkata while creating a broader territorial spread for urban and industrial activity. We will attempt to sketch a broad outline of the events that

precipitated a regime change at this juncture and became an important factor for development policy in West Bengal.¹³⁷

Near the township of **Singur** in Hooghly district, 997 acres of land was allotted to Tata for building a car assembly factory. The project ran into a major hurdle as throughout September 2006 to January 2007 several confrontations took place between anti-land acquisition groups and the CPI(M) 'cadres'.¹³⁸ On 3rd October 2008, Ratan Tata declared in a press conference that he had decided to move the 'small car project' out of Singur to Gujrat.¹³⁹

Anti-land acquisition movements in **Nandigram** in the Midnapore district ran parallel to the Singur agitation. Around 14,500 acres of land in Nandigram was earmarked for the Salim group, to be developed as an SEZ containing a chemical hub.¹⁴⁰ Popular agitations broke out against police action in West Midnapore following several arrests and local resistance against a Jindal steel plant in Salboni.¹⁴¹

The above events precipitated two major outcomes in the following years: (a) the succession of violent clashes hardened public suspicion around every move concerning development that argued for land acquisition; (b) the Left Front

¹³⁷See Pranab Kanti Basu, "Political economy of Land Grab", *Economic and Political Weekly*, April 7 2007, 1281-1287. See also Amit Bhaduri, "Development or Developmental Terrorism", *Economic and Political Weekly*, February 17 2007, 552-553. See as well Dayabati Roy, "Politics at the Margin: A tale of Two Villages", *Economic and Political Weekly*, August 11, 2007, 3323-3329, and Maitreesh Ghatak, Sandip Mitra, Dilip Mookherjee and Anusha Nath, "Land Acquisition and compensation: What Really Happened in Singur", *Economic and Political Weekly*, May 25, 2013, 32-44.

¹³⁸Sumit Sarkar, "A Question Marked in Red", *Indian Express*, 9th January 2007, accessed on October 5, 2013, <http://www.indianexpress.com/story/20488.html>.

¹³⁹D Bandyopadhyay, "Singur: What Happened, What Next and Time to Pay the Cost", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 43, no. 48, (2008): 13-16.

¹⁴⁰See "Six Killed in group clashes in Nandigram", *The Hindu*, 8th January, 2007, accessed October 5, 2013, <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/six-killed-in-group-clashes-at-nandigram/article1779841.ece>, "Turmoil in LS over Nandigram violence", *The Times of India*, 30th April, 2007, accessed October 5, 2013, http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2007-04-30/india/27883919_1_nandigram-marxist-cadres-adhir-chowdhury, and "Death toll in Nandigram violence rises to four", *The Times of India*, November 7, 2007, accessed October 5, 2013, http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2007-11-07/india/27986222_1_police-s-panda-nandigram-police-station-death-toll.

¹⁴¹For details of the events in Lalgarh and also a moving first-hand account by an activist from the area see Sumit Sarkar and Tanika Sarkar, "Notes on a Dying People", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Volume: XLIV, Issue: 26 & 27, June 27, 2009, 10-14, and Manik Bora and Budhaditya Das, "The Movement in Lalgarh", *Economic and Political weekly*, Volume: XLIV, Issue: 26 & 27, June 27, 2009, 15-17.

Government was ousted from the State Legislature after thirty-five years of continuous rule to be replaced by Mamata Bannerjee and the Trinamool Congress in 2011.¹⁴² In the following section we will return to the Barasat municipal area at the north-eastern fringe of the Kolkata Metropolitan Area in order to situate it in the planning discourse we have discussed in the preceding pages.

Planning and Periphery: Arguments in Urban Theory

Ananya Roy, in her 2003 study of periurban spaces of KMA, commented that the 'planning regime' itself had become an 'informal entity'.¹⁴³ Roy's argument is located within specific governance practices like mapping, land use registry and the planning of developmental projects. Instead of taking mapping and enumeration as categories for understanding urban governance she constructed a narrative of gaps and lapses, which she called 'unmapping'. This, she argued was the state's modality for altering land use in the periurban fringe of Kolkata. She underlined the practice of incomplete mapping that then allows apparently unplanned transformations. These transformations bypass formal procedures by negotiating through local power structures. Through her conceptual critique of the apparently formal process of planning, Roy describes the institutionalized 'misrule of law'.¹⁴⁴ We can relate this to Shubhra Gururani's study on Gurgaon which states that 'flexibility' in planning refers to a 'range of political techniques through which exemptions are routinely made'.¹⁴⁵ She sees this as a 'cultural logic' that permeates the creation of an entire city and not just the illegal or squatter settlements of the urban poor. According to her, this is a generalised planning practice, where the threshold between legality and

¹⁴²For a detailed analysis of the situation see DwaipayanaBhattacharyya, *Government as Practice: Democratic Left in a Transforming India*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

¹⁴³Ananya Roy, *City Requiem, Calcutta: Gender and the Politics of Poverty*, (Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003). Also see the following article by the same author 'Why India cannot Plan its Cities: Informality, Insurgence and the Idiom of Urbanization', *Planning Theory*, Volume-8, Issue-1, (2009): 76-87.

¹⁴⁴Ananya Roy, *City Requiem, Calcutta: Gender and the Politics of Poverty*, (Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

¹⁴⁵Shubhra Gururani, "Flexible Planning: The Making of India's 'Millenium City', Gurgaon" in *Ecologies of Urbanism in India: Metropolitan Civility and Sustainability*, eds. Anne Rademacher and K. Sivaramakrishnan, (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2013) 119-144.

illegality is daily traversed through the application of class power and local political network by the elite and well to do sections of a locality. She sees this as the generalised condition of urban planning in India. These informal/illegal networks, Gururani argues, is the key to understanding the ‘heterogeneity and multiplicity of metropolitan modernity’.¹⁴⁶

The tendency of the State to use an institutionalized flexibility in mapping means that documents, statistical data and available land use registers create and maintain gaps from the actual patterns of growth and development. The last large scale collection of land use data in the Kolkata Urban Agglomeration, though incomplete, dates back to the early 1990’s. This documentary confusion intensifies the problems of ‘heterogenous’ land use at the urban periphery. Rural migrants and daily wage labourers compete with middleclass housing development due to ‘counter urbanisation’ triggered by the difference in land prices. Veronique Dupont points out that the periphery is at the heart of competition for land that has multiple uses. State agencies argue over land use at the periphery for the purposes of housing, industry and environmental upgradation in simultaneity with the contestations among different classes and groups inhabiting the periphery.¹⁴⁷

The above arguments are in strong contention with another influential view concerning the nature of the peripheries of the Indian metropolises. Expressed with a strong quantified component, the view seeks to understand the periphery of the metropolis as ‘degenerated peripheralisation’. It holds that the city pushes out a major portion of the working class population to the periphery which also accumulates a large number of rural labourers who live in conditions of squalor, virtually abandoned by the state and in the complete absence of civic amenities. This creates dense informal settlements that are then targeted by state backed demolition and dispossession. Amitabh Kundu argues that much of what we understand as urban growth is basically the

¹⁴⁶ibid.

¹⁴⁷Veronique Dupont, “Conflicting Stakes and government in the peripheries of large Indian Metropolises – An Introduction”, *Cities*, 24, no. 2,(2006): 89-94.

administrative inclusion of such peripheral areas within municipal governance. This inclusion however does not mean betterment of civic amenities. It most often translates into harsher developmental measures that result in displacement.¹⁴⁸

The first set of arguments emphasise that rather than being abandoned by state and policy discourse, the peripheries are at the centre of social and political processes of development and post-liberalization flows of capital. Ananya Roy situates it at the heart of the new trends in post-colonial capital accumulation, where new economies of space and planning are created through urban governance. This centring relates to the nature of periphery as a place of informal and dense habitation of the urban poor. Likewise, Gururani and Dupont have both given a certain generality to the notions of informality and flexibility, in terms of characterizing the periphery. For them, the periphery is defined by flexibility and informality that permeates the upper and middle class actors as much as the state agencies and the urban poor.

Due to the peculiarities of the problems offered by transitional spaces and populations, the concepts of 'heterogeneity', 'informality' and 'flexibilization' have informed several studies concerning urban planning and development at the peripheries of Indian cities, which we have discussed above. 'Heterogeneity' in terms of demographic characteristics and the co-existence of multiple uses of land has been underlined by the above studies. 'Informality' and 'Flexibilization' has been used in the literature discussed above in two different registers. Firstly, they outline the disaggregation of the economic processes that result in casualization labour and the concentration of migrant daily wage labourers and petty manufacturing initiatives in the urban periphery fuelled by local entrepreneurs. Secondly, they refer to the informal practices of formal planning machinery in terms of documentation and negotiations with

¹⁴⁸See K. C. Sivaramakrishnan, Amitabh Kundu, B. N. Singh, *Handbook Of Urbanization in India*, Oxford University Press, (New Delhi: 2006). See also Amitabh Kundu, B. K. Pradhan and A. Subramanian, "Dichotomy of Continuum: Analysis of Impact of Urban Centres on their Periphery," *Economic and Political Weekly* 37, (2002) 5039-5046.

local power structures. These concepts underline flexibilization of labour, conditions of shelter, contentions over land and the flexibilization of governance and see them as critical elements in the growth of the cities of global south.

The conceptual framework detailed above seems to repeat the themes of a particular distance that reproduces itself through the circuits of neoliberal capitalist development. The distance between the town and country, centre and periphery, urban and not fully urban, is reiterated in every attempt at finding the reasons for the existence of periurban spaces. Kundu insists that the difference between the centre and the periphery is defined by the difference in civic amenities, quality of life and economic hierarchy. Roy believes that the periphery is a space of land resource exploitation that is connected to a wide national and international network of Capital flows. It remains true that the emphasis on capital flow and flexibility have opened up a number of interesting possibilities of enquiring into urbanization, as Gururani and Dupont have demonstrated in their works. However, it remains somewhat unclear how the periphery is a specifically different space. After all, ‘informality’ and ‘heterogeneity’ have more or less always featured in narratives of urban core. Then they may not be entirely sufficient in distinguishing the particularity of a peripheral space. As we also know, such cases are not hard to find where the centre of the city has become the site for a political contest over access to shelter and livelihood by the working classes and the urban poor.¹⁴⁹ These approaches seem to place the burden of differentiation largely on the aspect of ‘competition over land’.

The above section attempts to demonstrate how the conceptual arrangements created by the literature on the urban periphery seems to have a gap in terms of strongly outlining the specificity of the periphery as a space distinct from the

¹⁴⁹ Specifically in relation to Kolkata one can readily recall the popular and publicised movement created by street vendors agitating against eviction from the pavements in the city core. See Ritajyoti Bandopadhyay, “Hawker’s Movement in Kolkata: 1975-2007,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, 44, no. 17, 116-119.

core in terms of political and economic processes. We hope the case study undertaken here will attempt to address this problem in a manner both empirically and theoretically productive.

In the case of Kolkata's periphery we see several different arguments taking shape. While scholars like Sen, Samaddar and Dey have argued that 'New Towns' at the periphery signal an important shift in the spatial and social structures of the city¹⁵⁰ other scholars like Sanjoy Chakravorty see in it the continuation of the colonial spatial regime.¹⁵¹ There is general consensus among the scholars that most of the new state development policies that have been implemented since the 1990's have sought to include Kolkata in the circuits of global capital¹⁵². These state policies have also resulted in large scale dispossession and popular political resistance. This chapter discusses the faltering and tentative process through which state policy frames the urban periphery and also attempts to bring into focus the transformations that take place in the periurban areas in the absence of spectacular and forcible dispossessions by the state or private agencies planning large projects. Over the various sections of the chapter we have constantly been confronted with the example of Kalyani township as an important staging of the relationship between the formal planning machinery and a refugee concentrated area of the Kolkata Urban region. In the next section I want to shift our attention to a different refugee concentrated town in the district of North 24 Parganas. We have encountered this district several times in the discussion above, especially in the table detailing the refugee population concentrations in various districts surrounding Kolkata in the 1970s. But we have refrained from delving into

¹⁵⁰Ishita Dey, Ranabir Samaddar and Suhit K. Sen, *Beyond Kolkata: Rajarhat and the Dystopia of Urban Imagination*, (New Delhi: Routledge, 2013).

¹⁵¹ Sanjoy Chakravorty, "From Colonial City to Globalizing City? The Far-from-complete Spatial Transformation of Calcutta," in *Globalizing Cities: A New Spatial Order*, eds. Peter Marcuse and Ronald Van Kempen, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2000).

¹⁵²See Mark Jackson, "'Live the Way the World Does': Imagining the Modern in the Spatial Returns of Kolkata and Calcutta", *Space and Culture*, 13, no. 1, (2010): 32-53, Urmi Sengupta, "Housing Reform in Kolkata: Changes and Challenges", *Housing Studies*, 22, no. 6, (2007):965-979. See also Kalyan Sanyal and Rajesh Bhattacharya, "Bypassing the Squalor: New Towns, Immaterial Labour and Exclusion in Post-colonial Urbanisation", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 46, no.31, (2011) 41-48.

specific townships. This is due to the peculiar relationship that this district shares with the planning machinery. While it has been an important refugee concentrated town for a while, it was not considered for any major urban development projects. Instead the development of urban settlements in this town was left to the Refugee Rehabilitation Department for a long portion of its history. In the next section we will delve into the current relation this town shares with the state planning machinery.

Barasat: Arrested Transition of the Counter-Magnet

The Draft Vision plan, discussed earlier in this chapter marked out a number of new growth centres. One of them, the Barasat-Nabapally centre in the North 24 Parganas district, about 25 km from the core city was marked out as a gateway between the hinterland and the city. It is the meeting point for several national and state highways and the sub-urban railway network.¹⁵³ Barasat has had a long history of suburban development within the KMA. This area has witnessed several changes in the urban spatial structure since 1814.¹⁵⁴ It has evolved from a small town at the urban fringe to an important transport node and district headquarters in 1986.

This area was central to the plan of building a “New Metro City System”. As a meeting point of National Highway 34 and 35 it was seen as an important link in a chain of fast growing settlements along the National Highways 117 and 117 A. The plan also envisaged a ring road linking the settlements into a new city system that would function as an ‘anti-magnet’ to the city core.¹⁵⁵ Surprisingly, in the subsequent city development plans of 2007 and 2012 this area found almost no mention and in fact was demoted from the status of a ‘major growth centre’ to a third tier centre linked to the Trans-Metro City System. The Barasat- Nabapally centre of growth disappeared altogether from

¹⁵³*Vision Plan 2025*, 8-3 – 8-4.

¹⁵⁴Area Planning and Development Control Circle – II, *An Outline Development Plan for Barasat Area Within Calcutta Metropolitan Area (Draft)*, (Kolkata: Calcutta Metropolitan Development Authority) 1 – 2.

¹⁵⁵*ibid.*, 8-7.

the list when the spatial hierarchy was finalized in the city development plan of 2012 and found mention only as a rural hinterland for horticultural production and possible development of garment industry.¹⁵⁶

Barasat has had a steadily growing population following outgrowths along major avenues of transport like the suburban railway line and the State Highway 2. In 2001 the population of Barasat was 231,521 while Rajarhat - Gopalpur was 271,811.¹⁵⁷ After direct state intervention in developing Rajarhat it stands at 404,991 and Barasat at 283,443 in the 2011 census. Even unassisted therefore, Barasat seems to have managed a steady growth of population. Several rural *mouzas* (revenue villages) at the fringes of the Barasat municipality from three gram panchayats were inducted into the municipal body in 1995 adding 14 square kilometer territory. The difference between this newly added area and the rest of the municipality is framed as a ‘liability’ to be shouldered by governing and developing this ‘semi-urban’ area.¹⁵⁸

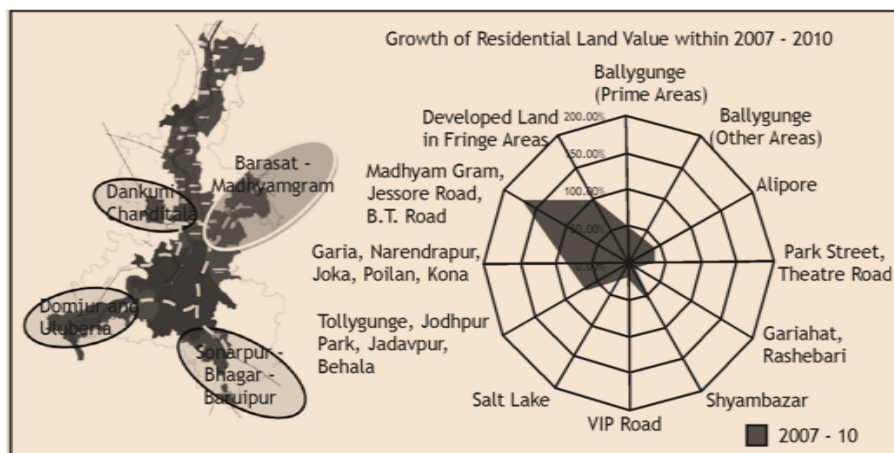


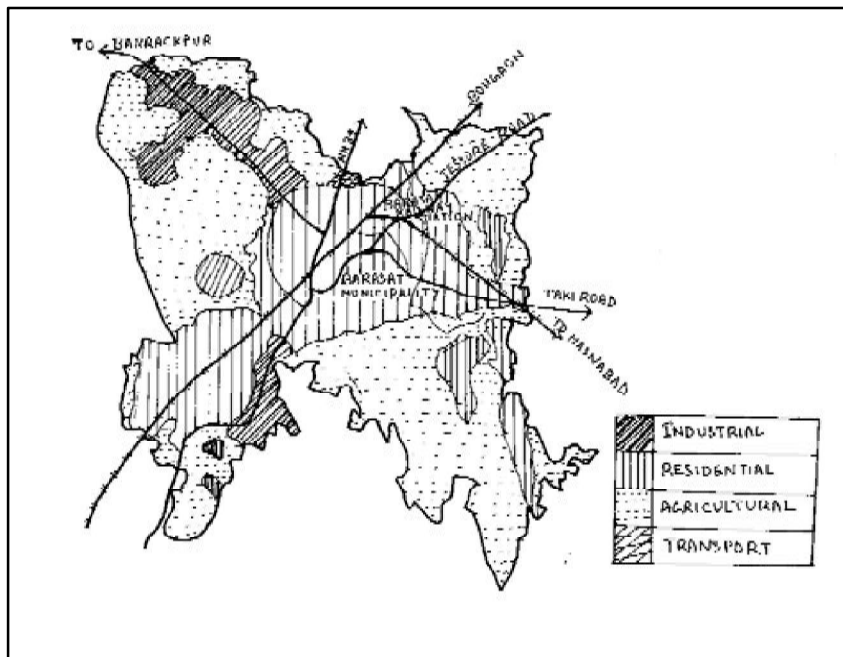
Figure 1: Growth in Residential Land Value (Source: Sourav Sen, ‘Effect Of Urban Sprawl on Human Habitation in Urban Fringe and Peri-Urban Areas in Kolkata Metropolitan Area’, Institute of Town Planners India Journal, 8-4, October-December 2011)

¹⁵⁶Kolkata Metropolitan Development Authority, *City Development Plan 2012*, II-8, accessed March 20, 2013, <http://jnnumwestbengal.gov.in/HTM/CDP.htm>.

¹⁵⁷Census of India, accessed July 12, 2017, http://censusindia.gov.in/PopulationFinder/View_Village_Population.aspx?pcaid=5865&category=U.A.

¹⁵⁸Barasat Municipality, *Draft Development Plan 2007-2012*, (unpublished: From the private collection of Sourav Sen), 12.

The above figure clearly demonstrates the sudden and impressive spike in residential land value in the area which goes against the grain of the categorization of this area as a liability by the Municipal body. Compounded with this is the fact that the outgrowth along the State Highway 2, the Barasat - Barrackpur link road, has seen some large but privately owned projects that have heightened the urban character of the area. The Larica township project of 2001, the Adamas Knowledge City project and the Anandabajar Patrika press and office (the most popular vernacular daily) are a few of the impressive and large structures that have come up in the area in the past decade.



Map 2: Zoning map of Barasat in 1986. Source: Barasat Outline Development Plan 1986

The above zoning map of Barasat from the 1986 plan shows the extent of industrial commercial and residential areas planned along with small transportation hubs. The north-west ward spur of industrial and residential zones following the state highway 2 as it comes out of national highway 34 and progresses towards the Barrackpore municipal area. In my conversations with planners in the KMDA, I was told that this connecting area between the two municipalities was to be the focal point of the Nabapally growth centre. Barasat

has been experiencing a rapidly growing number of commuting workers, rising population density and conspicuous structural transformation of the surrounding village areas over the preceding decade. A subsidiary report to the Vision 2025 plan presents a stark picture of the nature of this extension and growth in a particularly alarmist tone. The report mentions that in 1995 an approximate 14 sqkm area was added to the municipality which are described as 'semiurban' in nature. This addition, the report argued, have added underdeveloped 'liabilities' to the responsibility of the municipality. This addition also increased the influence area of a municipality already hosting 'over one lakh' commuting labour population, a stable population of 2,31,521 with 20 % BPL families and 159 slums.¹⁵⁹ The report seems acutely aware of the history of this area as 'rehabilitation colony area' with the 'typical characteristics of a periurban region'.¹⁶⁰

The 1986 Outline Development plan for the Barasat Municipality, written in anticipation of the creation of the new district of North 24 Parganas and the new status of Barasat as the district headquarters, underlined the importance of cross-border migration and the transport network as the two causes of the waxing of the urban characteristics of the area.¹⁶¹ The working-class population pushed out from the CMA was found to be an increasing component of the local population. The report argued that these demographic patterns caused land use patterns in the area to change in an unplanned manner.¹⁶² The plan document described this change as inevitable and encouraged it. They argued for the development of dense planned settlements to arrest the unplanned mutation of agricultural land. The fast growing 'Non-municipal Urban' areas significantly widened the population catchment area. The significant

¹⁵⁹ Barasat Municipality, *Draft Development Plan 2007-2012*, 12-14.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁶¹ *Barasat Outline Development Plan*, 2-3.

¹⁶² *Barasat Outline Development Plan*, 35-41.

development projects that the plan mentioned for the area were largely limited to transport based changes.¹⁶³

The situation of Barasat within the KMA as a broader planning unit has varied over the years significantly. While the BDP hardly took notice of the area, being concerned with creating the Kalyani-Bansberia growth centre for dedensification of Kolkata, the 1971-81 Perspective Plan marked Barasat as an independent urban agglomeration and a Class II growth centre with growing settlement areas. Throughout 1980 and 1990 Barasat gained a steady mention in the perspective plans as a rapidly growing area centred on transport and goods transit. Interestingly the City Development Plan 2007-2012 located Barasat in a cluster of five settlements that would eventually form the ‘Trans-Metro City System’: Kalyani, Barasat, Saltlake-Rajarhat, Baruipur and Uluberia-Bagnan. We have come across each of these areas in the section on Perspective plans.

The removal of Barasat-Nabapally from the list of major growth centres and its framing as ‘semi-urban’ ‘liability’ needs some explanation because urbanization trends in this area are clearly visible. The importance of this area is also borne out by the fact that it was chosen for a metro rail extension project that would have connected it to the metro-core, thereby thoroughly integrating it with the city. The plan for the metro rail track connecting Dum Dum and Barasat was put into operation in 2011. By connecting the international airport with the city core, the project was to lessen the passenger pressure on the ailing suburban railway network in the Sealdah-Barasat section of the Eastern Railway.¹⁶⁴ In 2013, newspapers reported the project has been halted due to ‘land politics’.¹⁶⁵ Along with the stalling of the metro railway project one stretch of the Jessore road which connects the Barasat area to the Kolkata international airport was demoted from National Highway to State Highway

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁶⁴ Metro Railway Kolkata, Homepage, accessed July 21, 2017, http://www.mtp.indianrailways.gov.in/view_section.jsp?lang=0&id=0,1,397,

¹⁶⁵ Sanjay Mondal and Subhajoy Roy, “Stuck,” *The Telegraph*, Kolkata, July 11, 2013, accessed August 20, 2013, http://www.telegraphindia.com/1130711/jsp/calcutta/story_17104679.jsp#.UIWmXFBOHis.

status.¹⁶⁶ The state government had originally taken hefty loans from the Asian Development Bank in order to finance the widening and development of the road transport in the area.¹⁶⁷ The project stalled due to protests by occupants of shops on the roadside strip of land.¹⁶⁸ Indeed, a pamphlet issued in this area in 2009 claimed that opposition to land acquisition was more widespread than acknowledged.¹⁶⁹ These developments need more investigation but it is not difficult to imagine that the political reaction to developmental projects in the state may have led the state agencies to rethink the pace of inclusion of the area.

There is another history of planning Barasat that awaits underneath the great tomes of KMDA and its perspective plans. Barasat, has been one of the major centers of refugee resettlement in the post-1971 era.¹⁷⁰ The town has a high concentration of government sponsored refugee colonies in the area surrounding the railway station and has several post-1950 squatter colonies deeper inside the township area as well as the periphery of the municipal area.¹⁷¹ In fact a decade before the detailed development plan for Barasat was written, the Rehabilitation Department had submitted a plan for its development as a refugee township in 1975.¹⁷² The report had marked out Barasat for special consideration because by 1971 the town already had a refugee population of 50%. There were, at the time, 23 refugee colonies of various categories in this town of 14.25 sq. km.¹⁷³ With low access road

¹⁶⁶ Krishnendu Bandopadhyay, "Stripped of NH status, highway in the rut," *Times of India*, October 1, 2013, accessed July 21, 2017, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/kolkata/stripped-of-NH-status-highway-in-the-rut/articleshow/22194556.cms>,

¹⁶⁷ Bureau, "Widening work on NH 34 next month," *Business Line*, June 17, 2003, accessed July 21, 2017, <http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/bline/2003/06/17/stories/2003061700450600.htm>.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Sukritiranjana Biswas, *Dalit Mukti Andolonar Drishtite: Nandigrame Ganohatya, SEZ O Buddhijibi*, (Machlandpur and Kolkata: Bishakha Biswas, 2009), 7-14.

¹⁷⁰ Samaddar, Ranabir. "The Marginal Nation: Transborder Migration from Bangladesh to West Bengal" (1999).

¹⁷¹ See Government of West Bengal, *Manual Of Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation- Volume 1*, (Kolkata: Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation department, 2000) 259-300.

¹⁷² Study Team Appointed by Rehabilitation Department, *Report on Improvement of Basic Civic Amenities in 16 Refugee concentrated towns in West Bengal*, (Kolkata: Government of West Bengal, 1975).

¹⁷³ Ibid., 1.

coverage, silted up outfall canals and acute drinking water crisis the town had been the epitome of the refugee town in crisis. In addition to all of the above distressing conditions, it was also the subdivision head-quarters for the Barasat block.¹⁷⁴ This administrative position made its linkages with rural and semi-rural colonies around it even stronger and increased the dependence of the local refugee population on this municipal area. Even though the colonies had been in the town since the early 1950s they were not yet part of the piped water supply system and most refugee families would have had to travel to the only two public tube wells in the municipality area for their drinking water or put their trust in the canal and pond water.¹⁷⁵ The plan had envisaged an outlay worth 19,00,000 INR for comprehensive development of roads and water delivery in the town.¹⁷⁶ The history of erasure of Barasat then, can also be seen as the outcome of the uneasy and intermittent relationship that refugee spaces seem to share with the mainstream planning discourse of the State government. This uneasiness worked out in Kalyani in terms of a violent uprooting of an unwanted population from the limits of a township meant for others. The restriction, one may argue lead to the utter failure and stagnation of the project as it could never really garner a sustainable population growth across decade of urban explosion in West Bengal. In case of Barasat there is a tentative relation of focusing and then shying away as if from a scandal of the planning machinery. The trouble with Barasat is its close contiguity to the urban center of Kolkata and its road and rail connectivity noted by all planning documents consulted above. It exhibited sustained population growth even at the absence of major state investment and indeed state neglect. That growth however was meant to be handled by the secondary agency of development, the rehabilitation department. It remained a problem or a liability for the mainstream planning machinery, one may contend, due to its troubling demographic content.

¹⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁷⁵Study Team, *Improvement of Basic Civic Amenities*, 27.

¹⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 28.

In a 2014 report, the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), while expounding upon the theme of linking the Indian North-East with the circuits of global economy came upon Barasat as a terminating point for its glorious imagination of a super-highway connecting several Indian state to Bangkok.¹⁷⁷ Even though there have been no discernible moves towards actualizing this plan, one can see here that the fringe of the urban is now becoming legible in the registers of Global Capital in interesting ways. The coming together of a space of 'liability' as the state understands it and a space of possible surplus extraction as the institutions of Global Capital frame it can hold interesting indications for re-evaluation of the value of the urban periphery.

Conclusion

While discussing the urban periphery two important categories come up time and again, (a) the capture of these spaces by global capital (b) the failure of capital and state in completing the transformation of these spaces and the local population. This brings up a larger theoretical concern where the case of Barasat may become instructive. The question that needs to be posed here is that – how do we explain the stalled, faltering and incomplete nature of the transformation of the periphery? In the framework proposed in studies that take up the concepts of flexibilization, informality and heterogeneity, we come across descriptions of the periphery where these spaces are already part of the circuits of global capital. Such descriptions are characterized by state led development and dispossession, evictions, violence and an active informal labour market. Several of these elements are missing in the Barasat story. The planned inclusion of this space into the larger circuits of planned urban transition has stalled with its disappearing act from the plan documents. The infrastructure that was to bind it closer to the urban centre has failed to arrive. The land market has become extremely active without the presence of

¹⁷⁷FICCI, *Gateway to the ASEAN: India's North-East Frontier*, accessed July 12, 2017, <https://www.pwc.in/assets/pdfs/publications/2014/gateway-to-the-asean.pdf>.

spectacular or violent land acquisition by the state. Land zoned for industrial growth in the mid 1980's has become part of the privately owned growth of middle-class housing enclaves and engineering colleges catering largely to the urban middle-class youth.

Barasat presents to us a situation where both the transformative agenda of the state and capital seems to be arrested and faltering in terms of its meta-narrative. Though it has a long history of being part of the Kolkata Metropolitan Area, it has not become a part of the general push towards the new urban transformation. The space and its population have largely been left to its own devices while projects have been taken up to connect this space to the city core. With the failure of those projects the area seems to have entirely fallen out of the loop of the new wave of urban development. Yet, land use is changing in the area. Middle-class residential enclaves are beginning to make their way to these spaces without the direct presence of state led development. However, these are entirely 'unplanned' spaces. There is a certain tenuous link to the formal planning machinery and a broad resemblance seems to inhere between the zoning maps from the mid 1980's and the recent land use transformation in the area.

In fact, it is not only Barasat, but several projects over the last several decades in the peripheries of Kolkata have either failed miserably or have taken decades to mature. In this chapter we have taken stock of Salt Lake, Kalyani, Kolkata West International City and Rajarhat. Each of these projects represents intense effort and many a times violent land acquisitions by the state and popular protests against the projects as well. But what runs as a common thread is the demise or faltering of the projects themselves. Even in the absence of major political movements projects like KWIC have failed. Ananya Roy has commented on images of such failures in the framework of 'dialectics at standstill'.¹⁷⁸ She argues that the possibility of witnessing the demise of capital's utopia creates the space for politics where capital's imagination of

¹⁷⁸Ananya Roy, "The Agonism of Utopia: Dialectics at a standstill," *TDSR*, 23, no. 1, 15-24.

growth can be interrupted. Specifically in the case of Kolkata one comes across several important works on capital's abandonment of the city. Samaddar has called this a 'strike by capital'.¹⁷⁹ In relation to de-industrialization in Kolkata, Nandini Gooptu offers an interesting insight by relating it to the political disillusionment and the changing forms of political participation by the working class.¹⁸⁰

The impulse of these arguments point to the fact that the spaces that Global Capital and the state planning machinery seeks to build often falters. This faltering is not always directly related to political resistance by the dispossessed, as in the case of KWIC, Kalyani or even Barasat. This faltering is a figure of the contingencies of realizing spatial imaginations. These situations demand a careful discerning of patterns as against explanations for their apparent success or failure. The material presented here demonstrates how the journey of populations mark the spaces they travel to or accumulate in. The attempt here is to take a broad view of the urban peripheral development in spaces marked by complex histories of layers of crisis and entangled acts of spatial government and planning which are not necessarily articulated in terms of intended effects as much as outfalls and influence.

¹⁷⁹Ranabir Samaddar, *Passive Revolution in West Bengal: 1977-2011*, (New Delhi: Sage, 2013), 3-7.

¹⁸⁰Nandini Gooptu, "Economic Liberalisation, Work and Democracy: Industrial Decline and Urban Politics in Kolkata", *EPW*, May 26, 2007, 1922-1933.

Chapter Two:

Rehabilitation and Productivity: The Making of the Refugee Labourer

Refugees and productivity

In the June of 1956 the West Bengal government had opened a “contractor department” which organized the refugees to build their own colonies. The motive of the department was not to create better living conditions and greater earning for the displaced population as is clear from the available information. The report on the department admits that the refugees were not “significantly profited”¹⁸¹ by the work provided by the department. 2500 refugees had already worked under the directions of the department by December 1956 in various developmental works around the city of Kolkata and its suburbs.¹⁸² 8 lakh INR had already been paid as wage to the daily work force of 1100 to 1900 refugee labourers. This wage was not the ‘profit’ that the department was looking for or justifying its work through. The primary gain from the department’s activity, the report states, was that the refugees were “learning the dignity of labour”.¹⁸³ The refugee population was employed in developmental tasks across several peripheral municipalities in Kolkata metropolitan district in addition to at least

¹⁸¹ Government of India, *Purbobonger Udbastu Punorbashoner Panch Bochor*, (Delhi) Publication division, 1956, p 13

¹⁸² Ibid

¹⁸³ Ibid

10 refugee colonies being built across the 24 Parganas. The population increase caused by refugee influx had created pressure on the suburban municipalities. By employing the refugees in fulfilling the labour needs of these over taxed agencies the government found a way to create a function for the refugee population while simultaneously transforming the suburban spaces according to rehabilitation plans.¹⁸⁴

Alongside the employment made available through state directed infrastructural labour, the refugee population was also engaged in a limited amount of industrial production. Several of the colonies which were then being built under the supervision of the Contractor Department also housed manufacturing units. Private industrialists were given loans to start industrial units in various government colony and camp areas to provide training and employment to make the refugee population functional.¹⁸⁵ The main condition for the loans was that the industrialists availing the facility will have to hire able bodied refugee youth as a significant portion of their workforce. The government by all accounts was desperate at this point to stop survival expenses for the refugee population which it had seen as a financial drain since 1948. At the end of April 1949 there were 58,000 refugees in camps in the Kolkata suburbs. Of this 8500 were being given relief provisions in lieu of work and around 25,200 were receiving what was called “gratuitous relief” and later came to be known as ‘dole’.¹⁸⁶ The Government was intent on cutting down the expense on doles and gave a notice on 3rd October 1948 that the “able bodied” men will receive any doles after his first week of arrival in the camp. The total number of dole recipients was brought down from 2,00,740 to 29,797 by the end of October and several government supervised work programmes were initiated in and

¹⁸⁴ Ibid

¹⁸⁵ Subhasri Ghosh, *The Impact of Immigration on West Bengal, 1947 – 1971*, (New Delhi) Jawaharlal Nehru University, Unpublished Thesis, 2006, p 136

¹⁸⁶ Ministry of Rehabilitation, *Rehabilitation Review: January to April*, (New Delhi) Government of India, P 25

near the camps.¹⁸⁷ By the mid 1950s these programmes had become diversified into manufacturing units, production centres and training facilities.

The aim of this disciplinary move of stopping doles while making routes of employment available, admittedly not very good ones, came from a specific understanding of citizenship. The plans for employment and for training and education were aimed at creating a “disciplined ideal citizen”. To this end, the rehabilitation ministry had designed a programme for training refugee children as “ideal citizens” and show cased the outcomes to various dignitaries. Around 16.000 refugee children had gone through this training by 1956.¹⁸⁸ Along with the production of the ideal citizen, according to the then Prime Minister “the country needed a psychology of work and enthusiasm and energy”.¹⁸⁹ Nehru’s pronouncement was predicated upon what he saw as the path to enfranchisement for the refugees. The path to citizenship was paved in ‘wealth’. His approach to this realization was delivered couched in the popular socialist rhetoric of the time where he classified the rehabilitation effort of the time as having been over-concerned with the problem of providing compensation to land owners who had lost property. The true task of rehabilitation was to be the creation of a new social organization for the non-propertied displaced groups who needed ‘productive employment’. “Wealth producing activities” were to be the only focus of the rehabilitation machinery.¹⁹⁰ That the planning of the expansion of the national economy will provide chances for rehabilitation was an integral assumption of the first planning exercise in Independent India. Between 1951 and 1954 the Central government planned to spend INR 15.59 crore on technical training, education and other employment generating schemes alone. This was the highest financial commitment in terms of ‘rehabilitation as differentiated from relief

¹⁸⁷ Ibid

¹⁸⁸ Government of India, *Purbobonger Udbastu Punorbashoner Panch Bochor*, p 16

¹⁸⁹ International labour Office – India Branch, *Monthly Reports – December 1950*, p 46

¹⁹⁰ Ibid

measures.¹⁹¹ Alongside the training and the ideological project of transforming the refugee into a productive citizen there was also a sense of this man power being available as 'cheap labour'.¹⁹²

While there was sharp attention at the macro level towards building effective ways to train and to utilize refugee labour, at the micro level one may find stories of slippages and a periodic lack of care that is quite astounding and intriguing. Take the case of Gayeshpur Refugee Township in North 24 Pargana for an example. It is at the periphery of the Kalyani Township which was one of the first major suburban township projects in West Bengal in the 1950s. In 1955 a number of camp families were relocated there. Due to infrastructural woes around 800 of them deserted the township.¹⁹³ Since it was categorized as a township, primarily a number of small trader families were rehabilitated there. Possibly, the planners had wanted to place a service population in the vicinity of a new and planned small town. The problem was that neither the town nor the consumers were there yet so opportunities for business were next to none. Unfazed by the high level of desertions the rehabilitation department kept sending refugee families there. By 1955 the township stood dying due to crippling unemployment. The few who were employed were primarily daily wage laborers and rickshaw-pullers.

¹⁹¹ Planning Commission of India, *First Five Year Plan*, <http://www.planningcommission.nic.in/plans/planrel/fiveyr/1st/1planch38.html>, (accessed 20.02.2017)

¹⁹² Udit Sen, *Refugees and politics of Nation Building*, p 68

¹⁹³ *Jugantar*, 10 January, 1955

Type of Expenditure	Rs. In crore
Urban loans	12.60
Rural loans	18.60
Rehabilitation Finance Administration loans	12.90
Industrial loans	3.00
Housing	66.90
Education and Vocational Training	21.70
	135.70

Table 4. Source: 2nd Five Year Plan¹⁹⁴

In the above table we can see that the expenditure on vocational training only grew in the next planning period and was second to the expenditure on housing even if only a distant one. It grew alongside the money allotted for urban loans for traders and industrial loans which we have seen in the preceding pages were also aimed at creating possibilities for greater wealth creation by the refugees. In fact throughout the 1950s the central government stayed focused on increasing productivity and came up with experiments that more often than not back-fired due to grave errors in execution. The exclusively horticultural colonies for mixed populations of rural agriculturists and non-agriculturists were one such example. The colonies failed primarily due to immense poverty ensuing from a lack of nearby market places which induced heavy desertions and the scheme had to be shutdown in the mid 1950s.¹⁹⁵ The colonies were made with the Kolkata city in mind as a primary market but the sites being chosen in a hurry meant that the distance between the colony and the city killed the scheme off.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁴ 2nd Five year Plan, <http://planningcommission.gov.in/plans/planrel/fiveyr/index2.html>, (accessed on 20.02.2017)

¹⁹⁵ Ministry of Rehabilitation, *Annual report - 1954-55*, (Delhi) Government of India, p 10

¹⁹⁶ Governmanet of West Bengal, Report of the committee of ministers for the rehabilitation of displaced persons in West Bengal, (Calcutta) Government of India Press, 1954, p 10

If the failure of the schemes as sustainable habitational and productive units registered at all, it probably created greater resolve on the government's part to restrict the flow of refugees into West Bengal. By 1955-56 the government had made the issue of Migration Certificates extremely difficult and the availing of all rehabilitation facilities contingent upon having the right documentation. Both small traders and agriculturists with land in East Pakistan were made ineligible for migration certificate unless they could prove a direct threat to their lives. The Chief Migration Officer was given sweeping discretionary power and strong instructions to avoid giving the certificate and also to persuade more people to take Pakistani passports and travel on visa.¹⁹⁷ We know now that these efforts at plugging the migratory flow from East Pakistan provided only a temporary breather and the migration ebbed and flowed through 1964 and later the 1971 land mark years.

In the mean time, the attempts at training the available refugee man power went on and became increasingly varied. The state government opened three training cum work centres in Titagarh, Gayeshpur and Habra, all within an hour to hour and a half journey from the city of Kolkata on the suburban railway line. By 1954 around 1100 people had received training in using advanced Japanese looms, new printing presses and braiding machines. Simultaneously some refugee students had the opportunity for 'superior technical training in Jadavpur engineering college and Dum Dum Aeronautical engineering college. The most lucrative scheme however was the apprenticeship scheme with the Directorate General of Resettlement or the Government of West Bengal. The apprenticeship promised a stipend of Rs. 30 and 'generally assured' employment at the end of 6 to 12 months.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁷ 'Regulating the issue of Migration Certificates to Hindu migrants from East Pakistan by the Deputy High Commissioner for India in Pakistan, Dacca...' Letter from MEA, New Delhi, India to the High Commissioner for India in Pakistan dated 11 th July 1956. F. no. 29/2/56-PSP, MEA, NAI, New Delhi. Cited in Pallavi Chakravarty, *post partition refugee rehabilitation in india with special reference to bengal 1947-71*, (Delhi) Delhi University, Unpublished Thesis, 2011. P 170

¹⁹⁸ Ibid p 15

Occupational transitions

Kanti Pakrashi commenting on the 1948 statistical study of the refugee population in West Bengal comments that “occupation of any individual is more than just a means of livelihood”.¹⁹⁹ The 1948 statistical study was the first fully fledged enumeration of the refugees and it set the tone and method for the later enumerations of the refugee population at least till 1955. The survey had divided the refugee population in four main categories a) agriculture and kindred avocations b) trade and commerce and allied activities c) service and allied jobs and d) others. These occupational groups, recorded according to the pre-partition occupation of the reported by the refugee formed the bedrock of stratification of the refugee groups. These occupational groups however did not necessarily correspond to rural and urban spatial divisions. Only about 35% of the families that admitted to agrarian occupations hailed from rural areas. As many as 16% of agriculturists were entirely urban residents yet were dependent on agrarian incomes.²⁰⁰ Even among those that reported income from the agrarian sector, it was not their exclusive source of sustenance. In the final tally only a third of the migrant population in the very first year of partition came from agrarian caste communities.²⁰¹ In the spatial-occupational index the two largest populations were traders from rural areas and service workers from urban areas of East Pakistan. Interestingly, even this small portion of rural agriculturists did not all gravitate towards the rural areas of the newly formed West Bengal. A sizeable portion of them actually remained in the urban and urban peripheral areas of Kolkata.²⁰² Over the next seven years of near constant but varying intensities of migration one thing will change while the other will remain the same. As we will see in the following paragraphs, the proportion of rural-agrarian families and lower castes will increase significantly by 1955 but their desire to stay close to Kolkata will remain remarkable.

¹⁹⁹ Kanti Pakrashi, *The Uprooted: A sociological Study of the refugees of West Bengal, India*, (Calcutta) Editions Indian, 1971, p 106

²⁰⁰ Ibid 107

²⁰¹ Ibid p 108

²⁰² Ibid p 110

Little less than 50% of the refugee population coming into India gravitated towards Kolkata and the 24 Parganas²⁰³. In a 1955 statistical survey conducted by the state government of west Bengal, the surveyors took a close look at the livelihood question for the refugees living outside the government run refugee camps. Though the government had originally planned to get a sense of the encamped refugees, there was a misunderstanding between the then head of the statistical bureau and the minister-in-charge. Following the tabulation of preliminary results of the survey, the head of the bureau had to leave office and an amended tabulation along with comparative figures on aid given to the encamped refugees was finally published in 1956. The fieldwork for the survey was completed between 7th April and 6th July 1955. The original sample allotted for the detailed questionnaire on livelihood changes was 60,093 but at the time of the second phase of the survey, only 27,745 of the identified families could be found at their earlier residence. The disappearance of 32,348 individuals from their recorded addresses within two months of the hiatus between the first and second phase of the survey gives us a good sense of the intense mobility of this population at the time²⁰⁴. The measurement of unemployment among the refugee population was one of the major highlights of the survey. The document claims that by 1955 the refugee population had surpassed its pre-displacement levels of participation in the work force²⁰⁵ while at the same time showing a significant loss of jobs among the sections of the refugee population which were already part of the workforce in East Pakistan.

24 Parganas, had the second highest concentration of migrants after southern Kolkata but only about a sixth of that population had decided to engage in agriculture²⁰⁶. This was despite the fact that this district received by far the largest portion of erstwhile agriculturist caste communities. Compared to an earlier survey on the refugee population, this one marked an important increase

²⁰³ State Statistical Bureau, *Rehabilitation of refugees: A statistical survey*, West Bengal Government press, Alipore, 1956, p 2

²⁰⁴ Ibid, p 1

²⁰⁵ Ibid, p 5

²⁰⁶ Ibid, p 3

in the pace of growth of the scheduled caste refugee population as a component of total number of migrant families. There was a simultaneous rise in the number of people taking up livelihoods involving, unskilled labor, petty trade, small industry and service²⁰⁷. Probably the most significant feature of this report was to create an index of aspirations for change within the migrant population. The surveyors asked the respondents whether they were happy with their current livelihoods. This allowed them to map the possibilities of individuals shifting in and out of occupational brackets. The scenario in agricultural sector was quite telling. Of the 2,15,200 refugees originally engaged in agricultural activities before Partition 47,800 lost their livelihood. There were 36,800 refugees who wanted to attempt agriculture but had neither prior experience nor the resources for it and there were 32,400 actual new entrants in the sector. This was the largest single occupational group among the refugees and showed the most instability when compared to small trade, small industry, service and unskilled work²⁰⁸ all of which registered unprecedented growth in numbers of new entrants. These were clear indications that the (*non-encamped*)²⁰⁹ refugees were going through a large scale occupational transition along with a sharp increase in participation in the work force. The dynamics that we see develop in these two statistical reports will largely remain unaltered through the next two high water marks of migration in 1964 and between 1968 and 70. The percentage of agricultural refugees will continue to rise from around 15 percent of the total population in 1947 to around 40% in the 1950s and 70% in the 1960s.²¹⁰ By conservative estimates, of the 5.28 million refugees received from east Pakistan 75% remained in West Bengal.²¹¹

²⁰⁷ Ibid, p 4

²⁰⁸ Ibid, p 7

²⁰⁹ I am using a category developed by Lewis Turner while analyzing the situation of (Non-)encamped Syrian refugees in the Jordanian labor market. See Turner, Lewis. "Explaining the (non-) encampment of Syrian refugees: security, class and the labour market in Lebanon and Jordan." *Mediterranean Politics* 20, no. 3 (2015): 386-404.

²¹⁰ P. N. Luthra, *Rehabilitation*, (New Delhi) Publications division: GOI, 1972, p 17

²¹¹ *ibid*

The question of aptitude

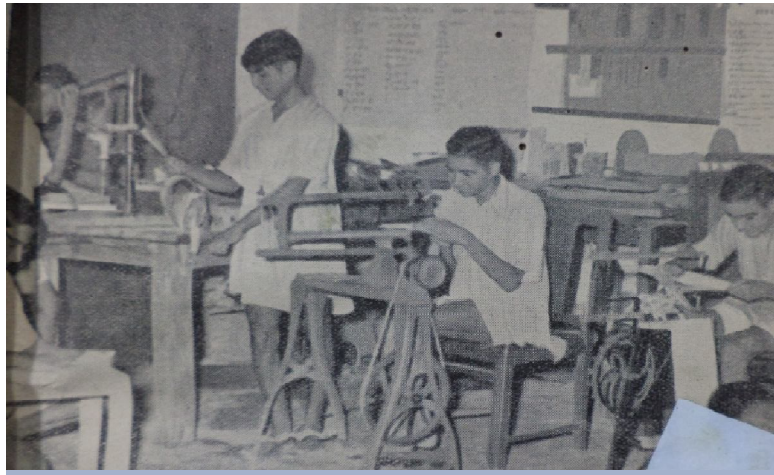


Figure 2. Source: *Purbobonger Udbastue Punorbashoner Panch Bochor*,

The deepest anxiety expressed by bureaucrats, state employed anthropologists and statisticians in the policy narrative of 1950s and 1960s concerning the camp refugee population were the possibility that they would lose their desire and aptitude for productive work during camp stay. The 1954 report of the committee of ministers had admonished the camp authorities severely for the delay in dispersing refugees from camp to rehabilitation sites. They surmised that it was harmful to allow the refugee population to continue living in relief and transit camps for long durations because the stay “demoralised” the population and created “vested interests”. The resistance to dispersal by the camp inmates was also a matter of some worry.²¹²

This notion of demoralisation becomes clearer when we read it in terms of the process of *Primitivation*²¹³ that the Guha report of the same year expounded upon. His analysis was based on a comparison between a primarily upper caste squatter colony in Southern Kolkata and a mixed population colony camp in Jirat in Hoogly district. Two distinct impressions about the camp population are underscored by the report a) dependence on state assistance and b) lack of

²¹² The Committee of Ministers, *Report of the Committee of Ministers for the Rehabilitation of Displaced Persons in West Bengal*, Manager of Publications, Government of India, Calcutta, 1954, p 3

²¹³ B. S. Guha, *Memoir No. 1: Studies in social tensions among the refugees from Eastern Pakistan*, (Delhi) Manager of Publication, 1954, p xii

initiative. This report is an important foundation to the discourse on the stereotype of the lazy and dependent East Pakistan refugee in comparison to the hard working and successful West Pakistan refugee. In the later decades social workers and bureaucrats will become increasingly more concerned with dispersing refugees away from camps as fast as possible and getting them to work because the long camp stay was assumed to negatively affect their skills and capacity for hard labour. Additionally, bureaucrats were afraid that the skills rusted by a long stay will ultimately result in the failure of rehabilitation projects in Dandakaranya and other states.²¹⁴ There was a sense that camp stay and the availability of doles will increasingly make the refugees inactive and sedentary.²¹⁵

The process of “primitivation” and the loss of skill are tied together in this explanation. Even though there were other possible explanations for the failure of several rehabilitation schemes as I have tried to demonstrate earlier, this became an oft repeated one. We can begin to discern in this situation, the outlines of the process of De-agrarianization and De-peasantization²¹⁶. I am using these two concepts in order to underline the particular processes and effects of the transformation of this population after their displacement from their erstwhile spatial and occupational belonging. De-peasantization is the process of transforming family and kinship networks while de-agrarianization is the transformation of occupation and forms of subsistence.

The becoming primitive of the peasant waiting in the camp for the Prime Minister to find a way for him to produce wealth may seem a sad waste, in the way that policy documents frame it, but, this becoming primitive is functional, because the primitive has a function of production just as I have

²¹⁴ Ashoka Gupta, private papers, teen murti, subject file: 3, p 49

²¹⁵ Ibid

²¹⁶ I am using these two concepts in order to underline the particular processes and effects of the transformation of this population after their displacement from their erstwhile spatial and occupational belonging. De-peasantization is the process of transforming family and kinship networks while de-agrarianization is the transformation of occupation and forms of subsistence. See Wallerstein, Immanuel. *The World is Out of Joint: World-Historical Interpretations of Continuing Polarizations (E)*. Routledge, 2015, p 79

tried to demonstrate that it is itself actively produced through the depeasantizing mechanisms of the state apparatus. Samaddar, has argued that the labourer is possibly the primary “physical site” of primitive accumulation.²¹⁷ If we were to take this insight forward we may argue that in the case of post-Partition India, the refugee camp was an important holding ground precisely for laboring bodies which could be measured and channelized.

The basis, assumptions and desires of the state are expressed in the acts of measurement that it practiced upon the refugee population stuck in the refugee camps. In 1954, the government commissioned a voluminous series of statistical volumes targeted specifically at the camp refugee population. This round of surveys was aimed at finding the exact number of persons in each refugee camp who were “keen on industrial employment”.²¹⁸ Each of the camps in West Bengal came under the ambit of this survey. The systematic and continuous progress made by the state from the 1055 to the 1956 survey is of great interest and so is the distinct tone of placing the question before an encamped population as against a non-camp population. While the non-camp population was asked of its desire and satisfaction with current occupational belonging, the camp population had to submit to a measurement of aptitude. This is not to say that it is a matter of politeness as to how the state asks the question. It is a matter of having power over a population held within an enclosure of humanity at its most desperate hour.

The survey volume distributes the individuals interested in industrial employment on three axes. Firstly, the population of the camps under discussion was divided into “keen” and “not keen” groups in terms of industrial employment. The group exhibiting keenness towards industrial employment was then divided into groups claiming or exhibiting specific skills. The skills

²¹⁷ Ranabir Samaddar, *Primitive Accumulation and Some Aspects of Work and Life in India In the Early Part of the Twenty First Century*, (Kolkata) Mahanirban Calcutta Research group, 2008, p 9

²¹⁸ State Statistical Bureau, Report on the survey of aptitude of Displaced persons for Industrial Occupations, 1956: Ghosuri Cossipur. (Calcutta. Government of West Bengal. 1956)

recorded in the survey are extremely varied and range from weaving to *beedi* (local cigarette) making and technical or professional skills. The last distinction was drawn on the basis of the refugee's choice between creating his or her "own enterprise" or taking up a paying job in some or the other industrial process.²¹⁹

In the volume on Ghusuri and Cossipur camps, the statisticians surveyed a total of 1,554 families. Of these, 554 were caste Hindus and 1000 were scheduled caste.²²⁰ The rate of employment across castes was dismal but the upper castes had significantly better labour force participation in terms of full employment at 5.9% while only 1.9% among the scheduled caste inmates of the camp was employed full time.²²¹ The upper castes did marginally better in terms of part-time employment and the proportion of people willing and desirous of work was similar in all caste groups. Of the total 215 families with some form of employment 113 were Self-employed and 76 of those were petty traders.²²² Of the few people participating in the labour force, the vast majority were engaged in multiple forms of livelihood and despite caste differences, the per-capita income showed only a 60 paisa difference in the favor of the upper castes.²²³ As a normative derivation from the statistics, the report cautions that the near absence of remittances in the income descriptions of the camp inmates demonstrated their unwillingness to move away from the camp for income. This tendency compared to colonies, where remittances were in high incidence was underscored as the ill effect of camp stay on the refugee population.²²⁴

Dispersal and National Development

By the late June of 1948 the central government of India had begun to prepare the first set of measures that would go towards stalling the work of rehabilitation and transform the way East Pakistan Partition migrants were

²¹⁹ Ibid, p 62

²²⁰ Statistical Bureau, Report on the survey of aptitude. P 9

²²¹ Ibid

²²² Ibid

²²³ Ibid p 13

²²⁴ Ibid p 2

perceived in policy. In order to curtail their responsibility towards the refugees, the government attempted to reclassify the reasons for migration by arguing that it was economic rather than forced in nature.²²⁵ In fact, many within the government believed that most of the migration from East Pakistan was induced by economic reasons like food shortage rather than any threat of violence.²²⁶ Alongside this sense of the migration from East Pakistan being economic and therefore either temporary or reversible in nature, there was sense of foreboding in the city of Kolkata by the early 1950s that the refugee influx was negatively affecting the city. There was a sense among planners and municipal functionaries that refugees were unfit for the city.²²⁷

It was under these conditions that the first imagination of dispersing the refugee population came up. In her study of Dispersal of refugees to colonies in Andaman, Uditi sen has argued that contemporary governmentality played an important role bringing other states and the central government to the table of discussion over refugee resettlement outside of West Bengal.²²⁸ Sen, argues that the idea of planned distribution of populations, in spaces where they were to be made necessary or productive, was integral to the planning imagination of the time. Anwasha Sengupta has criticized this argument by demonstrating that the periodic dispersal of the refugees was never entirely coordinated or smooth. It was in fact highly dependent upon immediate political situations, scarcities and other contingent elements.²²⁹ Earlier histories of Partition have also approached the question of refugee rehabilitation in terms of its weaving in to

²²⁵ Haimanti Roy, *Citizenship and National identity in Post-Partition Bengal: 10947-65*, (Unpublished Thesis, university of Cincinnati, 2006), p 228

²²⁶ Ibid, p 221

²²⁷ Anwasha Sengupta, *"They must have to go therefore, elsewhere": Mapping the Many Displacements of Bengali Hindu Refugees from East Pakistan, 1947 to 1960s*, Public arguments – 2, TISS Patna, 2017

²²⁸ Uditi Sen; *Refugees and the Politics of Nation Building in India; 1947-1971*. (unpublished thesis. Cambridge university, 2009)

²²⁹ Anwasha Sengupta. *Breaking up Bengal: People, Things and Land in Times of Partition*, (Jawaharlal Nehru Unibversity, Unpublished Thesis, 2015)

the discourse on national development and nation building immediately following Partition.²³⁰

Sengupta's revisionist thesis is based on a reversal of the causality implied in the arguments made by Udit Sen and Tan and Kudaisya. Her argument emphasizes that the real quantum of refugee influx was always in doubt. The government, instead of planning and then placing populations according to its need was left reacting to migration and political upheavals. Whenever it was felt necessary, the government hurriedly created programmes and schemes that could qualify as part of the nation Building schema and channelized the refugees into them. This debate around the question of national development and the instrumentalization of the refugee has been the mainstay of political economic debates around Partition both in the east and the west. Early scholarship by economists like V. K. R. V. Rao studying specific refugee rehabilitation spaces²³¹ have also depended on the framework of development, improvement and productivity to understand and act upon the reality of Partition migration and its attendant problems like, poverty and unemployment.

In this chapter I point towards a different site of analysis for understanding the economic impetus behind the idea of making the refugee productive. I am pointing at the considerable continuity in the project of training the refugee population in ways that prepared it to inhabit a very specific niche in the economy. This is not a story of continuous plans. It is a story of intermittent failures that forced the refugee population towards a set of choices left explicitly open to it. Probably the most ambitious among the dispersal plans and the one that had the most impact over an extended space of the nation and also a very significant and mobile population was the Dandakaranya Project.

Set up in 1958, the Dandakaranya Development Authority was an ambitious plan for agrarian colonization of rocky and forested terrains of Andhra Pradesh,

²³⁰ Kudaisya, Gyanesh. "Divided landscapes, fragmented identities: east Bengal refugees and their rehabilitation in India, 1947–79." *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 17, no. 1 (1997): 24-39.

²³¹ Rao, Vijendra Kasturi Ranga Varadaraja, and Prasannavadan Bhagwanji Desai. *Greater Delhi: a study in urbanisation, 1940-1957*. Asia Pub. House, 1965.

Madhya Pradesh and Orissa. The refugees were to be resettled in different types of settlements ranging from rural to industrial with the aim of integrated developments of the entire area of 30,092 sq. miles.²³² The transformation created by this project, in terms of the sheer scale of ecological transformation was immense. Three dams which were completed under the project brought 36,300 acres of land under irrigation and cleared vast amounts of forested lands. From 1959 onwards the government in west Bengal and the central government began a strong campaign towards enforcing migration to Dandakaranya by threatening to stop doles, close camps and eject refugees from their minimal shelter.²³³ In the early 1960s the government was already aware that the project was not doing very well and that there were heavy desertions from the agricultural colonies as well. The government decided to blame this on the stereotype of the Bengali refugee and kept extolling the virtues of the scheme till the very end.²³⁴

For most part this scheme would remain ineffective for actual resettlement and plagued by delayed dispersal from transit camps, periodic violence and immense measures of desertion by the refugees. In 1978 following the election of the first Left Front government of West Bengal a substantial part of the population deserted the area and came away to West Bengal.

²³² Ministry of Rehabilitation, A Note on Dandakaranya, (Calcutta) Gosain, 1958

²³³ See Ministry of Supply and Rehabilitation, Report of the working group on the residual problem of rehabilitation in West Bengal, (New Delhi, Government of India, 1976). P 6; and Anwesha Sengupta, *"They must have to go therefore, elsewhere"*, P 12-13

²³⁴ Ministry of Rehabilitation Annual Report, 1961-62, New Delhi: Government of India Press, p. 16

YEAR	NO. OF FAMILIES DESERTING
1965	1039
1966	1865
1967	581
1968	77
1969	169
1970	501
1971	103
1972	3465
1973	242
1974	149
1975	236
1976	71
1977	209
1978	14345

Table 5. Source: Dandakaranya Project: 30th Report, 1978, pp 9-10

The coming of the Refugee population to West Bengal touched off a political battle between the refugees and the fledgling Left Front government which dealt with them with unexpected and brutal finality. The Marichjhanpi massacre that opened the period of Left rule in West Bengal remains probably one of the darkest stains on a regime which was no stranger to blood and dirt.²³⁵

The project then, in terms of the narrative of National Development seems to have faltered and failed entirely. The argument made by Sengupta and discussed earlier in the section seems to fit quite well with the situation of the

²³⁵ See Mallick, Ross. "Refugee resettlement in forest reserves: West Bengal policy reversal and the Marichjhanpi massacre." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 58, no. 1 (1999): 104-125 and Jalais, Annu. "Dwelling on Morichjhanpi: When tigers became 'citizens', refugees' tiger-food'." *Economic and Political Weekly* (2005): 1757-1762.

Dandakaranya Project. However, it is important to take note of what the government was actually doing - not in terms of the broadest intentions of the scheme but the micro investments that go un-noticed due to the grand gestures of demographic and ecological transformation. One such small gesture was the creation of the Rashtriya Vikas Dal in 1964.

During the post 1964 period 4.3 lakhs refugees entered government relief camps and they were mostly dispersed to various rehabilitation schemes, transit camps, camp colonies and work site camps administered either by the Dandakaranya Development authority or by different state governments. By the end of 1971 44,000 families had been dispersed to other states and 42,000 awaited dispersal in various camps.²³⁶ That this population was overwhelmingly composed of scheduled caste communities can be surmised from two things. Firstly, in the earlier sections we have seen how the scheduled caste component grew across the years of migration. Secondly this population was chosen for agrarian rehabilitation and dispersal to colonies built in newly cleared forest areas. The choice of refugees for such tasks or rehabilitation in newly cleared or recently settled agricultural land has always been defined in terms of pre-partition occupational preference of the refugee. There is however, evidence to suggest that specifically for agrarian settlements in difficult terrain the officers preferred to take lower caste families rather than *Bhadrolok* families due to the belief that the scheduled caste families made better laborers and tillers.²³⁷ It is fair then to assume that the population dispersed outside West Bengal at this time consisted of, if not entirely then at least primarily of scheduled caste families.

On receiving this population in the Dandakaranya camps, the government reevaluated its strategy in terms of the specific deployment of refugee labour that was being attempted until then. The agricultural colonies were found to be too restrictive an option for the employment of such large groups of people.

²³⁶ Ibid 21

²³⁷ Bikash Chakraborty, *Andaman –e Punorbashon: Ak Bangal Officer-er Diary*, Gangchil, Kolkata, 2012, pp 29-30

One of the schemes that the Central government implemented was the “Rashtriya Vikas dal”.²³⁸ At this time the transit and work camps at Dandakaranya had over two and a half lakhs of refugee population categorized as new migrants. This population was only entitled to rehabilitation if they agreed to move outside of West Bengal. The government devised a plan to use this population as an organized group of migrating labour force at its beck and call. The Khand, as the unit was called, was to be arranged in units of a thousand labourers each.²³⁹ Each Dal was further sub divided into 5 paksh, each consisting of two hundred labourers. These teams of labourers were to be deployed for the developmental work of the rehabilitation department and the various projects of nation building which were already underway.

The Basic Training module for the “Sahakaris” or labourers chosen for recruitment is interesting. It is not simply aimed at producing a skilled labourer but the imagination of a skilled labourer. The imagination played closely on the image of a soldier or scout. The document on basic training begins with physical training and route march for the recruit and then moves on to “Drill, Map reading and training in Self-defence”.²⁴⁰ Alongside the general physical training was a nine component list of schools including camp hygiene, personal hygiene, general discipline, barrack and train discipline and emotional integration. Interestingly, alongside these mundane and prosaic qualities and skills, the functionality of which, as labourers in infrastructural projects was ambiguous at best, the young men were to receive training in “rudiments of civil administration and the duties of citizens”.²⁴¹

Alongside this strange mix of skills, the refugee was also to become proficient at a trade like blacksmithing, carpentry or brick laying over a course of 2 to 45 months of vocational training.²⁴² Following the training period the refugee had to be attached to the dal for three years in order to receive full benefits and also

²³⁸ Ministry of Rehabilitation, *Rashtriya Vikas dal*, (New Delhi, Government of India, 1965)

²³⁹ Ibid, p 2

²⁴⁰ Ibid

²⁴¹ Ibid

²⁴² Ibid p 3

agree to work anywhere the unit was sent. The question one must ask here is what is the transformation being wrought in this instance? When we change the unit of analysis from the larger programme and down to the refugee population itself, we get a very different picture of the project. The refugee in this case becomes the site of both a disciplinary²⁴³ investment of national development and an imagination of the perfect and dutiful citizen, docile²⁴⁴ yet capable of administration, obedient and productive.

One can begin to understand the totality of this investment when one begins to peel back the layers of these attempted transformations of the refugee population across gender and across agencies, be it the state or civil society actors. Let me elaborate on this with the help of another example from a slightly earlier period. Ashoka Gupta had been an active part of the rehabilitation effort for a long time and one of her major contributions to the effort was towards constant attempts to ensure better conditions for migrating women and children.

In 1957, faced with the massive migration and failing camp infrastructure, she decided to create a work training programme for the women in various camps under the Dandakaranya Development authority. The scheme was to be called "Domestic Service and attendance". This was a training scheme for young women and men as domestic attendants for the middle or upper middle class households.²⁴⁵

Every home and infirmary were to choose young men between the ages of 14 to 18 years and widows between the age of 25 and 45 years for the training which was to include an apprenticeship in a first grade hotel for three months.²⁴⁶ The training to be imparted included preparation of beverages like tea or coffee, preparation of two to three types of Indian sweets and various vegetarian and

²⁴³ The idea of disciplinary investment is taken from the work of Michel Foucault. "Discipline and punish (Alan Sheridan, trans.)." *New York: Pantheon* (1977).

²⁴⁴ The allusion here is to the concept of Docile bodies used by Michel Foucault in his seminal work, "Discipline and Punish, trans." *Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1979)*.

²⁴⁵ Ashoka Gupta, Private Papers, NMML, Subject file: 2. P 60

²⁴⁶ Ashoka Gupta, Private Papers, NMML, Subject file: 2, p 62

non-vegetarian dishes as well.²⁴⁷ In the interest of practicality the syllabus also included a special module on the cooking of breakfast and lunch suitable for various different economic strata.²⁴⁸ One element of training that seemed to span the two programmes that we have discussed is a concern with hygiene. Both personal and work space hygiene was made a specific part of each programme with the use of disinfectant being one of the modules in the syllabus for the domestic worker in training.²⁴⁹

In the two examples given above one can begin to read the pattern of transformation that was being unleashed upon the population under discussion here. The men were being trained not only in the craft necessary for construction work but also being given a three year periods training in itinerancy. In a very practical and empirical way one can argue from these examples that the Indian state was in the process of producing a population pre-disposed towards certain sectors of informal work.

The Residue and the Camp

While the process of transforming the refugee population in the transit and work-site camps outside of West Bengal was progressing in full swing the ambit of rehabilitation itself was slowly being shortened in the state. By July 1959 the government had once again decided to close down all refugee camps to force the population to either take the offered rehabilitation schemes outside West Bengal or to simply disappear from the camps.²⁵⁰ Of the 35000 families then in camp, most were to be rehabilitated through dispersal to other states while 10,000 had to be rehabilitated in West Bengal. For the camp refugees there was a single stern reminder that who so ever decided to say no to the rehabilitation scheme offered during the closing of the camp would have to leave with only six months dole in advance and no other benefits would be

²⁴⁷ Ibid

²⁴⁸ Ibid

²⁴⁹ Ibid

²⁵⁰ Jugantar 24th April, 1960, cited in Subhasri Ghosh, *Attitude of the Host society Vis a vis the East Pakistani*, p 153

allowed to them.²⁵¹ The threat of closing down camps and stopping the process of rehabilitation was carried out in part when in April 1961 the government finally closed down all camps in West Bengal and the various work site schemes as well. Thereby creating what will come to be known as the Ex-camp site.

Of these Bagjola camp is probably one of the most striking examples of appropriation of refugee labour. The project of land reclamation and canal excavation in Bagjola had started with two aims. The refugees were to extend the Bagjola canal complex by creating a new channel. Refugees from across several camps were given the opportunity to move to the scheme area and immediately join work at the canal digging site. For their troubles they were to be paid a wage but the main wage of the programme was to be 20,000 acres of land at the fringe of Kolkata.²⁵² The land excavated by the refugees at the edge of the canal was supposed to become the rehabilitation settlement for the refugees doing the work of digging. The government was hopeful enough of the projects that it had planned to close down camps by March 1955 expecting massive land reclamation programmes to succeed. The hopes were dashed firstly by the slow pace of land reclamation and later due to tensions between the refugee population and the local population in the surrounding areas. After 1200 acres of land had already been reclaimed and several title deeds were distributed by the rehabilitation department, there was severe pressure from the locals that forced the government to entirely stop work in the area and retract from the original promise to the refugee families.²⁵³ In 1958 Dr. B. C. Roy, the Chief Minister of West Bengal, in a reply to a U. C. R. C. proposal for rehabilitation clarified that only about 400 families were ever rehabilitated in the bagjola scheme.²⁵⁴ The refugees in bagjola were organized under the leadership of Hemanta biswas and had seen some success in agitations fro

²⁵¹ Ibid

²⁵² West Bengal Legislative assembly, 8th February, 1955, p 303.

²⁵³ West Bengal legislative assembly, 27th February 1954, p 342, cited in Subhasri Ghosh, *Attitude of the Host society Vis a vis the East Pakistani*, p 156

²⁵⁴ Dr. B C Roy, Statement on rehabilitation of camp Refugees, October 13, 1958, p 2

increase of wages for the labour of canal excavation in 1956.²⁵⁵ In 1958 the West Bengal Government decided to close the work site camp and disperse the refugees to the Dandakaranya colonies. The news was not welcome to the already politically organized refugees of the camp. And a movement encompassing refugee activists from several other camp areas began at this point and it was supported by the opposition political parties in West Bengal which were primarily on the Left.²⁵⁶

Ahladi Mistri was the first of several deaths during the movement.²⁵⁷ In June of 1960 a large section of the camp population had decided to occupy a nearby vacant plot of land in the Sulonguri revenue village. This occupancy turned into a bitter fight between the local peasantry and the refugees. The locals were afraid of the refugee taking over land beyond what was reclaimed as part of the reclamation project and they also came to be backed by political parties. The occupying party was made up of refugees from Bagjola, Cooper's camp and Bongaon. Their squatting was bitterly contested by locals which ended in four deaths among the refugees with Ahladi Mistiri being the first.²⁵⁸

Nalini Ranjan Mondal, who was a young boy at the time, told me during an interview that the death was unexpected because at the time of the fighting she was sitting at her door and was not part of the scuffle. Apparently someone from the other side had brought a rifle and one of the first few shots accidentally claimed an innocent far away from the battlefield.

Even though the movement could not stall the process of closure of the camps it did create a foothold for the refugees in the area. When the camps did close, the refugees continued living in the area, reportedly at times on plots over “3

²⁵⁵ Nalini Ranjan Mondal, *Khandita Desher songrami Bangali*, (Hridaypur park, Nikhil bharaat prakashani, 2015)

²⁵⁶ Ibid P 66-67

²⁵⁷ Ibid, p 68

²⁵⁸ Jugantar, 27th June, 1960

cottahs”.²⁵⁹ The government had planned to densify the settlement by redistributing the plots and giving the ex-camp population some modicum of rehabilitation by building houses “back to back”²⁶⁰ on the existing land while also appropriating some of the land away from the refugees.

The review committee report on Bagjola, published in 1970, is a perfect example of how the rehabilitation apparatus placed refugee populations in the shadow zones of different townships. The report justifies at length why it was important to take up the rehabilitation of Bagjola as an important case once again. The primary argument for doing so was its contiguity to Ultadanga, Lake Town and Salt Lake.²⁶¹ One can also argue that Bagjola was responsible for the growth of many of the urban settlements that we will discuss in later chapters. The canal system that the refugees made in this area was crucial for draining and raising the waterlogged areas around it which later became the township of Rajarhat which has been briefly discussed in the first chapter. There was a consideration at one point of rehabilitating the refugees from the Bagjola Camp in the newly created Salt Lake town since the commercial value of the camp land had already outstripped the cost of other empty land plots in the vicinity. Since the projected cost of rehabilitation land in Salt Lake was 53.25 lakh, the price of land must have already been quite high in the camp area for that to seem comparatively cheap.²⁶² The committee of review had proposed that the 1065 ex-camp families be removed to Salt Lake to create commercial property at the Bagjola Camp site which amply proves the increased valuation of the land due to the investment of refugee labour.²⁶³

The Bagjola camp area has now been integrated into the urban area of the Kolkata Metropolis quite thoroughly and it recently became one of the

²⁵⁹ Committee of review of rehabilitation work in West Bengal; *Report on rehabilitation of displaced persons from East Pakistan living on the bagjola group of Ex-campsites*. (Calcutta, Government of West Bengal, 1970), p 3

²⁶⁰ Ibid p 4

²⁶¹ Ibid P 3-4

²⁶² Committee of review . *Rehabilitation of displaced persons from East Pakistan living on the Bagjola*, P 6

²⁶³ Ibid

constituent parts of the Bidhan Nagar Corporation. It can be argued that this was one of the modes of indirectly appropriating refugee labour by adding to the quantum of land available in the city, develop commercial property and infrastructure with the help of a labour force living on edge of bondage in work-site camps. The fall out of subsumption of Bagjola in the Bidhan Nagar Corporation will be discussed in the fourth chapter.

The Precarity of Economic Rehabilitation

Of approximately 80 lakh displaced persons 70 % were found to be below the poverty line in 1981. Of this 50% were at starvation level. Most of the economic plans for the rehabilitation of these refugees had failed to an extent where most of them had already closed down.²⁶⁴ The necessity of the moment was at least an additional 5 lakh jobs in West Bengal where it was near impossible to do so with any less investment than 25,000 INR per job. Needless to say, by then, no such investment was coming from the central government.²⁶⁵ The attention of policy makers remained turned therefore to existing small scale industries. Especially in West Bengal, because of a fairly diverse small scale sector, such imagination was still strong. This move was however a walking backwards of sorts. In 1964 itself Ashoka Gupta had commented that the small scale sector plans of economic rehabilitation were failing dismally and there was no possibility of rescuing them.²⁶⁶ She had argued with the authorities constantly for large scale organized sector industries for the employment of refugees.²⁶⁷ She had by then become a thorough convert from her days of designing domestic worker courses. Her disillusionment in fact came out of a great deal of stalling and funding crisis created by slow fund devolution and non-payment which destroyed some of her attempts for economic rehabilitation of refugees in the Dandakaranya development area. Throughout 1964 she carried on the process of trying to develop at least three

²⁶⁴ Samar Mukherjee, refugee Rehabilitation Committee report, (Calcutta, West Bengal Government, 1981) p 50

²⁶⁵ Ibid

²⁶⁶ Ashoka Gupta, Private Papers, NMML, Subject File 3, p 48

²⁶⁷ Ibid

different programmes of small scale or informal sector employment for refugees through the domestic worker programme, a programme of handicrafts²⁶⁸ and the condensed course run by the Kondagaon Mahila Mandal.²⁶⁹ Alongside this she kept trying to argue that without large scale industries near the big transit camps and important refugee concentration areas there was no possibility of actual economic rehabilitation. The Kondagaon Mahila Mandal limped on through the year and the next because the rehabilitation department did not send them their first fund disbursal.

Despite this situation the 1970s saw the investment in small scale sector continue. The master plan for refugee rehabilitation planned seven Industrial estates and 3 Industrial areas in refugee concentrated space in order to generate income for un-employed refugees. the problem was that with the highest possible investment of 10.23 crore it was possible to generate employment for 6,000 people while the refugee mass awaiting economic opportunities was, by conservative estimates, 30,000.²⁷⁰ Howrah, Hooghly, Birbhum, Nadia and Murshidabad were targeted at the time for textile based industries. The idea of textile based industries were thought of as especially helpful because they were expected to have the outcome helping the weaver communities increase production in their areas of growth.²⁷¹ The attention of the master plan also turned towards the question of rural industrialization since much of the refugee population was in fact living at the urban fringe in Nadia, 24 pargana and Jalpaiguri. The master plan envisaged an investment of 1.25 crore staggered over 5 years to create three rural industrial zones with extended employment capacity of 25,000 more jobs. The problem with such plans was simple. By the time new plans and some initiative came up older centres of refugee industry were already dying or dilapidated. By the time the master plan came up with the idea of broad rural industrialization, production centres opened in the 1960s

²⁶⁸ Ashoka Gupta, Private Papers, NMML, Subject File 4, p 50-52

²⁶⁹ Ashoka Gupta, Private Papers, NMML, Subject File 4, p 40

²⁷⁰ Refugee relief and rehabilitation department, A master plan for rehabilitation of displaced persons in West Bengal: 1973-1978. (Calcutta, Government of West Bengal, p 25)

²⁷¹ Ibid P 26

were already dying. The camp based production centres with 470 women workers were at the brink of shutting their doors due to chronic lack of raw material and orders for their produce. Similarly the Kamarhati bamboo production centre was in deep trouble with fund crunch, low production and low cell. With 100 direct employees and around 300 more indirect dependents this production centre like the others opened in the first era of economic rehabilitation had become spaces of dissolution where once again an exodus was happening along with dissolution of whatever minor entitlements had been built on top of this architecture.

Though I was not able to locate implementation records for these programmes the possibility was that none of these came to any grand conclusions. By the 1990s the state government had largely given up on the possibility of comprehensive financial solutions. The 1992 Package Proposal for refugee rehabilitation²⁷² overseen by Parasanta Sur was primarily focused on the housing question and relegated the question of employment and industry to a single annexure. Even the annexure was essentially the last few pages of the RR committee report²⁷³ submitted more than a decade back in 1981, with which we had started the discussion in this section.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have seen the rise and fall of the discourse on refugee employment. The investment in the productivity of the refugee was designed for the unorganized sector from very early on. The constant push for training coupled with the precarity of the economic structure built to house the work force meant periodic reshuffles in which a number of refugees would simply lose out and fall through the cracks of the system. What this meant for the refugee population was that they would periodically lose all entitlements built on the base of precarious employment and housing. The desertions that would

²⁷² Government of West Bengal, *Package Proposal for Rehabilitation of displaced persons in West Bengal, 1992*, (Kolkata, GOWB, 1992).

²⁷³ Samar Mukherjee, refugee Rehabilitation Committee report. P 50

follow would channelize them down paths that the rehabilitation machinery had already marked out for them. The enforced itinerancy that the refugees had to contend with is demonstrated in the preceding passages. With the understanding of the lower caste refugee population developed from this discussion we will now move to the next chapter where I trace their contemporary economic habitation.

Chapter Three:

Labouring at the Borders: Namasudra Refugees in Peri-Urban Kolkata

A Village at the Border of the City



Map 3: Location and approximate outline of Netajipally village (source: author)

Netajipally is a village at the border of Barasat municipality, located in the north-eastern fringe of the Kolkata Metropolitan Area (KMA).²⁷⁴ I was introduced to this village through refugee activists who had come to Delhi during the 2011 winter session of the Parliament to protest against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act of 2003 (2003 Act, here on), which had put them under immense pressure by adding a clause defining an ‘illegal immigrant’. These were refugees who had a history of multiple migrations across the West Bengal border going back one or two generations since the Partition of 1947. All of the refugee activists belonged to the Namasudra community and many of them had additionally faced discrimination while trying to make Scheduled Caste (SC) certificates. The local Panchayat had started asking for a citizenship certificate as part of the application process after the passing of the 2003 Act. This caste community was also the main component of the lower caste peasantry of erstwhile East Pakistan. It is now the most vociferous political group demanding extension of legal citizenship to late migrants to India from present day Bangladesh.²⁷⁵ They are part of a politically organized religious sect known as the Matuas. This community was one of the strongest forces in the pre-Partition lower caste movement in Bengal.²⁷⁶ The political contestations and processes that this group engages in, and how I came to travel with them will be discussed in the fifth chapter of this dissertation. In the following pages I will discuss the creation of an economic niche by this doubly disadvantaged population.

* All first names of respondents have been changed in this chapter. The caste names have been retained to give a sense of the social hierarchy. Only the names of elected Panchayat members are mentioned unchanged.

²⁷⁴The above figures are hand drawn outline maps showing the location of the area being discussed in this section. None of the maps in the paper are to scale. They are manual reproductions from various plan documents and low resolution photographs taken in the Kolkata Metropolitan Development Authority Library. They are reproduced here to give a sense of locations, administrative boundaries and direction of growth.

²⁷⁵See Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *Caste, Culture and Hegemony: Social Dominance in Colonial Bengal* (New Delhi: Sage, 2004). See also Praskanva Sinharay, "A New Politics of Caste," *Economic and Political Weekly* 47, no. 34, (2012): 26-27.

²⁷⁶See Bandyopadhyay, *Caste, Culture and Hegemony*.

The entry to the village is two and a half kilometers from the Barasat railway station which is at a half hour distance from the KMA by the suburban railway. The paddle van from the railway station plies through a landscape riddled with older middle-class refugee colonies like the Pioneer Colony and the Salbagan Government Sponsored Colony to get to the National Highway 34. It then takes a detour down a narrow street called Masjid Bari Road to suddenly enter a stretch of single storey houses with terracotta tiled roofs, a couple of three storey madrasa buildings, a small mosque and a forested old graveyard. Five hundred meters into the neighborhood, the deep blue façade of the Moonlight Club with its yellow stars and crescent moon stands at an angle from a turn into a slightly wider road. The Moonlight Club is the only Muslim dominated boys' club in the three revenue villages in the vicinity, in what used to be a primarily Muslim peasantry dominated area of North 24 Parganas before Partition.²⁷⁷ This turn is the beginning of the village that became the primary base of my ethnography of refugee lives at the periphery of Kolkata city. Netajipally had also been the staging ground for the political activities of the activist groups and refugee organizations that I studied at this time and will discuss at length in the final chapter of the dissertation. Several founding members of the Joint Action Committee for Bengali Refugees (JACBR) and the Association for the Refugees in India (AFRI) lived and worked in this village at the time. In addition to the political importance of the village I was intrigued by the burgeoning social and economic complexity of the space and its relation to the metropolis slowly moving towards it.

Of late, it is an area exhibiting rapid change in land-use. The local population is engaged mostly in non-agricultural activities in the construction sector or small scale manufacturing and petty trading. The population belongs mostly to the scheduled caste Namasudra community. Land prices have soared within the

²⁷⁷This was confirmed by a number of respondents from the neighboring villages. I spoke to members of the Moonlight Club on a few occasions and they confirmed that the village under discussion was primarily made up of erstwhile farmland of Muslim farmers from the Maynagadi and Chaturia areas. The space transformed in the mid to late 1980s when Namasudra refugees started coming to stay and bought the farmlands in bits and pieces.

village as areas across the neighbouring national and state highways have been brought under municipal administration and have consequently become the destination for real estate development and site for several large educational and industrial developments. Families from the village inform that the last vestiges of sharecropping, a widely practised seasonal occupation have disappeared from the area since around 2006-7. The village is currently under the administration of the Paschim Khilkapur Gram Panchayat²⁷⁸ adjacent to the areas brought under the administration of the Barasat Municipality in 1995.²⁷⁹

Approximate information about this village has to be pieced together from surveys of the revenue units (*mouza*), parts of which makes up the village. These revenue units are Chak Barbaria, Chaturia and Chak Chaturia. The village begins at the northern end of Napara and continues till Khilkapur along the link road branching away from National Highway 34. The name of the village appears in the household surveys done in the panchayat area and the list of Below Poverty Line (BPL) card holders and beneficiaries.²⁸⁰ The Rural Household Survey of 2005 lists 122 families of BPL card holders in the village. The 1999 Survey using the revenue units as its base, instead of listing BPL families, listed the number of landless families dependent on agricultural labour and registered significant figures against both Chak Barbaria (264 landless families) and Chaturia (62 landless families).²⁸¹

The Nirman Sahayak or the technical advisor for planning and development attached to the Paschim Khilkapur Gram Panchayat referred to the settlement quite clearly as a 'colony area'.²⁸² However, the residents prefer the term

²⁷⁸Gram Panchayat refers to the elected village council institutionalized as the lowest tier of the Indian democratic structure by the 74th amendment of the Constitution.

²⁷⁹Interview with Ajit Ray, elected member of Paschim Khilkapur Gram Panchayat, Netajipally, December 21, 2013.

²⁸⁰Rural Household Survey 2005 (After 1st Revision), District North 24 Parganas, Block Barasat-I, Paschim Khilkapur Gram Panchayat, p16-20.

²⁸¹Barasat-I, Police Station – Barasat, *Gramin Poribar Somuher Arthonoitik Ebong Peshagato Samikkhalabddho Karyakari Talika*, April 1, 1999.

²⁸²Interview with Krishna Saha, Paschim Khilkapur Gram Panchayat, December 14, 2013. 'Colony area' is both a popular and governmental term designating informal settlements. In West Bengal they carry the added meaning of being refugee settlements created in the aftermath of the 1947 Partition and the Bangladesh Liberation War. See Partha Chatterjee, *Politics of The Governed: Reflections on*

‘neighbourhood’ or ‘village’. They point out that it was founded in 1986 by the first set of migrant families from Khulna who had been displaced from their homes in the former East Pakistan by the ‘Liberation War’ of 1971.²⁸³ In 1995 Chak Chaturia was partly included within the municipality administered area and the revenue unit of Chak Barbaria was marked as a census town in the 2011 census.²⁸⁴

The village is an example of the spatial and economic changes considered characteristic of peri-urbanity. Its existence as a neighbourhood unit and a perceived village community is contradicted by its flickering administrative or legal legitimacy as a habitational unit. It is rare to find agricultural land in the village without the mark of concrete construction even though there is a moratorium on the conversion of agricultural land in the area. Whatever little exists is seamed with low single-brick walls defining plot boundaries of the pieces sold to buyers as residential holdings. It appears to house the population that serves as workforce in the urban ensemble – erstwhile marginal farmers, commuting daily wage labourers, lower level service workers for middleclass residential complexes and migrating construction workers whose families are sometimes split between three metropolitan cities (where sons work as construction worker in Chennai, daughters work as domestic help in Hyderabad and remaining members commute to Kolkata as daily wage labourers).²⁸⁵ Physically, the village occupies a space at the interstices of big developmental projects, embodying the peculiar transition from the not-urban to the urban.

Popular Politics in Most of The World (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 54. The suspect nature of colony spaces is an element of everyday discussions concerning these spaces. In the aftermath of a particularly visceral case of sexual violence in Barasat this was expressed in a newspaper article blaming ‘colony culture’ for the lack of women’s safety in the locality. See “Anatomy of a bloodstained mofussil,” *Times of India*, accessed January 14, 2017, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/kolkata/Anatomy-of-a-bloodstained-mofussil/articleshow/18683139.cms>. The Barasat Police Station held the dubious honour of highest number of reported crimes against women in the state of West Bengal with 2,800 complaints in 2012.

²⁸³For a detailed history of the conflict and displacement during the 1971 war, see Antara Datta, *Refugees and Borders in South Asia: the Great Exodus of 1971*(London and New York: Routledge, 2012).

²⁸⁴ Barasat-I, Village Directory, Census 2011, accessed on October 6, 2013, censusindia.gov.in.

²⁸⁵Interview with Adhir Biswas, December 20, 2013, Netajipally.

Since Netajipally has not yet completely passed into the jurisdiction of any institution of urban governance, it operates at the fringes of the planning discourse. The fragmentary documentation and an attentive stroll through the area is enough to suggest its deep material and political relations with the formally recognised urban area. It is an important case to track the relation of state policy to development at the urban fringe because in this village, unlike other places, predatory land acquisition and large scale infrastructural projects backed by the state have not taken place. It is a site where the spatial limits of the city are intertwined with the limits of citizenship²⁸⁶ - the proximity of the international border with Bangladesh getting coupled with the significant presence of the Namasudra community that has a long history of marginalisation in legal and social citizenship.

As mentioned earlier, land prices have soared within the village as areas across the neighboring national and state highways have been brought under municipal administration and become the destination for real estate development and the site for several large educational and residential developments.



Figure 3: Larica estate township project beside Barrackpore Road 2 (source: author)

²⁸⁶ArjunAppadurai and James Holston, "Cities and Citizenship," *Public Culture* 8, no. 2, (1996): 187-204.



Figure 4: Sprawling campus of a new privately owned technology institute and school
(source: author)

Interestingly, the Gram Panchayat website does not list Netajipally as a village under its administration. The existence of the village, however, is in evidence in the recent lists of voters' lists prepared for the Lok Sabha polls of 2014. From these lists an approximation can be made of the demographics of the village and the caste stratification of the village population. The voting population of the village in the provisional voters' lists of 2013, as recorded while being revised for the Panchayat elections, was 3906 with an overwhelming majority of lower caste families.²⁸⁷ The voters' lists locate the village within the revenue unit Chaturia *mouza* (revenue village). Residents and elected members of Netajipally village and elected members from it strongly prefer to call the settlement a village and point out that in 1986 the village was founded by the first few families from Khulna who had been displaced from their erstwhile residence in East Pakistan by the 'Liberation War' of 1971. They recall a founding ceremony presided over by Chitta Basu, an important leader of the refugee movement and a long time member of Parliament from the Barasat constituency belonging to the All India Forward Bloc. They further

²⁸⁷ The voters' lists were provided to me by the elected panchayat representatives from each of the booth areas. Voters' Lists - 2013, State - (S 25) West Bengal, Legislative Assembly Constituency – Madhyamgram (General), Parliamentary Constituency – Barasat (General), Rural, Paschim Khilkapur, Parts 40, 41, 42, 47 and 48.

clarify that the village originally encompassed parts of the three revenue units Chaturia, Chak Chaturia and Chak Barbaria. In 1995, when the last territorial extension of the Barasat municipality took place, Chak Chaturia was partially included within the municipality administered area and the revenue unit of Chak Barbaria was marked as a census town in the 2011 census.²⁸⁸

Land-Use Change and Changing Communities

Let us step back now to two sets of concerns marked earlier in the paper. One is the transformation of the Netajipally village into a periurban space and the other is the occupational destiny of Namasudra refugees. In this section we will attempt to construct an oral history of a population which is largely untraceable in the archives of the Refugee Rehabilitation Department. This is the ex-camp refugee population made up of deserters and late migrants. Many of the families have two sets of migration stories where the first generation had migrated to India during the partition of 1947 and then moved back to the erstwhile East Pakistan. The same families migrated with younger members two decades later following the intensification of the *Bhasha Andolan* and the 'Liberation War' in 1971. Several individuals as well as families went through the repatriation process in which they were relocated to Bangladesh after the cessation of hostilities between the MuktiJodha groups and the Pakistan army.²⁸⁹ Many of these repatriated families came back in the late 1970s and 1980s. This retelling is not, however, concerned with the migration itself, but the nature of habitation, livelihood and labour that this group demonstrates at present. We will begin with a retelling of a *Kirtan Gaan Utsav* (celebration accompanied by religious music) from a few years back.

A group of *Goshain*²⁹⁰ from Netajipally and neighboring villages came to visit Nilakantha Goshain²⁹¹ at his home one morning in May 2007 and offered

²⁸⁸Barasat-I, Village Directory, Census 2011, accessed on October 6, 2013, censusindia.gov.in.

²⁸⁹For a detailed history of the repatriation process, see Datta, *Refugees and Borders in South Asia*.

²⁹⁰ Not unlike several other Vaishnav communities, remarkably devout individuals are called *Goshain* among the Matuas. The respondents clarified while telling this story that there was a religious notion

begaar, a form of unpaid labour given as gift, for harvesting his crops from that season's sowing. *Begaar* had once been a form of appropriation of labour by landlords who would expect some amount of free labour from the *proja* (subject) on auspicious occasions, family celebrations like marriage or funeral and also during harvest from *khash* lands. In the case of Nilkantha Goshain, however, unpaid labour was offered as a gift to an exceptionally devout and hospitable member of the community. The land from which the crop was to be harvested was not owned by the Goshain. He would rent it each season and farm it, apparently to feed the guests at his next year's *Kirtan Gaan Utsav*. A group of villagers arrived at the fields adjacent to his home and under the red *nishan* (flag) of the Matua community, finished the harvest in a single day's work. For the day of the harvest, Nilkantha Goshain had hired a photographer who stayed with them the entire day and at night for the impromptu feast and musical gathering commemorating the event. Photographs from the event have now become an important part of the storytelling. The story is lent significance by the fact that the tilling of this plot of land came to an abrupt halt next year. Nilkantha was not the owner of the plot of land. He used to take it on rent from a Muslim farmer living in the neighboring village. The owner decided to sell the plot to a local land developer subsequent year. The land developer immediately erected a number of bamboo poles around the plot to mark out the boundaries with wire and to limit access. The fencing was left incomplete and by the time of my visit most of the bamboo poles were also missing. Even though the physical enclosure of the plot was not imposed with any great violence, the rent arrangement had been interrupted and the land fell into disuse.

of *begaar* which came very close to sounding like service given in the name of god. It was seen as a form of prayer in the way it was described.

²⁹¹Interview with Nilkantha Goshain (name changed), Netajipally, September 20, 2013.



Figure 5: The red flag in the above photograph is the “*nishan*” which is a sacred symbol in the Matua community²⁹² (source: Nilkantha Goshain)



Figure 6: Several older members of the community pose for photographs with traditional smoking instruments and bundles of the harvest (source: Nilkantha Goshain)

²⁹²The photographs of the celebration were provided by Nilkantha Goshain during an interview in May 2013. I photographed them sitting on his porch while he narrated the story for the first time. Over the next several months numerous other respondents mentioned this event to me as an important milestone in the life of the village.



Figure 7: All the members of the group that helped with the harvest(source: Nilkantha Goshain)



Figure 8: Eldest member of the group is photographed here with harvesting implements, bundle of paddy and pictures of the Matua pantheon of Gurus.(source: Nilkantha Goshain)



Figure 9: Musical celebration following the harvest(source: Nilkantha Goshain)



Figure 10: *Kirton Gaan Utsav* in 2007(source: Nilkantha Goshain)

The event depicted in the photographs above was not a regular practice when it took place. Nilkantha Goshain did not remember another such event taking place in the village before or after. The celebration captured above, though a community activity, does not necessarily signify a continuous engagement and

employment in agriculture for the Goshain. His occupational life was extremely diverse and the tilling of the land did not add substantially to his family's subsistence. He explained that he did it partly because he enjoyed it and partly because he could use the grain to feed guests during the winter festival of the Matuas.

The respondent had arrived in Barasat in the early 1970s. Following the disturbances in East Pakistan in 1969, he and his family had arrived in India along with other refugees from Fakirhat in Khulna. He had stayed in a refugee camp in Medinipur for duration of almost two years before being repatriated to the then newly liberated Bangladesh. After coming back to India in 1974, he started living with an acquaintance from his village in Khulna, who had settled in a government sponsored refugee colony in the early 1960s. This was the Salbagan Colony which is in the immediate neighbourhood of the Netajipally village and was one of the areas brought under the purview of the Barasat municipal administration during the territorial extension of KMA in 1995. He worked as a tube well *mistiri* (roughly translated as mechanic or several other skilled technical professions) in the area and periodically as an agricultural laborer for his host. He also took up carpentry to supplement his income by doing odd jobs in the neighboring town area.

He bought his homestead land in 1986 at INR 1,200 per *kottah*. In 2007, when the farmstead land which used to be rented out to him was sold, the prices had already reached INR 3 lakh per *kottah*.



Figure 11: A present-day photograph of the same area seen in the earlier photographs of the celebration (source: author, July 2014)

In the above picture we can see the present day situation of the same farmland. Certain differences are immediately noticeable. The horizon has changed with the urban area surging forward. Large part of the land has reverted to a wild and overgrown swamp having been abandoned for the last five years. Behind the first two bamboo huts are several medium sized concrete constructions which are three or more years old. Several such unfinished constructions dot the area.²⁹³ Nilkantha Goshain has now taken up sinking of tube wells as his primary occupation while periodically working as both a carpenter and a mason to supplement his income.

Nilkantha Goshain's narrative marks the transformation of a Namasudra refugee family in a period of forty odd years starting from the conflict driven displacement in 1969 and the stay in the refugee camp. This narrative gives us a link back to the history of rehabilitation spaces from the period after the 1947 Partition. It underscores that the margins of the Barasat municipality, and by extension Kolkata, retain links with early attempts at refugee rehabilitation through the government sponsored camp colonies. It is also important to mark

²⁹³ Interview with Anirban Mondal and Sunil Biswas (names changed), Netajipally, December 2013.

here that the refugee camps in West Bengal and in the Dandakaranya Development Authority area in the early 1950s as well as later in the 1970s, had an important investment in training the refugee population as labourers (as demonstrated in the earlier chapter).²⁹⁴ Several of the reports produced by the government in those years stressed the necessity of training the refugee population to engage in work in the numerous national infrastructural projects that were going on at the time. An Estimates Committee report mentioned the formation of a 'Rashtriya Vikas Dal'.²⁹⁵ The Vikas Dal was supposed to be a group of young travelling labourers who were meant to be transported to various sites for working on projects that would contribute to 'national development'. One can probably argue that there was something near prophetic in the bureaucratic imagination of the Vikas Dal since it seems to anticipate the destiny of footloose condition of the informal sector worker today. The above narrative seems to be in continuation with the project of refugee rehabilitation in which the camps and government sponsored colonies were meant to introduce peasant families to a different kind of labour and life.

Peri-Urban Transformation and New Economies

In the following table is the sample size and details of the types of occupations that I found in Netajipally village and its surrounding areas. The entirety of the sample is not made up of Netajipally residents. Due to the presence of four major labour contractors and promoters in the village, belonging to the Namasudra community, labourers from several neighboring settlements connected by the suburban railway line, the NH 34 or SH 2 regularly visit the village to get hired by the labour contractors or to receive their pay. I also traveled up to Guma, four stations to the north of Barasat to interview labourers who had originally been tenants in Netajipally but later bought land farther away from the city and moved away. For the residents of this area this moving

²⁹⁴See B. S. Guha, *Memoire No. 1* (Delhi and Calcutta: Manager of Publications, 1954). See also Estimates Committee, 71st Report (3rd Lok Sabha), (New Delhi: Lok Sabha Secretariat, 1979); Government Of India, *Working Group on The Residual Problem of Rehabilitation in West Bengal* (New Delhi: Ministry of Supply and Rehabilitation, 1976).

²⁹⁵Estimates Committee, 71st Report (3rd Lok Sabha), (New Delhi: Lok Sabha Secretariat, 1979), 48.

away from the city is generally a marker of progress because the new plot of land signifies a considerable increase in wealth.

The variety of occupations in Netajipally and its surrounding areas is testament to the intensity of economic diversification among a refugee population in transition. At the same time it is also a sign of the space inhabited by this population which too is in transition between the rural and urban. The sample, however, in continuity with the initial section of this chapter is entirely made up of individuals who had their origins in present day Bangladesh. A significant portion had either direct or family experience with life in refugee camps. The camps, camp colonies, transit camps and rehabilitation villages mentioned by my respondents covered a swathe of the national territory. In the list of camps mentioned by my respondents there were camps in nearby districts like the Salboni camp of Midnapore while there were also respondents who had been residents of the Mana Bhata camp which is now part of the property of Raipur Airport in Chattisgarh.

The work in this section, however, is not a project of oral history of camp life. For me the more important task was to figure out the precise economic and functional space that this population came to inhabit. The “finality of government” after all, as Foucault reminds us, “resides in things it manages and in the pursuit of the perfection and intensification of the processes which it directs”.²⁹⁶ Deriving our direction from the historical reconstruction of this population’s emplacement as demonstrated in the previous chapter, we will go ahead with extending our understanding of the specific niche that this population came to occupy.

²⁹⁶Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller, *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, 95.

OCCUPATION	SUB-TYPES & SAMPLE
1. Land Developers	a. Tout (28) b. Small procurer (15) c. Promoter (8)
2. Skilled Laborers (<i>Mistiri</i>)	a. Master mason [<i>Raj Mistiri</i>] (38) b. Plumber (14) c. Tube well mechanic (9) d. Carpenter (30) e. Bamboo workers (6) f. Electrician (18) g. Painter (7)
3. Labor Contractors	a. Big contractors [more than 30 employees] (6) b. Medium contractors [less than 30 employees] (17) c. Small Contractors [less than 10 employees] (21)
4. Daily Labor	a. Earth Work (40) b. Agriculture (17 full time) (82 part time) c. Construction (94) d. Small industry [textile, welding, packaging] (14)
5. Transport	a. Paddle Rickshaw (6) b. Paddle Van (passenger - 30) (goods - 14) c. motorized van (Passenger - 27) (goods - 20)
6. Fish trade	a. Door to door (8) b. Shop (30) c. Fishing [part time - 22] d. Fish Dressing (8)
7. Shop keeper	a. Formal (32) b. Informal (14)
8. Workshops	a. Gloves (26) b. Plastic bottle (8)

	c. Quilts (38) d. Plastic garlands (40)
9. Scrap resale	(9)
10. Tailor	a. Ready-made for domestic market (26) b. Export (18)
11. Musician/traditional theatre	(Part-time 28)
12. Domestic Work	a. Wage only/shift work [<i>Thika</i>] (62) b. Full Time/Meals provided [<i>Khawa Pora</i>] (6)
13. Finance	a. Collective/Samiti (23) b. Individual (17)

Table 6: Ethnographic sample (source: author)

*1 - Total respondents – 844

*2 - Direct experience in refugee camp – 86

*3 - Ex-Camp/G.S. colony family member – 292 (from rehabilitation spaces outside of West Bengal – 130)

*4 - Multiple cross-border transitions –264

All respondents were of Namasudra Hindu and of East Bengali origin

With the transformation of the village new occupations have become increasingly important. Both late and early partition refugees come in the village in search of economic belonging.



Figure 12: Gloves manufacturing workshop in the village (source: author)



Figure 13: Motorized sewing machines for industrial gloves (source: author)

The above photographs show us a glove making workshop in the village. The workshops were less than a hundred square feet in area. It housed three tables with sewing machines and a number of heavy plastic buckets for soaking the gloves. The remaining floor space was taken up by two women from the village

trimming the material for the gloves. The sewing machines were adapted from foot paddled manual machines around a decade old. They had been refurbished by mechanics in a workshop in Basirhat. The foot pedal had been linked to a small motor which was connected to the spinning wheel to the right of the machine. The needle point had been widened and given extra support to punch through the thick rexine used to make the gloves. The tiny motors whirred and whizzed all day while the owner explained his relative success in running the workshop when compared to other residents of the village who had tried and failed to get their businesses going.

“It is all in the motors you see” he had explained “I got the Chinese motors from Siliguri”.²⁹⁷ There is an array of choices when it comes to motors – repurposed motors from old pumps were the most available and cheapest options alongside motors made by local manufacturers in the district. The local or repurposed motors were popular till the early 2000s and there was a thriving economy of spare parts shops and roving mechanics who would service motors on site. By the time I had started my fieldwork most of the shops for fixing repurposed motors in or near the village were shut and even the ones on the nearby highway were slowly changing their custom and selling ‘Chinese motors’. These new motors were more fuel efficient and could run from car batteries. They were low cost and light weight so they could be strapped onto the base of the sewing machine rather than standing to the side. The only downside, some of the other owners of glove workshops felt, was that they were not repairable. Apparently, once a ‘Chinese motor’ broke, it had to be replaced entirely. The diverse chain of intermediate commodities and petty production networks that connect such villages with circuits of global capital are varied and they are connected not only to the border economy contiguous to their own habitation but an entire system of borders spanning a vast horizon.

A large part of the population has taken up petty manufacturing trades. Several men and women of the village are now employed in these gloves making

²⁹⁷Interview with Haradhan Mondal, Netajipally, June 18, 2013.

workshops run by slightly well-off members of the community. Several families manufacture quilts for bulk orders which are then sold in Kolkata and in other states. Walking through the village one finds strange resonances of these changes reflected in the everyday lives of the village population. Consider the photograph below.



Figure 14: A house of silk (source: author)

The above house stood out against the background of the wild growth surrounding it. The family living there produced quilts in the winter season. The walls of the house were draped in a tapestry of randomly selected pieces of silk and synthetic textile sheets left over from the season's raw material. To the back of the house sit large bales of cotton waiting for the orders of the upcoming season.

The transformation of the area has given rise to different networks of migration and labour. Along with the fringe of Kolkata's urban economy the village has become more and more connected to a national and global network of labour. The gloves made in the workshops travel to a whole seller and warehouse owner in Nadia district and then to the far away shores of Portugal. One respondent, after being assured of anonymity, recounted his travels from India

to the Andaman Refugee camps, and coming back only to leave for Bangladesh and then returning to India in the 1980s and settling down in the village.²⁹⁸ Another respondent gave a short description of his family's occupational travels that spanned the length and breadth of the country.²⁹⁹ While his son worked periodically as a driver in Mumbai and a construction worker in Kochin, his two daughters worked as domestic helps in Bangalore and Hyderabad. He had himself arrived in the village after being evicted from a squatter colony in the mid 90s. The existence of the colony he spoke of was underscored by several other respondents from the village. The Talikhola colony, from these retellings seems to have been a squatter colony populated mostly by migrants from Bangladesh in the early 90s. After the territorial extension of the Barasat municipality in 1995 this colony was evicted from the margins of the SH 2.

The above stories describe how a lower caste refugee population came to fill the labour deficit at the fringe of the city while living in conditions of subsistence in the city's periphery. The respondents connect the older refugee population and several rehabilitation spaces that spread out from the peripheries of the city of Kolkata and spread through the country. The space of transition at the urban periphery of Kolkata – the space between the urban and the non-urban – came to be populated by people and families which have travelled through the channels of the refugee rehabilitation apparatus. One can here begin to formulate a tentative understanding of a governmental allocation of a population with a history of multiple displacements to a zone of transition between the agrarian and the urban. The fluid and transforming space at the urban periphery comes to be inhabited by a population that itself straddles the cusp between the agrarian and the urban in their history. The story of the growth of the city, the informal economies and the migrant settlements at the border of the city intersects here with the stories the de-peasantization of the refugee population. The borders of caste and how its expression in the effects

²⁹⁸ Interview with Subir Mallick (name changed), Netajipally, September 2013.

²⁹⁹ Interview with Asit Biswas (name changed), Netajipally, September 2013.

of Partition leads it to coincide with the borders of urban development, can also be underlined in this narrative.



Figure 15: The last house of the village, facing the city across unused and already sold agricultural land (source: author)

Both, the idea and the design of the inquiry of this chapter, closely resembles the insights generated by Ranabir Samaddar's study of the 'immigrant niche' and the creation and growth of Namasudra settlements in the territory between Barasat and Bongaon. Ranabir Samaddar has demonstrated, especially in relation to Thakurnagar and its outlying settlements that there was a surprisingly steep growth of population in these areas in terms of census data and registered voters in the late 1970s and early 1980s.³⁰⁰ What the stories from my respondents confirm is that these migrants had a history of negotiating and travelling through the corridors of the rehabilitation apparatus. Therefore, the

³⁰⁰Ranabir Samaddar, *The Marginal Nation: Trans-border Migration from Bangladesh to West Bengal* (New Delhi: Sage, 2003), 96-99.

creation of the niche that Samaddar locates in caste and affinal ties was also bolstered by a governmental process of population production.³⁰¹ He locates the state actors within the ambit of affinal response as well when he documents cases where security personnel at the border may view migrating hindus with greater lenience than migrating muslims.

The fact of migration is well demonstrable and so are the global similarities of the situation since a large portion of the Bangladeshi population makes up much of international and especially South and East Asian migration networks. The focus of this chapter is not whether people are moving and how. I am interested in the labour process of this population, the processes of work and accumulation that these communities nurture and the forces they unleash, which, I will argue are the primary force of spatial and economic transition of the Kolkata urban periphery in the present day.

The Profit of Wage

The sector which attracted the largest number of workers from my sample was construction. Most of these construction workers were working in peri-urban building projects in Kerala, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh. Arrays of skills that this population demonstrated were all necessary components in the arena of construction. Plumbers, electricians and carpenters migrated almost as frequently as master masons and daily laborers in the construction sector. The construction sector in India is generally considered one of the most predatory and extractionist work environments in the country.³⁰² I was somewhat baffled by the vehemence with which my respondents working in the sector defended their choice to work in it and argued that the sector was the best destination for an *enterprising* young man, especially if they were willing to step out of their home state of West Bengal. My respondents from among the construction sector workers would often state,

³⁰¹Ibid, 101-102.

³⁰²Ravi S.Srivastava, *Bonded Labor in India: Its Incidence and Pattern* (International Labor Office, 2005), 26.

“There is *profit* in construction; there are opportunities for *business* if you work hard enough.”³⁰³ The word profit was not used in a general sense of the work being rewarding or gainful in comparison to other employment. My respondents invested significant meaning in the claim as they thought that the opportunities they were alluding to made them self-employed (স্বনিযুক্ত) and autogenous (স্বনির্ভর).³⁰⁴

In India, the construction sector has a history of using low technology³⁰⁵ and bolstering the production process with numerous workers³⁰⁶. So the sector has a great need of cheap manpower. Since there is a need for many times the number of workers than would be necessary in a more mechanized sector, kinship ties are used to get workers from similar places and backgrounds into similar work processes.

A number of my respondents were engaged in a common building activity that needs multiple skills and complex co-operation among workers. My respondents called this activity *centering*. It is the process for making the beams and pillars that form the main load bearing skeleton of modern day buildings. The process involves three distinct stages, materials and skills. The first step of the process involves making a metal cage of wires and rods that forms the internal structure of the beam or pillar. In the next stage, workers tie slats of wood onto the metal skeleton to create a chamber of uniform volume around it. In the last stage a concrete mix is poured into the chamber and allowed to set to finish the beam. Each pillar or beam has a team of labourers working on it at a time. Each pillar is considered a finished piece or component

³⁰³The idea of construction work being profitable came from labourers and contractors. This was particularly intriguing since the contractor's mode of appropriating portion of the labourers wage can actually qualify as accumulation it is hard to think of the workers wage as profit.

³⁰⁴My interpretation and analysis of the 'meaning making' mechanisms embedded in self descriptions given by labourers is intellectually indebted to Sharad Chari's work on the "Self-made men" of Tiruppur. See Sharad Chari, *Fraternal Capital: Peasant-Workers, Self-Made Men, and Globalization in Provincial India*(Orient Blackswan, 2004).

³⁰⁵Rina Maiti, "Workload assessment in building construction related activities in India," *Applied Ergonomics* 39, no. 6, (2008): 754-765.

³⁰⁶E. Koehn and S. Reddy, "Safety and construction in India," in *Implementation of Safety and Health on Construction Sites*, ed. Amarjit Singh et al. (Rotterdam: A.A. Balkema, 1999), 39-45.

in the building process. The counting of the pillars by piece allowed for a specific work and payment arrangement that seems to be unique to this form of work.

In the early days of the ethnography, I wanted to understand the level of wage difference that may induce such significant levels of migration away from the state. According to data published by the National Buildings Organization in 2012, an unskilled male labourer in Kerala (an important destination for labourers from West Bengal) earned considerably more than a master mason working in West Bengal.³⁰⁷ My respondents, especially the labourers, argued that even though the wage differential looked significant in terms of the quantity of pay on the books it did not necessarily translate into a big gain. A significant part of the cash gained by migrating to a high wage state was lost in paying for food and board in labour colonies in the construction sites.³⁰⁸ Significant amounts from the 'Money wage'³⁰⁹ was spent on maintenance away from home; which eroded the quantum of 'real wage'³¹⁰ gained by the workers involved in processes paying daily wages. The *profit* was not considered enough by the workers to induce migration by itself. At times this even created debt due to delayed wage payment on sites which forced the workers to borrow on the basis of payment backlogs. However, both workers and medium level labour contractors employing and transporting up to fifty laborer teams to various states and construction sites confirmed that piece rate³¹¹ payment which could be negotiated in the centering process was the main attraction for the migrant workers.

³⁰⁷ Shobhana K., "Kerala pay too irresistible for Bengal," *The Telegraph*, October 4, 2012, accessed January 12, 2017, https://www.telegraphindia.com/1121004/jsp/nation/story_16050826.jsp.

³⁰⁸ This understanding was fleshed out through multiple sittings for group interviews with migrant Namasudra construction workers in Netajipally between May and September 2014.

³⁰⁹ In classical political economy 'money wage' is derived by distributing the so called 'wage fund' among workers in terms of the quantum of pay available in terms of local currency, as part of the social value accruing to the individual labourer in relation to the elastic exploitation of their individual labour power. See Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume I* (London: Penguin Books. 1982), 760.

³¹⁰ 'Real wage' is 'money wage' expressed in terms of the actual quantity of the means of subsistence that can be bought with it at a given point of time. See Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 665.

³¹¹ Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 692-700.

The piece rate payment negotiation that they described was a curious one. Several contractors and experienced master masons with experience of working in several construction sites in Kochin described a process which they named the *hajira* system of payment. Since the word *hajira* translates to ‘attendance’ the easiest way to understand it in a political economy framework is to think of it as daily wage which is just another way of saying time-wage.³¹² The labourers I interviewed, however, insisted on qualifying it as piece rate *payment* (many respondents preferred to use this word instead of the older word *majuri* which means wage) and their gains from it as *profit*. Several of my unskilled labourer (সোঁগাড়ে) respondents saw themselves as budding contractors due to their extensive experience in securing such informal sub-contracts. Their self-descriptions were replete with aspiration towards becoming self-employed or autogenous (স্বনির্ভর). The self description was also attached to their understanding of their earnings as profit.

The payment system they described required a granular sense of ever percolating sub-contracts informally negotiated in the construction site. This is also why the counting of pillars as individual pieces is a significant move. After working in a construction site for the first few weeks, a few workers, often belonging from the same community, village or neighborhood would collectively bargain with the supervisor on site to take informal sub-contracts for building a number of pillars for which they will be paid a quoted amount. They would band together and speed-up works on the allotted pieces or pillars. The idea is to finish the piece work as quickly as possible so as to be able to earn the full pay for the pillars before the time-wage could catch up to their quoted amount. The supervisor in the construction site, however, does not record this as a separate sub-contract. He records it as *extra attendance* - awarding multiple attendances each day to the workers who had negotiated the informal and invisible sub-contract. It is a strange turn since the payment is construed very differently at opposite ends. While the accounting for the

³¹² Ibid, 683-691.

payment records it as intensified time-wage, the workers see it as profit gained from independent sub-contract.

The Marxist political economy approach bypasses the importance of framing these kinds of payment arrangements in the terms in which the worker sees it. Firstly, Marx has argued that there is actually no difference or gain to be made by the worker in working for piece-rate since at the level of the general economy of production. The individual gains made by competing workers are lost in the balancing acts of abstract social value.³¹³ Secondly, Breman argues that such sub-contracts are essentially “wage-work agreements”³¹⁴ which are mediated and indirect. He is staunchly opposed to qualifying them as self-employment since they are not “own-account work”.³¹⁵ However, if one were to step outside of the framework of assessing and categorizing payment arrangements as part of the general economic aggregate then it will become important to take the labourers self-description as a self-employed person will become important as a social function especially in terms of understanding neo-liberal capital. Vinay Gidwani has recently demonstrated that one can analyse payment arrangements and workers preference towards piece-rate payments through an understanding of local caste dynamics and the historically structured competitions between particular communities. This competition, he argues, manifests in the preference for competitive payment arrangements.³¹⁶ He substantially demonstrates how cultural logic can define and structure the wage contract in a given context. In a similar vein, I will like to take the self-descriptions of the workers as an index of certain social forces being expressed in a culture of enterprise and profit making. The workers who insisted on calling their earnings *profit* were also deeply invested in certain financial processes in the village. They defined these financial practices as

³¹³ Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 1032-1033.

³¹⁴ Jan Breman, "The study of industrial labour in post-colonial India—The informal sector: A concluding review," *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 33, no. 1-2, (1999): 407-431.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*

³¹⁶ Vinay Gidwani, "The Cultural Logic of Work: Explaining Labour Deployment and Piece-Rate Contracts in Matar Taluka, Gujarat-Parts 1 and 2," *Journal of Development Studies* 38, no. 2, (2001): 57-108.

investment. This nomenclature was given many a times in English in interactions with elected panchayat representatives, younger labourers and labour contractors. Other workers, a great majority of them spoke in terms of *taka khatano* (making your money work). The financial practice I am speaking of here is the informal finance network that spans the local village economy in interesting ways. The primary institution that maintains this network and forms the nodal point of money circulation in the village economy is the *samiti*. It can be translated to association, committee or board. In the village it works as an informal banking system, maintaining and regulating cash flows and directing it towards emerging economic opportunities and most importantly functioning as the primary organ of accumulation at the village level.

Informal Accumulation: *Samitis* and the Land Market



Figure 16 The Banner of a local Samiti : (source: author)

Samiti is the preferred name of local informal credit institutions in the village of Netajipally. Several smallbamboo and thatch kiosks shine through the night in the alleys of the village market. Hopeful names like *Surjodaya Samiti* (Sunrise Association) and *Dhanalakshmi Samiti* (named after the goddess of riches andprosperity) populate the alleys. These kiosks are centres of activity for the young male population of the village, divided across smaller neighbourhood units. The Samitis provide three main services to the village population (a) daily savings schemes with an annual payment of the saved

amount with a small interest,(b) small loans for emergencies between INR. 1,000 and INR. 15,000, (c) large loans to land developers and promoters involved in the local land market, (d) mediating land deals between the local peasantry and buyers from among the local builders and promoters or individual buyers from the neighbouring municipal areas.⁴⁷ This mediation has three main components: (a) information concerning availability of land in the neighbouring areas; (b) negotiating the amount and mode of payment along with the number of instalments if the sale is financed by the particular *Samiti*; (c) investing the *Samiti*'s accumulated capital in large land deals and housing projects initiated by local builders and promoters in the form of large loans. These loans vary in size depending upon the project and the size of the *Samiti*'s capital.⁴⁸

The number of savings accounts held by the associations and the small amount of daily deposits (ranging from INR. 5 to INR. 50 daily) however, do not explain the immensity of the local land market and the speed of land use transformation. Loans to land developers undertaking large projects can range from INR. 10 to 30 lakh.⁴⁹ The majority of the capital seems to arrive once or twice a year with the return of the migrant construction worker population to the village. Migrant construction workers form by far the largest occupational group among the working male population of the village. Most of this population travels to growing urban centres and urban peripheries in Kerala, Maharashtra, Goa, Delhi and Chennai to work in the construction industry for six to eight months a year, returning when building activities slump during the monsoon. The workers and the labor contractors bring back the entire periods savings and a portion of this remittance goes in as 'investment' to the *Samitis*, which are very often controlled by the labor contractors. This capital fuels much of the speculation in the local land market.

The *Samitis* act as nodes of accumulation and speculation at the lowest level of the peri-urban social field. They mediate between networks of other local

institutions like clubs, neighbourhood development committees and the land developers and elected panchayat representatives.

The *Samitis* themselves are a remnant of an older practice that disappeared in the early 1990's. When the first set of local land developers had opened shop they had fulfilled three separate functions of labor contractor, material supplier and project developer. At that time it was common practice to withhold a portion of the workers' wages as security till the end of the project. Portion of the wage was appropriated by the developer as a 'fund' for the 'welfare' of the worker, as an annual savings fund.

Kamal Mondal and Saroj Biswas, two of the most important land developers and builders in the village mentioned to me that they had envisaged a full-scale provident fund like savings service for their laborers. Both Kamal and Saroj had worked as migrant construction laborers in Mumbai in the early 1990s. Both of them argued that as workers they felt an acute insecurity in terms of money while sending money home since it meant that for a while at least they had no funds for any contingencies or accidents that may happen either in their work-place or back home. Saroj Biswas in a long conversation argued that the reason for their being only four or five successful businessmen in the village was the lack of 'savings and investment culture'. Both Kamal Mondal and Saroj Biswas had started a *Samiti* in 1994 in the village while they were still working as laborer and labor contractor in Mumbai. They had started the *Samiti* with their own saved capital and had started giving small loans and also a little bit of interest to members of the *Samiti*. The first of these *Samitis* had limited their functions largely to the group that contributed the initial capital and to people who opened savings accounts with them.

Bhabotosh Biswas or Doctor Bhabotosh was the only other character from the village running a *Samiti* back then. He was also one of the first generation land developer and speculator. His model for the *Samiti* was vastly different. He would take up plots of land on loan and then draw up a diagram with the help of local land surveyors and municipal engineers to plot the land as a settlement.

He did this across several nearby municipalities like New Barrackpore, Madhyamgram and Barasat. He would then take prospective buyers from the neighbouring villages to see the plot and deposit a small amount with him as advance for a plot of land in the larger area of development. These were not necessarily people interested in taking up residence in that plot of land. This advance bought them the right to transfer that land to other buyers for a higher advance there by selling their informal claim to the land, they could end up buying the plot after the development or even pull out of the project with a high one time return on their original deposit by returning the land to Bhabotosh after the development was completed. Bhabotosh's *Samiti* folded when a land deal went bad in Madhyamgram and Bhabotosh had to sell the rest of his holdings along with his two three story houses in the village of Netajipally. I was told this story by the current resident of one of those houses while I was trying to track down the story of *Samitis* in netajipally. The respondent was an elected member of the panchayat. The *Samiti* started by Saroj and Kamal was aimed at the migrant construction workers from the village. It was not yet a part of land speculation. I came to know of it originally from several other younger labor contractors and construction workers in the village who had originally been employed by either Kamal or Saroj. Many of those early respondents cited delayed payments as one of the reasons why they stopped contracting or working with Saroj and Kamal. The stories seemed to be more than just skimping on wages. It was a systematic story of not only delayed but 'withheld wage'. The *Samiti* would apparently keep back a percentage of the wage from the laborer as payment to an informal provident fund maintained by the builders and labor contractors. The fund promised a one-time payment with heavy interest at the end of 10 years. Several workers complained that they were not able to get their money back while they needed it and they had to lose substantial amounts of the principal amount while leaving the contractor's employ. Kamal explained to me during one interaction that he had believed that by making available the infrastructure of savings he was helping create a culture of financial prudence and an understanding of 'how money works'. The

rise of these *Samitishas* to be seen within the larger context of what these builders and contractors called the “money market”. This was also the moment when several big informal savings schemes and chit-funds like Sarada, Ramel, Rose Valley, Sunshine Heaven and Shyamel were being regularly exposed on media for being unable to return deposits in cash or in kind and several districts across eastern India were up in arms against leaders of ruling parties for having contacts with the controlling interests in these companies. One of my respondents, a labor contractor and the head of a *Samiti* told me that while it was important to catch thieves who ran away with poor people’s money it was also important to have an appreciation for what the ‘money market’ had done for the country. He mentioned how Ramel a chit fund (ponzi scheme) that had just been caught in a scandal, was the financial wing of a construction company that channelized money into the building sector in North 24 parganas. He claimed it was the capital behind the transformation of the areas neighbouring the national highway 34 where builders used money from Ramel’s fund to buy up land and to finance several housing projects in the area. It is this coming together of the two models of the *Samiti*, the land based and wage based models that fueled the emergence of big builders from the Namasudra community. In 2003 several workers and contractors from the village protested against Kamal Mandal and Saroj Biswas and forced them to give some of the money back from their informal provident fund *Samiti* which they had started almost a decade earlier. By then however these two individuals had already left their lives as labor contractors far behind and become major players in the local land development market.

The administration of such informal savings funds was parallel to the process of activating the local land market. The financial institution and its commercial counterpart broke apart with increasing specialisation in the sector as these original businesses became increasingly unable to administer the fund along with the business. The first few of the funds were administered by relatives of land developers or local government contractors and private labor contractors. From the early 2000’s however the local financial institutions (*Samiti*) began to

become independent components of the land market and the local mode of accumulation. This becoming independent meant that the *Samitis* were now outside of the control of local businessmen in term of direct appropriation of the wages of their employees. At this point the village residents were already in the habit of depositing money in order to gain interest or to consciously deposit money into *Samitis* known for their connections with big land development businesses.

Conclusion

During my fieldwork in Netajipally and the neighbouring villages I was struck by the use of economic language to talk about life. One of my main contacts in the village, Dasarath had started calling me a historian- a historian of labour. Time and again, he would argue with people how the entire village and in fact much of West Bengal and Calcutta were made by refugee hands and that it was essential that at least somebody knows and writes the history of this labour, so that some justice can be done to the refugees.

At the time several CPI(M) activists in the locality had started a rumour that I was a detective pursuing illegal immigrants and making secret reports to the mobile task force for their arrests. Dasarath's introduction of me as a historian helped me get some access to my field in those initial days, but it did something extremely interesting to the way that narratives were presented to me. I found that most of my conversations would deal with names of occupations that any particular respondent would have gone through or practiced at some point in their lives. This was to make the claim that their work was somehow responsible for the development of Bengal and India at large. However, these conversations were precisely lacking in the kind of work space detail that we find in tracts of labour sociology and labour history. There was always a common thread of my respondents saying that 'a refugee can do anything'. This complete generalization of the refugee's labour power made details of particular work processes irrelevant. This persona built upon generalized labour power had very few chinks in its armor. It seemed a total

and complete spelling out of refugee rights on the basis of their labour. The second component of this story telling was the discussion of money. Here a large part of the story was told in terms of investment, profit, loss, gambling and deposits. I found far greater detail in this second layer of conversations as compared to the first more generalized discussion of occupations. For the first several months of my ethnography, this financial language seemed to pervade every single moment of my respondents' story telling. So overwhelming was the presence of this terminology that I had in fact thought of this form of narrativizing as an outcome of a popular socialist language meeting grassroots exchange ethics to form a highly monetized language of labour rights.

The Samiti as an institution gives an important lens to us in order to discern the importance of this heavy economic language. The understanding of wage as profit was not a matter of adding dignity to occupation. It also played the function of legitimizing the entire process of accumulation in which the wage of the worker was appropriated as investment. In a reversal of Vinay Gidwani's argument which we have discussed in the earlier section on the question of piece wage and inter-community competition I will argue that instead of culture governing the preference of work process it is possible that certain kinds of work processes become entangled in the meaning making process of the worker. In the case of the Namasudra Refugee then it can be argued that the Hajira system and the granulated contract is part and parcel of the way that the refugee decides to use the wage as investment in the local land economy. though the beginning of the process was through coercion by the community's leading businessmen, over time the neo-liberal ideological language of entrepreneurship became part and parcel of explaining the process of work. In order to think of sub-contract arrangements in this vain it is also important to underline that the way in which Breman argues about not categorizing mediated work as sub-contract or "own account work" is problematic. This is not so because the argument takes away the agency of self description from the respondent but because without the framing of wage as profit the arrangement of *Samiti* as a local investment bank will actually falter. The capacity to think

of the money wage earned from intense self-exploitation structured through the hajira system derives from the new framing given to the income as an amount already in circulation rather than as the cost of reproduction of labour.

Chapter Four:

AT THE EDGE OF URBAN LAND AND GOVERNANCE: MAPS OF THE STATE AND REFUGEES

An Impossible Address: Land Survey and social ambiguity

Recently, the Trinamool regime in West Bengal decided to amalgamate the Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation department with the West Bengal Land and Land Reform Department.³¹⁷ The difference between the filing and titling systems of the two departments and their incompatibility was perceived as a governance problem that stalled the process of land records digitization, the state government took the decision to merge the two departments as part of the streamlining of administration process.³¹⁸ This effectively did two things A) the spatial data concerning refugee spaces was consolidated into the publicly available data on land and that made it visible to the land market beyond the local community of refugees and B) the indirect protection offered by the presence of a specific department adding a layer of negotiation between the modernizing policy and the refugee groups was removed. To understand the

³¹⁷ Government of West Bengal; Finance Department, Budget Branch, *No: 1505-F.B.; Howrah 6th February, 2017*:<https://wbxpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/1505-FB.pdf>, (accessed 20th February, 2017)

³¹⁸ The decision was endorsed by the Left Front regime in 2008. See Government of West Bengal. *Report of the Expert Committee on administrative reform*, (Kolkata, 2008)

impact of this re-organization of records and land governance it is important for us to understand the direct impact of such transformation upon the refugee community. The story narrated over the next few paragraphs is a representative of many stories of refugees struggling to hold on to their precarious occupancy of land threatened by changing procedures of land department.

On 22nd January, 2015, Mr. Atindra Biswas (name changed) lost his home for the second time in his life³¹⁹. He was a refugee from East Pakistan who had registered with the Ghusuri camp for refugees in 1951 according to the dole card that he showed to me. Later he had moved to a work camp in Bagjola. Bagjola is a well-known camp settlement for refugees in north-eastern Kolkata. He became a resident of Camp no. 3 in late 1950's. When I interviewed him in the December of 2016 he had lost the home he had built in the camp over 40 years of working as an informal labourer. On 22nd January the police had arrived with an order of evacuation for him and his family. The plot on which he had built his house in the refugee camp was legally claimed by another person, who had filed a suit and won. The story is folded around several changes in the ownership and acquisition of the camp land. Apparently, the land was temporarily requisitioned by the state government in the early 1950's. On 10th April 1978 a large section of the camp land was vested in the state by a gazette notification.³²⁰ One section of it was released back to the original

³¹⁹ I had two conversations with Atindra Biswas (first name changed), on 20th and 22nd December of 2016. He showed me several photographs from the day of the demolition mentioned in this story. His daughter in law had taken intermittent video footage of the demolition on a small phone which was later given to me by a local refugee activist. As a record of what happened that day, these photographs were not of much use. They simply show a number of men, some in uniform and some not, removing bamboo poles, broken roof tiles and small odds and ends of domestic life. Some of the shots show police men standing in a first floor room with the wall knocked down. Taken from low angles, as if while concealing the phone, the photographs are always partially obstructed by trees and hanging branches or blurred to some extent. One of the photographs showed the legal notice pasted before demolition by the police. However, it was pasted on a corrugated tin sheet and the wavy surface made the case number illegible so there was no possibility of my tracing the legal paperwork of the case.

³²⁰ I saw a faded photocopy of the notification with a local member of the Communist Party of India (Marxist). The upper half of the document had faded away altogether. I was unable to ascertain the exact date of this acquisition. However, an RR&R department official in the Barasat branch, which administers the camp area confirmed that the land acquisition had taken place in the date given to me by the refugee respondents.

owners as it was considered part of the embankment land for a nearby canal.³²¹ Mr Biswas had received an allotment letter from the rehabilitation department in the late 1980's, but by the time the demolition took place he had lost much of his older documentation. The plot numbers issued by the rehabilitation department had by then changed entirely and the plot number that he could remember was considered part of the embankment land, which had become one of the major thoroughfares of the camp by 2015. So his house was on land that had not been vested in the state, even though within the camp and his only entitlement was to a piece of land that had become a road. The details of the land ownership having become available several local realtors and land developers became aware of the tenuous nature of his occupancy and one realtor produced a sale deed from the 1990's claiming that the original owners had sold the land to him after the state government had released it back. He filed for mutation of the revenue documents and for the eviction of Mr Biswas simultaneously.

Mr Biswas began telling me his story with a bundle of letters he had written to the rehabilitation department trying to find a copy of his allotment letter. He had been able to piece together much of the administrative transactions concerning camp land by then. The allotment and plot information however remained entirely inaccessible to him. When I met him in December 2016, the rehabilitation department was already in the process of being folded into the land revenue department and the old rehabilitation plots, which had papers of mutation, had all been reframed in the digital method and new numbers had been issued. Mr. Biswas and his occupancy had become entirely illegible within the new system of filing and measurement. His address had become an impossible one.

The task of this chapter is to create an outline of the processes by which various types of refugee spaces are governmentally delineated by the state. In

³²¹ I could not find any evidence of this release of land back to owners from either my respondents in the bureaucracy or the refugees themselves.

the process of describing this relationship the chapter will comment on the transformation of land governance itself through an ethnography of the land department and rehabilitation department bureaucracy. Lastly, the chapter engages with the representation of refugee space coming from a periurban village in North 24 Parganas, at the border of Barasat Municipality.

Refugees as the object of land governance

Let me underline a particular problem that the survey and titling process ran into in West Bengal, almost two decades back. In the early 2000s an undated circular was issued in BL&LRO giving specific instructions to deal with bottlenecks in the titling and the resurvey process allied with the digitization drive. The circular dealt particularly with the problem of refugee land³²². Since West Bengal was one of the states Partitioned in 1947 and it was also one of the states to receive massive numbers of refugees during the 1971 war of liberation in Bangladesh, the refugee rehabilitation department has been an extremely long running and important department of the state government. A large quantum of land was distributed to the refugee families especially in districts close to the international border between Bangladesh and India like the North 24 Parganas. The titling process and the type of land entitlement have varied significantly across the years. Several types of lease deeds, free hold title deeds and gift deeds were distributed for varying sizes of plots fluctuating between 1 kottah to 6 bigha approximately.

In conversation with surveyors from both the rehabilitation department and the land reform department the problem was farther elucidated. The rehabilitation department used Cadastral Survey (CS) maps, dating back to the 1920s to requisition and distribute land to refugees throughout the 70s and 80s. The land department under the rehabilitation directorate issued a rehabilitation plot number to the title or lease holder as a fragment of the original CS number. This filing system was not integrated or referenced to the Land Reform (LR)

³²²[http://banglarbhumi.gov.in/banglarbhumi/\(S\(wnz1j554h00fzuoachmbhystd\)\)/DwnLod/Refugee%20L and.pdf](http://banglarbhumi.gov.in/banglarbhumi/(S(wnz1j554h00fzuoachmbhystd))/DwnLod/Refugee%20L and.pdf). (accessed on 20.01.2017)

system of titling and recording which had become the standard for the land department revenue surveys. The plot numbers in the deeds produced by refugee families are therefore incompatible with the Computerization of Record Documents (CORD) database and subsequently invisible in the new BHUCHITRA database which is the web based repository of land titles and records maintained by the land department.

Buried behind a stack of papers awaiting his pen, a rehabilitation department surveyor told me that the work for the department was constantly increasing while the government had practically stopped hiring personnel. The bulk of his workload seemed to come from distributing ownership deeds to refugee families with allotment letters from various colonies and ex-camp areas. The completion of each case, he told me with great resignation, generated more work for the department because each deed would come up for registration in ten years time. Firstly, the rehabilitation department deeds had a clause denying the right to sale the land for at least 10 years after the award of land. This usually translated to an informal moratorium of mutation applications by the refugee families. In many case the refugee families never applied for the mutation and registration of the deed in the land department database. Secondly a large quantum of land distributed to the refugees came from vested properties of big raiyots, which were taken over under the Review Survey (RS) after the 1953 Estate Acquisition act. The lack of full scale surveys during that period of vesting makes the boundaries of these extremely large tracts of land extremely difficult to define. The last physical surveys of these plots took place in the 1920s creating a significant gap between actual and recorded land use. This situation is farther complicated by the cut-off date of conversion of land use since the recording of refugee land titles in the new database will require special dispensation for the recording of unnatural land use transformation post 1986.

The quantum of land under such holdings is significant. A single district rehabilitation office in a border district tallied around 3500 acres worth of land

titles distributed under its authority. I had sat discussing the daily work that the department's survey staff had to do in order to glean some insight into the field work done by them in the colonies, to get a sense of their contact with the colony residents. I was instead given a long description of deskwork which seemed to form the bulk of the task for surveyors since all of the documentation was based on existing 1928 CS maps. Given the size and prevalence of the problem and the particular problems of legal and cartographic illegibility of the spaces under discussion, the refugees stand to lose grip of their precarious entitlement to residential land in several places.

'Un-Mapping' and practices of state cartography

Ananya Roy has argued that 'Informality is a key socio-spatial technique of regime power'³²³ in the case of Kolkata and most cities of the global south where the liminal zone between the agrarian and urban is in the process of transformation. The primary process for this unmapping, Roy argues, is related to the refugee influx in the city of Kolkata. The Left Front had built the mechanism of "informal vesting" to create enough flexibility in mechanisms of land requisition so as to be able to supply ambiguously categorized land for refugee rehabilitation.³²⁴ This situation seems rather grim and unexpected, especially in the context of West Bengal where the investment of colonial cadastral based mapping had created some of the earliest fully mapped and measured revenue units with legal documentation.

She argues this specifically in the light of unavailability of legible maps of land use and developmental planning in the city of Kolkata. Her analytic is sustained to an extent by earlier readings of the planning process in Kolkata.³²⁵ The dubious nature of available information on land holding is the mainstay of these readings of the mapping process. Roy substantiates her

³²³ Ananya Roy. *City requiem, Calcutta: gender and the politics of poverty*. University of Minnesota Press, 2003, p 144

³²⁴ Ibid pp 159-168

³²⁵ Amiya Bagchi, "Planning for Metropolitan Development: Calcutta's Basic Development Plan, 1966-86—A Post-Mortem." *Economic and Political Weekly*, 22, no. 14, 1987, pp 597-601

argument by presenting the primary map of the *Land Use and development Control Plan*³²⁶, which she criticizes for its ‘illegible glory’.³²⁷ It is important to note here though that the existence of secret plans, which are kept classified and out of the public domain is an old reality of urban governance in Kolkata.³²⁸ These secret maps and plans and their strategic inaccessibility is qualified by Roy as the foundation for the creation of a regime of informality which is kept alive by the state in order to stabilize patronage links. Her arguments are substantiated through her ethnographic study of refugee settlements or semi legal squatter colonies built under CPI(M) patronage.³²⁹ Her description seems to privilege the refugee as a recipient of CPI(M) support.

In the following section I will attempt to lay out the process of mapping that was simultaneously taking shape during Roy’s ethnographic study of land politics in Kolkata.

Our ethnography is going to proceed through a different route than Roy’s. The following pages will present an ethnographic snapshot of the process, the pitfalls and transformations in the structure of land governance and the bureaucracy that inhabits its institutions. What people see as the state are the activities of government officials and the various clients of government programmes in relation to citizen beneficiaries. Any characterization of the state apparatus in general and in particular arms of governance must then track the “routine and repetitive procedures of bureaucracies”.³³⁰ Much of the material narrated in the next pages are culled from interactions with land surveyors, rehabilitation officers and revenue officers in Barasat and Barrackpore sub-divisions of North 24 Parganas. I also visited the South 24 Parganas Headquarters and the Alipore Survey Building to speak to higher

³²⁶Ananya Roy. *City requiem, Calcutta*, pp 135-136

³²⁷ Ibid

³²⁸ S. Chakravorty, and G. Gupta, “Let a Hundred Projects Bloom: Structural Reform and Urban Development in Calcutta.” *Third World Planning Review*, Vol 18, no. 4, 1996, pp 415–31

³²⁹Ananya Roy, *City Requiem*, p 145-163

³³⁰Aradhana Sharma and Akhil Gupta, *The anthropology of the state: a reader*, MA: Blackwell Pub, Malden, 2010, p 11

officials but the operative descriptions of daily work and even the legal structure came from middle and lower level employees of the government.

In the following pages we are going to investigate the processes and routine functions of land governance that has been a continuous element of evolving policy articulations of e-governance since the early days of liberalization in India. Officers in two district Headquarters informed me that it had started as a programme for the 'Computerization of Land Records' (CLR) in the early 1990's, and steadily grew in scope with the development and introduction of the 'Computerization of Record Documents' (CORD) platform³³¹. The material descriptions of these practices come from descriptions given by employees of the West Bengal Land and Land Reform Organization (WBLRO) and the surveyors and rehabilitation officers of the Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation Department of West Bengal.

My first visit to the Rehabilitation Department had come in early 2011 while I was planning my doctoral research. Many of the senior officers I had met back then had agreed to give me recorded interviews. By the end of my field work, many of these officers and surveyors had become increasingly insecure about allowing their names to be mentioned in interviews, even with simple descriptions of rules and procedures. By mid 2016 all of my respondents had explicitly told me not to mention them by name in my writings. Needless to say, the situation was much more difficult in the land department. My first foray in to the state headquarters of the department in the Survey Building in New Alipore had fetched me nothing but a three hour wait for a meeting with the Joint Commissioner of the Directorate. After a cursory look at the letters from my University department he had packed me off to another officer in the survey department. I repeatedly took appointments and loitered around the corridors before being directed to one of the retired sub-divisional officers from the district I was interested in. Having retired in 2008 he had direct experience with the transformations brought in by new technologies and I was told that he

³³¹<http://nicwb.nic.in/html/land.htm> (accessed on 20.01.2017)

was intimately acquainted with the older chain link survey method as well having carried out surveys as a young entrant to the department many decades back. He became my primary contact with the department and over time I was able to interact with a number of functionaries across the layers of bureaucracy, even though the highest echelons of the Alipore Survey building remained closed to me.

In West Bengal, the journey for *computerisation of land governance* began in 1986. However, it was as late as in 2000 when the state assembly finally brought in a Bill exclusively adopting the printed ‘records of rights’ (RORs), and strictly discontinued the issuance of manual parcha/patta³³². Towards actualisation of this aim, the BHUCHITRA project has been operationalised recently. The fundamental plan of the project is to have an integrated database that brings together different functions like mapping land use, land (re)categorisation, zoning/planning, settlement mapping, property registration, mutation, individual plot mapping, and printing parcha/patta/ROR into a ‘single window service’ system available and accessible to the public in general. The website of BHUCHITRA is already functional while the State Government puts final touches on the transition of land governance in West Bengal from manual to digital by sealing all paper maps and registers.³³³ This digitization is meant to push forward the larger vision of the use of spatial data for comprehensive development planning and to assist with the governance of multiple projects run by the government.

In the two district headquarters that I visited in the course of my research, the younger computer cell staff was always the first to agree to speak to me. For them the bureaucratic moratorium against talking about work to outsider was not as important since they saw themselves in two rather contradictory ways. Firstly, they saw themselves as the more important functionaries in the office

³³² The details in this section are culled from Interview with Ex-Sub Divisional Officer (Retd. 2008), BL&LRO. (06.08.2016), group Interview with land surveyors in the (08.08.2016) and group interactions with computer cell staff WBL&LRO (09.08.2016)

³³³ Ibid

since the transformation of the record keeping practices quite literally meant that much of the lower bureaucracy of the survey departments would become redundant over time. Secondly; they thought of themselves as somehow being outside the machination and corruption that the land department is infamous for among the public. They considered technology their talisman since it seemed to guarantee, at least in their self narration, their integrity and consistency. The contradiction here is that they see themselves both as the most powerful functionaries of the office with the future of the department in their pockets while simultaneously placing themselves outside the power structure of intradepartmental politics.

The primary focus of the computer cell, according to the officials, was to create multi-functional maps. The evolution from the CORD software was apparently aimed at developing a platform that brings together the two split functions of the land reform department onto the same window of service – mapping and titling. While CORD was primarily focused on archiving and generating RORs, BHUCHITRA, the new website, interface and repository of map data, is capable of reproducing maps of the plots referred to in the RORs along with the certificate or title of ownership. A large number of maps of revenue villages are already accessible on the Land Reform Department (BL&LRO) website along with ‘live’ data maps that show the immediate limits and shape of the plot. The platform also stores land use information and is meant to evolve into a central repository of all spatial data in the state from which maps will be generated for the purposes of developmental projects and other uses by government department. Interestingly, the database is also open to the citizenry. The interface requires simply a plot number (*Dag* number) or a file number (*Khatian*) in order to generate ROR and maps in districts and revenue villages where the work of survey/resurvey has already been completed.

The BHUCHITRA programme is a new version of the BHUMI software developed in Karnataka in the early 2000's.³³⁴ In the second Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC) the project of land record digitization was a primary mission mode project in the state government category.³³⁵ It is important to take up this component for a detailed study because it has been a project of continuing importance for nearly three decades. As a state government category project it allows us to understand regional flexibility and variety. We get the opportunity to state power articulated across at every scale; central, provincial and local- while they are engaged in concretizing the same apparatus. It is equally important to remember that as a reframing of land governance, this programme allows us to trace the transformation of the governmental objectification of one of the most important material resources for livelihood and shelter.

As a contested resource, land allows us to foreground questions of law, history, society and politics and as a central element of economic development; land is the canvas for larger forces of use and habitation struggling against each other in the form of historic tendencies. I came across a refugee family in the corridors of Alipore Survey Department building while fruitlessly waiting for a mapping department official. They helped me understand the situation with refugee land entitlement and the tangled situation of records in some detail.

In *Salboni*, an area in *West Medinipur* district of West Bengal a rather common set of events took place early February of 2016. Such stories, though common, can only be told with a sense of surprise at the complex entanglements of power, procedure and contingency. In the village of *Kamla* (name changed), a family home was attacked due to the escalation of a land dispute. A 0.2 acre plot of land was a bone of contention between two families for nearly a year.

³³⁴ The BHOOMI programme generated an extremely important critical report on the implementation of e-governance and its close relation to extractionist political and economic moves that transformed Bangalore in the early 2000's. Benjamin, Solomon, R. Bhuvaneshwari, and P. Rajan. "Bhoomi: 'E-governance', or, an anti-politics machine necessary to globalize Bangalore?." *CASUM-m Working Paper* (2007).

³³⁵ Second Administrative Reforms Commission, *Eleventh report: Promoting E-governance: The Smart Way Forward, Government of India*, December 2008, p 109

The family that had owned and used the land for over two decades had both the legal documents necessary to prove ownership of land in India A) a legal and registered deed of sale and B) the mutation certification issued by the Land Reform department of the government that certifies the registration of the owners name against the revenue documents of the plot of land and in the revenue maps of the district. The situation was not an easy one because the issuing of revenue documentation and the documentation of sale deeds are functions of two different departments. Another family from the adjacent neighborhood had approached the block level land reform office with an older registered deed of sale for the same plot claiming that they were the original owners while the occupants were illegal squatters. The issue was sent to the district land reform office and after a search through the database on sales registry three deeds were found registered for the same property with the current occupants being the latest deed holders. They had all bought the same piece of land at various times from the family members of the original owner. The revenue documentation of the plot was pending for fifty years before the latest occupants had filed for their mutation. The revenue department changed the name on the mutation certificate of the plot and registered it to the name of the second oldest registered deed.³³⁶ This was done apparently in accordance with the general practice of honoring the claimant with the oldest registered deed.³³⁷ The change of name on the revenue document was made directly on the rolls since at the time, the digitization of land records documents was ongoing and the staff found it convenient to make the change directly in the information to be updated rather than going through a process of notification and survey for the individual plot.

Several such stories can be heard each day in the corridors of the land department of West Bengal government. The opening provided by the shift from analogue to digital governance seems to have shifted and opened up

³³⁶ Group interview in Alipur Survey Building, Directorate of Land Records and Survey, Kolkata, (22nd November and 20th February, 2017)

³³⁷ I was told of this practice by several Revenue officers and land surveyors across various district and block level land department offices that I visited in between October and December 2016.

possibilities of making changes and manipulating existing entitlements in ways that threaten the precarious grasp of the refugee on his or her land.

Configuring the practice of Land Governance

In this section I will attempt to describe the process of land record/revenue survey and its 'everyday' context. Much of this description was culled from conversations with land surveyors and computer cell employees of the land revenue department at the level of the city headquarters, district headquarters in north 24 parganas and panchayat level staff. The process of survey described here and the periodic shifts in those processes are not necessarily traceable in law. They are part and parcel of what Mitchell had called 'mundane social processes we recognize and name as the state'.³³⁸ The bureaucracy at the bottom of the state hierarchy, the zone of contact between the abstract entity called the state and the citizenry is the materiality of the 'state effect'.³³⁹ The constant shifts in what the surveyors and revenue officers call '*JoriperKaj*' (the work of measurement) creates a number of channels through which the disciplinary presence of the state is felt as both a unifying mechanism but also a generator of contradictions at the level of social transformation.

The process of comprehensive revenue survey, which is also a land use survey, is a time consuming process. There is a detailed four stage process of land survey for the physical mapping, land use categorization and verification of title under the West Bengal Land Reform act of 1955³⁴⁰. Among the surveyors, the first two stages have retained their Persian names drawn from Mughal revenue administration. The first stage is *Khanapuri/KamBujharat*. At this stage field workers from the revenue department go from plot to plot on specified dates in an already notified area in order to speak to the immediate occupant and note down the current physical conditions of the plot and land

³³⁸ Timothy Mitchell, *Society economy and the State Effect*, in Aradhana Sharma and Akhil Gupta, *The anthropology of the state: a reader*, MA: Blackwell Pub, Malden, 2010, p 185

³³⁹ Ibid

³⁴⁰ West Bengal land reform act of 1956,

<http://www.hooghly.gov.in/dllro/pdf/W.B.%20L.R%20ACT,1955.pdf>, accessed on (14th December 2016), p 68-72

use, along with any easements or unique conditions and arrangements on the ground. This fieldwork copy becomes the basis of the *Khasra* or the first draft of the land record volume for that revenue village.³⁴¹ For executing this stage the field workers and the revenue department inspectors/surveyors are accorded the power to enter any property in a notified area and the quasi-judicial power to directly record the names of occupants. These powers in fact make the revenue department officers a rather unique presence in the lower bureaucracy. Their unique combination of physical access, judicial powers and executive functions indeed make them local actors of extreme significance and impact.

In the second stage there are notified meetings in the nearest local governance authority building where the work of attestation is of the first draft of the ROR volume begins. This stage is called *Tasdiq*. All deed holders for the plots surveyed in the first stage are notified to come and present all available documents of ownership with the revenue inspectors present in the office. This is very often the first stage of dispute resolution where the land records are corrected on spot based primarily on the judgement of the revenue inspector present. Very often there is more than one claimant to each plot of land. There are also cases of ambiguity of partitions and borders of plots. If the claimant and the recorded occupant of the plot are the same but the name in the old ROR volume turns out to be different then it becomes a simple case of delayed mutation of ownership, but when the claimant and occupants are many and different from the last known record then the revenue inspector exercises his judicial power to authenticate one or more deeds of ownership or occupation and awards them a place in the record volume.

In the next stage the draft volume of the record is published and the area is notified so that the residents of the area can come check the volume of records in the office and file complaints under a specific format in order to meet the revenue officers again for disputes over recorded names and deeds. A year

³⁴¹ The details given in this and the following pages concerning the process of survey come from several interactions with village and sub-division level surveyors from the WBL&LRO department in Barasat and Barrackpore subdivision.

from the notification of the third stage the volume is considered finalized and it is republished including changes from the third stage. In the fourth stage the local governance body provides another application format for correction but the meetings for this take place in the BL&LRO office rather than the local authority's buildings thereby physically moving the adjudicating authority to physically more centralized locations in the district.

Each record volume for each revenue village may take 4 to 6 years, or even more to go through each stage of record surveys. The process has only been repeated thrice since colonization by the British East India Company. The first set of mid-19th century surveys were done from the horseback in order to mark out the first set of permanent settlement plots and district boundaries. The more important set of survey maps were made between 1908 and 1928 through the first generation Cadastral Surveys (CS). This remains the primary physical maps still in use for most land use and development needs.

The CS maps were corrected in the mid 1950's when Zamindari/Permanent Settlement big land holdings were dissolved by the Estates Acquisition law of 1953(EA)³⁴². A new survey was mandated and completed and the new generation of maps came to be known as Review Survey (RS) maps. In this survey however, only large feudal holdings dating back to permanent settlement were physically surveyed before being transferred to the state as eminent domain holding. The vesting of this large quantum of land can also be seen as an important temporal boundary since it arranged the maps as a snapshot of land use and ownership around two primary cut-off dates, 14.04.1955 as the vesting date and 10.04.1956 as the date of transfer of *under-riyots* or tenants of the zamindars to the state authorities.³⁴³

The mapping system was restructured again in 1955 with West Bengal Land Reform Act (LR) Act of 1955, which added a different method of consolidation

³⁴² West Bengal Estate Acquisition Act, 1953, [http://banglarbhumi.gov.in/banglarbhumi/\(S\(tto5cryjezsyh3crtkytoqgi\)\)/DwnLod/West%20Bengal%20Estate%20Acquisition%20Act,%201953.pdf](http://banglarbhumi.gov.in/banglarbhumi/(S(tto5cryjezsyh3crtkytoqgi))/DwnLod/West%20Bengal%20Estate%20Acquisition%20Act,%201953.pdf), (accessed on 12th July, 2017)

³⁴³ Group interview with staff in District Land Reform Office, Barasat, (15th November, 2016)

to the land records and determined a large part of the structural characteristics of land disputes in West Bengal. This law inaugurated the concept of *One Man-One Khatian*³⁴⁴. The move separated the physical map and the record files in order to file all land owned by the same person in one revenue unit under the same file number (Khatian). This was meant to allow the land reform office to take note of all owners of ceiling surplus land so that the land could be vested in the state for redistribution to landless peasants, artisans and laborers. This was possibly the single longest engagement of the government in revising the maps and more importantly the filing system of the land records in West Bengal.

The act was passed in 1955 and implemented in 1965. Due to political turmoil and lack of infrastructural strength the process of actual transformation of the governance machinery only began in 1972³⁴⁵. It has been one of the longest running re-arrangement of the land governance machinery in India. During my fieldwork several surveyors agreed that in several districts, especially North 24 Parganas and West Midnapore, the process of this revision was not complete even in 2016. This generation of reforms produced the third generation of corrected maps known as Land Reform Survey (LR) maps. These maps however often look quite the same as the CS maps since the physical layout of the plots are often not marked on the map itself but simply filed as a fragment of the CS plot number under the present owners file number. This makes the physical location of the LR plots particularly ambiguous because the CS plots or the *SabekDaag* were large plots which have now fragmented among dozens of owners who have been filed under *Bata Daag* (fragmentary plot numbers) giving them proof of ownership but the exact location of the land is at times contested within the larger plot. Most significantly, this recording exercise created another temporal limit in the land records by declaring the cut-off date

³⁴⁴ *ibid*

³⁴⁵ Interview with retired survey department staff, Lake Town, Kolkata, (3rd December, 2016)

of 24.03.1986³⁴⁶ for natural conversion of land use. Therefore, all changes in land use in the records needs a special authorization from the local governance authorities in order to be legitimized if said change happens after the date limit.

The period under discussion in this paper started with the ‘Computerization of Land Records’ programme in 1992. The Records Of Rights (ROR) became printed documents and the Record Volumes were stored in block level office servers. This first intervention of technological change was entirely limited to the record section of land governance and the task of physical mapping remained entirely limited to the cadastral method employing the flat table. The work of LR mapping continued but it became increasingly focused on issuing new file numbers and plot numbers in order to make the new processes of record printing functional. This was the period of development of the Computerization of Record Documents (CORD) software and the creation of the primary database of the records of rights. The records generated by the CORD Software had to be printed and signed from the BL&LRO office in order to be legal copies of the records. The database was not accessible to any other departments or the public³⁴⁷. This has been one of the major arenas of change after the early 2000s. With the coming of the BHUCHITRA programme this information has become open to the public. We will see what effect this opening up of information has had at the level of everyday struggles in refugee spaces.

From interactions with retired and senior bureaucrats in the district level Land department offices I learned that this period saw the slow retraction of the mass deployment of surveyors and inspectors from the ground level work of the first two stages of survey discussed in earlier passages.

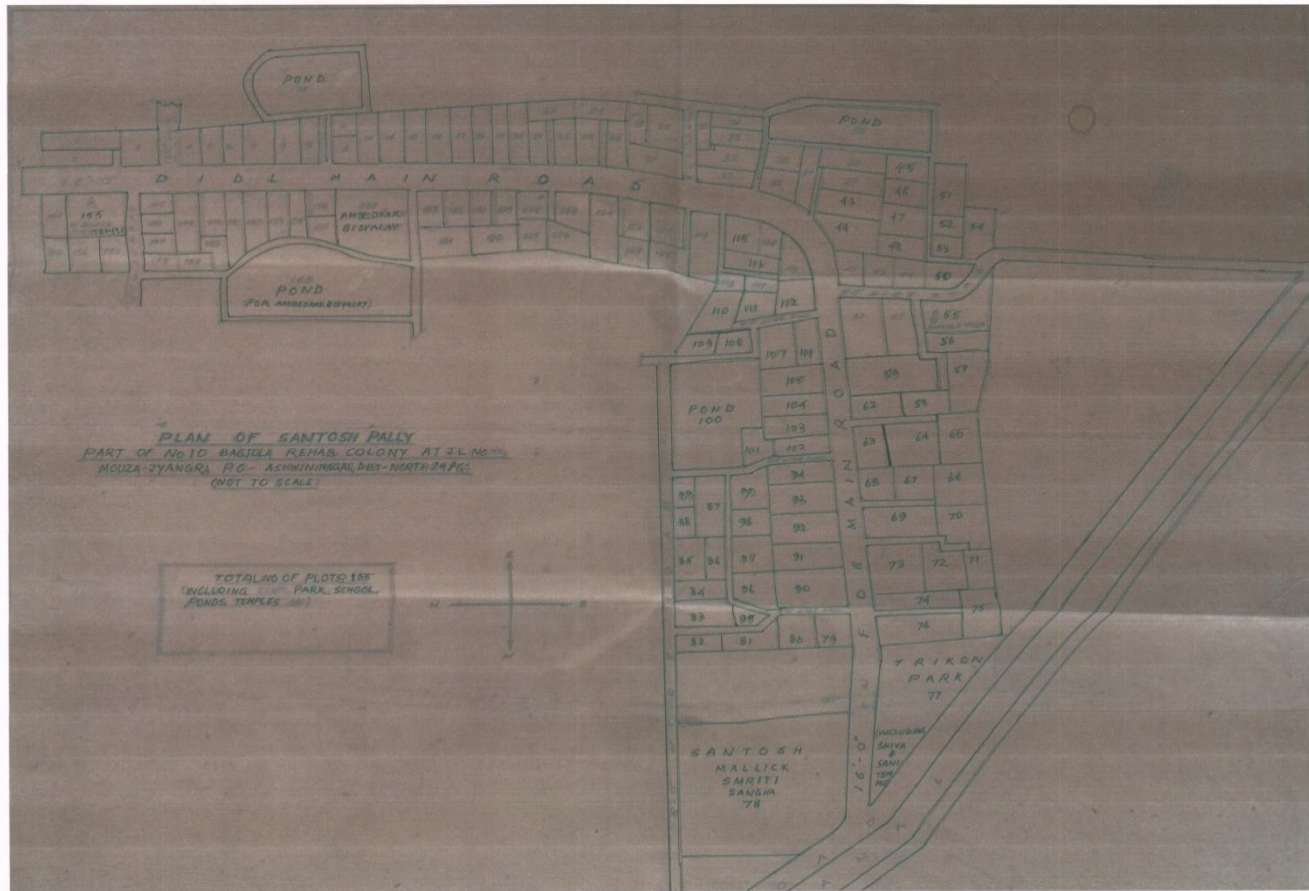
The work of *KhanapuriKamBujharat* almost completely stopped and notices for *Tasdiq* were sent out directly. The first draft was made by simply copying

³⁴⁶ This date was an outcome of the implementation of Urban Land Ceiling Regulation Act of 1976. http://moud.gov.in/upload/uploadfiles/files/ulcra_1976.pdf, (accessed on 12th July, 2017)

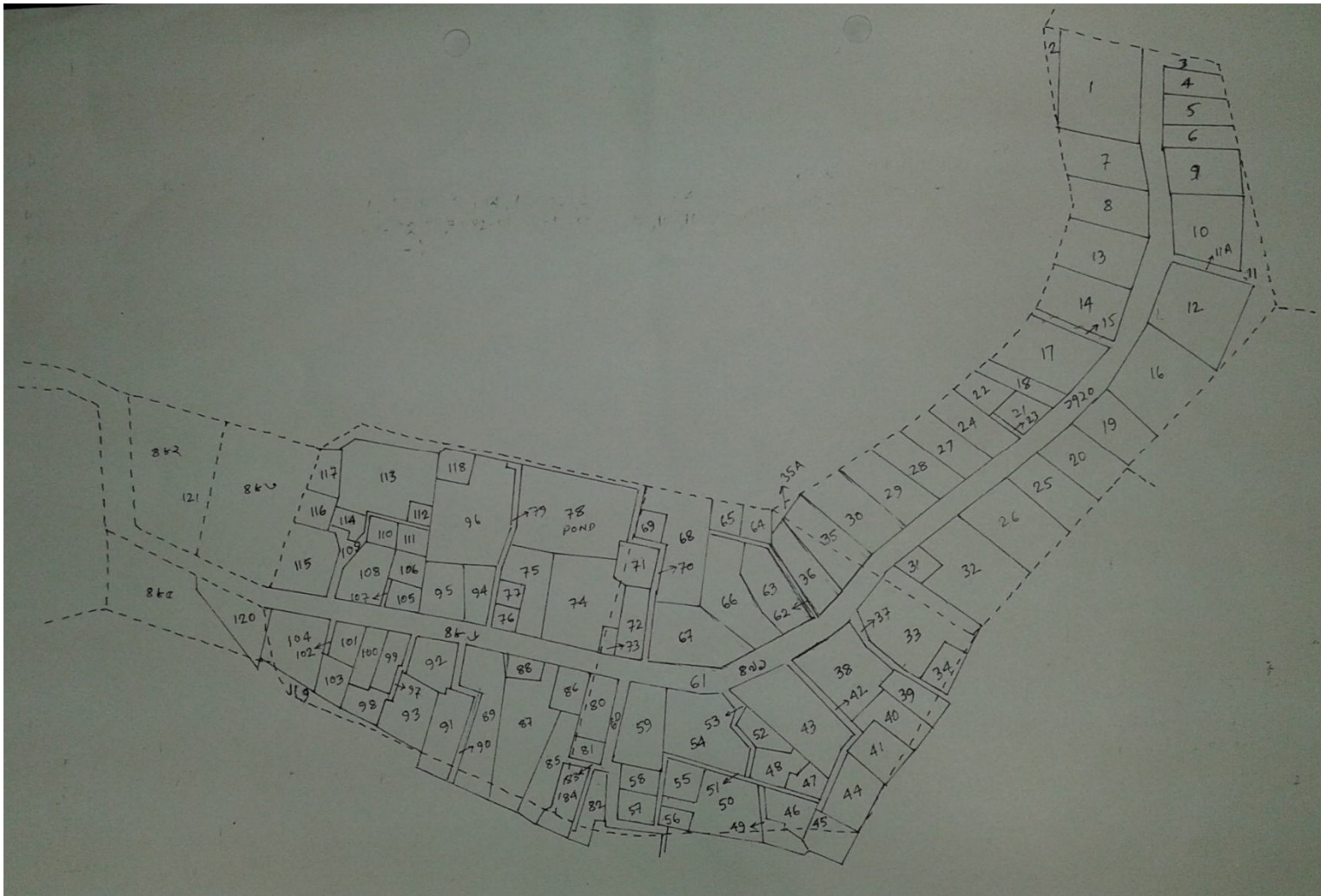
³⁴⁷ Staff interview, Directorate building, Alipore, Kolkata, (8th November, 2016)

existing records on the new *Khasra* volume and then notifying all plots in the area for attestation meetings³⁴⁸. Thus the recording process became increasingly bound within the legal process of determining authentic and older deeds and papers as against the recording of use, sale, condition and occupation of the land plots in real time. This, compounded upon the already existing plethora of cut-off dates, created and widened the gap between ground level occupancy and the record of rights in the database. The process of digitization coincided with the older process of issuing LR plot numbers. In many cases there were problems like the one narrated in the second section of the paper. The family in Salboni had their right to their existing occupancy and right to use challenged despite having legal document and title due to the existence of an older deed that arrived at the office while the process of digitization was ongoing. The problem is farther exacerbated by the slow centralization of the data.

³⁴⁸ Village meetings from north 24 parganas, PaschimKhilkapur and Guma 2 Panchayat



Map 5. Source: Bagjola Camp No. 10 Refugee Association: Proposed Plan Submitted by the refugees to Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation Department in 1998



Map 6. Source: Bagjola Camp 10, Refugee Association. Plotting map for the settlement of Bagjola Camp 10 and 11; RR&R Dept.

Negotiating property and commons on Camp land

Of the three maps given here the first is the in situ development plan of the work site camp that we had discussed in the second chapter of this dissertation. I had gone to the camp in search of first generation refugees and settlers in order to create an oral history of camp life if possible. Even though I found no first generation settlers I did find a respondent who had recently written a book that I have extensively used in the second chapter. He was only a young boy at the time of the political struggle that I have described earlier but he was an active part of camp politics since 1986. His father had been a labourer in the Bagjola Worksite scheme. The maps attached to the left of this section are all from his collection. The first is the in situ development plan recently officially sanctioned by the Rehabilitation department. The map shows an extended area of the camp, covering both camps 10 and 11. The land was acquired in two stages, first in 1976 and later in 1989. The second map shown here was created by the refugees themselves with the help of an architect from a nearby neighborhood. They took the engineer around the settlement and helped him chalk out the settlement pattern according to the liking of the local refugee association. The plan was then submitted to the department as a request to settle the refugee families who had been living there at least since 1955. Though the refugees submitted it in late 1990s, the government came to act on it much later. In fact the plea was heard only after the regime change at the state level. In the next few pages we will discuss these two maps, the locality they define and the third map which is the Rehabilitation department's version of the settlement plotted by the refugees in the late 1990s

I collected all of the maps from Nalini Ranjan Mondal. He is one of the eldest among the refugees still actively organizing and leading the struggle for resettlement in the area. Even though the acquisition was complete in 1989 the rehabilitation department did not allot plots and distribute parcha/patta(deed) as was expected. In 1986 the process had apparently been started by the then Rehabilitation minister from CPI (M). However, the process got stalled due to

two differences between the plan proposed by the state government and the plan proposed by the refugee committee in the area. Firstly, the ponds shown on map 3 were not considered part of the rehabilitation land by the government. These ponds were used by local committees formed by the refugees for harvesting fish (pisciculture) and considered as 'commons' meant for collective but organized use. The state refused to leave the ponds in the hands of the refugees and attempted to keep them as state property to be leased to local businessmen for pisciculture. The refugees attempted to negotiate the naming of the local club 'Santosh Mallick Smriti Sangha' the care taker of most of the ponds. The refugee committee led by two different factions headed by Maharaj Biswas and Nalini Ranjan Mondal decided to keep one pond as a source of income separate from the club but as the chief source of funds for a local primary school for the refugee family children called Ambedkar School. The Rehabilitation department refused to accept the arrangement but proposed to fill in the ponds and create more plots for refugee families from outside of the camps number 10 and 11. This created the second set of tensions between the state and the refugee leaders as well as among the refugee leaders themselves. While the leaders of both factions disagreed to part with any of the camp land, they were divided on the question of who can be considered an outsider. While the Maharaj Biswas faction wanted only families of original camp inmates (dole families) to get plots in the new colony, Nalini Ranjan Mondal was agreeable to giving plots to extended family members and in-laws on the ex-camp inmates as well. The complex negotiations broke down as the local refugees physically stopped the survey process in 1986 and forced the government to shelve the plans for plot distribution.

Thirty years later, under the aegis of the Trinamool Congress regime, the process began once again in the middle of 2016. This time however the question of the ownership of the ponds remained a thorny issue even though the refugee committee decided to go ahead with the survey and plot distribution under the leadership of Nalini Ranjan Mondal. As the founder of the Ambedkar School, Mr. Mondal remained in possession of the pond. He and some of the

local youth were regularly cleaning and utilizing the pond as a source of funding for the school, which had received neither affiliation nor money from the government. The situation became further complicated when a man from a nearby colony, Gautam Nashkar, filed a complaint with the police in mid 2016 alleging that the pond attached to the school and managed by Nalini Mondal had been bought by his maternal grandfather in 1978. The Santoshpally residents started to gather when a police force from the local precinct arrived in Camp 10 to give possession of the pond to the claimant Gobinda Naskar.

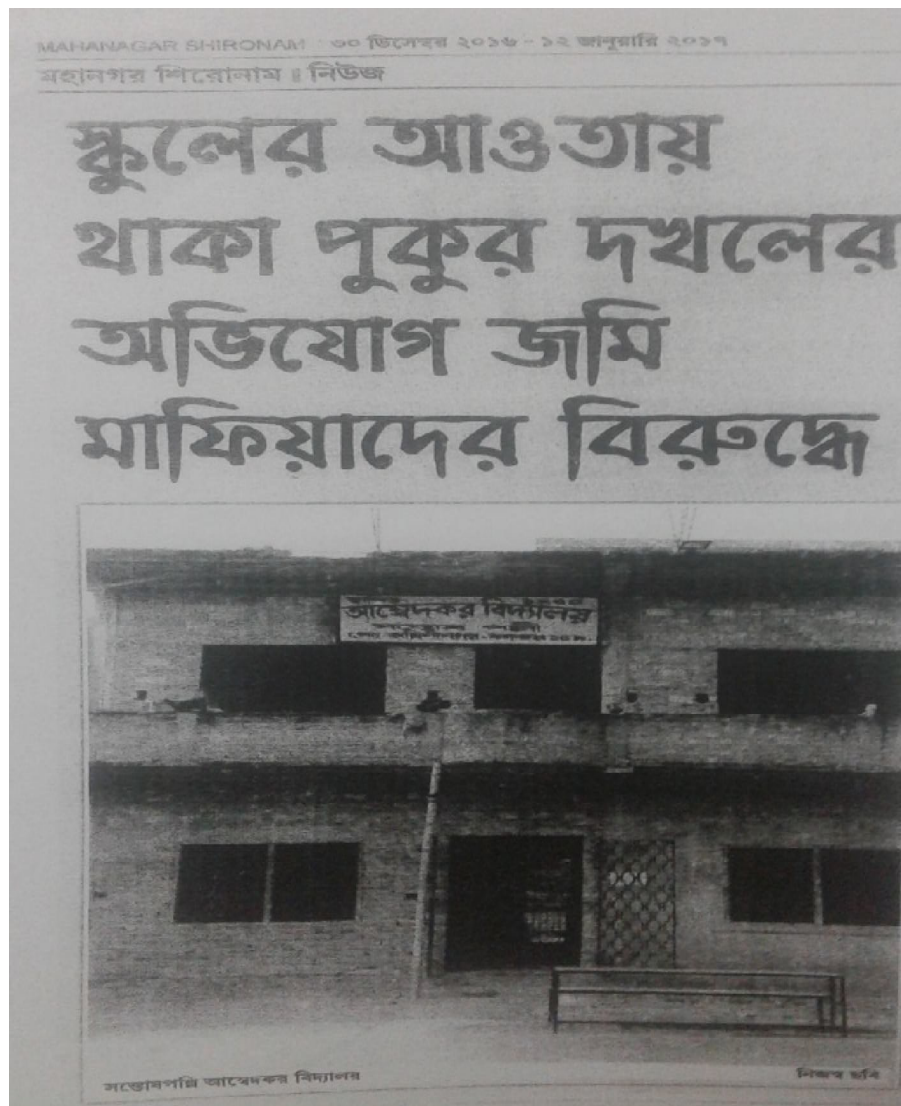


Figure 17. Source: ‘Allegations of grabbing school pond against the land mafia’, *Mahanagar Shironam*, 30th Dec 2016 to 12th Jan 2017, p 7

The local residents of Camp 10 resisted the move by the police. They began to clean the pond and young men were designated night guards to remain nearby the pond through the night.



Figure 18. Source: ‘Allegations of grabbing school pond against the land mafia’,
Mahanagar Shironam, 30th Dec 2016 to 12th Jan 2017, p 7

The residents created boards mentioning that the pond had been under occupation since 1955, when the camp was first settled in the area and remained under the control of the school. They also claimed that the pond was part of the land acquired by the state for refugee rehabilitation. During a face to face confrontation in the presence of the police Mr. Nalini Ranjan Mondal asked Mr. Gobinda Naskar “why is it now that you have woken up?” He argued and most of the locals agreed that there was something suspicious in the coincidence that he became aware of his grandfather’s ownership dating back to 1978 within months of the negotiation reopening with the Rehabilitation department and the redrawing and sanctioning of the plan for resettlement by the Land Reform department. Many of the local residents started mentioning

the possibility of this being a “syndicate”³⁴⁹ land grab and that Gobinda Naskar was simply the front man provided with some ‘fake documents’ and bribe money to wrest the land away from the refugees only to then hand it over to the syndicate. ‘Syndicate’ is a term that has been in popular use now for over two decades in and around Kolkata. It is used to describe organized land and real estate mafia in West Bengal.

Many of the more knowledgeable among the refugees were aware that the land records of their revenue unit had become partially available online. The refugees were suspicious of the sudden appearance of an inheritor several years after the sale. They suspected that he somehow must have gained enough information to figure out that the land was under ambiguous ownership. There were several examples of acquired land remaining un-mutated, leaving the tenural registration similar to what it was before acquisition. But the move to secretly buy it up was seen as something new.

The area of Santoshpally, located within four kilometers of the Rajarhat New Town area is a coveted piece of real estate. It is one of the growing and fast gentrifying areas formerly under the Rajarhat-Gopalpur municipality and recently amalgamated with the older and more prestigious Bidhan Nagar Corporation. Political squabbles and contestations concerning control over land development between MLAs from the ruling Trinamool Congress government started fairly early with the onset of the regime. The first set of controversies, allegations and counter allegations had started with the murder of a known Trinamool Leader Swapam Mandal in 2011. Another district level Trinamool leader named Partha Sarkar was arrested by the police as the perpetrator. The two leaders allegedly had been running extortion and land syndicates in the area.³⁵⁰ What started as a competition between mid- level leaders soon became

³⁴⁹ This is a term popularly used for the land and building mafia in West Bengal. It was commonly used to refer to a variety of groupings and businesses that are considered informal/illegal with a potential for violence and support from the major political leaders in the area.

³⁵⁰ ‘CM warning on syndicates’, *The Telegraph*, 4th December, 2011, https://www.telegraphindia.com/1111204/jsp/bengal/story_14836443.jsp (accessed on 14.12.2016)

a full scale scandal with local MLAs and MPs like Dola Sen and Purnendu Bose, Jyotipriya Mullick, Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar and Saugata Roy became involved and there were allegations that one of the MLAs had instigated the murder and then framed an innocent to take revenge against competing factions and syndicates.³⁵¹ Within months the situation deteriorated with two of the most significant leaders of the TMC labor wing publicly accusing each other of factionalism and links with local syndicates.³⁵² The situation became farther complicated when Tapas Chatterjee, an ex-CPI(M) councilor in the Rajarhat-Gopalpur municipality joined Trinamool and promptly became a competitor for Sabyasachi Dutta, the MLA, Mayor and strong man candidate of TMC in Bidhan Nagar. The two were also infamous for their respective contacts with the local syndicates. Sabyasachi Dutta came under even greater scrutiny due to a sting operation that recorded him taking part in contract negotiations. Instead of being silenced, Dutta remained a loud supporter of the syndicate system and proclaimed it a mode of employment for the local working class people.³⁵³ A complex skein of connections links several MPs and MLAs in the immediate suburbs of Kolkata that come under the KMD authority.³⁵⁴

On 25th February 2016 the peace of the camp locality was once again broken by a syndicate related murder. A Trinamool Congress youth wing activist Sanjay Roy (Buro) was allegedly shot dead by another local businessman Dipankar Sarkar (alias *GasBabu*) allegedly due to a business rivalry. Both the opposition and the local residents were of the opinion that the murder was backed by another powerful youth leader and the head of the local syndicates Biswajit Biswas (Babai). Allegedly, on being thwarted in his ambition for fighting

³⁵¹ 'TMC divided over Syndicate links', *The times of India*, 4th December, 2011, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/kolkata/TMC-divided-over-syndicate-links/articleshow/10975693.cms> (accessed on 14.12.2016)

³⁵² 'Trnamool leaders trade charges on party leaders', *Indian Express*, 11th February 2012, <http://indianexpress.com/article/cities/kolkata/trinamool-leader-trades-charges-on-party-leaders/>, (accessed on 14.12.2016)

³⁵³ 'I am not uneasy, syndicates are my USP', *ZeenewsBengali*, 6th April 2016, http://zeenews.india.com/bengali/kolkata/sabyasachi-dutta-commented-on-syndicate_139180.html, (accessed on 14.12.2016)

³⁵⁴ 'Who is the next target', *Eibela*, 14th July 2016, <https://ebela.in/state/who-is-next-target-1.434181>, (accessed on 14.12.2016)

municipal elections on a councilor post, Babai had broken from his earlier patron in TMC and started negotiating with a different faction. The earlier patron contacted Buro and attempted to promote him to the head of the local syndicate network. The Locals believed that jealous of his territory Babai decided to get rid of his second in command to hold on to his business exclusively.³⁵⁵ It is important to note that Buro was a young third generation member of a camp inmate family and Babai was also from a refugee family, while being the Vice-president of the TMC supported local Auto Union.

³⁵⁵ 'Shadow of factionalism on the murder of TMC activist', *Anandabazar*, 26th February 2016, <http://www.anandabazar.com/calcutta/tmc-activist-murdered-due-to-internal-conflict-1.318408>, (accessed on 14.12.2016))



Figure 18. Source: Author (8th December, 2016)

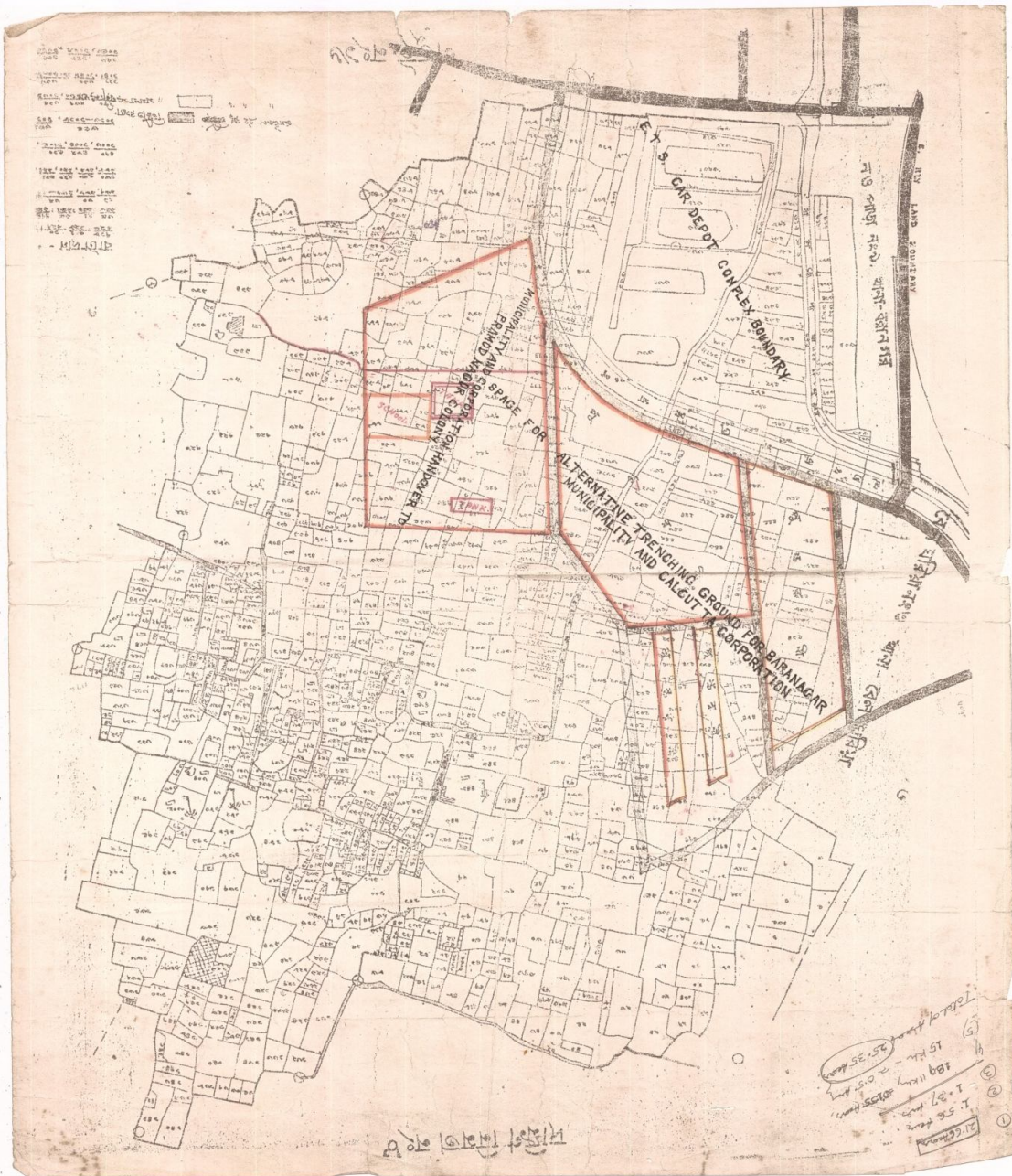
When I last visited the Bagjola Camp area in December 2016 I found several posters such as the one photographed above, commemorating the passing of Sanjay Roy (Buro), put up by factions within the local TMC. The banners celebrated the memory of the TMC activist and strongman along with the Birth Anniversary of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. The posters with Buro's photographs were almost always kept at a distance from but facing other banners and posters carrying the faces of Dola Sen, Purnendu Bose and the CM Mamata Bannerjee.

In light of the above discussion it seems entirely possible that the curtailment of the acquired area and the sudden appearance of long forgotten owners may be part of the larger dynamics of the land market in the camp area. With the induction of the area into the newly formed Bidhan Nagar Municipal Corporation on 18th June of 2015³⁵⁶ the land politics in the area has intensified in terms of the syndicate cartels controlling increasingly more of informal transport, land and building material sectors.

The above description helps us understand the socio-political process through which land is mapped and unmapped in relation to local politics and history. Most importantly we can here begin to productively apply the idea of a passive transformation of space. The violence of this transition is endemic. It is not a spectacular violence that launches movements or becomes a powerful public memory of injustice or resistance. It is a quotidian violence edged by competition within the space constituted by a working class and scheduled caste community. The transformation of Bagjola Camp and its subsumption into the urban land market is particularly telling because this group of camps gave rise to some of the first Dalit Namasudra leaders of the refugee movement and had a strong history of resisting both the Congress and Left

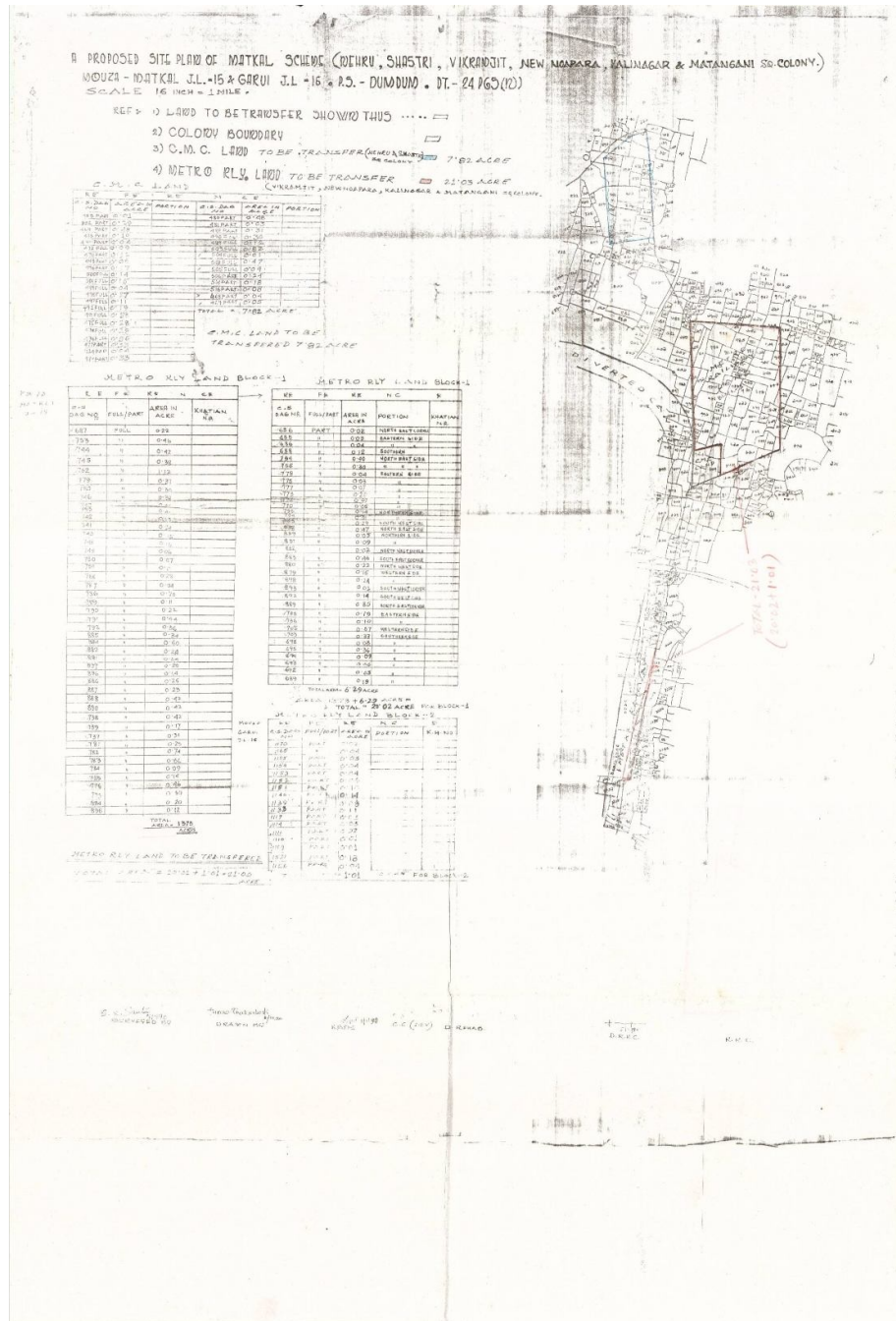
³⁵⁶ Government of West Bengal, Department of Municipal Affairs, No. 401/MA/O/C-4/1A-12/2012, 18.06.2015

Front regimes in their attempts to remove them from their occupancy of an ex-campsite.³⁵⁷

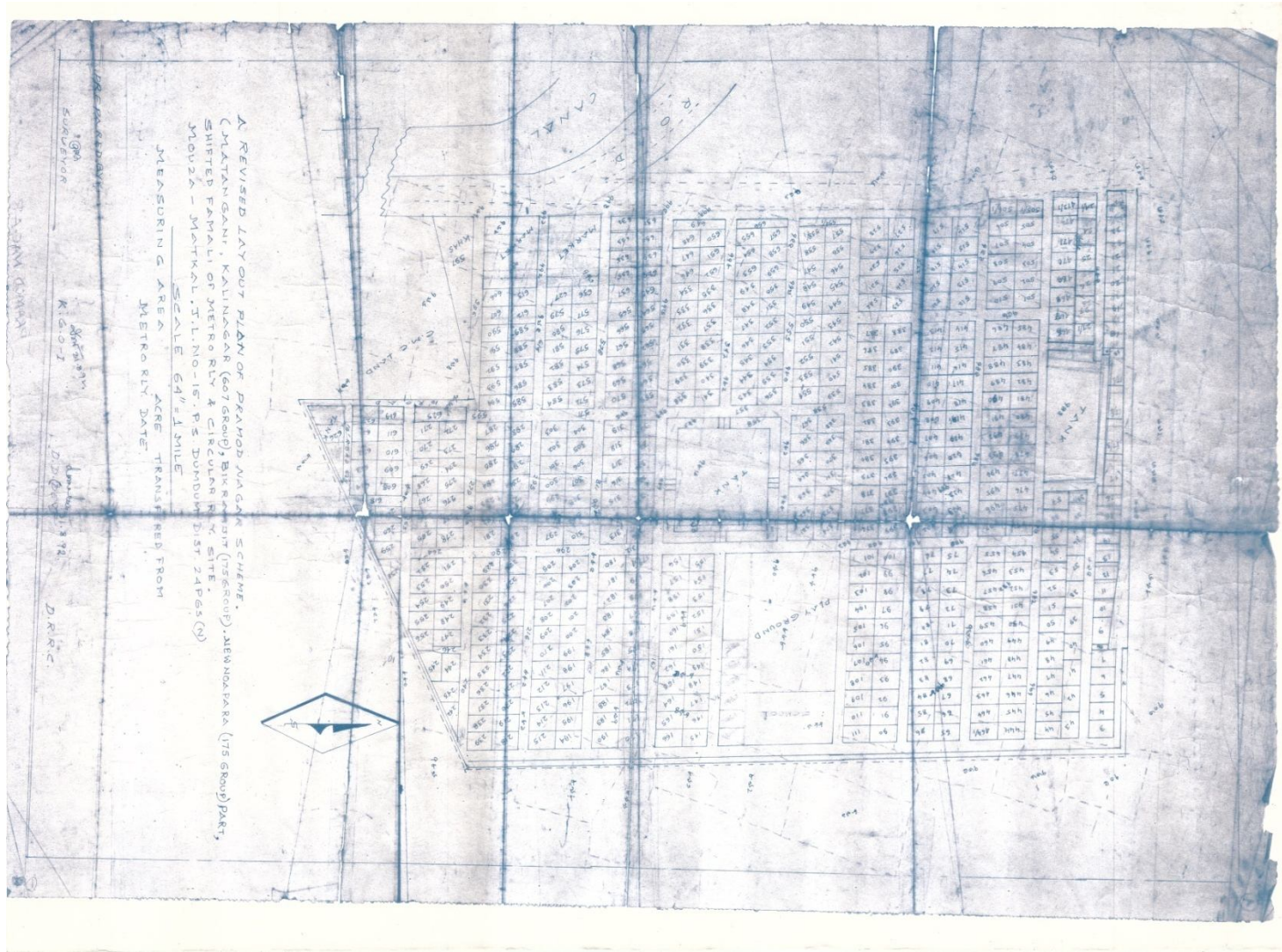


Map 7. Source: Gauranga Halder (Ex. President of Colony Committee of Pramod Nagor)

³⁵⁷ SekharBandyopadhyay and AnasuaBasu Ray Chaudhury, "Partition, Displacement and the Decline of the scheduled Caste Movement in Bengal", in Uday Chandra, GeirHeierstad and Kenneth Bo Nielsen ed. *The Politics of Caste in West Bengal*, pp 70-71



Map 8. Source: Swapan Bala (Ex. Secretary of Colony Committee Pramod Nagar)



Map 9. Source: Swapan Bala (Ex. Secretary of Colony Committee Pramod Nagar)

State, Infrastructure and Refugee settlements

The discussion in the preceding section gives us a sense of the intertwined processes through which claim-making by refugees is connected to both market and state bureaucratic mechanisms. In this section we will be delving into the interaction between state departments to demonstrate how very different arms of the state machinery can co-ordinate and transform space while addressing very different issues. This is the story of Promod nagor. It was built in the late 1980's as a rehabilitation site for six refugee colonies displaced from three different sites in Kolkata in order to restructure the transport network of the city. Matangini Colony was removed from beside the Patipukur rail bridge. Nehru and Shastri colony were removed from Ultadanga where they were located close to the railway lines going through the Bidhan nagor Railway station. These three were removed to facilitate the extension of the Kolkata Circular Railway. The other three colonies – Shibnagar, Vikramjit and New Noapara were located between the old Bagjola Channel and the new Bagjola Channel. They were removed in order to facilitate the building of the Noapara Metro Car shed.

The first map shows us the relative positions of the new colony area as against an entire host of new infrastructural growth. The first noticeable thing is the bifurcated canal of Bagjola running through the area. The metro car-shed has been marked on the map in the area where three colonies used to be. The new space of the colony marked by the rehabilitation department puts the refugees square in to the old trenching ground of the Calcutta Corporation. When asked, several employees in the Barasat rehabilitation department office agreed that the area where the refugees are housed on now, used to be a landfill for the corporation area and the area was bulldozed and up cycled as the refugee settlements from various parts of Kolkata were brought together. I had once asked a rehabilitation officer in Barrackpur about what he considered good 'rehabilitation' and he had mentioned this site as the most successful rehabilitation he had ever seen. I had visited the colony soon after to learn more

about the locality and I came across these maps that demonstrated in the clearest way possible, the relation between refugee settlements and urban infrastructure.

The second map shows us the quantum of land transferred by different departments to the Metro Railway. The Calcutta Municipal Corporation had a used trenching ground for landfill in the nearby Matkal revenue village. The colonies were picked up and removed to this trenching ground land, which was then transferred to the Metro Railway. The Metro Railway Corporation received 21.3 acres of land in transfers. The land was amalgamated with the land made available by the Municipal Corporation, creating a new trenching ground and the Promod nagor colony.



Figure 19. The above photograph shows Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation minister Mr. Amritendu Mukherjee on inspection in Pramodenagar (source: Dipak Bhattacharya, RR&R)

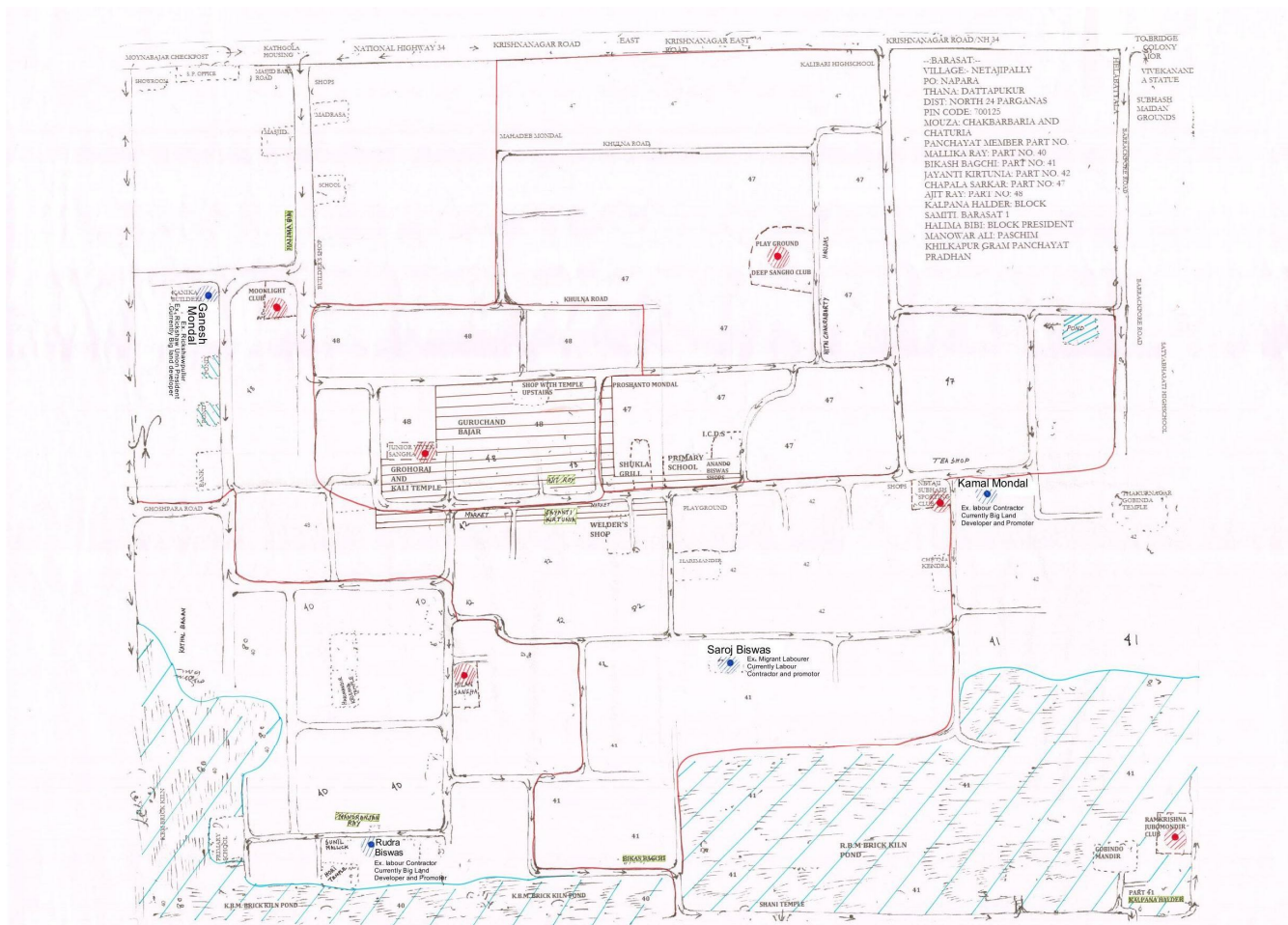
There are three important things to notice in this event. Firstly, this was one of the largest relocations of refugee colonies in Kolkata, which took place without

a single protest or resistance. This is the single most curious character of refugee rehabilitation in West Bengal under the Left Front. The network of activists created by the UCRC served well to bridge the gap between the party and society where massive relocations of land and people could happen without any friction.

One may argue that the promise of free hold title deeds were the primary reason for the quiet and tame process of displacement but it has to be remembered that by the late 1980s all colonies within the KMA were already regularized. So, there was already a quasi legal tenure protection for the refugees when they were displaced. Secondly, the process of accumulating land is particularly interesting here. The re-purposing of state owned land where inhabited land is transformed into infrastructural space and dumping grounds are recycled as habitation there is a very specific form of land transaction taking place. This form of land use transformation is not mapped in the public domain as these transfers don't require gazette notifications or procedures of acquisition. But, even though the land being state owned creates this loop hole. The land was none the less inhabited, thereby giving us an instance of 'accumulation by dispossession' where a legal transfer of right is unnecessary and there is no market mediation in the form of real estate companies or other speculative actors. Thirdly it is important to note here that these maps were not digitized as part of the land record digitization process. These histories of minute transfers and transitions become untraceable quite fast within the state register. In 2015 the rehabilitation deeds given to the refugees in Pramodenagor were re- issued as mutation certificates and patta (title document). The history of these displacements and managements remain largely obscure precisely due to the quotidian nature of the task. Land transformation without acquisition allows for less political resistance while efficiently keeping the traces of dispossession away from the public eye.

The third map in the set shows us the rehabilitation department's vision of the locality. It is a tightly woven, dense settlement on the other side of the car-

shed. The increased density is as much a function of land scarcity as the sign of planning by the rehabilitation department. The official, who had led me to the Promod Nagor settlement, had been an important leader of the co-ordination committee or the government official's left wing union. It is nominally independent of the party so as to give space for the official injunction against government servants being part of political parties. As a person close to CPI (M) and closely linked to the refugee movement, for him the settlement of Promod Nagor was framed in the light of Refugee – Party co-operation. I had asked him and several of the resettled refugees about how this quite move was managed. Most of them argued that once Anil Sinha, the legendary refugee leader came to see them they had no other way but to agree to move. He gave them personal guarantee that if they facilitated the metro project there will be a lot to gain because he will ensure that they get their title deeds. This notion of co-operative displacement probably best captures the relation between the refugee settlements and the communist party in the middle and later days of the regime.



Map 10. Source: Anonymous Respondent mentioned As Record Keeper in the following Section

Refugee villages at the urban periphery

The above discussion has given us a sense of the specificity of the bureaucratic and cartographic process through which the transition of land use is taking place in informal refugee settlements, which are at an advanced stage of being subsumed into municipal governance. Let us look at the rural units at the outer urban periphery for an understanding of the social process that initiates the first stage of transition from rural-agricultural land to urban-residential land.

This section will discuss the seventh map in the chapter. The map is a free-hand drawing created by one of my respondents from the village of Netajipally. Since the village is an amalgam of two partial revenue units (Chaturia, ChakChaturia) and a full third Revenue unit (ChakBarbaria) it is hard to have a standard understanding of the limits of the village and the way in which the village moves towards and away from the city. The only possible way of marking the ever oscillating limits of the village was to traverse it – thoroughly- and then to hold in it one’s mind. The village existed as a unit primarily in the social practice and community networks of the villagers. They had taken agricultural land and built upon it a settlement as dense as any *Bustee* in old Kolkata. Yet its limits were not a matter of state record. That does not mean records were not being kept. I had met the *record keeper* on my first visit to Netajipally. He had first migrated to India as a 16 year old during the 1964 riots in Bangladesh. After the situation quietened he went back in 1966, only to come back in 1969 as the “Bhasha Andolan” (Language movement) turned intense and violent across the border. Through both his migrations he lived in refugee camps. First he lived in the Mana Bhata camp that is now in Chattisgarh and the second time he was sent to the Salboni Camp in Midnapore. After the end of the liberation war he was repatriated to Khulna along with other inmates of the camp in Salboni. My respondent had been a ‘deed writer’ (legal scribe) in Khulna Judge Court before becoming embroiled in a property dispute with local strong men of the majority community and fleeing Bangladesh again in the early 1980s. Through his first decade after his

third migration to India, he had worked as a construction labourer in Odisha. An amateur theater enthusiast, elocutionist, devotional singer, legal counsel, expert draftsman, draughtsman and construction laborer – he was a truly surprising individual with an array of skills - he was also the informal *record keeper* of the village.

He was one of the first two members of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) from the village. He had received his membership in the early 1990s. Since then he had been an archivist and scribe for most of the village residents. In terms of his function in the village community he is not a rare character. He is a common figure of ‘rural communism’ in West Bengal. One can find a very similar character in Rudd’s ethnography of Muslim communist leaders. I had in fact found my ‘Selim master’ who would write mini development plans at the back of notebooks..³⁵⁸

Yet, this was a different context altogether, this was not a member of the peasantry looking for ‘modernity’ and ‘communism’ like Rudd’s selim master. The significance of the difference between Ruud’s ‘Selim Master’ and my respondent was that instead of bringing a ‘modernizing’ consciousness to the village society and space, he had the task of transforming the village into an urban space. His archive was and is an authoritative source for village history. His collection is referred for dispute resolution between political actors, local sporting clubs and land developers. On the very first day of my arrival in the village, at 10.30 pm on a cool November night, I was taken to meet two panchayat members and the *record keeper*. I had gone to him hoping for directions to work in the village. I was told he knew ‘everything’.

The village is only two kilometers from the Barasat Municipality, the Headquarters of the second most urbanized district in West Bengal after the Kolkata Metropolitan Area. The nearby Municipality is in fact one of the

³⁵⁸ Ruud, ArildEngelsen. *Poetics of village politics*. Oxford University Press, 2003, pp 75-78

constituent municipalities of the KMA. The settlement was of course fairly dense.

I had taken to jotting down crude maps of the area on my notebook in order to remember my way around the village and the several clubs and houses of my respondents. My respondent, the village record keeper, had taken a cursory glance at my jottings and my attempts at manual maps with family names marked in red and he had started speaking of maps that he had made of the village at various times. Gradually, a territorial arrangement of the village began to emerge for me. I requested a drawing of the village from him and after nearly a month of cajoling he handed me an outline map of the village with several layers of territorial arrangements marking it.

These layers were each connected to representations of state power or local informal institutions that are at the heart of the 'social regulation' of the informal sector and local markets of land and labor in peri-urban India.³⁵⁹ This was, he told me, a rather simple map. There were better, he claimed. Each of the clubs in the locality had divided up their areas of influence in order to better control soliciting of funds for various programmes and also to keep track of the real estate market in their respective neighborhoods. The version of the map provided here is a less detailed version since I had to electronically erase the names of the people that he had noted and located on the map. Overtime I consulted my other respondents on the map and slowly translated and edited details till attaining the most common image of the village as per the residents.

How do we read this map? The map of course is an act of complex representation:

“Behind the map-maker lies a set of power relations, creating its own specification. Whether imposed by an individual patron, by state bureaucracy, or the market, these rules can be reconstructed both from

³⁵⁹ Barbara Harriss-White. "India's socially regulated economy." *Indian Journal of Labour Economics* 47.1 (2004).

the content of maps and from the mode of cartographic representation”.³⁶⁰

The first feature that caught my attention was the framing of the map. It is set within a quadrilateral defined to the top and to the right by the National Highway 34 and the State Highway 2. These two roads connect the area to the core of Kolkata. Even though the actual village starts at least two kilometers from the roads on both sides, the roads were present as the primary frame of the representations of the village in every hand drawn map that I saw of it. The contiguity to the city is implied in those two roads, an ever present gesture pointing towards the city.

The space within this quadrilateral is criss-crossed by paths, which are kept obsessively straight and meeting at right angles. None of the streets actually mirror the tortuous shape it marks across the actual village. The space defined and described within the village map is riddled with numbers. This was the first part of the legend that my respondent had begun with. The tiny numbers strewn across the village mark the territories as defined by different electoral roles in various electoral lists. The names of local Panchayat representatives are edged in green. The state’s presence in the distribution of village space is marked in terms of electoral unit. The legend mentions five parts of electoral rolls that converge in the village (40, 41, 42, 47, 48). The numbers roughly correspond to the dispersal of the voters in the influence area of each booth.

The second feature that stands out against the background is the serpentine red line that meanders through the village cutting it into approximately five pieces. This boundary marks out the influence area of each of the clubs marked with a red circle and hatches. The clubs are frequented by young men of the area, who periodically arrange community festivals, lotteries and sports events. They double up as the primary contact for the buying and selling of land within their influence area.

³⁶⁰ J. B. Harley, "Maps, knowledge, and power." In George Henderson and Marvin Waterstone ed. *Geographic thought: a praxis perspective*, Routledge, 2009, p 287.

One of the recurrent mentions that I heard from my respondents was that there were five maps – all made by the same record keeper which were on ‘full chart sheets’ with each club marked in a different colour and each of them with their boundaries marked with the same colour. Many a times during my visits I asked the clubs to show me these maps. The clubs clarified that the boundaries changed with season, with the building of more paths and following contestations between clubs. The third and last structuring feature of the village is marked in blue circles and hatchmarks. These are the names and locations of the local land developers and business men who run the local syndicate and control their respective territories through the clubs that they finance. In the next section I will discuss how the actors represented in this cartography interact in terms of enclosing and capturing land, changing land use, legitimizing claim and negotiating between market and state forces.

Quiet Transition

And all of a sudden that rubbish, in time to the mad and unpredicted rhythm of the storm, was being sorted out, individualized, until what had been a narrow street with a river at one end and a corral for the dead at the other was changed into a different and more complex town, created out of the rubbish of other towns.³⁶¹ – Gabriel Garcia Marquez

The quietude of Macondo is significant only against the backdrop of war and devastation. The village of Netajipally described in the next few pages, is not ‘quiet’ in the sense of being peaceful. It is the quietude of a constant tension. The politics of transition touches upon it with a great deal of inner violence, yet it is a controlled violence – within its shade ‘peace committees’ are made and disbanded with alacrity and amateur historians and archivists – activists of a communist party witnessing the dissolution of its own social and political

³⁶¹ Marquez, Gabriel Garcia, ‘Introduction’, *Leaf Storm and Other stories*, Bard Books, New York, 1973, pp 9-10

apparatus,³⁶² put down words on paper recording premonitions of its own death. The ‘quiet transition’³⁶³ is an outcome of a particular kind of labour, the ‘labour towards transition’. Against the backdrop of the spectacular, violent, visible and successful peasant movements like Nandigram and Singur it is important to notice the banal transitions wrought each day by the deployment of a population produced out of the de-peasantizing apparatus of rehabilitation and the experience of displacement – a population constantly in the grip of social hierarchy and legal threat of disenfranchisement. In the following narrative the paper will try to sketch the effect of systematic ‘emplacement’³⁶⁴ of an ‘insecuritized’³⁶⁵ population.

In early July 2010 the playground in front of the Netajipally free primary school was going through a renovation under the supervision and expense of Kamal Mandal and Rathin Halder.³⁶⁶ The school playground of around 23 cottah was originally owned by Sakina khaton, who had moved away from the village in the early 1990s. She had come to inherit the plot after the death of her husband Hassan Ali in 1999. In 1995, a group of refugee land developers had formed an informal partnership to take up around 5 bighas of land in Chak Barbaria from Janab Hassan Ali in order to plot and sell the land as homestead

³⁶² In West Bengal the debate on the urban periphery has been closely related to the social and political apparatus necessary to govern the process of ‘primitive accumulation’. The political economic debate between ParthaChatterjee and KalyanSanyal concerning layers and strategies of capital accumulation develops simultaneously with ideas concerning the particularities of the mediation between State, Party and Society. See Bhattacharya, Dwaipayana. “‘Civic Community’ and Its Margins: School Teachers in Rural West Bengal.” *Economic and Political Weekly* (2001): 673-683 and Bhattacharyya, Dwaipayana. “Of Control and Factions: The Changing ‘Party-Society’ in Rural West Bengal.” *Economic and political Weekly* (2009): 59-69. For a detailed study of the ‘party machinery’ see Dasgupta, Rajarshi. “The CPI (M) ‘Machinery’ in West Bengal: Two Village Narratives from Kochbihar and Malda.” *Economic and Political Weekly* (2009): 70-81. The discussions on primitive accumulation and its reversal through governmentality are to be found in Chatterjee, Partha. *Lineages of political society: Studies in postcolonial democracy*. Columbia University Press, 2011 and Sanyal, Kalyan. *Rethinking capitalist development: Primitive accumulation, governmentality and post-colonial capitalism*. Routledge, 2014.

³⁶³ I am trying to reverse Solomon Benjamin’s lens of ‘Quiet Politics’ in order to characterize state policy driven transitions that are immensely successful while being nearly invisible. See Benjamin, Solomon. “Occupancy urbanism: Radicalizing politics and economy beyond policy and programs.” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 32, no. 3 (2008): 719-729.

³⁶⁴ Foucault, Michel, and Jay Miskowiec. “Of other spaces.” *diacritics* 16, no. 1 (1986): 22-27.

³⁶⁵ Lazzarato, Maurizio. “Neoliberalism in action inequality, insecurity and the reconstitution of the social.” *Theory, culture & society* 26, no. 6 (2009): 109-133.

³⁶⁶ All first names have been changed to maintain anonymity.

to several families of Namasudra refugees. Of the three businessmen involved in the deal Haripada Mondal was also the father of Kamal Mondal. There was an informal agreement made jointly between Netajipally Vidyalaya (school) committee, Netajipally Unnayan (development) Committee, Netajipally Sporting Club and the three businessmen in 1997, for donation of a portion of land from within that 5 bigha for making a school building for Netajipally free primary school and a playground. The two informal committees and Netaji sporting club were given possession of land, where 17 Kottah was kept for the school building and 23 Kottah³⁶⁷ for playground. The ownership and legal deed for the school building land was registered in 2003 but the playground remained unregistered. The village had however, claimed and occupied this land as a 'commons' for holding cultural and sporting events without payment. Its central location, nearness to the village market and size made it an extremely valuable piece of land over the next several years. In August 2010, the village was about to host an important set of sporting events, a lottery and a *kirtan utsav* under the guardianship of Netajipally sporting club.

Kamal Mondal, who had started out as a migrant construction sector labourer in Mumbai in the early 1990's had by then made his fortune as a labour contractor and promoter. Being the president of the Netaji Sporting Club he had decided to invest some of his money to beautify and improve the condition of the playground as gesture goodwill towards the village residents.

Within a week of commencing work, there was a rumor that Kamal Mondal had ordered several trucks full of iron rods, bricks and cement from one of his nearby warehouses and several villagers saw a number of masons from his company along with one of his engineers measure the playground. Soon there were rumours that Haripada Mondal had given his old agreement papers signed by Hassan Ali to his son and that he had met Sakina Khatoon and signed another agreement naming him the owner of that 23 kottah plot of land. There were immediate protests from the Netajipally Vidyalaya (school) Committee

³⁶⁷ 1 Kottah is equivalent of 0.017 acre in West Bengal

and the Netajipally Unnayan (development) Committee. The trouble was that the primary school had not yet received its affiliation. This meant that property would have to be held by either a registered cooperative or a single person as a trustee, who would guarantee proper use of land as a 'commons' in the future. Kamal Mondal argued that he would register the deed for the land and pass the title to the Netajipally Sporting Club, which was by then a registered club. Over the next 5 days his engineers and masons had built an iron and concrete wall of about five feet height around the entire plot of land with two gates.

A resident of the village, a minor land developer and sub-contractor informed the Unnayan committee that Kamal Mondal was attempting to register the land in his own name. Once again a meeting was convened and the Unnayan committee members argued that since Kamal was the President of Netaji Sporting Club at the time and most of the other office bearers of the club were involved in his business, registering the deed and title to the club was the same thing as the land being taken over by the promoter himself since he could later conveniently transfer the title to himself or to his company as and when he would please.

Next night, in a series of midnight attacks the gates and windows in the homes of the members of the Unnayan committee were broken. Following this, the panchayat members and committee members filed several complaints with the police, the panchayat, the District Magistrate, the court of the sub-divisional executive magistrate and the local land revenue and registry office. The violence continued unabated and several young masked men attempted to break into the house of the Forward Bloc Panchayat member from the neighborhood. Following this, the village community immediately cobbled together a peace committee, where three of the businessmen, who had originally signed the agreement with Hassan Ali were called to speak in favor of the committees. Kamal Mondal's father Haripada Mondal also attended the meeting and spoke for continued common use of the piece of land.

In the entire week leading up to 22nd July when the final police complaint was filed Sakina hatoon did not once visit the meetings. She has not visited her own land for over two decades. I was never able to interview her and she remained an absent presence throughout the negotiations with Janab Abid Ali as her dubious proxy as one of the businessmen to have signed an agreement with her husband on the basis of a 10% advance on the price of land in 1995. Till my last visit to the village, the land remained disputed with vestiges of a wall around it. By 2014, the work on the Netajipally primary school building was finished, financed by 'Roundtable India'. Rest of the land around it has changed and is changing faster. With the civic transition of the Netajipally the reallocation of its space became necessary and the erasure of the local peasantry became inevitable.

The primary resistance to the land grab came from the Namasudra hindu refugee community which in the process of staking its own claim erased the claim of the representatives of the local peasantry.

Sakina Khatoon's absence and the quiet transformation of the neighborhood makes visible the register of *effects* of the Partition and the urbanization process that reproduces it constantly because it is structurally coextensive with the process of nation making. With the tabling of the 2016 Citizenship (Amendment) Act – the first instance of a religion and country specific naturalization application process in India – may be the 'quiet transition' will reach its formal apogee of 'insecure' enfranchisement of the Namasudra refugee and a stabilization of this population's place at the frontier of urbanisation.

The map discussed in this section can be thought of in two different ways firstly it is a form of "local knowledge" that places the local actors in space as a way of navigating not only the physical but the abstract social space of the village. The electoral markers are a way of understanding contiguities between clubs, Business men and the elected representatives. The arrangement of local power is represented here in almost a pictorial schema. The second important

indication is that in such practices of representing space from below, there is a tendency towards objectifying the state machinery by marking its limits and attempting to find pathways through it. The map then is an index of power, a lens through which to read the state and disaggregate it while simultaneously representing the incursion of the market into the space of habitation as well.

Conclusion

While commenting on the history of Delhi Development Authority and the process through which it came to own and develop staggeringly large land holdings around Delhi, Ghertner mentions the arrival of the partition refugees as one of the primary moments of ‘urban enclosure’³⁶⁸ in the national capital. In the case of Delhi the process was accelerated by the Delhi Land and Finance company, which had gained control over large tracts of land and had cornered the real estate market to such an extent as to trigger a response from the state in the shape of DDA and its monopoly power over land acquisition.³⁶⁹ This power was, to a small extent channelized towards producing refugee housing. Ghertner argues that the dynamics that have been marked as an agentic act of ‘occupancy urbanism’³⁷⁰ might very well be read as a diluted access to cheap housing provided by a weak state to its urban poor.

In the case of west Bengal the question of violent forms of primitive accumulation has long been the main stay of the political landscape. This process of spectacular state violence has strongly affected the field of political organization where the spectacular events surrounding acquisition of agricultural land for the purpose of creating new industries resulted in the

³⁶⁸ D Asher Ghertner, India’s urban revolution: Geographies of displacement beyond gentrification, *Environment and Planning A*; V 46, 2014, pp 1554-1571, p 1555

³⁶⁹ Ravi Sundaram, *Pirate Modernity: Delhi’s Media Urbanism*, Routledge, 2009, New York

³⁷⁰ Solomon Benjamin, 2008, “Occupancy urbanism: radicalizing politics and economy beyond policy and programs”, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, Volume 32, 719–729

‘implosion’ of the political structure and the legitimacy of the ruling Left Front government.³⁷¹

This chapter is an inquiry into the more quotidian transformation of land that takes place without spectacular interventions by the state machinery in the form of large scale land acquisitions and building of middle class housing projects. Especially for the city of Kolkata, which has received several waves of refugees over the years, refugee colonies have been the primary actors of transformation of the urban-rural contact zone into densely populated urban areas.

The above pages lay down a description of the various modalities through which the refugee becomes an object and an agent of urban transformation. There has been a significant restructuring of the technologies, capacities and practices of the West Bengal Land and Land Reform department. The refugee as an object of governance appears as a malleable instrument for both passive and aggressive transformation of space. The refugee population, given its informal standing, legally, socially and spatially – is driven towards competitive participation in local land markets. However, due to its particular history and relation to the state and land tenure, this population cannot capitalize or stabilize gains. Specifically, refugee land and regularized refugee colonies, without ownership, are instruments for repurposing of urban land.

³⁷¹Dwaipayan Bhattacharyya. *Government as Practice: Democratic Left in a Transforming India*. Cambridge University Press, 2016 pp 155-212

Chapter Five:

Contemporary Mobilizations: Namasudra Refugee Politics in West Bengal

I. Introduction

My fieldwork in the settlements of Namasudra³⁷² refugees at the edge of the city of Kolkata had begun in late 2011, at a protest site in front of Jantar Mantar in New Delhi. A group of 20 Namasudra refugee activists and a support team from ‘Joint Action Committee for Bengali Refugees’ (JACBR), led by Sukriti Ranjan Biswas, had arrived at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi on 28th November to start an indefinite hunger strike demanding the repeal of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act of 2003 (2003 Act, here on). This amendment has made it difficult for post-1971 migrants from Bangladesh (erstwhile East Pakistan) to gain citizenship in India by adding a clause defining an illegal immigrant and by disenfranchising family members born on Indian soil after migration.³⁷³

Over the next week, I witnessed their unsuccessful negotiations with several Congress leaders including V. Narayanasamy and K.C. Singh Baba. Through the first three

³⁷² The historian Sekhar Bandyopadhyay has written extensively on the formation of the Namasudra community and the evolution of their religious thought and activities as a foundation for caste politics in colonial Bengal. He has argued that the Namasudra community was able to build a ‘protest religion’ to bind together various sub-castes of the peasantry and create effective mobilization against upper caste landlords. See Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *Caste, Protest and Identity in Colonial India: The Namasudras of Bengal, 1872-1947* (New Delhi: Routledge, 1997).

³⁷³ See Anupama Roy, *Mapping Citizenship in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010).

days, leaders from the Communist parties, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Jamiat Ulama-i Hind and Lok Janshakti Party came to visit the tent periodically. There were no concrete outcomes from the strike. After several insipid promises from Members of Parliament (MPs) to bring up the issue in Lok Sabha, the activists decided to wrap up the agitation. The hunger strike came to a rather dissatisfactory end in the evening of the fourth day when Baba visited the protester's tent and requested the leaders to discontinue the strike. Several of the activists were rather disheartened by their near invisibility in the theater of so many protests. They were distraught over not being able to garner any media attention in a year when mass agitations were sweeping through the country.

I found this invisibility telling, given the fact that this population had held very successful campaigns and agitations in the border districts in West Bengal and the urban periphery of Kolkata. They were also a significant element in the social and political coalition that had toppled the Communist Party of India (Marxist) [CPI(M)] – led Left Front government in the 2011 state assembly elections.³⁷⁴ Their precarious position in the national polity, an inevitable outcome of a politics based on the refugee identity in times of rising xenophobia, seemed to blunt the possibility of a national conversation. This invisibility did not stem from a simple lack of information. On the contrary, the 'Bangladeshi immigration question' in eastern India has been staple fare for BJP's national campaign for years.³⁷⁵ Within six weeks of the Babri Mosque demolition, L.K. Advani had begun speaking on the East Indian immigration issue. He continued pushing the issue vehemently in the follow up to the 2003 Act³⁷⁶ and extremely important policy moves like the National Citizen's Registry and the biometric Unique Identification system evolved out of the legal and political debate concerning the apparent porosity of the East Indian borderland.

Though there were activists from several states and representatives from committees and organizations across several districts of West Bengal, the district of North 24 Parganas was significantly over-represented in the activist group. Three of the 22

³⁷⁴ Praskanva Sinharay, "A New Politics of Caste," *Economic and Political Weekly* 47 (2012): 34, 26-27.

³⁷⁵ See Soutik Biswas and Farzan Ahmed, "Migrant Tinder-box," *India Today*, May 15th, 1993, Accessed 7th January, 2017 <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/bjp-hopes-to-reap-political-dividends-by-communalising-bangladeshi-immigrant-issue/1/302212.html> .

³⁷⁶ See 'Illegal immigrants to be deported', *The Tribune*, February 17th, 2003, Accessed 7th January, 2017 <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2003/20030217/main3.htm>

hunger strikers hailed from the same village, Netajipally, a ‘refugee village’ as several activists categorized it. The campaign for the hunger strike and protest in Delhi had in fact begun from the very same village, on the 6th of November 2011, with a rally, street corner meetings and speeches in the village market. The campaign had then covered several border districts of West Bengal to mobilize support before going for the protest in Delhi. The travel back to the periphery from the nation state’s ‘civic square’ was not a triumphant one.³⁷⁷

Migrants and National Politics

The BJP discovered in the 1991 assembly elections that its anti-infiltrator pitch, particularly in West Bengal, helped raise its vote percentage from less than 1 per cent to 11.6 per cent. Since the bulk of the Bangladeshi immigration – out of a total census estimate of 38.32 lakhs – is concentrated in these areas, the party hopes for a political dividend by stoking anti-foreigner passions.³⁷⁸

Within six weeks of the Babri Mosque demolition, BJP had begun its campaign against Bangladeshi migrants in Delhi in earnest. The BJP MP Madan Lal Khurana had given a call for forcible eviction – of presumably ‘Bangladeshi immigrant’ colony residents from Okhla’s working class settlements in order to tackle what his party had by then marked as their main project not only in the urban periphery of Delhi but at the periphery of the nation as well³⁷⁹ – in eastern and north-eastern India.

These events continuing through the year of 1993 culminated in L.K. Advani’s virulent rhetoric in the *Organiser* in the November of 1993. He declared that the Bangladeshi ‘infiltrators’ were part and parcel of ‘pan-Islamic forces’, which were slowly creating a ‘fifth column at our very doorstep’.³⁸⁰ This political line would

³⁷⁷ I am referring to Holston’s argument concerning new political demands being articulated in the peripheries and then moving to the civic square. See James Holston, “Insurgent Citizenship in an Era of Global Urban Peripheries,” *City and Society* 21 (2009): 2, 245-267.

³⁷⁸ Soutik Biswas and Farzan Ahmed, “Migrant Tinder-box,” *India today*, 15th May, 1993, Accessed 20th February, 2017. <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/bjp-hopes-to-reap-political-dividends-by-communalising-bangladeshi-immigrant-issue/1/302212.html>.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid*

³⁸⁰ L. K. Advani, “Onwards to Ramrajya,” *Organiser*, 7th November, 1993, 11, cited in Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics: 1925 to the 1990s: Strategies of Identity-building, Implantation and Mobilisation (with special reference to Central India)* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1999), 486.

continue gaining acceptance and in 1998 the issue became part of BJP's election brochure:

We, however, continue to view with concern the unabated illegal infiltration into India from that country and will seek the active participation of the Bangladesh authorities in curbing this.³⁸¹

This fear of 'illegal infiltration' was founded upon a rather specific historical religious division. Sikander Bakht, one of the founding General Secretaries of the BJP, had commented in the Rajya Sabha that following the logic of the 1947 Partition, India needed to take care of the 'Hindu refugees' but that the Muslim migrants were 'invaders'.³⁸²

Bakht was the original Muslim poster boy of BJP. Derided and reviled publicly in the Organiser in the 1950s for being a 'pet' of Liaqut Ali Khan, he had started his career in politics, allegedly, as a Muslim League National Guard.³⁸³ Following which he had made a well-publicized shift to Congress. In his time as a Congress leader in Delhi, trusted by the Muslims leaving the country and fleeing to Pakistan, he was apparently entrusted with documents pertaining to immovable property by numerous fleeing Muslim families. Hindu right wing groups had at the time (in the 1950s) accused him of misappropriating these properties for his own benefit. During the 1969 split of the Congress party he had decided to side with Congress (O) and spent nearly eight years in the party's Organizing Committee.³⁸⁴

During the Emergency he was jailed for eighteen months at the end of which he became one of the founding members of the Janata Party. He then spent time as a minister in the Janata government and the Vajpayee government. He was also the leader of opposition for BJP in the Rajya Sabha for a significant part of the 1990s.³⁸⁵ Bakht's career as a politician probably represents very well the situation of the Muslim question in Indian politics and the vicissitudes of practicality meeting

³⁸¹ Bharatiya Janata Party, *Election Manifesto*, 1998, 30

³⁸² Biswas and Ahmed, "Migrant tinder box."

³⁸³ 'Sikandar Bakht and CO', *Organiser*, June 2, 1952, reprinted in 'Sikander Bakht: Then and Now', *Milli Gazette* Accessed 20th February 2017

<http://www.milligazette.com/Archives/2004/01-15Apr04-Print-Edition/011504200486.htm>,

³⁸⁴ 'Sikander Bakht: BJP's best known Muslim Face', *Outlook*, 23rd February, 2004, Accessed 20th February 2017 <http://www.outlookindia.com/newswire/story/sikander-bakht-bjps-best-known-muslim-face/203364>

³⁸⁵ *Ibid*

increasing marginalization. His stance in Rajya Sabha, however, finished off all possible vacillation on the 'immigration' issue on the Bangladesh border. The Muslim invader/infiltrator figure became a mainstay of BJP's politics in eastern and north eastern India in the time that he served as the leader of opposition in Rajya Sabha while Advani took up the mantle of building up a mass movement against migration through the Bengal border.

By the early 2000s, Bangladeshi immigration had become a staple of national political rhetoric for BJP. This was further developed and underlined by the violence that ensued in Bangladesh during the 2001 polls, which ushered in the coalition government of Jamat-e-Islami and Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). The election itself had to take place under stringent security measures since pre-poll violence had already claimed several lives.³⁸⁶ The out-going Prime Minister and Awami League President, Sheikh Hasina, had hurled accusations of a planned terror campaign being waged against the minority community by the BNP. Following the accusations the situation became increasingly tenser as the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) apprehended citizens from the minority community attempting to illegally migrate to Indian Territory.³⁸⁷ A decade later, after the reinstatement of the Hasina-led Awami League government, an inquiry panel confirmed the participation of BNP and Jamat members in the 2001 poll violence.³⁸⁸ This gesture by the Bangladesh government was too little on top of being too late since a series of events in the intervening decade had already made the issue a veritable vote cow for the BJP leadership.

'Push back'

1st February 2003, a tragic coincidence brought alive the debate on immigration at the Bengal borders. The Border Security Force (BSF) and BDR came to a "face-off as both forces tried to push back more than 230 people across the Indo-Bangladesh border".³⁸⁹ 'Push back' and 'Push in' are terms regularly used to refer to police action

³⁸⁶ 'Bangladesh goes to polls today', *The Hindu*, DATE? Accessed 20th February, 2017, <http://www.thehindu.com/thehindu/2001/10/01/stories/0301000j.htm>

³⁸⁷ 'Khaleda orders probe into reports of persecution', *The Hindu*, 16th October, 2001, Accessed 20th February, 2017 <http://www.thehindu.com/thehindu/2001/10/16/stories/0316000k.htm>

³⁸⁸ 'Bangladesh persecution panel reports on 2001 violence', BBC News, 2nd December, 2011, Accessed 20th February, 2017 <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-15987644>

³⁸⁹ Bureau, 'Border Forces Push Back And Forth', *The Telegraph*, February 1st. 2003, Accessed 7th June, 2012 http://www.telegraphindia.com/1030201/asp/nation/story_1628751.asp

against migrants at the Bengal border and in north-eastern states. Such action usually entails the arrest and forcible transfer of populations across the border.

BSF personnel apprehended 213 individuals of suspect national origin as BDR attempted to herd them into Indian Territory through Satgachi border in Cooch Behar district. Simultaneously, BDR stopped 26 similar individuals who had been arrested in Delhi and transferred to the border by the police, for the BSF to forcibly transfer them to Bangladeshi territory at Phulbari in Nadia district.³⁹⁰

The 'Indian Social Institute' had created a chronology of newspaper reports published in 2003 relating to immigration in India. The list of newspaper reports³⁹¹ was 12 pages long and 28 out of 47 articles were regarding Bangladeshi immigrants. The Cooch Behar event was finally resolved on 7th February when the Bangladesh Government capitulated and allowed the 213 individuals into their country.³⁹² L.K. Advani remained at the forefront of the issue for more than a decade and repeatedly warned Indian citizens of 'colonies' of foreigners slowly covering Indian Territory. He repeatedly argued for mass identification and deportation of these 'infiltrators'. Even the Delhi High Court accused Delhi police for being 'lackadaisical' in evicting Bangladeshi immigrants from the capital.³⁹³

Following the Cooch Behar incident the West Bengal government had 'asked the police to intensify vigil' in the 'districts along the border with Bangladesh'.³⁹⁴ The police force was deployed to 'supplement' the BSF. Reportedly there were a set of border skirmishes and a rather significant incident took place on 13th February 2003 when the BDR 'tried to push in about 200 persons at Hilli in north Bengal'.³⁹⁵ The CPI(M) led Left Front government, headed by Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, had supplemented the BSF's efforts after the BDR attempted to push Bangladeshi nationals into India during the standoff at Satgachi.³⁹⁶

³⁹⁰ Ibid

³⁹¹ K. Samu, "Refugees/Migrants-2003", *Human Rights Documentation*, Indian Social Institute," Accessed 7th June 2012 http://www.isidelhi.org.in/hrnews/HR_THEMATIC_ISSUES/Refugees/

³⁹² Ibid, 3

³⁹³ Ibid, 10

³⁹⁴ Malabika Bhattacharya, "Bengal police to intensify vigil against infiltration from Bangladesh," *The Hindu*, February 16 2003, Accessed 7th June 2012, <http://www.hindu.com/thehindu/2003/02/16/stories/2003021605000800.htm>

³⁹⁵ Ibid

³⁹⁶ Ibid

Significantly, the CPI(M)-led Governments in West Bengal and Tripura, eschewing their ideological differences with the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) at the Centre, came forward to lend force to the national campaign against infiltration and cross-border terrorism.³⁹⁷ At both levels the governments decided to secure the ‘porous border’ much more ‘stringently’. On 16th February 2003, the Foreign Minister of Bangladesh, Mohd. Morshed Khan, met the Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.³⁹⁸ The newspaper headline, ‘Illegal immigration on both sides’, was probably an extract of the political engagement of these two leaders presented to the general public. The Bangladesh Foreign Minister had to face charges of ‘ISI activities’ and accusations of allowing insurgents to operate on the Bangladesh side of the Indian border.³⁹⁹

Both chief ministers, of West Bengal and Tripura, had apparently supplied Prime Minister Vajpayee with information on ‘infiltration’. The effort had apparently taken ‘several months’ to facilitate the preparation of the papers handed to the Bangladesh Foreign Minister. “Mr. Bhattacharjee’s concern” was not “difficult to comprehend” in the particular political climate.⁴⁰⁰ The fear of “Bangladeshi crime lords based in Kolkata” who were thought to be “flush with funds and contacts”, escaping their homeland authorities and relocating to West Bengal, was a major portion of the propaganda. This cause was followed closely by the concern over “rapidly changing the demographic profile in many parts of the State”.⁴⁰¹

The Rajya Sabha Secretariat notified the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2003 on 21st June 2003. The bill was in front of the ‘Department-related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs’ headed by Shri Pranab Mukherjee. The notification stated the aims and objectives of the bill. The stated goal of the legislation was to grant dual citizenship while introducing a process for compulsory registration of every citizen of India. The bill also mandated, for this purpose, the issue of national

³⁹⁷ Ibid

³⁹⁸ Amit Baruah, ‘Illegal immigration on both sides’, *The Hindu*, February 16 2003, Accessed 7th June 2012 <http://www.hindu.com/thehindu/2003/02/16/stories/2003021605050800.htm>

³⁹⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰⁰ Bhattacharya, “Bengal police”

⁴⁰¹ Ibid

identity cards.⁴⁰² The various objectives of the amendment are stated thus in the notification:

(i) Make Indian Citizenship by registration and naturalisation harder to obtain; (ii) deny eligibility to illegal migrants for application to Indian citizenship; (iii) simplify re-acquisition of Indian citizenship for children of Indian citizens and former citizens of India; (iv) provide for overseas citizenship of India to Indian origin individuals belonging to specific countries and citizens who choose to apply for the citizenship of these countries later on; (v) create a process of compulsory registration and a national identity card for all citizens of India; (vi) enhance the penalty for violation of provisions and rules framed under the Act; and (vii) omit all provisions of Commonwealth citizenship from the Act.⁴⁰³

The ruling party had to face questions in the Parliament concerning the Citizenship Amendment Bill.⁴⁰⁴ The ‘Leader of the Opposition’, Dr. Manmohan Singh reminded the members about persecution of minorities in Bangladesh which, according to him, fed the flow of forced migration and that a special safeguard for such cases was a “moral obligation” for the Indian leadership.⁴⁰⁵ Gen. Shankar Roy Chowdhury, an Independent MP supported by the Left and the Congress in West Bengal, argued that the Bengali refugees coming over due to persecution should be treated differently.⁴⁰⁶ The significance of the bill for West Bengal can be read in the constant articulation of ‘special provisions’ for West Bengal.

The 2003 amendment profoundly shifted the political scenario in West Bengal. What followed were a slew of arrests, voters list revision, ration card cancellations and debates between political parties flaring up. The passage of the bill also created a new upsurge in refugee activism. This led to the formation of political combines that redefined the field of refugee activism by bringing the Matua Mahasangha and several other smaller organisations to the centre stage of citizenship activism. An invisible population, fallen out of the map of rehabilitation suddenly became visible and turned

⁴⁰² Rajya Sabha Secretariat, *The Statesman*, 21st June 2003, in Joint Action Committee for Bengali Refugees, *Shafal Holo Udbastuder Dillir Anashan Andolan*, Joint Action Committee for Bengali Refugees, Madhyamgram, 2011, 25.

⁴⁰³ *Ibid*

⁴⁰⁴ Rajya Sabha Proceedings, SKC/4m/6.25, Uncorrected/Not for Publication-18.12.2003, 680, Accessed 20th June, 2012, <rajyasabha.nic.in>

⁴⁰⁵ Rajya Sabha Proceedings, 18th December 2003, 681

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 682

into a question that was repeatedly asked and addressed in parliamentary politics but dealt with in very different ways in the competitive political arena.

Counting Infiltrators: An All-Party Effort

The magnitude of migration has remained a thorny issue for most political commentators and competitors in the milieu of both national and regional politics. In the 1990s the BJP was already making claims of there being at least 15 to 30 million refugees in India. They claimed to have met some measure of success in pressurizing the Election Commission to disenfranchise approximately 1.5 lakh migrants.⁴⁰⁷ The claims however, were quickly trounced by the Election Commission and the migration numbers claimed by the party also looked almost comically inflated, especially given the proof they offered. The primary argument coming from BJP at that time was that Bangladesh was logging less than its projected growth rate in the census, thereby proving the point that a portion of their population had been moving elsewhere.⁴⁰⁸ These claims and numbers, evidence seems to point, originated from correspondence between the central government and the then Chief Minister of West Bengal, Jyoti Basu, in the late 1980s.⁴⁰⁹ Jyoti Basu had apparently written several letters to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi regarding his concern over the magnitude of immigration from Bangladesh. In the early 1990s, keeping with the national political mood, Basu decided to enter into public discussion concerning his stand on the immigration issue. In a 1992 essay in the CPI(M) mouthpiece, *Ganashakti*, he wrote a long and detailed article furnishing statistics, not only on usual migration but also on arrests, religious backgrounds of detainees and the projected number of illegal immigrants from Bangladesh including individuals who may have arrived as legal travelers but overstayed their legal welcome.⁴¹⁰ He authoritatively stated that the BSF had spotted a total of 2,35,529 Bangladeshi nationals in West Bengal and that they had been returned. Of these, 1,64,132 were apparently Muslim migrants.⁴¹¹ He argued for further strengthening of the mobile taskforce for apprehending the migrants. He

⁴⁰⁷ Biswas and Ahmed, "Migrant tinder box,"

⁴⁰⁸ *ibid*

⁴⁰⁹ Sujata Ramachandran, " 'Operation Pushback': Sangh Parivar, State, Slums and Surreptitious Bangladeshis in New Delhi," *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, 23 (2002): 3, 313.

⁴¹⁰ Jyoti Basu, "The infiltration problem needs a genuine solution," *Ganashakti*, 11th October 1992, reprinted in Amalendu De, *Prasongo: Onuprobesh* (Calcutta: Barnaparichay, 1993) 125 – 127.

⁴¹¹ *Ibid*, 126

also alluded that he had been corresponding with the central government since 1985 to help with the infiltration issue. While these numbers are as suspect as the numbers provided by various BJP leaders over the years, they carried with them the legitimacy of a long term ruling Chief Minister of the region. This knowledge was also marked with the apparent benevolence with which CPI(M) had dealt with the refugee question, though somewhat sullied by the Marichjhanpi massacre. These arrest data are not public. There is practically no way of verifying and tabulating such claims. Instead, there is a system of political referencing that establishes the legitimacy of such claims made in terms of uncountable numbers.

Starting from the upper limit of 30 million in the early 1990s, the BJP propaganda machine dropped the estimate down to 20 million in the late 90s with the addendum that the number of Bangladeshis in Delhi was at least 300,000. Scholars from several different districts, in Assam, West Bengal and Tripura, attempted to correct these estimates through research on census data in both India and Bangladesh.⁴¹² Gautam Navlakha has rightly characterised the politics in this period as a numbers game.⁴¹³ The numbers proffered by Jyoti Basu went on to garner immense legitimacy in both the left and the right wing circles of political activists and authors. Mohit Roy, the BJP candidate from the old refugee concentrated neighborhood of Jadavpur spent considerable amount of time and energy in quoting and bolstering the numbers given by Jyoti Basu over three extremely popular booklets which have increasingly become part and parcel of the BJP book stalls selling political literature at various public events across West Bengal.⁴¹⁴

The politically referential counting that we are discussing here constantly attempts to approach a certain scientific horizon of being a trustworthy fact. The counting of a less visible or hidden population per force generates inventive energies directed at better counting through indirect methods, or better still creates new protocols of quantification that may expose the invisible. Demographers have argued for the

⁴¹² See De, *Prasongo* and Ashish Bose, "Beyond Hindu Muslim growth rates: Understanding socio-economic reality," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 40 (2005): 5, 370-374.

⁴¹³ Gautam Navlakha, "Bangladeshis in India: the numbers game," in *States, Citizens and Outsiders: The Uprooted Peoples of South Asia*, ed. Tapan K. Bose and Rita Manchanda (New Delhi: South Asia Forum for Human Rights, 1997), 353-359.

⁴¹⁴ Mohit Roy, *Onuprobesh jehader dapote Paschim Bonger vobitabbyo: Paschim Bangladesh* (Kolkata: CAMP, 2015); Mohit Roy, *Bangladesh O Paschim Bango: Kichu Bidhi Baddho Satarkikaron* (Kolkata: CAMP 2013) and Rantideb Sengupta and Mohit Roy, *Satter mukhomukhi: Santrash, onuprobesh o annoy prasongo* (Kolkata: Sankhanad Prakashan, 2014).

linking of religion, population growth rate and birthplace data in order to create ways to detect immigrant clusters.⁴¹⁵ Political commentators have made the function of such counting clear over the last several years. Mohit Roy formulated a seven point programme which became a standard argument one would often receive from BJP activists during and after the 2014 Lok Sabha elections. The programme calls for a ‘special census’ for detection of ‘suspect populations’ and denying them all possibility of acquiring citizenship. Secondly, the programme calls for a seizure of their right to vote, thereby revolutionizing the electoral landscape of West Bengal. Thirdly, all access to welfare benefits for the ‘suspect population’ is to be stopped so as to discourage further migration. Fourthly, the ‘suspect population’ is to be disqualified from applying to any government service. Fifthly, citizens will compulsorily have to check the identity cards of workers before employing them or themselves face penalties. The sixth point demands the creation of a ‘special zone’, approximately 30 kms wide, around the border and giving the security forces special powers within that zone to stop communal, terrorist, smuggling and trafficking related activities. Finally the programme calls for economic sanctions on Bangladesh to force the political parties there to accept arrested suspect populations back into the country and to accept their role in the infiltration situation.⁴¹⁶ The demand for a special census is shared by political parties and actors which are considered the primary resistance to the rise of the BJP in West Bengal. Trinamool Congress (TMC), once an NDA ally, today stands, at least publicly, as one of the primary pro-migrant forces in the state. In the recent past however, the situation was quite different. In 2005 an embattled Mamata Bannerjee had attempted a major push against the CPI(M) in the Parliament by presenting the findings of a survey conducted by TMC activists identifying illegal immigrants in the border districts of West Bengal.⁴¹⁷ While I was conducting my fieldwork among the refugee activists in the suburbs of Kolkata, I was time and again shown photocopies of letters signed by Jyotipriyo Mallick and other TMC functionaries which were sent to the Chief Election Commissioner for the deletion of the names of fake voters from the electoral rolls in 2006. Although there was no way for me to verify the authenticity of these letters, I was struck by the fact that the letters

⁴¹⁵ See Sanjoy Hazarika, *Rights of Passage: Border Crossings and Imagined Homelands, India's East and Bangladesh* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2000).

⁴¹⁶ Sengupta and Roy, *Satter Mukhomukhi*, 60

⁴¹⁷ “Mamata flings papers, resigns,” *The Hindu*, 05th August, 2005, Accessed 20th February, 2017 <http://www.thehindu.com/2005/08/05/stories/2005080504310100.htm>

consisted of cover letters accompanying lists of names and other particulars of the voters to be deleted from the rolls. It is very much possible that this pointed to the lists prepared in 2005 which Mamata Bannerjee was not allowed to table in Parliament by Deputy Speaker Charanjit Singh Atwal. The political quantification of a secret population had become a social reality with these attempts. The CPI(M)'s method of passing information to the central authorities through official channels had intensified by the early 2000s into a competitive political agenda of exposing migrants to the state apparatus.

Contemporary Refugee Politics



Figure 20. Association for the Refugee In India Campaign Art

In the poster above, the Citizenship (Amendment) Act of 2003 has been depicted as a serpent with a body marked by the symbols of the major political parties that dominate the electoral scene in West Bengal. The snake coils on the field of the poster while devouring the ‘future of refugees’. This poster was a much admired piece of campaign art during a ‘symbolic hunger strike’ (*pratiki anashan karmasuchi*) undertaken by the leaders of several refugee political organizations at the Dharmatala Y Junction in Kolkata on 15th September 2014.

The 2003 Act, specifically its clauses numbered 2(i)(b) and 3(c) have been called into question by several organizations of East Indian refugees from all over the country with heavy participation from Assam, West Bengal, Orissa, Bihar and Uttarakhand. Kolkata has served as a centre for this political demand in recent years and has been witness to several important mobilizations by the refugee organizations. Clause 2(i)(b) has introduced the word ‘illegal immigrant’ in the 2003 Act and has defined it broadly as any person who has entered Indian Territory after the enforcement of the constitution without ‘valid travel documents’.⁴¹⁸ Clause 3(c) disqualifies individuals born within Indian Territory from citizenship, whose biological parents are either ‘enemy aliens’ or ‘illegal immigrants’.⁴¹⁹ Since East Indian refugees have been coming to India as late as 1971, the community feels understandably threatened by the legislation and has been up in arms against the amendment since 2004.⁴²⁰ Following a series of meetings between various refugee and scheduled caste organizations concerning the 2003 Act, Sukritiranjana Biswas had approached the Matua Mahasangha in 2004. On 15th December 2004, twenty-one Matua community leaders joined a hunger strike⁴²¹ that would become the primary stepping-stone for the new refugee movement as well as the involvement and politicization of the Matua Mahasangha.⁴²²

⁴¹⁸ Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2003, Accessed 15th September, 2015
<http://indiankanoon.org/doc/949775/>

⁴¹⁹ Ibid

⁴²⁰ Joint Action Committee for Bengali Refugees, *The Citizenship Amendment Act 2003: A History of Betrayal of Refugees from East Bengal*, (Madhyamgram: Joint Action Committee for Bengali Refugees, hereafter, JACBR, 2011), 35-47

⁴²¹ Ibid, 28

⁴²² This period of increasingly visible caste based politics in the electoral arena is possibly what has been called a new politics of caste by scholars like Sinharay. See Sinharay, "A New Politics of Caste," 26-27

The pamphlets and booklets collected during agitations show that the organizations are strongly cognizant of a caste identity and the difference between the first wave of refugees who came before the liberation war and those that came later.⁴²³ They hold their caste positions responsible for their lack of substantial rehabilitation and their exclusion from the citizenry of the Indian nation-state. They mark this difference starkly against the early upper caste refugees who were rehabilitated either by the government or through the 'squatter colony movement' organized by the left wing parties in Kolkata in 1950s and 60s.⁴²⁴ Most of the older refugee colonies dating back to those two decades were regularized by the CPI(M)-led Left Front government which came to power in 1978.

Let us return to the poster photographed above. The image stands out as a criticism of the major political parties that have come to dominate the electoral field at both national and state levels. There is a powerful criticism of the political parties that can be expected from a non-member population but it seems to go against pragmatism since negotiating with functionaries of several different parties and front organizations has been a standard political practice among the refugee population since the 1947 Partition.⁴²⁵ It is important to ask anew whether the articulation of caste difference from within the unassimilated refugee mass has in fact brought about a major change in the form of political organization in West Bengal.

Parallel to this criticism and distancing from certain political parties by the actors of the new refugee movement, there has been growing scholarly interest in community organizations and their role in electoral and other domains of politics. There seems to be a growing insistence that the lower caste population in West Bengal, especially the Matua Namasudras, engage in politics more as a community than as members of a party.⁴²⁶ After the recent demise of Kapil Krishna Thakur who was both a community leader and an MP supported by the TMC, an acrimonious fight broke out among the members of the first family of Matuas. The Thakur family members are descendants of Harichand Thakur and Shanti Mata, the spiritual founding figures of the Matua

⁴²³ Ibid, 23; 25-26

⁴²⁴ JACBR, *A History of Betrayal*, 33-34

⁴²⁵ See Prafulla K. Chakrabarti, *The Marginal Men: The Refugees and the Left Political Syndrome in West Bengal* (Kalyani: Lumière Books, 1990).

⁴²⁶ Sinharay, "A New Politics of Caste," 26-27. Also see Sarbani Bandopadhyay, "Caste and Politics in Bengal," *Economic and Political Weekly* 47 (2012): 50, 71-73.

sect. Their home and temple in Thakurnagar in North 24 Parganas in present-day West Bengal is the central congregational destination for Matuas across the country and seems to fulfill nearly the same function of pilgrimage as Orakandi, the birthplace of the sect which is now in Bangladesh.

The first man from the family to have become electorally politically important was Pramatha Ranjan Thakur who had been elected as Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) from Indian National Congress from the Hanskhali constituency in 1962. He was also the founder of the temple and *Thakurbari* in Thakurnagar.⁴²⁷ Since the rise of the Left Wing in West Bengal the family had lost its direct electoral standing while remaining an important force forging political opinion in the hinterlands and suburbs of Kolkata. Recently, the community gained political importance from a huge mobilization of Matua refugees that stunned the residents of Kolkata on 29th December 2010. A gigantic rally choked the city centre with thousands-strong crowds of people from the hinterlands and suburbs of Kolkata agitating for citizenship.⁴²⁸

Following this agitation the Thakur family once again joined the electoral fray which it had abandoned for the past one generation. First to join was the youngest of the brothers who was not directly an office bearer in the central community organization, the Matua Mahasangha. In 2011, buoyed by the general anti Left-Front mood of the state electorate, following the violent protests and clashes with the police in Singur, Nandigram and Lalgarh, Manjul Krishna Thakur won an MLA seat on a TMC ticket. When the 33-year-old Left Front government was unceremoniously toppled by the surge of an indisputable mandate, Manjul Thakur became the Minister for Rehabilitation in the new government. Kapil Krishna Thakur, the elder brother and *Sanghadhipati* of the Matua Mahasangha won an MP seat from Bongaon on a TMC ticket in the 2014 general election. Within months of his election he passed away, leaving the seat open for a by-election.⁴²⁹ Several members of the Thakur family entered an acrimonious public battle at this point in late 2014 to get the ticket for this

⁴²⁷ See Praskanva Sinharay, "Building up the Harichand Guruchand movement: The politics of the Matua Mahasangha", in *The Politics of Caste in West Bengal*, ed., Uday Chandra, Geier Heierstad and Kenneth Bo Nielsen (New York: Routledge, 2016), 147-168

⁴²⁸ See *Vote game brings rivals to the same dais*, http://www.telegraphindia.com/1101229/jsp/bengal/story_13364470.jsp and *A rare display of Unity*, <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/a-rare-display-of-unity-by-leaders-of-major-parties-in-kolkata/article1012177.ece>, Accessed 15th September 2015.

⁴²⁹ 'TMC MP Thakur passes away', Indian Express, 14th October 2014, Accessed 20th February, 2017 <http://indianexpress.com/article/cities/kolkata/tmc-mp-thakur-passes-away/>

by-election. Both Manjul Krishna Thakur and his son Subrata Thakur started courting media attention as the next heads of the community organization and the key to its political clout. Mamatabala Thakur, wife of the deceased MP also put in her bid. The confrontation that ensued brought out in public a set of inner family conflicts whose existence was rumoured within the community for long while. Both Subrata and Manjul Thakur intensely contested her claim to the seat and different political parties started courting their attention seeking to break into the situation and run away with the ruling party's clothes.⁴³⁰ Mamatabala Thakur filed a First Information Report alleging vandalism, manhandling and forced entry into her house in which she accused activists from Matua Mahasangha and several local refugee organizations of threatening her and colluding with Subrata Thakur.⁴³¹ Two days before the by-polls, suddenly a rumour surfaced that the 96-year-old matriarch of the Matua Mahasangha, *Boroma*, had been abducted by the TMC functionaries to use her for campaigning and legitimising Mamatabala Thakur against Subrata Thakur.⁴³²

At this point of time, Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, an eminent historian of caste movements in pre-independence Bengal voiced his concern over the political situation of the community in a long editorial in a popular daily.⁴³³ In the article he argued that the community's only entryway into the narrow corridors of power had been the unity of its community organization. So much so that he found the classic separation of church and state, in this case between the Mahasangha and the political allegiance

⁴³⁰ *Bongaon uncertainty in Matua Split*,

http://www.telegraphindia.com/1150213/jsp/bengal/story_3109.jsp#.VfoQXBGqqko , *Vote split leaves Bongaon battle open*, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/kolkata/Vote-split-leaves-Bongaon-battle-open/articleshow/46113380.cms>, and *Matua Rift: Subrata Thakur to Join BJP*, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/kolkata/Matua-rift-Subrata-Thakur-to-join-BJP/articleshow/45891542.cms>. , Accessed 15th September, 2015

⁴³¹ *TMC Minister's son threatened Aunt?*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hGcdXuJU8fU>, Accessed 15th September, 2015

⁴³² *Manjul Krishna's voice on the abduction of Binapani Devi*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H8nX_fQgVEY, and *Mamatabala Thakur denies abduction of Binapani Devi*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PL_RDWmHF7k.

⁴³³ *Manjul Babur siddhanto banam Matua sartho*, Anandabazar Patrika, 21st January 2015 <http://www.anandabazar.com/editorial/%E0%A6%AE%E0%A6%9E-%E0%A6%9C-%E0%A6%B2%E0%A6%AC-%E0%A6%AC-%E0%A6%B0-%E0%A6%B8-%E0%A6%A6-%E0%A6%A7-%E0%A6%A8-%E0%A6%A4-%E0%A6%AC%E0%A6%A8-%E0%A6%AE-%E0%A6%AE%E0%A6%A4-%E0%A7%9F-%E0%A6%B8-%E0%A6%AC-%E0%A6%B0-%E0%A6%A5-1.107267>

of members of the Matua community as detrimental to its claim to political power. He strongly advised 'unity' while warning the community that any fragmentation within the community's 'vote bank' will only hasten the loss of all possibilities of their demands being fulfilled.

It is this constant conflict between the party and community forms of political organization that I want to underline as one of the primary features of the new forms of refugee mobilization. Actors seem to pass in and out of the two modes of organization, using each to manage a different aspect of political mobilization. This makes us come back to the series in which Dwaipayan Bhattacharya had framed 'party-society' as a replacement of ethnic, economic and social hierarchies with a party structure. He had argued for this as a corrective to the conception of 'political society' where the 'bridging' politics of 'community' is replaced by the 'bonding' of 'party' form.⁴³⁴ In this idea of replacement there is a shadow of a series of forms. The party form has to replace a set of existing relations and reproduce them in reference to itself so that conflict within villages or even families becomes a matter of the party. In this sense community is the primitive of the party. The community is produced out of the dynamics of the party and then placed at the beginning of the series.⁴³⁵ Sinharay's argument reworks this series by insisting on a return of the community organization to the fore of electoral politics in West Bengal with the demise of the Left Front. But no return can leave its object unchanged. He therefore argues that the 'local organizations' in fact gain in strength on returning from their long sojourn in the circuits of the party.⁴³⁶ The community in these figurations seems to precede and follow the party in terms of a historical cycle.

The difference between party and community in the case of West Bengal is also intricately linked with the question of capital and primitive accumulation. The question of 'accumulation by dispossession' found an extremely productive turn through the argument that there was, in West Bengal, a governmental reversal of the effects of primitive accumulation.⁴³⁷ Following this argument the debate around the

⁴³⁴ Dwaipayan Bhattacharya, "Of Control and Factions: The Changing 'Party-Society' in Rural West Bengal," *Economic and Political Weekly* 44 (2009): 9, 59-69.

⁴³⁵ Ibid

⁴³⁶ Praskanva Sinharay, "The West Bengal Story," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 49 (2014): 16.

⁴³⁷ Kalyan Sanyal, *Rethinking Capitalist Development: Primitive Accumulation, Governmentality and Post-colonial Capitalism* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2014).

social and political processes through which this reversal takes place, gained in detail and complexity.⁴³⁸ The theoretical considerations brought into focus the organized cadre force of the communist party regime that drove much of the political life of the state. The question of ‘who mediates’ between state, capital and population was given intense consideration. A number of mediating figures like the primary school teacher or the local party leader were presented as anthropological examples of the mediating figure. Concepts like ‘political society’, ‘party society’ and the conception of community in the work of Sinharay are part of the same deliberation. Significantly, these considerations also changed the ‘site’ of the new modes of mediation and new imaginations of politics. Chatterjee argued in one of his most influential books that “the real story of political society must come from rural West Bengal”.⁴³⁹ It was the knowledge of rural politics and the networks formed through it that drove the politics that he thought of as a new development extending the possibilities of democratic politics.⁴⁴⁰ We can then think of the ascension of both, the ‘party-society’ form and the new ‘community’ based political organizations, as an intervention into the urban-centric and mainstream logic of political mobilization and structure. Let me return here to the agitation in New Delhi in 2011 with which I had started the discussion. How do we discern the scalar arrangement of building a movement which moves in space to come into contact with the centres of political power? This can only be done through a meticulous mapping of how movements are built. Before launching the agitation in Delhi the activists of JACBR built up participation and consultation with refugee activists from various suburban, ex-urban and rural refugee settlements. In the table below it can be seen that the activists constantly moved in between four distinct nodes of spatial hierarchy. The vertical hierarchy of these spaces of agitation is a) rural colonies/villages, b) suburban areas of Kolkata Municipal District (KMD), c) Kolkata city and d) national capital.

⁴³⁸ See Chatterjee, Partha. "Democracy and economic transformation in India," *Economic and Political Weekly* 43 (2008): 16, 53-62 and Bhattacharyya, "Of Control and Factions."

⁴³⁹ Partha Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 64

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 63

DATE	PLACE	TYPE OF ACTIVITY
15 th – 21 st December 2004	Thakurnagar	Hunger strike (backed by Matua Mahasangha)
28 th December 2010	Kolkata	Procession and public meeting (backed by Matua Mahasangha)
7 th September 2011	Kolkata, Moulali Jubo Kendro	Public convention, JACBR foundation
13 th September 2011	Pilvit, Uttar Pradesh	Nikhil Bharat Convention
29 th October 2011	Kolkata	Convention, Convenor selection
1 st November 2011	Kolkata, Bharat Sabha Hall	Convention
1 st November 2011	Kolkata Press Club	Press conference
6 th November 2011	Barasat Netajipally, Guruchand Bajar	Street corner meeting, call for civil disobedience (not backed by Matua Mahasangha)
7 th November 2011	Barasat Subhash Institute Hall	Public convention
9 th November 2011	Jalkar Bhomra (Nimtala Nadia district)	Public meeting
9 th November 2011	Thakurnagar Bajar, North 24 Parganas	Public meeting
11 th November 2011	Hridaypur Bajar, North 24 Parganas, KMD	Public meeting
12 th November 2011	New Barrackpore, KMD	Public meeting
13 th November 2011	Helencha, North 24 Parganas, Bhabanipur High School	Meeting
13 th November 2011	Sonarpur, KMD	Public meeting
14 th November 2011	Bira Station, North 24 Parganas	Public meeting
15 th November 2011	Durganagor, KMD	Public meeting
16 th November 2011	Ghutiyari Sharif	Public meeting
17 th November 2011	Barasat Dwija Hori Das Colony and Wireless Para, KMD	Public meeting
17 th November 2011	Gandhi Peace Foundation, New Delhi	Convention
18 th November 2011	Barasat Railway Station	Public address
19 th November 2011	Akaipur, Tyangra Colony and Bongaon	Public meeting
20 th November 2011	Bhayna, Bagula, North 24 Parganas	Public meeting
21 st November 2011	Ashokenagar Sen Danga, North 24 Parganas	Public meeting
22 nd November 2011	Kolkata, Metro Channel, Rani Rashmoni Road	Civil disobedience

28 th November to 1 st December 2011	New Delhi, Jantar Mantar	Hunger strike
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Table 7. Source: Joint Action Committee for Bengali Refugees

Their choice of physical space for various forms of political engagement is not coincidental. It came out of several different considerations. Other than the two major moments of agitation in Thakurnagar in 2004 and Kolkata in 2010, the Matua Mahasangha stayed away from the headaches of organizing and financing the movement. A network of organizations regularly solicited funds from refugee localities across the suburban areas and distant districts to fuel the agitation. There were internal disagreements on the pitch of the movement and the necessity of agitation. Several refugee activists periodically mentioned an incident that took place after the historic 2011 elections in West Bengal, when the younger son of the Matua matriarch took office as the Minister of Rehabilitation. A number of community elders and activists had repeatedly gone to meet him in his office to ask about the future of the movement. In one such meeting, somewhat bothered and cornered by the activists, the Minister Manjul Krishna Thakur had asked with a deal of irritation, “Why are you scratching yourself sore without an itch? Has anyone tried to deport you yet?” This incident, its repeated telling and its appearance in the form of a pamphlet had created a distance between the Mahasangha leadership allied to TMC and the local committees of Namasudra refugees.

In the following section, I will attempt to argue that instead of thinking of party and community as elements in a series, it is more helpful to think of them as ‘arrangements’. Elements and actors from both modes of organization and articulation leak into each other and there are periodic reshuffles that place pieces of one inside the other. They are also mutual receptacles of antipathy where reconstituting one field becomes a way to criticize the other domain.

Experiments with Party Politics

Since 2011 the same group of actors from within the Namasudra refugee local organizations has made three serious attempts towards forming a party. However, none of these parties were demographically homogenous in terms of their formation. From the first attempt in 2011 to the most recent in 2013 these actors have attempted to create networks spanning several states and different demographics. Sukriti Ranjan Biswas, President of the JACBR is one of those actors. His most recent experiment was the Bahujan Mukti Party (BMP), an organization that had been launched on 6th December 2012 by the All India Backward (SC, ST, OBC) And Minority Communities Employees Federation (BAMCEF). On 27th April 2013, the State Committee of BMP was formed by Sukriti Ranjan Biswas and Jafarul Molla.⁴⁴¹ Molla had dissolved two district units of the West Bengal Muslim League party in order to join another party experiment with Biswas.⁴⁴² Praskanva Sinharay mentions the formation of this party as one of the major developments preceding the 2014 elections.⁴⁴³

The first major attempt at a party formation came up in 2011 when Sukriti Ranjan Biswas had given a call for creating an Other Backward Classes (OBC)-Dalit-Minority front in West Bengal. This front was a direct outcome of refugee politics in the Kolkata hinterland where a set of agitations since a six-day hunger strike against the 2003 Act in Thakurnagar had built enough momentum to propel the leadership towards imagining an electoral presence. Biswas had led the 2004 hunger strike from the Thakurnagar *Thakurbari* under the aegis of the Matua Mahasangha and later also planned the 2010 rally in Kolkata. Following the rally he attempted to build the OBC-Dalit-Minority Front as an instrument for continuing the struggle for citizenship through a diversified and more institutional platform.⁴⁴⁴ This Front was dissolved in 2012 when All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) decided to make a foray into West Bengal. This party had originally been formed by Badruddin Ajmal in Assam following incidents of violence against Muslims. The party had also protested against the categorization of Bengali speaking Muslims as D-voters in the Assam electoral

⁴⁴¹ *BMPr daake mahajati sadan chaloan*, 2nd December, 2013

⁴⁴² Interview with Jafarul Molla (name change?), Place of Interview, 2nd December 2013

⁴⁴³ Sinharay, "The West Bengal Story."

⁴⁴⁴ Interview with Sukriti Ranjan Biswas, Place, 2nd December 2013

roles. On 27th May 2012, People's Democratic Conference of India (PDCOI) was dissolved by its leader Moulana Sidiqullah Chowdhury and merged with the AIUDF along with members of two district units of the West Bengal Muslim League under the leadership of Jafarul Molla to form the state committee of AIUDF.⁴⁴⁵ In an interview in the office of the new AIUDF, Moulana Sidiqullah clarified that the social base of the party in Assam and in West Bengal were conceptualized in very different ways. He laid great stress on the importance of the Namasudra population in the politics of the party. He argued that it should be preferable for the Dalit Hindus to find a social and political coalition with Muslims in West Bengal since they were a far more egalitarian presence than the upper caste Hindus.⁴⁴⁶ This is of course not an unknown formulation in the history of West Bengal. Leaders of the Scheduled Caste Federation and Jogendranath Mandal forwarded similar arguments in the pre-partition era. It was however, fairly surprising to follow the effect of this party formation at the level of village politics.

In the following weeks I was able to speak to several activists of the party whom I had seen around the office. These were individuals with long association with Namasudra refugee organizations in North 24 Parganas. Anirban Halder, the then Secretary of JACBR described his situation as that of a 'political vagrant'. He expressed increasing difficulty in speaking to both the Muslim and the Namasudra constituencies in his village and also across the Namasudra populated areas of the district.

In recent times there has been a public debate over the ruling TMC's policies towards the religious minorities, specifically Muslims. One of the most debated issues was the stipend of INR 2,500 for *Imams* which was initiated by the state government in early 2012.⁴⁴⁷ The policy was struck down by the Kolkata High Court in September 2013 in response to a Public Interest Litigation filed by the state BJP unit. During the same year, another policy came into effect that seriously affected public debate among Namasudra activists in the urban peripheries. The state government allotted INR 69.07 crore to award 2,09,121 bi-cycles to young Muslim women studying in schools

⁴⁴⁵ *All India United Democratic Front: State committee Booklet*, Sukriti Ranjan Biswas and Mufti Rafikul Alam, 2012

⁴⁴⁶ Interview with Moulana Sidiqullah Choudhury (name?), Place, July 2013

⁴⁴⁷ See <http://www.hindustantimes.com/ht-view/mamata-s-votebank-politics-takes-bengal-to-edge/story-sPE3kn8VWFKQG2kwm4v65L.html>, Accessed 2nd May, 2016 and <http://www.ndtv.com/india-news/calcutta-high-court-scraps-mamata-banerjees-stipend-to-imams-533409> Accessed 2nd May, 2016.

between standard IX and XII.⁴⁴⁸ Bi-cycles remain a coveted commodity in sub-urban Kolkata where the primary mode of transport is the railway that connects the *mufassils* to the city. The bicycle is used as an in-between conveyance to go from place to place within neighborhoods. It is also one of the first signs of attaining not only spatial but class mobility of certain kind. A Namasudra respondent in a Barast II Panchayat commented that the only way to balance the scales between Muslims and Namasudras was to steal at least half the bi-cycles given by the Panchayat and give them to school-going Namasudra women. The expression ‘*miander rajniti*’ or ‘Muslim politics’ became an easily encountered epithet with which JACBR politics was qualified in those days.

As a response to the situation, the activists working with JACBR and AIUDF started a campaign for Dalit-Muslim unity through village-level meetings and a set of pamphlets written by a Jamiat Ulama-i Hind ideologue back in the 1990’s came back in circulation. Two pamphlets titled “*Pobitro Quran O Dalit Sama*” (The Holy Quran and Dalit Society) and “*Sammya, Maitri O Swadhinata*” (Equality, Fraternity and Liberty) by Sheikh Nasir Ahmed were circulated in several small programmes in North 24 Parganas. The pamphlets attempted to bring together the Dalit criticisms of caste Hindu society with a reading of Quran.

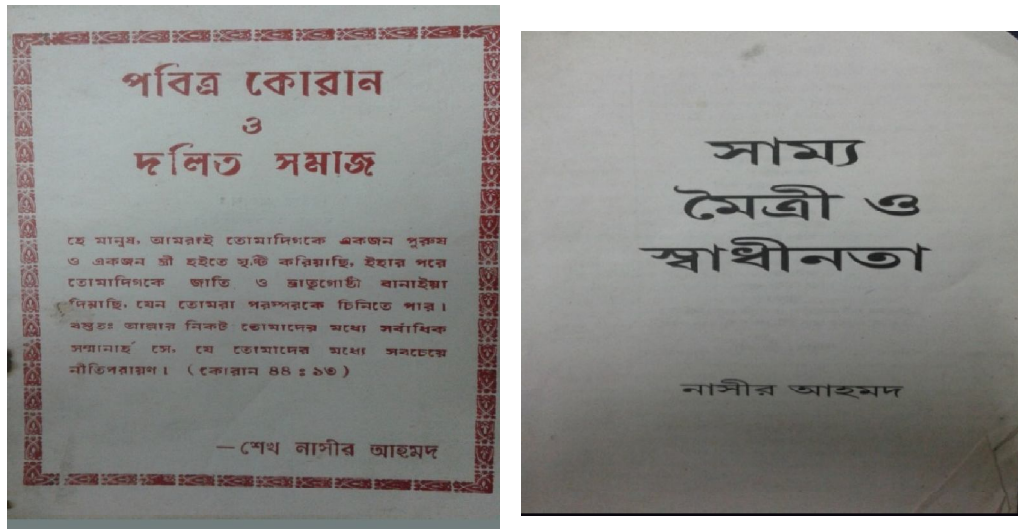


Fig 21. Pamphlets by Sheikh Nasir Ahmed distributed by AIUDF activists

⁴⁴⁸ <http://wbcmo.gov.in/achieve.aspx?dept=7>

The pamphlet titled “The Holy Quran and the Dalit Society” dates back to 1995 when it was published in Howrah district in a political journal run by Jamiat Ulama-i Hind. It insists that the Quran should be read as a criticism of Brahminism, as even though the Quran was originally based on an understanding of inequalities inherent in the Arab society, the analysis has universal validity. These attempts to stitch together Dalit politics with Muslim politics created an interesting coalition at the level of village politics with local Muslim leaders and personages attempting to take up leadership of Matua villages. Mr. Jafarul Molla, who had mostly been a Muslim leader with some amount of popular presence in Deganga, began his foray into Panchayat level politics in Barasat Block 1. The discontent over the perceived neglect of Dalit-Matua refugee population in favor of the Muslim peasantry kept simmering and increasingly the activists from JACBR found themselves marginalized within village politics.

In early 2013, both Jafarul Molla and Sukriti Ranjan Biswas walked out of AIUDF after a prolonged battle with the State Committee President Sidiqullah Chowdhury on the matter of choosing and fielding candidates for the 2013 Panchayat elections.⁴⁴⁹ All three of the above attempts at forming a party ultimately failed. In mid-2014 the elected State Committee of BMP dissolved the party unit and went back into discrete local organizations. The pamphlet declaring this dissolution accuses the Central Committee of the party of being high-handed and anti-democratic. The pamphlet claimed that BMP was in fact a ‘private limited company’ run by BAMCEF leadership to garner funds in the name of fighting elections.⁴⁵⁰ These differences became clearer with the treatment meted out by the party to the individual Namasudra refugee activists working with them. These activists went back to reframing their engagement with the party formation. They attempted to creatively envelop their experience with the party by distributing their valuation of the desires, ambitions and energies expressed in the party making experiment.

Anirban Halder, one of my respondents and allegedly accused in the case of vandalism lodged by Mamatabala Thakur, insisted that what he does with the Mahasangha is social and not political.⁴⁵¹ In comparison to Sekhar Bandyopadhyay’s

⁴⁴⁹ Interview with Sukriti Ranjan Biswas, Place, 2nd December 2013

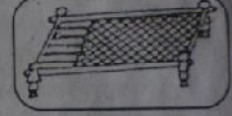
⁴⁵⁰ *BMP State Committee*, Place, 23rd April 2014.

⁴⁵¹ Interview with Anirban Halder (name?), Place, December, 2014

argument it might be helpful to accept for a while this insistence on a distinction. It allows the actors to arrange portions of their lives, allegiances and activities in different worlds and use parts of their lives for particular functions with greater impunity against the charge of self contradiction. Anirban was a volunteer in the Matua Mahasangha in 2004 when the first hunger strike on the issue of citizenship took place in Thakurnagar. Before that he was already an active member of the Student Federation of India, the student wing of CPI(M). Between 2004 and 2010 he worked with several Namasudra refugee organizations and by 2011, when I met him for the first time, he was second-in-command in the West Bengal chapter of the JACBR. While still functioning as a secretary in JACBR, he co-founded the Association for the Refugee in India (AFRI) with Prithwish Dasgupta in mid-2014. Prithwish Dasgupta, an influential entrepreneur known to be close to TMC and especially the temperamental leader Mukul Roy, became the President and primary backer of the organization and Anirban became the General Secretary. He was also one of the founding members of the BMP West Bengal chapter. He had become important in the party organization in practically no time at all and was expected to be one of the first parliamentary aspirants from the party.



বারাসাত লোকসভা কেন্দ্রে
বহুজন মুক্তি পার্টি(BMP)-র প্রার্থী
অনির্বাণ হালদার-কে
খাটিয়া চিহ্নে ভোট দিন



বহুজন মুক্তি পার্টি নিম্নলিখিত আশু কর্মসূচি বাস্তবায়ন করার জন্য দৃঢ়প্রতিজ্ঞ:

১. বি.এম.পি পশ্চিমবঙ্গের শাসন ক্ষমতায় সর্বপ্রথম একজন বহুজন সমাজের সত্যিকারের প্রতিনিধিকে মুখ্যমন্ত্রী করার লক্ষ্যে নিরলস প্রচেষ্টা চালিয়ে যাবে।
২. পার্টি রাজ্যের প্রতিটি লোকসভা/সাব ডিভিশনকে ভিত্তি করে পশ্চিমবঙ্গে ৪২টি জেলা গঠন করবে।
৩. রাজ্যে ক্রমবর্ধমান বেকার সমস্যা ও চাকরির সুযোগ সংকোচনের নীতির বিরোধিতা করে পার্টি। শ্রমিক অংশের মানুষের যোগ্যতামান অনুযায়ী কর্মসংস্থানের সুযোগ বৃদ্ধির জন্য পার্টি পরিকল্পনা রচনা করবে ও কার্যকরী করবে। উৎপাদন বৃদ্ধি, বিশেষ করে কৃষি উৎপাদন বাড়িয়ে দ্রব্যমূল্যবৃদ্ধি প্রতিরোধের ব্যবস্থা গ্রহণ করা হবে। উচ্চতর ও নিচুতরের ব্যাপক দুর্নীতি এবং ফটকা কারবার কড়া হাতে দমন করা হবে।
৪. সবার জন্য এবং সবার জন্য সমমানের শিক্ষার ব্যবস্থা। প্রগতিশীল, বৈজ্ঞানিক এবং বাধ্যতামূলক শিক্ষার ব্যবস্থা ও শিক্ষার সমস্ত দায়ভার গ্রহণ করবে সরকার। মোট বাজেটের ন্যূনতম ১০% বাজেট শিক্ষার জন্য বরাদ্দ করা। প্রতিটি শিক্ষা প্রতিষ্ঠান হবে আনাসিফ।
কৃষি পরিকাঠামোর উন্নতি। উন্নত প্রযুক্তি ও প্রকৌশলের ব্যবস্থা করে কৃষি উৎপাদন বৃদ্ধি, প্রকৃত কৃষকের জন্য জমির ব্যবস্থা, কৃষিপণ্যের যথাযথ মূল্যের ব্যবস্থা এবং সহজ শর্তে কৃষকের জন্য ঋণের ব্যবস্থা করা। সস্তায় সার, বিদ্যুৎ, কীটনাশক ও উন্নত বীজের ব্যবস্থা করা। ছোট ছোট কৃষিজাত শিল্প-কারখানা গড়ায় জোর দেওয়া।
সরকারি হাসপাতাল ও স্বাস্থ্য পরিকাঠামোর ব্যাপক বিস্তার ও গুণগত মান বৃদ্ধি করা। বিশেষ করে গ্রামাঞ্চলে যথেষ্ট সংখ্যক আধুনিক হাসপাতাল নির্মাণ। গরিব ও মধ্যবিত্ত মানুষের চিকিৎসার যাবতীয় ব্যয়ভার বহন করবে সরকার। মুত্বা ব্যবসায়ীদের ঋণের থেকে রাজ্যবাসীকে রক্ষা করা।
সাম্রাজ্যবাদী শক্তিসমূহের দেশকে লুণ্ঠন করার নীতির বিরোধিতা করা। নয়া শিল্পনীতির বিপরীতে দেশকে স্বনির্ভর করে গড়ে তোলার পদক্ষেপ গ্রহণ। সেজ, এফডিআই প্রভৃতির বিরোধিতা করা। রাজ্যের ভেঙে পড়া শিল্প কাঠামোর অধঃগতি রোধ করে ছোট ও শ্রমনিবিড় শিল্প স্থাপনের পরিকল্পনা নেওয়া হবে।
৫. দেশভাগের শিকার বাঙালি হিন্দু-বৌদ্ধ-খৃষ্টান উদ্বাস্তু মানুষের নাগরিকত্ব ও পুনর্বাসনের ব্যবস্থা করা। তার জন্য নাগরিকত্ব আইনে প্রয়োজনীয় সংশোধন করা।
৬. হরি-গুরুচাঁদের নামে বিশ্ববিদ্যালয় প্রতিষ্ঠা করা এবং চাঁদপাড়ায় হরি-গুরুচাঁদ ঠাকুরের নামে মহাবিদ্যালয় প্রতিষ্ঠা করা।
৭. মাহিষা, বেনে, সদগোপ, আন্তরি প্রভৃতি সাম্প্রদায়িক সহ মওল কমিশনের সুপারিশকৃত সব সাম্প্রদায়িককে ওর্বি তালিকাভুক্ত করা এবং তাদের জন্য ২৭% সংরক্ষণের ব্যবস্থা করা। ক্রিমিলেয়ার ব্যবস্থা বাতিল করা।

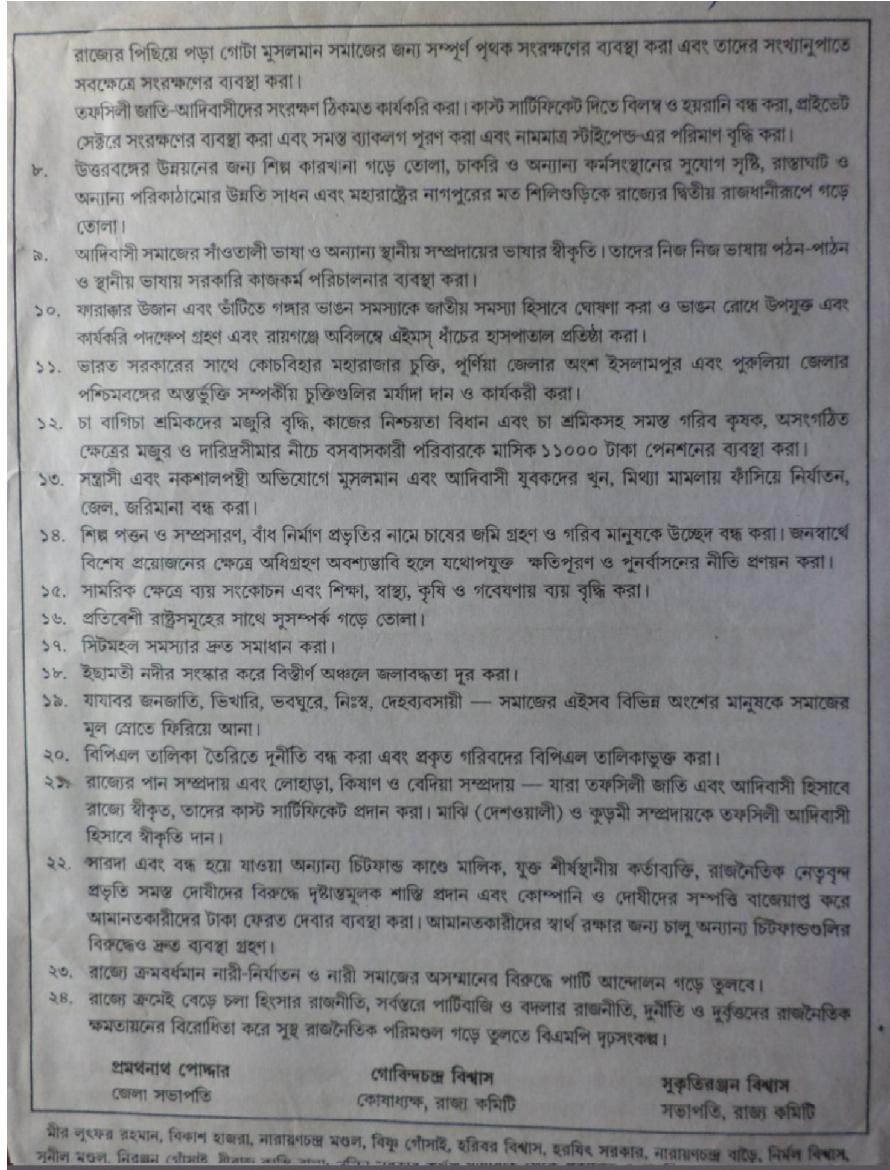


Figure 22 Bahujan Mukti Party Election Handbill

This part of his life activities is represented in his evaluation of his work being ‘social’. In the case of his work with both the refugee organizations he insisted on the apolitical nature of the task. At the same time however, he volunteered a large amount of time and effort in the activities of the West Bengal chapter of BAMCEF, Republican Party of India and AIUDF, directly extending from his network and his peer group in the refugee organizations. However, his 2013 foray into the competition for an MLA ticket from the newly launched BMP gave a severe setback to his political career. While he expended all his energies in the foundation of the party, other projects of the party had already disappeared or been appropriated by other

factions. AIUDF had been taken over by the Ex-PDCOI activists under the leadership of Moulana Sidiqullah, and the other front organizations had become inactive and were largely disbanded. This probably explains his move towards founding AFIR with Prithwish Dasgupta stretching beyond his usual network of Namasudra refugee activist network. Dasgupta's closeness to TMC and his, anecdotally famous, understanding with Mukul Roy made him a good contact for plugging into the ruling party in the state.

Three things need to be underlined at this point:

1. Each of these moves towards creating a party came out of inter-state and inter-regional connections rather than a direct 'subsumption' of local identities into party structures.
2. Each of the party experiments contained at least three prominent and discrete political identities: Dalits, OBCs and Muslims.
3. The same set of actors moved between the small organizations while coordinating with the Matua Mahasangha agitations and these party formations.

In the above sections I have tried to demonstrate that the set of actors around the Namasudra-refugee agitation for citizenship constantly move through different organizational frameworks, articulating a similar set of demands through different channels. At this level it becomes impossible to tell three things apart: a) community organizations (like Matua Mahasangha), b) issue-based organizations (like JACBR) and c) political parties. In fact, the three instances of nascent party formations show that 'bridging' activities, between ethnic or religious formations can be taken up within the party form while 'bonding' activities are centred in community organizations.⁴⁵² This reversal of the set of activities mentioned by Dwaipayan Bhattacharya is not a part of a series-like transformation of the social field. It does not signal that the ruling logic of society oscillates between party and community. Rather, it shows that certain elements move in and out of different fields of politics and the movement is categorised at different times under different organisational frameworks.

⁴⁵² Bhattacharyya, "Of Control and Factions", 69

Local Contradictions and the Failure of BMP

After the failure of the BMP experiment, interviews with activists underlined one major problem that had cropped up between the Central Committee and the State Committee. Several activists from North 24 Parganas had expressed their discomfort with the main slogan of the party, which was written on pamphlets in Hindi issued by BAMCEF but remained conspicuously absent in the Bengali pamphlets. The slogan was “*Bol Pacchasi, Jai Mulniwasi*”. Among the activists and state level party functionaries the word ‘mulniwasi’ became a point of tension. Since a large part of the members mobilized by the activists from North 24 Parganas, Maldah and Nadia were migrants demanding citizenship, a slogan insisting on an autochthonous identity did not hold much favour with them. One of my respondents angrily retorted while storming out from the BMP state convention,

Do I not know who is from where? Where have the Miyas (Muslims) come from? Everybody comes from somewhere else. All of us might have come from Africa for all I know. I have lived here for generations now. I still have my grandfather’s border slip. My children may again have to pick up and leave. What is this Mulniwasi? Only rocks and idiots sit and rot in the same place forever.⁴⁵³

To me the outburst seemed out of place since slurs based on their migrant status is nothing new to most Namasudra refugees. It was uncharacteristic of this group to be entirely unable to reconcile with a word in a slogan. The first set of explanations I received from the leadership during the December convention also pointed towards an ideological difference between the ‘agents from Maharashtra’ named in the pamphlet and the state leadership. They highlighted the contradiction between overstating the idea of Dalits being autochthonous and the demand for citizenship being placed by refugee Namasudras. They argued that the Marathi leadership was underlining the word ‘mulniwasi’ in order to create a leeway for them to wriggle out of their promises to defend the cause of Namasudra refugees in case they ended up winning a few seats in the Lok Sabha.⁴⁵⁴

⁴⁵³ Interview with Narayan Mondal (name changed), Place, 2nd December 2013

⁴⁵⁴ Interview with Sukriti Biswas and Haribar Goshai, Place, 2nd December 2013

Later in the day I came across a large group of Bengali activists standing with a large photograph of Mahishashur, shouting the slogan that very many Namasudra activists had found distasteful. On approaching this group I was promptly handed a pamphlet written by a Hoogly based organisation of Mahishyas, which had been conducting a Mahishashur Puja while running a campaign for all Mahishyas and Kaibartyas to respond to the caste census under the category 'Chashi Kaibartya'. The reason for the campaign was to make it possible for the community to reach a modicum of self-enumeration proving their numerical majority. The lead activist quoted figures from the 1931 census and argued that the Chashi Kaibartya was the single largest mulniwasi backward class community in West Bengal.⁴⁵⁵



Figure 23 Chashi Kaibartya Association Banner

It is important to note here that for nearly two decades the Mahishyas have been agitating and petitioning the state government for inclusion into the OBC list. Their petition was turned down by the West Bengal Commission for the Backward Classes

⁴⁵⁵ Interview with activist from 'Association of Chashi Kaibarttya Community', 2nd December 2013

in 1997.⁴⁵⁶ Assam remains the only state that recognizes Mahishyas as OBC. The Mahishya organization was aiming at including their community within the older definition of the Chashi Kaibartya caste in order to access the OBC list. Following this logic they had become amenable to the word mulniwasi as the community belonged to West Bengal since the pre-partition era. The Mahishyas, according to the Commission's report, were a prosperous community with large land holdings and prosperous trading interests. The commission found only two smaller sub-groups eligible for affirmative action, which were named Hele-Kaibartya and Chashi Kaibartya.⁴⁵⁷ Since this caste group belongs to the same districts as the Namasudra activists in the Party, it can be argued that the word mulniwasi became a point of contention between two groups looking for inclusion into affirmative action. Even though the Namasudra groups were seeking Scheduled Caste (SC) status in states outside West Bengal, their status as non-citizens made it problematic for them to reconcile with a political assertion designed around the notion of an 'original inhabitant'. At the same time a competing group found the same political principle agreeable to its political agenda. A second problem stemmed from a difference between the political demography of West Bengal and the rest of the country. Caste assertions in Bengal have historically been led by the SC communities. This location of political pre-eminence is still a matter of some contention and communitarian interest, especially for the Namasudras. BAMCEF had issued a pamphlet translated in Bengali, which became an important issue for several Namasudra activists and members. The pamphlet titled "OBCs are the true Sudras" was sold by a BAMCEF activist in front of Mahajati Sadan on the day of the BMP convention in Kolkata. This pamphlet heightened the tension between the Mahishya/Kaibartya and Namasudra groups. It is important here to take note of the fact that the Namasudra members of the State Committee ultimately resigned and issued a pamphlet declaring the dissolution of the BMP while the Kaibartya and Muslim members continued associating with and working for the Central Committee of the party.

The issue of 'autochthonous Dalit' identity claims has received some attention recently in West Bengal. Indrajit Roy's work on 'transformative' caste politics among the Desiya community in the district of Maldah specifically identifies the 'meaning

⁴⁵⁶ Government of West Bengal, *West Bengal Commission for Backward Classes, 7th Report, 1997*

⁴⁵⁷ Government of West Bengal, 'List of Other Backward Caste', <https://wbxpress.com/other-backward-classes-of-west-bengal/>, Accessed 12th March, 2017.

making' politics that goes into revising identities and origins while crafting a political project as a community by reshaping its claims and belonging.⁴⁵⁸ His commentary on the Desiya community demonstrates the fluid nature of the claim making process and the changes in self-making that go hand in hand with it. The district and the community that I worked with are very different from Roy's and so were the times. While Roy had finished his ethnography in late 2009, mine started in mid-2011. The tendencies and terms of conversation which Roy saw in their moment of initial distinction from the ruling political regime, I witnessed in their high consolidation over the next five years. The booklet named '*Swadeen Bharater Paradeen Bahujan*' from which Roy had derived many of his insights had also changed shape.⁴⁵⁹ Its cost had gone up from INR 10 to INR 25 and its title had been changed to '*Sadhin Bharater Paradin Mulnibasi*'. Keeping with Roy's argument, it seemed that the 'imagination' of 'Mulnibasi-ness' had caught on and stabilized within the network of activists and organizations he had studied in Maldah. Circulating and changing in its journey through district level and suburban politics, this booklet had reached the BMP convention in Kolkata in 2013. Alongside it, however, there were other claimants to attention. I will discuss here a book that I bought that day from one of the small travelling bookshops of Ambedkarite literature that pop-up in front of political meetings. Late in the evening, one of my Matua Namasudra respondents accompanied me to the stall and pointed out the book as the most 'glorious' history of the Namasudra people. My activist friend introduced Sunil Kumar Roy's⁴⁶⁰ work as the 'definitive civilizational history of the true Bengalis'. Priced at INR 150 and comprising of 206 pages, it was one of the priciest and thickest books in the crowd of political pamphlets and booklets. The book introduces its civilizational project with the following question:

Did the Nomo people infuse themselves with the mythical Phoenix of their land before making their way to this country? What did they have in their

⁴⁵⁸ Indrajit Roy, "Transformative Politics: The Imaginary of the Mulnibasi in West Bengal.", in *The Politics of Caste in West Bengal*, ed Chandra et al., 169-192

⁴⁵⁹ Indrajit Roy, "Transformative Politics," 176

⁴⁶⁰ Sunil Kumar Roy, *Bangojan Sabhyata: Namojatir Attoparichay, Janomon, second edition* (Kolkata, 2010).

hearts before reaching Banga Lands that they would craft new lives overcoming a hundred disasters?⁴⁶¹

Over the next several pages the author builds a surprising narrative of ancient migration through Assyria and Mohenjodaro before tracing the path of the ‘Nomo people’ to West Bengal.⁴⁶² The book creatively reads colonial ethnographers like Hunter to underline proud civilizational belonging of the Nomo people in Birbhum.⁴⁶³ I call it a creative reading because the ascription of the Namasudra identity to indigenous people of Birbhum may very well be contested by residents of Birbhum and for good reason. Hunter himself may take exception to attaching the identity of Namasudra to the groups he had documented in the district. The significance of this gesture is not in its verifiability in terms of evolutionary anthropology but the political gesture of introducing ‘movement’ in the field of belonging. This belonging is political in its gesture and content. While speaking of interconnections between this population and the seafaring groups of ancient Ethiopia, the author also underscores the similarity between Mohenjodaro script and the Mahasthanar inscriptions. Thus, the author connects the Nomo people to the sea and faraway lands while simultaneously keeping them grounded in ancient India, lest the connection to the latter be lost.⁴⁶⁴ Equally intricate attention is paid in the text to mark the Namasudra as an originally urban laboring people by placing them in the ancient and ‘democratic’ urban culture of the Bengal region.⁴⁶⁵ The text, for many of the more educated and well-to-do members of the activist groups, committees and enthusiastic founders of the BMP, was a seminal work defining the ‘self-identity’ of the ‘Nomo people’. This strand of Namasudra intellectual life runs directly against the mulniwasi discourse. Given the strategic dissonance that the ‘autochthonous’ identity formation has with refugee politics, it is understandable that for at least a significant portion of the Namasudra population the mulniwasi discourse did not seem a good choice.

However, intellectual production and representations by community leaders are also contextual to the shifts in locations and articulations of power. In recent times a different section of the newly empowered Namasudra intellectuals and political

⁴⁶¹ Ibid, ix

⁴⁶² Ibid, ix-xiv

⁴⁶³ Ibid, 7-8

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid, 34-35

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid, 45-46

leaders have started shaping a certain notion of autochthonous belonging of the Namasudra community. This group is best represented by Dr. Upendra Nath Biswas.⁴⁶⁶ An ex-IPS officer, famous for his relentless pursuit of Lalu Prasad during the fodder scam, he was elected to an MLA seat on a TMC ticket in the 2011 elections. He became an important part of Mamata Bannerjee's Cabinet as the Minister for Backward Classes Welfare. Along with being a political heavyweight from the Matua community he is also considered an authority on historical anthropology of caste in eastern India. He had completed his doctoral degree in the early 1960s in the Calcutta University Department of Anthropology and remains one of the primary voices in the politics-academia interface in West Bengal. His arguments concerning the origin of the name 'Bengal' and the mulnivasi character of the Namasudra community is fast becoming the primary counter narrative to the intellectual tradition represented by Sunil Kumar Roy.

While republishing the 1921 collection of poems by Shri Raicharan Biswas in 2012 the publishers decided to append an essay to the book as a sort of political introduction to the classic.⁴⁶⁷ The author of the introduction was a celebrated lieutenant of Jogendranath Mondal. He discussed in detail the research presented by Dr. Biswas in the 2004 Namasudra Mahasammelan in the Salt Lake stadium. The paper was later presented at the Asiatic Society conference on re-appraisal of indigenous people, in 2005. In the introduction, Mondal mentions the historical changes in the name of the Namasudra community. It had gone from 'Chandal' in 1872 to 'Namasudra' in 1891 and was changed by the community, as a historic gesture, to 'Banga' in the 2004 Mahasammelan. On 6th November 2004, Dr. Upendranath Biswas presented a paper recounting Haraprasad Sastri's conundrum concerning the lost people of 'Banga' after whom Bengal had come to be named. Presenting a series of substantiations from census documents of the colonial period and pre-partition maps, Dr. Biswas argued his case that the Namasudras were in fact the original inhabitants of Bengal. Following the enumerations and accounts by O'Malley, Risley, Hunt, Owen and Wells, he traced the path that this population had taken through historic suppression and marginalization and finally becoming

⁴⁶⁶ "Bengal has not produced a Jagjivan Ram or a Mayawati," *Outlook*, 10th August 2012, Accessed 20th February, 2017 <https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/bengal-hasnt-produced-a-jagjivan-ram-or-even-a-mayawati/281957>.

⁴⁶⁷ Shri Raicharan Biswas, *Jatiya Jagaran* (Kolkata: Niva Printing House, 2012), জ - ঝ

‘Chandal’.⁴⁶⁸ At the end of the address, he proposed to change the name of the Namasudra community back to ‘Banga’ as a gesture to this lost history. Even though this change has remained topical only within a small portion of activists and the Namasudra public, one may argue that this is an inception of an ideological transformation of Namasudra politics that will increasingly project a ‘mulnibasi’ identity as against its older preference for a migrant identity.

Hindu “Sharanarathi” (Asylum Seeker) Vs. Muslim “Onuprobeshkari” (Infiltrator)

There has been an important shift in the overall make up of the refugee question in West Bengal. Competition over livelihood and land has brought the Dalit-Hindu and Muslim peasantry’s politics into direct competition in the last several years and this conflict has become increasingly visible at the urban periphery. In other chapters we will take a closer look at the outlines of this conflict over land and livelihood. In this section we will discuss the political and electoral competition that has taken place over the last several years. Let us begin from the present moment. Below is a set of two pamphlets. Both these pamphlets came out of the same set of Namasudra dominated peri-urban settlements at the borders of Barasat municipality. In 2014 Narendra Modi, the prime ministerial candidate for BJP visited Barasat as part of his triple rally in West Bengal. A large chunk of the local population and people from surrounding villages thronged to a large open ground in front of the Barasat court premises to witness the celebrations and attend the speech. Several of my respondents had already found space on tree limbs overlooking the boundary wall, choosing a high vantage to see the speakers.

Several older people in the audience were constantly reminding others that the last time a prime ministerial candidate had visited Barasat as part of their campaign was when Indira Gandhi had come to the same ground ‘approximately’ in the 1970s. The confusion over the dates of Indira Gandhi’s visit started almost immediately. Some of the respondents remembered Mrs. Gandhi as a visitor during the Bangladesh Liberation War when the town of Barasat had drowned under a massive wave of

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid, প-৯

refugees fleeing the Pakistan Army through Petrapole border in Bongaon.⁴⁶⁹ The entire town had filled with shanties and received the largest portion of the nearly 10 million refugees received by India during that period. Some respondents claimed that the visit had happened during her campaign as the prime ministerial candidate for the Congress party. There was a strong agreement though, that there was something deeply similar between Mrs. Gandhi and Narendra Modi in terms of strength, presence and an apparent capacity for getting things done. The first pamphlet presented below was distributed by Matua refugee activists associated with a local right wing Hindu organization named, 'Hindu Jagaran Samiti'.

⁴⁶⁹ Schanberg, Sydney. "South Asia: The Approach of Tragedy." *The New York Times*, 17 June 1971.

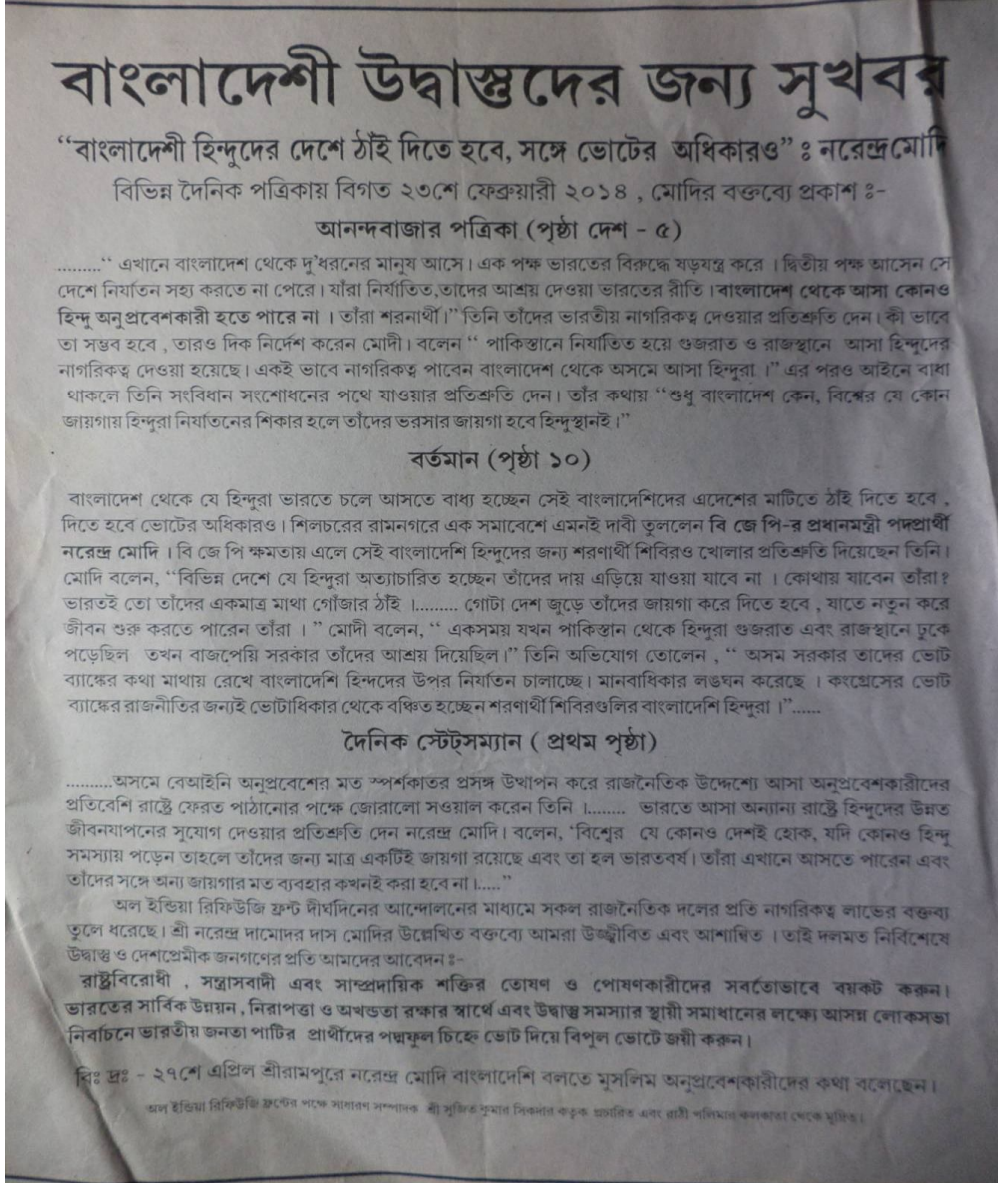


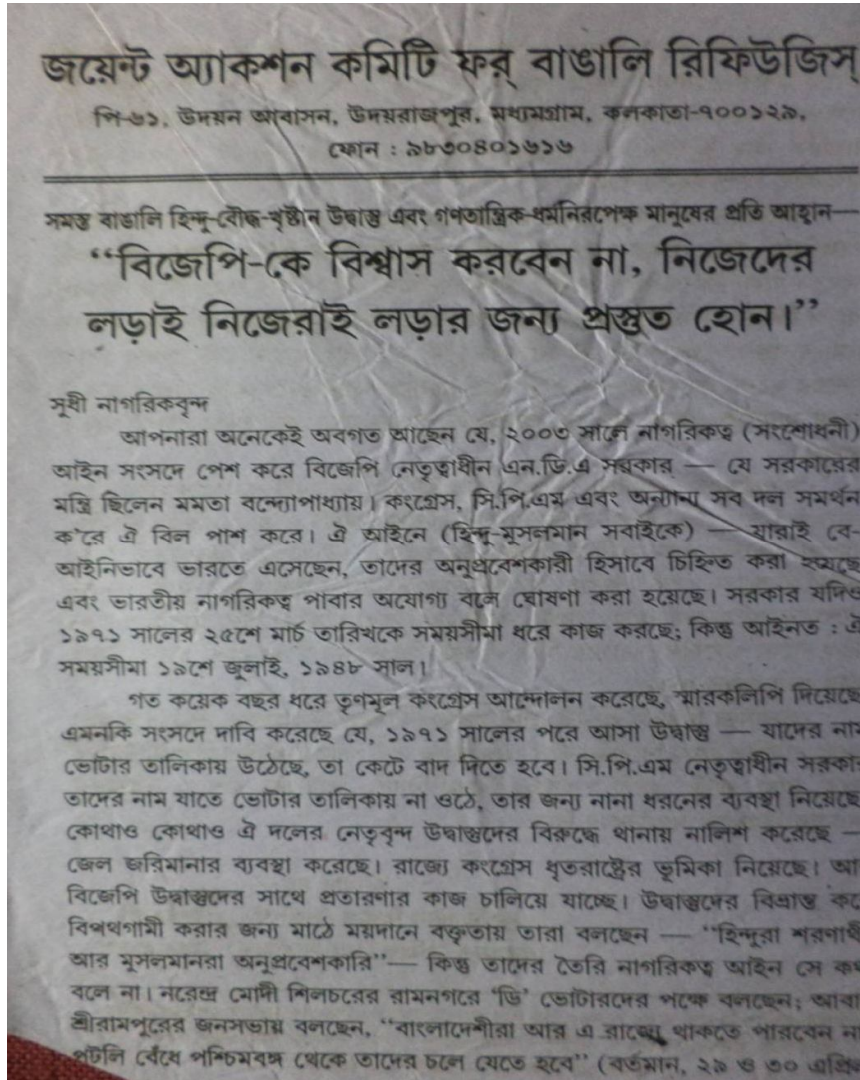
Figure 24 Pamphlet distributed after Narendra Modi’s visit to Barasat during 2014 election campaign, by activists of BJP, All India Refugee Front and Nikhil Bharat Bangali Udbastu Samannoy Samiti.

The pamphlet declares that Modi is the harbinger of ‘good news’ for Bangladeshi refugees. The sub-heading, however immediately qualifies refugees as Hindus. The pamphlet reiterates Modi’s statements quoted from several newspapers, that he is agreeable to not only giving space to Bangladeshi Hindus in India but also

ensuring their right to vote and becoming citizens of the country. The pamphlet came at the heels of controversy that Modi’s comments at the Srerampore rally created when he had admonished and warned ‘Bangladeshis’ to pack their bags and prepare to

go back across the borders because he was going to send them back anyway once he became PM. The pamphlet in its last sentence clarifies that Modi had in fact meant ‘muslim infiltrators’ when he had said ‘bangladeshi’ in the Srerampore rally. Within two days of the rally the pamphlet by Hindu Jagaran samiti’s refugee organization, the ‘All India Refugee Front’ became widely circulated through the blocks and villages lying adjacent to the Barasat municipality.

To counter this argument the JACBR activists began distributing the second pamphlet photographed below.



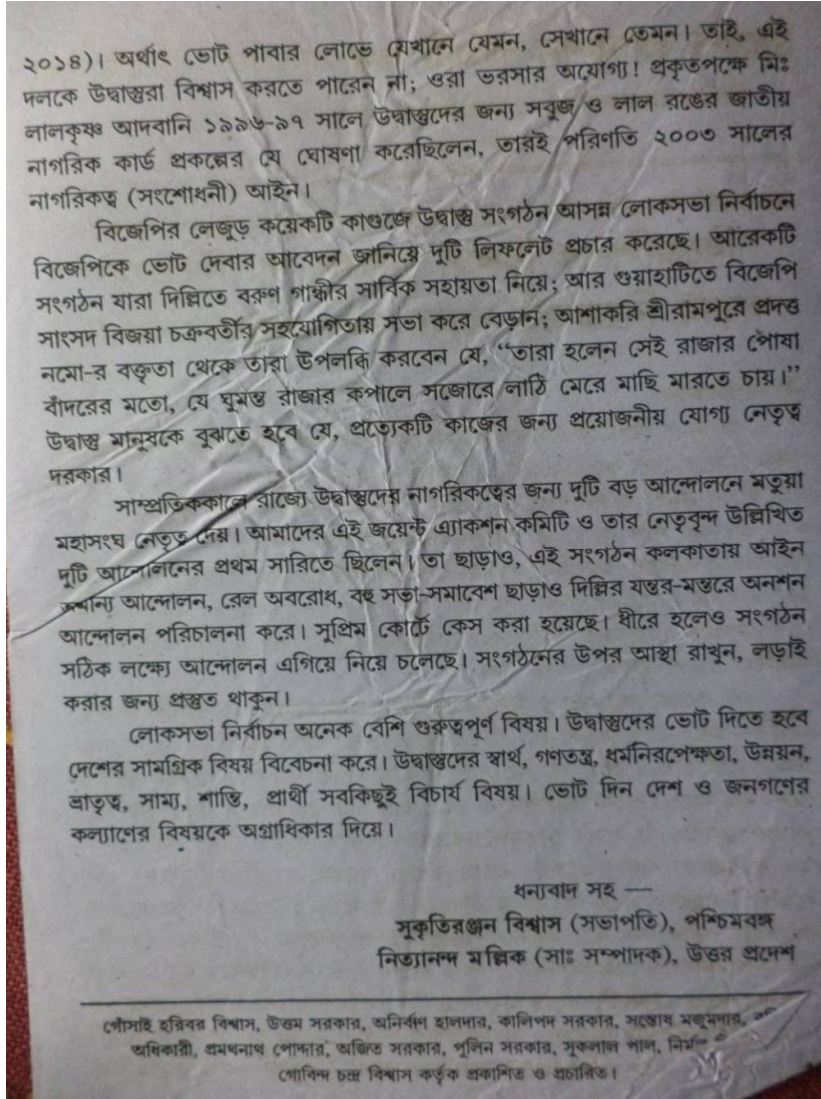


Figure 25 Joint Action Committee for Bengoli Refugees

The above pamphlet by JACBR argues that every party organization from CPI(M) to TMC and BJP had at some point or the other, acted against the interest of the refugees. The pamphlet argues that the refugees should keep faith in their “own organizations”, namely, the Matua Mahasangha and JACBR as the two representative organizations of post-1971 refugees. It is important to note here that at this time, the Matua Mahasangha was not yet involved in the tug-of-war over the by-election, mentioned earlier in the paper. Through both Manjul and Kapil Krishna Thakur, the Mahasangha was entirely allied to the TMC. The JACBR pamphlet, therefore, while seeming to be deeply critical of almost all parties, keeps a layer of negotiation open with the ruling party of the state through its association with the Mahasangha.

The Party-Community Interface

We have discussed a set of experiments in the above sections where Namasudra refugees have attempted to mix together two forms of politics by trying to bring together several small organizations and independent activists as part of a political party. Each of those experiments has failed and the only successful passage into mainstream politics has come through other mainstream parties like TMC, and more recently the BJP. Each of these experiments have three characteristic features: a) a set of activists who move between the Matua Mahasangha, smaller independent activist groups and front organizations, and several different political parties; b) attempts at forging a 'bridging' unity between different regions and caste groups; c) drawing resources from spatially removed organizations attempting to create wider solidarities at inter-state or even national levels.

The scalar design of building agitation shows that there is a spatial aspect to the way these groups organize and mobilize. The spaces of organization and articulation, and the space of agitation are chosen and intensively connected through constant travelling back and forth. The various 'central' locations are arranged across different registers. While Thakurnagar serves as a local centre for initial mobilization, the movement constantly targets the metropolitan stage as the primary space of intervention. The state capital of Kolkata is also a step in the hierarchy of 'civic squares', which serves as a stepping-stone for moving to Delhi with the movement's demands. This travel of the refugee activists resonates with two other abstract movements: a) the movement towards citizenship and b) the movement towards the party form.

The challenge faced by this political energy in terms of its movement to the national front is primarily the hegemonic presence of the 'infiltration' discourse. This discourse marks the activists as 'non-members' and makes it nearly impossible for them to take part in the national political process *as refugees*. The two alternatives offered by the present political climate are, a) Hindu 'sharanarathi' and b) 'mulnivasi' Dalit. Both of these identities, as we have seen in the preceding sections, are challenged by local solidarities built on complex histories and political competitions and linkages. In recent times, the BJP has become increasingly active through smaller front organizations like Hindu Samhati, Hindu Jagran Manch, All India Refugee Front

and Nikhil Bharat Bangali Udbastu Samannoy Samiti (NIBBUS) in the refugee settlements in West Bengal.

At the national level, the BJP has taken the route of positive 'insecuritization'.⁴⁷⁰ The 2016 Citizenship Amendment Act has offered the right to apply for citizenship to individuals belonging to select religions in select South Asian countries. The right to apply is of course, not the right to citizenship as demanded by the Namasudra refugees but it is a governmental mechanism for setting apart the Muslim and the Namasudra groups with the smallest possible investment of power. While it seemingly pushes forward the agenda of citizenship rights for a community long marginalized by design and by historical accident, it also exacerbates existing contradictions in the suburban and border districts of eastern India and allows for greater volume of propaganda of the kind demonstrated above by groups aligned with the BJP.

⁴⁷⁰ Maurizio Lazzarato, "Neoliberalism in action: Inequality, insecurity and the reconstitution of the social," *Theory, Culture & Society* 26 (2009): 6, 109-133.

Conclusion

Doreen Massey, in her seminal work on gender and space had argued for a complex and layered sense of space which can connect various elements structuring that space separately and connectedly.⁴⁷¹ She had delineated these various forces to illustrate the truly intertwined nature of power and its materiality in terms of structuring and producing space – beginning from the global financial scale to the scale of town, locality or household.⁴⁷² This sense of intertwined spaces and various different forces working on them is central to the task of this thesis. This thesis has tried to illuminate and situate the lower caste refugees living in the urban periphery of Kolkata as a significant element in the urbanization of the city. In trying to address the task the study had to span discourses on space and labour and situate them in the history of post-Partition rehabilitation of the refugee population. As it progressed, the thesis took shape as an inquiry into and a genealogy of the “actually existing neo-liberalism”⁴⁷³ at the urban periphery of Kolkata.

The first chapter of the thesis delves into the process through which the state apparatus went through two interconnected processes of suburbanization while keeping the refugee population largely excluded from the spaces of the big projects of middle class housing in the 1950s. The chapter then demonstrates that the state constantly oscillated between developing the centre or the periphery through the decades of post independence urban perspective planning but never quite structured either a stable relation or a separation between the core and the periphery of the metropolis. Through this time, the refugee settlements grew in the peripheral municipalities separately from the partially completed and often failing suburban projects of the city. 1990s onwards we notice another incursion of the development machinery into the urban

⁴⁷¹ Doreen Massey, *Space, Place, Gender*, 1994, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, p 3

⁴⁷² Ibid

⁴⁷³ Neil Brenner Nick Theodore, 'Cities and Geographies of actually existing neoliberalism', *antipode*, 2002, 34, pp 349-379

periphery and a strong impetus towards energizing the real estate sector through big residential projects for the rising middle class of Information Technology professionals. With the increasing focus on the periphery and attempts to augment the infrastructure of the city the government soon found itself in spaces where the refugee population had been channelized since the 1950s. The incursions into these places were not easily stabilized because semi-legal occupancy of the refugees came into conflict with the state which had till then given a limited patronage to the refugee population. The chapter primarily situates the simultaneity with which the state attempted to create urban space at the periphery of the city while keeping the refugee settlements separate and the middle class settlements discrete.

The second chapter focuses on the economic positioning of the lower caste refugee population in terms of the discourse on labour created and maintained through refugee rehabilitation policy. The chapter tries to map the system of periodic investment in imparting training to the refugee population in various kinds of government camps and providing for unstable and temporary employment as wage labour. The employment was unstable due to two reasons as identified within the state discourse of the time A) the funding by the state was often inadequate and ill planned and B) there was little stable consumption of the products made in the refugee production centers outside of a few government departments. Even though important actors had proposed the building of big industries in areas contiguous to the various rehabilitation spaces, the government remained bent on small scale or cottage industry solutions which started and failed easily. The chapter traces the transformation and the journey of the lower caste refugee through various peripheral spaces, refugee camps and settlements. In the process of this journey, the chapter demonstrates the de-peasantization of the refugee population and its slow insertion into an occupational gray zone. In the 1970s and 1980s the discourse on rehabilitation shifts quite sharply towards ‘self-employment’ of a different variety. This ‘self-employment’ is strongly reminiscent of what Aihwa Ong

had described as ‘self-sufficiency’⁴⁷⁴ in the case of the Cambodian refugees in the United States of America. The ideal of self-sufficiency was made into a distinction between unproductive and productive refugees which had lent itself to increasing exploitation of the refugee workforce. Coupled with the history of training and inserting the refugee population into petty manufacturing and trade is the history of periodic closure of camps and the forcing out of the refugee population to distant and underdeveloped spaces of rehabilitation. This process gave rise to substantial, desertion of the camps and colonies by the refugee population. Therefore, it can be substantially demonstrated that even for the population of agriculturists who were kept apart from the training process, the transition to wage labour came through the failure of rehabilitation compounded upon by multiple displacements. Desertion by a refugee family also meant that the state could simply wash its hands off in the case of such families. They became the population later categorized as “squatters” in the 1980s reports concerning camps, homes and undeveloped colonies in West Bengal in the urban fringes.

Though the study itself is specific to the Bengal Border area and the city of Kolkata, there is a larger question embedded in this discussion, that of the valence of the refugee as an economic actor – specifically as labourers. The making productive of refugee populations is integral to the global discourse on humanitarian governance and theorizations on structures and practices of asylum. The ‘practice’ of rehabilitation or refugee governance receives special analysis because it has been substantially demonstrated that the institutional design of rehabilitation can define and determine the economic absorption of the refugee labour force and the particular exclusions, challenges and marginalization that they may come to face.⁴⁷⁵ Commenting on the nature of the camp as a sort of social entry point it can be argued that the refugee camps and settlements, globally, and especially nearer the zones of distress and

⁴⁷⁴ Aihwa Ong, *Buddha is Hiding: Refugee, Citizenship, The New America*, University of California Press, Berkeley, p 88

⁴⁷⁵ Betts, Alexander, Louise Bloom, Josiah David Kaplan, and Naohiko Omata. *Refugee economies: Rethinking popular assumptions*. University of Oxford, Refugee Studies Centre, 2014.

conflict have become a sort of enclosure of laboring populations where a permanently catastrophic situation is constantly and carefully maintained through finely calibrated and ruthlessly exercised measures of control and extraction.⁴⁷⁶ Third chapter onwards I take up the case of *Ex-Camp* populations which have a history of living in and also escaping camps and government colonies at various times in the 1960s and 1970s.

The first two chapters are meant to situate the lower caste refugee population in a particular space (the urban periphery) and a particular economic niche (informal labour) by demonstrating the historical process of their journey. The chapters also situate the state as an important agent in the production of both this population and this space. The two chapters provide the spatial and economic location of the refugee so that the next three chapters could take up the task of describing the contemporary location and valence of the lower caste refugee in terms of space, economy and politics.

The third chapter presents the findings of a labour ethnography at the limits of the city of Kolkata. My base for the ethnography was in the village of *Netajipally*. The actual extent of the ethnography encompasses a number of refugee settlements from the *Bagjola* canal-side camps at the limits of the Bidhannagar Municipal Corporation to *Promodnagar*, a small refugee settlement in the census town of Guma. The majority of the interactions took place between June 2013 and December 2014. Throughout this period I intermittently lived in the village of Netajipally and travelled both away and towards the city core on the suburban railway line connecting the city core of Kolkata to the border town of *Bongaon*. My primary entry and contacts came from the refugee activists and organizations that I had become acquainted with in the first few exploratory forays I had made in the area while observing various agitations and political events in the area. The local nature of these organizations meant that my initial contacts were homogenous in terms of caste and class identity barring a few exceptional individuals at the helm of the

⁴⁷⁶ Agier, Michel. *Managing the undesirables*. Polity, 2011.

organizations. My primary contacts were also clustered around four railways stations on the *Sealdah-Bongaon* suburban rail route. These stations are surrounded by refugee colonies and camps along with village settlements of later day migrants from Eastern Bengal. The findings of this chapter allowed me to examine the transition of the transition of the Namasudra peasantry into the urban informal labour sector and the local mechanisms of extraction in close quarters.

Firstly, this chapter demonstrates that this population, though demographically accumulated around areas marked by older rehabilitation spaces, their destination for work is spread out across the national territory. The desire to work in other places while building entitlements in suburban Kolkata is one of the major strategies of survival for this population. The strategy also has a deep sense of aspiration built into it, especially in terms of becoming fully fledged actors participating in the land market speculation in the locality. This desire is propped up by a number of illegal local financial institutions known as *Samiti*. These institutions act like local banks and the workers returning from Kerala and Karnataka deposit substantial amounts from their wage savings into them for minimum rates of interest. The chapter demonstrates how this money then becomes part of the capital used by the local land developers and speculators as capital for buying up and transforming contiguous agricultural land. Underneath this story of transactions and remittances lurks a different story of networks of labour contractors and land developers that span the entire migratory route of the labourer. Often the labour contractor, the man running the village *Samiti*, and the land developer are connected through the network of caste and locality based affiliations. The chapter examines this process through the lens of “social regulation”⁴⁷⁷ of the refugee economy. The chapter argues that the wages of the refugees are then not only a sign of predatory practices in the construction sector in which the majority of them work. It is the site for a

⁴⁷⁷ See Harriss-White, Barbara. "Globalization, the financial crisis and petty production in India's socially regulated informal economy." *Global Labour Journal* 1, no. 1 (2009) and by the same author, "India's socially regulated economy." *Indian Journal of Labour Economics* 47, no. 1 (2004).

second layer of extraction through local finance institutions which buoy up an intricately networked local speculative economy. The chapter argues that the interest earned by the refugee labourer, which he considers his profit signifies the diminishment of his real wage. This chapter attempts to explain the space of the refugee in the logic of production and extraction so as to illuminate the function of the refugee figure and the state of permanent catastrophe that Agier had so eloquently put forth.

The diffuseness of the space of labour for the refugee population is problematized in the **fourth chapter** by bringing out the specificity and locatedness of refugee habitations in the fringe of urban space. The chapter is primarily a problematisation of state mapping practices and it deals with the knowledge and power actualized by the bureaucratic activities of the West Bengal Land and Land Reform organization and Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation Department. Following the insight of J. B. Harley⁴⁷⁸ and his celebrated work on the knowledge/power complex that comes together in cartography the chapter examines the technological transformation of the mapping apparatus of the state and its link to the question of refugee land titles. The chapter demonstrates the confusion of locating the refugee even within the much recorded camp-sites due to specific gaps in the activities of different parts of the state machinery. There are three arguments being made by the chapter. Firstly, the state's practice of cartography is distributed across multiple registers created by multiple departments working according to codes of bureaucratic practice that do not necessarily converge, thereby creating a palimpsest of maps that makes the entitlements of the refugees ambiguous. Secondly, the chapter demonstrates the process of interdepartmental land transfer which was used to push out refugees from their self-built colonies in order to create new infrastructure of the city. This process is particularly interesting since the transfer is non-notified and therefore has little public accounting. Thirdly and finally, the chapter demonstrates the process and

⁴⁷⁸ J. B. Harley, "Maps, knowledge, and power." In George Henderson and Marvin Waterstone ed. *Geographic thought: a praxis perspective*, Routledge, 2009, p 287

practice of auto-cartography of localities by the refugee communities in the ambiguous zone between the rural and the urban. The refugees' representation of his or her own village space, the closing section argues, shows an intimate and strategic understanding of how the state 'sees' or is present in space. The refugee cartographer uses a number of flags to distribute the circuits of power in the locality, simultaneously mapping local business men with elected representatives. The map analyzed in this section is one that was hand drawn by one of the refugee respondents from the village of Netajipally. The map is here taken up as representation of local spatial politics where the market and state are objectified in terms of location and influence by the refugee actors in a complex act of negotiation and habitation.

The fifth and final chapter takes up the question of political engagement of this refugee population after the 2003 act of citizenship amendment act which cemented their status as illegal immigrants.. The study is framed in terms of the party-society formulation by Dwaipayan Bhattacharya⁴⁷⁹ and its various reformulations and critiques in the works of Sinharoy and Chatterjee. The chapter demonstrates that the refugee political space in contemporary periurban Kolkata is diffused across a number of local committees that are very often active within one or two sub-divisions of a district while maintaining a network of Nmaasudra refugee activists across the eastern and central Indian states. The description of agitations and their particular distributions across district and periurban spaces are used to argue that there is no centralized organization of this politics, neither in terms of party nor in terms of community. The political space of contemporary refugee agitations are arranged in terms of scalar differentiations between peripheral spaces and civic squares at the provincial and state level. The chapter argues that this diffuse nature of political practice hides an intense engagement with local party formations and several experimental attempts to consolidate this population within mainstream modes of political organizations. While these experiments have largely failed, I

⁴⁷⁹ Bhattacharyya, Dwaipayan. "Of Control and Factions: The Changing 'Party-Society' in Rural West Bengal." *Economic and political Weekly* (2009): 59-69.

believe it does not point to the dissolution of the party structure in the area or the emergence of 'community' based politics. I argue that what is being construed as community is already engaged in thick and everyday acts of organizing locally as 'committees'.

The arguments presented in this thesis act through a series of localizations and dissolutions. While the first two chapters are historical localizations of the lower caste inmates of refugee camps in terms of space and economy the chapter on labour attempts to dissolve and examine the valence of this population within the larger frame of informal labour and surplus extraction. The next two chapters attempt to capture the specificity of the population across the scale of urban space as actualized within the bureaucracy of urban governance and politics concerning the illegal immigrant at both the national and provincial level.

Let me return briefly to the three realizations that were flagged at the very beginning of this thesis, in the introduction: (A) the project of Partition is a persistent reality of political engagements in South Asian nation states. (B) legal and administrative instruments evolved out of the reality of managing the fall out of Partition continue being a key element of governmental activity in India. And (C) the instruments of governance evolved out of the reality of Partition persist across time and space of the national territory and they determine the dynamics of wealth and population distribution.

The task of the thesis has been the substantiation of these three realizations. In conclusion, it can be argued, probably, that the Partition of 1947 was only the prelude to the persistent discourse of territorial and demographic management of wealth and liability. This task is the great work of this, our Partitioned and Partitioning state, actualised in quotidian acts of severances and amalgamations. This activity of daily Partitioning is not however limited to acts of state. At the level of the social, in the engagement between communities, interactions between spaces, exploitation of labour and extraction of surplus value – Partitioning is a daily and constitutive activity. The historical

intransigence and untranslatability of the violent event of communal strife and territorial dismemberment is in actuality dispersed through the political economic and spatial reality of the state apparatus and the social milieu in terms of everyday government.

Let me return here, briefly to the question of circulation and governmentality which I had flagged in the introduction to the thesis. Over the last five chapters we have seen the spatial and economic construction of the refugee and the insertion of this population into a sort of *produced itinerancy*. The investment in training and the periodic process of pushing out the population into the world outside the rehabilitation apparatus seems to have produced a population that is constantly on the move not only in terms of its labour but also its social and political location. The religious, caste and legal belonging of the refugee population hold it at bay from the possibility of integrating into the general population or the mainstream urban space. The population constantly operates at an unstable margin where social and economic competition is daily enforced and the refugee is called upon to do the task of Partitioning and transitioning.

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