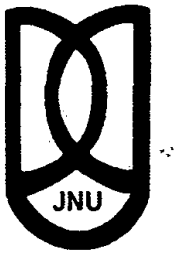
CLAIMING CORPSES: THE POLITICS OF THE DEAD IN COLONIAL CALCUTTA, c. 1800 – 1947

Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

SOHINI CHATTOPADHYAY



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DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation entitled **'Claiming Corpses: The Politics of the Dead in Colonial Calcutta, c. 1800 – 1947'** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** of Jawaharlal Nehru University, is my original work. No part of this work has been published or submitted to any other university.

Sohini Chattopadhyay

CERTIFICATE

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I hold CHS responsible for my interest in research. The few that is good and coherent in this thesis belongs to its people. The rest can only be excused by my lackadaisical lifestyle.

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To the glorious gang of non - historians in my life: My sister’s life can be written as a *Guide to How to be an Independent Woman*. I followed her footsteps to JNU. My parents inspired me to read everything, from newsprint on carry bags to extremely boring literature classics. This training paid off well in the archives. Aditya said he would provide technological help if I acknowledged him – the help is still to arrive, but let this be an early bribe for future research. Emon and Shreya have successfully managed to stay away from my MPhil, occasionally rolled their eyes, but have stuck around since school days. More than ever, I am grateful to the February 2016 movement in JNU that convinced me that by doing research, we were doing something right.

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INTRODUCTION

Sheikh Jahangir has been driving around Calcutta with a truck of cadavers once a month since 1986.[1] He has collected bags full of bodies from hospital morgues. They have no family. He complains that most of the bodies are decomposed and he had to scoop them out of stuffy plastic bags. He buries them in the Gobra Mohammedan Burial Ground in Calcutta, and an imam prays and performs the rituals.. He works at a popular charitable institution in Calcutta, the *Anjuman Mufidul Islam*. The Anjuman was established in 1905 to claim the unclaimed corpses identified as Muslims.

Why did organizations like the Anjuman claim dead bodies, and how did claiming them transform ideas of disposal and funerary rites of the unidentified dead? What new identities and meanings were these bodies given? Through a history of such dead bodies in Colonial Calcutta, this thesis studies the treatment and management of the poor and unidentified dead in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. How did a category of 'unclaimed' dead bodies come into being? What role did colonial encounters play? When did they become significant? Who managed them and why, what identities did they receive, and what socio-political functions did they serve?

In the governmental and administrative parlance, dead bodies without traceable families were often categorised as 'unclaimed', a heuristic device that the Colonial State used to identify bodies whose disposal was the state's responsibility. They state treated them as nuisance. The medical colleges saw them as valuable. Institutions like the Anjuman saw them with religious significance.

Such a theme is largely unexplored in the history of South Asia and its urban histories. But it draws from historical and anthropological works of grief and mourning, anatomical education, archival recording and also community formations. These are crucial allied topics to understand attitudes and forms of management of dead bodies in colonial Calcutta.

[1] Personal Interview with S. Jahangir, at Anjuman Mufidul Islam, Noor Ali Lane, Calcutta 700014, on 8 June 2015.

Anthropological and Historical enquiries of grief

As a subject of modern academic enquiry in the West, death has a recent past. Western historical scholarship was profusely interested in this inquiry particularly from the second half of the twentieth century. The publication of Geoffrey Borer's essay "The Pornography of Death" in 1955 opened up a new field.[2] Geoffrey Gorer showed that death and grief in modern times had become secret. He argued that with better healthcare facilities, natural death amongst younger population was reduced, but the naturalness of death was replaced by violent demises caused by wars, concentration camps, or even road accidents during peace. This sensationalized violent deaths and led to production of thrillers, mystery novels and their expression of violence became pornographic: public discussions shunned common and natural death.[3] This comprehensively defined the terrain upon which historical studies of modern death in the West started. In America, the Death Awareness Movement and the exposé of Jessica Mitford in her *The American Way of Death* (1963) were another pivotal point that led to a prolific expansion of studies on the subject. Jessica Mitford candid journalistic exposé illustrated how undertakers made death into a profitable business, and this business strained the finances of the average American family.[4] At around the same time in 1961, Robert Hertz's 1901 essay was translated, and it led to a lasting impact on anthropological works on death. Hertz concluded that burial rituals were important to control the time of death, so that the people could socially adjust to the absence of the person.[5] In historical scholarship, Philippe Aries' (1974) work on *Western Attitude towards Death*, presented first as series of lectures at Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, grappled with notions of death from the medieval times up to the segregation of death to hospitals. Aries argued that earlier people died at home surrounded by their families, but in recent times, people died in hospitals,

[2] For a historical context of Gorer's work, see Joachim Whaley ed., 'Introduction', *Mirrors of Mortality: Studies in the Social History of Death*, Taylor and Francis, London, 1981 p.2

[3] See Geoffrey Gorer, 'The Pornography of Death', *Encounter*, October, No. 49, 1955

[4] Jessica Mitford, *The American Way of Death*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1978 (1963)

[5] Written in 1902 but largely ignored in academic circuit before its translation in 1961, Robert Hertz used Durkheim's view of society as the entry point to understand life and death. See Robert Parking, *The Dark Side of Humanity: The Works of Robert Hertz and his Legacy*, Routledge, New York, 1996, p. 87, and Peter Metcalf and Richard Huntington, *Celebrations of Death: The Anthropology of Mortuary Rituals*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991, p. 2

alone. Death became a private affair. Pierre Chaunu (1976) was concerned with the same question of privatisation of death and grief, and he thought serial history through expansive archival data like wills and mortality rates were best ways of understanding shifts in attitude towards death.[6]

Generally speaking, this Western shift (but less so in Mitford's work) in historical investigation of modern death in the post-WWII era was dominated by six main ideas. First, they argued that early modern shifts in religion made invisible public expressions of grief, and mourning became silent and deliberately private. Second, they implicitly believed capitalistic economy radically altered grief. Third, they saw the rise of modern medicine and health-care as a crucial turning point that changed attitude towards death. Fourth, changing attitudes of the death of either the propertied class, or those who could access healthcare facilities largely dominated these literatures. Fifth, by seeing a shift in attitude towards the death of the gender-neutral 'man', in reality, gendered categories remained unexplored. Sixth, their focus lay strongly on the sentimentalities of grief and mourning, but less on attitudes towards the body itself. To them, the general business of managing death was grim and sad.

Jonathan Parry wrote *Death in Banaras* (1986) in this historical milieu.[7] He analysed death rites and rituals of Hindus in Banaras.[8] By merging sociology and anthropology with history, he explored wider traditions among Western academics and Indians who locally published in vernaculars. This allowed him to frame his research within debates on caste, religion, purity, and pollution, and provide critical insights on the economic transactions and values of death and grief.

While people came to cremate at the main two *ghāts*, the economies around it survived with the usual conviviality. The Doms bargained, others sold hair from the dead, and so on. Unlike the grim story of death in the West in the 1960s and 1970s, death in Banaras fused religion with pragmatism and robust economic sense. In another marked shift from the Western scholarship, Parry's analyses death, and the

[6] See Pierre Chaunu, 'La Mort a Paris XVIe-XVIIe-XVIIIe siècles', *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales, 31e Année*, No. 1, Jan. - Feb., 1976, pp. 29-50, as argued in Whaley ed., Mirrors in Mortality, pp. 10, 126, also see: Vanessa Harding, *The Dead and the Living in Paris and London, 1500 – 1670,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002.

[7] Jonathan Parry, *Death in Benaras*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge and New Delhi, 1994

[8] His corpus of theoretical literature is limited to Hindu texts on Banaras, Western authors. It does not explore the scope of influence of other religion on Hinduism in the city.

treatment of the body as *public*. To Parry, the performance of grief is written into the rituals themselves as gendered ways of identifying with the body, where the male identifies with the corpse as part of his kin, and the women publicly weep for the loss.[9]

Questions raised by Parry include how rituals control time of death.[10] This is significant to this thesis as it allows us to explain why reburial and reclamation for cremations were important forms of rituals for religious and political groups. However, Parry ignored the role of the state, or mentioned it only tangentially. Perhaps it was because his ethnography foregrounded the society.

From the 1980s, analysis of the body permeated into historical studies.[11] Laqueur (2001, 2011, and 2015) and Julie-Marie Strange (2005) embed their work in the literary and written archives, as unlike Parry, they work on a historical period of the past. The relationship between capitalism and state looms large in their work. Thomas Laqueur introduces the idea of caring for the dead body through a contrast between Diogenes the Cynic's desire to have his body thrown away and uncared for, with the actual current practice of caring for the dead. He wrote, 'In contemporary debates and, as far back as people have thought about the subject, care of the dead is regarded as foundational - of religion, of the community, of civilization itself.'[12] He particularly evaluated the meaning of this care in recent times. He argued that in modernity, the dead left a scope for enchantment and magic that people of modern times can believe in, despite the ruptures of metaphysics produced by modernity itself.[13] One can deduct from this that people across cultures see caring for the dead

[9] Parry reads grief as gendered and expressed with a certain degree of ritualistic mechanism. The women mourn with weeping and the men maintain stoic silence because of gendered ways of identifying with the dead body. Veena Das (1986) pointed that this difference ritualistically signifies the two extremes of attitudes towards death, one weeping with a 'fatal fascination' to follow the dead and the other maintaining silence to deny the existence of the departed. Parry instead identifies the stoicism of men within rituals, pointing out that crematory rituals make the chief mourner a part of the deceased, for which reason the stoicism of the chief mourner is because of not disjunction but conjunction with the departed. However, while deeper discussions on women mourners mark a significant shift in historical attitudes towards death, his interviews are not tempered with opinions *from* women about the rituals See Parry, *Death in Banaras*, p. 157.

[10] Jonathan Parry, Maurice Bloch ed., *Death and the Regeneration of Life*, Cambridge University Press, London and New York, 1982, p. 22

[11] See Kathleen Canning, 'The Body as Method? Reflections on the Place of the Body in Gender History', *Gender and History,* Vol. 11 No. 3 November 1999, pp. 499–513.

[12] Thomas W. Laqueur, 'The Deep Time of the Dead', *Social Research,* Vol. 78, No. 3, 2011, p. 801

[13] Ibid., p. 818

as a humanistic impulse – one that is separate from impulses of rapid economic change. This raises a question crucial to this dissertation, was caring for the unclaimed dead body as fundamental as caring for all other dead bodies? Was it also a humanistic impulse or can we embed the impulse in the political economy of its times?

Works of Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Julie-Marie Strange explored changes in treating dead bodies within an overarching impact of nineteenth and twentieth century political economy. Nancy Scheper-Hughes' (1991) anthropological work put a sharp twist to this story by breaking stereotypes of grief and its gendered roles. Set in Brazilian Northeast, she asserted that abject poverty, high infant mortality rates, physical and emotional violence in Alto do Cruzeiro emotionally distanced the mothers from mourning their children's deaths. The mothers did not cry, thus defying the conventional ideas of maternal bond.[14] The work convincingly tied grief with the political economy. Julie-Marie Strange (2005) engaged with the impulse to care for the dead in the working class household.[15] She wrote about the pragmatic ways of managing illness and taking care of the dead body. Her evidence from Burial Boards shows that relatives requested to exhume bodies for reburial once they gathered money to do so.[16] Parents collected money to buy tombstones. In spite of all this, anonymous burials were still commonplace, and marked working class burials. As Laqueur wrote of Julie-Marie Strange's work, it is as important a question found in Scheper-Hughes' ethno-history - Do patterns of grief and rites of passages indicate social class?[17]

History of Anatomy and Dissection

The question of class (as also race and caste) is pivotal to historiographies of bodies procured for Anatomy. Medical colleges since the late eighteenth and early

[14] Nancy Scheper-Hughes, *Death Without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Egypt*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1992

[15] Julie-Marie Strange, *Death, Grief and Poverty in Britain, 1870 – 1914,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2005

[16] Julie-Marie Strange illustrates this in the chapter on pauper burials. See: "Only a Pauper Whom Nobody Owns", Ibid., pp. 131 - 162

[17] Thomas W. Laqueur, 'Review of Julie-Marie Strange, Death, Grief, and Poverty in Britain, 1870–1914', *The Journal of Modern History,* Vol. 80, No. 3, September 2008, pp. 650-652

nineteenth centuries across Europe and America selectively dissected bodies of immigrants, paupers, or those who died in streets and hospitals without any known relatives. The choice itself was grounded in a socially hierarchical idea of granting the rich their proper rituals. The English term 'unclaimed' in Calcutta, as in other parts of South Asia, made its debut in economic terms. In the subcontinent, written transactions used the word as official terminology to describe rights of the government to reclaim abandoned buildings and goods, or insurances.[18] The fluidity of the term hints at the sense of property attached to an object that belonged first to someone else. This concept readily translated itself to the dead. In England, discussions prior to the Anatomy Act of 1832 popularized the term in relation to the corpse, which stated the right of anatomists to access dead bodies for education. One 1827 pamphlet from Albany claimed that these bodies were appropriated to service 'not because they are poor, but because they are friendless… and the measure here proposed is pregnant with good to the poor'. [19] Since then, the nineteenth and early twentieth century historical works on dissection attempted to legitimize the law by associating it with scientific rationality and general good for all.[20]

This positivist narrative was challenged to expose power-relations in knowledge formation through the study of discourses with Michel Foucault's *Birth of*

[18] Unclaimed property featured as a recurrent matter of enquiry in military proceedings for example. See Government of India (GOI), "Unclaimed Property of deceased Volunteer Native Soldiers", Military, General Orders by the Commander-in-Chief, B, 3rd October 1817, National Archives of India (Henceforth NAI), p. 505

[19] Southwood Smith, *Use of the Dead to the Living,* Websters and Skinners, Albany, 1827, pp. 49 - 50

[20] Since the time dissections became popular in medical practices, history of procuring bodies for anatomy has become popular. Most of the early histories had a Whig notion of history that also had the motive of justifying dissection to overcome possible protests. In 1881 for example, Edward M. Hartwell associated anatomy and dissection with Greek rational thoughts that the enlightenment thinkers gloriously claimed to have inherited. Some Nineteenth Century works in colonial India like George Smith's saw the history of anatomy and dissection through similar lenses. In USA in the twentieth century, such ideas also dominated A. M. Lassek's 1958 work in 'human dissection and its drama' upheld the importance of the laws to enable surgeons and anatomists a better scope for studying the human body. Further in this context, the right way of procuring bodies was the Western way. When William Montgomery McGovern wrote of Lhasa he chided that the Tibetans did not concentrate on their medical science at all, even though they practiced dissection - He was writing about Tibetan mortuary ritual of sky burial where the bodies were cut into pieces to be offered to vultures on the mountain tops. See for example, George Smith, *The life of Alexander Duff, Vol. I,* A. C. Armstrong and Sons, New York, 1879; Edward Mussey Hartwell, *The study of anatomy, historically and legally considered: A paper read at the meeting of the American Social Science Association, Sept 9, 1880,* Tolman and White Printers, Boston, 1881; William Montgomery McGovern, *To Lhasa in Disguise: A secret expedition to the mysterious Tibet,* Asian Educational Services, New Delhi, 2000 (1924); A. M. Lassek, *Human Dissection: it's drama and struggle*, Charles C Thomas, Illinois, 1958.

the Clinic (1963), contemporary to Jessica Mitford's publication. Ruth Richardson's *Death, Dissection, Destitute* (1987) more precisely revealed the Marxist and Foucauldian antecedents of such an analytical turn.[21] The Anglo-American world, as works of Ruth Richardson and Michael Sappol show, already faced a contentious history of identifying and marking unclaimed bodies. Michael Sappol showed in the case of the USA, that physicians and surgeons defined the unclaimed as 'multitudes from all nations unclaimed and unconnected, without relatives or friends to defray the expenses of their interment'.[22] This contentious tradition led to the Anatomy Acts in England and different states of the USA, which legally scripted the nature of unclaimed bodies – abandoned, without a benefactor to pay for its last rites, generally migrating population who left their families behind. Richardson argued that the Anatomy Act had implicit moral values.[23] Prior to the Anatomy Act in England, the Murder Acts of 1752 granted bodies of executed prisoners to anatomists. It was a fate calculated to increase punishment upon the mortal remains of the executed deceased.[24] As Ruth Richardson argued, the Anatomy Act in England and Wales, by expanding the pool of bodies to unclaimed or those in warehouses, condemned the poor to the same fate as executed murderers. To draw from Richardson's argument, the term unclaimed also became a morally loaded term, garnering both pity and contempt at the same time.

These acts of the state shifted the terms of debate around ownership of bodies, and government officers in colonies worked with this knowledge, as Helen MacDonald's (2007) work shows in the case of Tasmania where the scandal of grave robbing quickly led to an Anatomy Act in 1869.[25] When the term 'unclaimed' was used in the Indian context, it already brought with itself a baggage of meanings that it

[21] From its wording, Richardson writes, those who composed the Anatomy Act aimed more at infliction of punishment upon the poor than benefit to science. At the same time, the Act ensured that elite grave robbing ceased, and this way would ensure that the bodies of the well-to-do retained their decorum, and not reach the dissecting tables. Ruth Richardson, *Death, Dissection and Destitute*, Routledge, Kegan and Paul Inc, New York, 1987, Ruth Richardson, Brian Hurwitz, 'Jeremy Bentham's Self-Image: An exemplary bequest for dissection', *British Medical Journal,* Vol. 295, No. 6591, pp. 195-198

[22] Michael Sappol, The Cultural Politics of Anatomy in Nineteenth Century America: Death, Dissection and Embodied Social Identity, Dissertation Submitted to Columbia University, 1997, p. 163

[23] Ruth Richardson, *Death, Dissection and Destitute*, Routledge, Kegan and Paul Inc, New York, 1987

[24] Nickoal L. Eichmann, *'A Peculiar Mark of Infamy': Punitive Dissection and England's Murder Act of 1752*, California State University, Fullerton, 2012

[25] Helen MacDonald, 'A Scandalous Act: Regulating Anatomy in a British Settler Colony, Tasmania 1869', *Social History of Medicine* Vol. 20, No. 1, 2007, pp. 39–56

accrued through this particular history in the Anglo-American world. After all, the doctors in the Indian Medical Service received their degrees from England.

Sabine Hildebrandt (2008, 2013, and 2014) explores the role of the state in procuring dead bodies for anatomy. She estimated that Nazi power regime supplied 40,000 to 45,000 cadavers to anatomy institutions in Germany and German-occupied areas between 1933 and 1945. Hildebrandt's work shows how totalitarianism increases opportunity, where she points out that Nazi politics proved particularly beneficial to the anatomists because it also brought many executed bodies, especially of women, to the dissection tables. Hildebrandt also wrote about how the anatomists documented these bodies, usually addressing them as 'material' and 'matter', catalogued with initials, age, and gender, and thereby erasing all other traces of identity of the executed person from these archives.[26] Her work is also to claim back the identities of the bodies used and point out the deliberate nature of de-humanising and erasing identities from bodies used in research in order to reach the semblance of objectivity.

This intellectual discord between recovering identities as people and a need to ascribe scientific identities through anonymous words like 'specimen' and 'subject' is evident even in Calcutta's medical institutions. Hildebrandt's works and politics raise some questions - why did presence of bodies in medical colleges disturb some people. These are related to the idea that *what happened* to the dead bodies are closely related to what people (the state, the poor, the author, and so on) thought what *ought to happen* to the bodies.

While Katherine Verdery's (1999) work on reburial cultures and nationalism is different from the historiography of anatomy, it theorized this dissonance between what actually happened to dead bodies and what people believed ought to happen to bodies across different historical times. She linked dead bodies to state formation, nationhood, and ethnicity during the breakdown of USSR. Seeing nationalism as a heightened form of kinship, she brought the dead as political actors or ancestors for

[26] See Sabine Hildebrandt, 'Capital Punishment and Anatomy: History and Ethics of an Ongoing Association', *Clinical Anatomy*, Vol. 21, 2008, p. 8 Sabine Hildebrandt, 'Current Status of Identification of Victims of the National Socialist Regime Whose Bodies Were Used for Anatomical Purposes', *Clinical Anatomy*, vol. 27, 2014, pp. 514-536

the nation.[27] In this context, she offers a valuable insight about dead bodies and identity formations in any given society: 'A body's symbolic effectiveness does not depend on its standing for one particular thing, however, for among the most important properties of bodies, especially dead ones, is their ambiguity, multivocality, or polysemy.'[28]

This definition of the potency of the dead body is elemental to understand the politics behind claiming and reclaiming them. In this ambiguity, dead bodies have continuously offered societies various ways of identification and value formations. Unclaimed bodies especially offer a clean slate to fulfil such purposes. The fact that the colonial state archives and other elite groups wrote about unclaimed bodies differently from the known dead is a product of this difference. The colonial state archives, therefore, offer different accounts and narratives for bodies that their families claimed, and bodies that appeared abandoned. Such differences in wordings and their varying importance in state archives stand as an aperture to the study of unclaimed bodies.

Archives

To give pre-eminence to British colonial archives indicates a choice on my part. Some of it was directed by the nature of the questions I asked – Home Department documents at National Archives, Judicial, and Municipal Proceedings at the West Bengal State Archives answer questions of municipal management of the corpse. Moreover, state archives allow one to read governmental perceptions about identities and management of unclaimed dead, and thereby explore the role of an elite production of knowledge. A brief description of the Home Department and the Medical Board documents, which form the foundation of the first two chapters, is thereby necessary.

The East India Company authority at Fort William constituted a Hospital Board on 23 May 1786, for military hospitals, and it gave way to the Medical Board in 1796. The Medical Board had control of both civil and military hospitals, and

[27] Katherine Verdery, *The political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postcolonial Change*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1999, p. 26
[28] Ibid., p. 28

therefore recorded the activities of the CMC.[29] In 1843, the Government of India was completely separated from the Government of Bengal, and Revenue, Police, Judicial, Legislative, Marine, Ecclesiastical, Medical, Public Works, Sanitary, Municipal, Education were brought under the Home Department.[30] The Medical Board ended on 25 January 1858 and it merged with the Medical Branch of the Home Department.[31] It remained under the Home Department until 1918, after which it shifted to the Education Department. The ecclesiastical matters were under the home department, until it merged with the Education Department in 1910.[32] Christian burials were categorized as ecclesiastical matters. This was possible because the Ecclesiastical Branch of the Government appointed ministers for the churches. Sanitary Branch also took charge of Non-Christian burial grounds and concerns with the body. It also recorded sanitary concerns of Christian burials.

However, on a larger level, the Home Department manages to expose the rules and regulations in action. Any law concerning sanitation, municipal actions were predominantly discussed in the Home Department through letters back and forth from Simla, Delhi, Calcutta with copies sent to London. It gives us broad indications of the concerns of the colonial state about bodies, health, and mortality, and largely reveals to us the course of action of government. Usually, these documents leave us with only snippets of details like 'bodies floating in the river' or 'corpse found on street'. Nevertheless, they give us a general picture of colonial government's encounter with the body – and sometimes encounters strong enough that these snippets would sometimes reach London.

However, a lot more is revealed when we learn to note, 'The archives do not necessarily tell the truth, but… they tell *of* the truth.'[33] For this, the silences are as important as the revelations, because both together indicate to us the politics of policy-making and politics of bureaucratic record keeping of the dead. This muddiness in the archives about unclaimed corpses is perhaps the product of two reasons. First, they were corpses unknown to the government as well. Second, if it

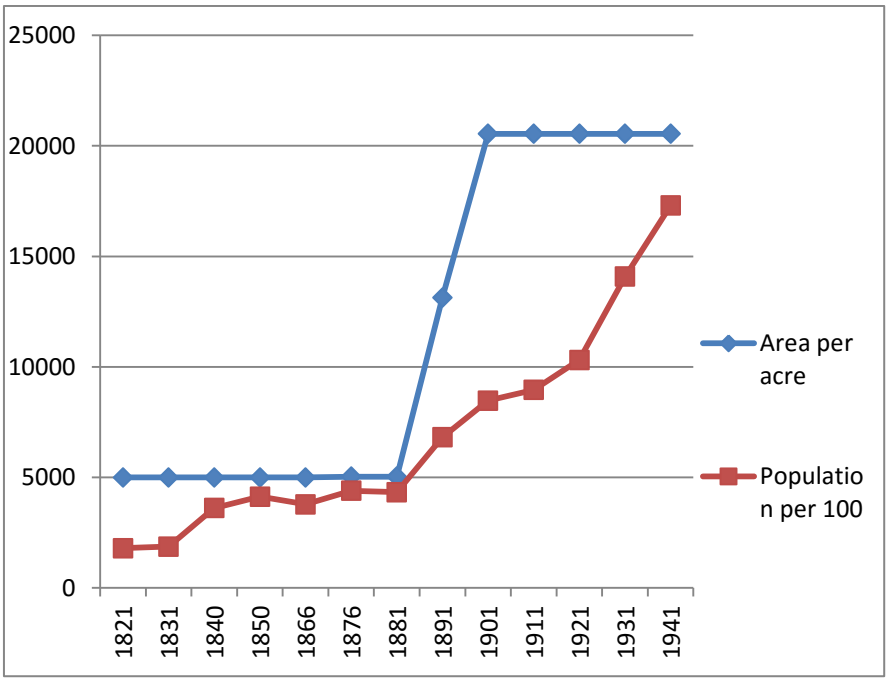
[29] *Guide to the Records in the National Archives of India, Part II, Home Department/Ministry of Home Affairs, 1748 – 1957,* National Archives of India (henceforth NAI) p. 5
[30] Government of India (henceforth GOI), Home, Public, No. 1, 3 May 1843, NAI
[31] GOI, Medical Board Proceedings, No. 4, 25 January 1858, p. 739, NAI
[32] *Guide to the Records,* p. 6
[33] Arlette Farge, *The Allure of the Archives,* tr. Thomas Scott-Railton, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2013

was not an important person by virtue of social position, a striking crime worth retelling, and so on, the government officers made them anonymous because bureaucratic record keeping would benefit nothing from copying down the name of someone who did not matter. This takes us to the politics of record keeping of deaths.

Census and Mortality Data

It is possible to get serial approximates on the population of the city. Between 1821 and 1872, the city remained the same size at 5000 acres. Its population more than doubled.[34] Between 1891 and 1951, the size increased from 13,000 acres to 20,000 acres, and population increased more than five times.[35]

Table 1: Growth of area and population of Calcutta



In the colonial period, census data did not have consolidated lists of mortality as the responsibility of civil birth and death registration was entrusted to the Census office only in 1960.[36] This leaves us with some specific challenges – we have to rely on very flimsy mortality data to guess the numbers of bodies concerned. It becomes

[34] Between 1821 and 1872, population increased from 179,917 to 447,601 people. See: Partho Datta, *Planning the City: Urbanization and Reform in Calcutta c. 1800 - 1940*, Tulika Books, Delhi, 2012.

[35] Between 1891 and 1951, the size increased from 13,133 acres to 20,547 acres, and population increased from 468,552 to 2,548,677. See: A Mitra, 'Calcutta City', *Census of India 1951*, Vol 6, Part 3, Manager of Publications, Delhi, Calcutta, 1954

[36] Rajendra Sharma, *Demography and Population Problem in India*, Atlantic Publishers, New Delhi, 2007, p. 56

more difficult to estimate the numbers of unclaimed bodies because estimates of mortality in the city usually left out such unidentified bodies. However, a brief history of death registration and collection is important, since it gives us a better idea of the sources, as also to re-emphasize the fact that the subject of this work is painfully resistant to usual forms of historical documentation.

Births, Deaths, and Marriages Registration Act all throughout British India was enacted only in 1886 while England already had such an Act since 1836. The focus of England's 1836 Act was to 'provide the means for a *complete Register* of the Births, Deaths, and Marriages of His Majesty's Subjects in England'.[37] In contrast, the 1886 Act in India was "to provide for the *voluntary registration* of *certain* births and deaths, for the establishment of General Registry Offices for keeping registers of *certain* births, deaths, and marriages".[38] Therefore, in India, the term 'certain' in contrast to 'complete' allowed an ambiguity through which the government officials could collect death records. This ambiguity tempers collection of mortality data in the nineteenth century.

In 1802, one of the magistrates of Calcutta, Blacquiere, introduced a system of registration of deaths at the sites of cremation and burials. The records were written in Bengali and stated in tabular detail the name, age, sex, caste, residence, occupation, disease, and duration of sickness.[39] Chowkidars at different *ghāts* and Muslim burial grounds kept these registers. The municipality also employed the *Doms* as informers. The municipality retained translated English copies that only recorded how the bodies were disposed of, and if they died of cholera and smallpox. The translations grouped the rest under a miscellaneous section. These Bengali documents then had no further use and the municipality did not preserve them.[40] Smallpox vaccinators independently kept mortality records of suspected smallpox cases.

In 1844, Duncan Stewarts, the Superintendent-General of Vaccination in Bengal complained that he had to rely on only mortality data from smallpox

[37] A transcript of the 1836 Act for the registering of Births, Deaths, and Marriages in England, www.ancenstry,org, [Accessed: 3 February, 2014]

[38] GOI, Act VI of 1886: See Legislative Department, March, 1886, Nos. 44- 213, NAI

[39] Duncan Stewart, *Report on Small Pox in Calcutta of 1833-44*, The Military Orphan Press, Calcutta, 1844, p. 17

[40] Ibid., p. 18

vaccinators.[41] Norman Chevers in 1862 complained about the lack of proper mortality statistics in stronger terms, pointing out that it prevented medical authorities in India from improving "public health" under an administration that did not give enough attention to medical professionals.[42]

At the crucial juncture of the mutiny of 1857, a Medical Officer was complaining about the entire British Indian territory, pointing out that while vital statistics were collected for the army, they were inadequately documented for a wider population.[43] The CMC annual reports collected some data on common people's death. Typing and lithographic prints enabled a standard format.[44] From the 1860s, it adopted the format used in England, popularised by Frederic Mouat in Calcutta, and incorporated them to explain mortality in Calcutta.[45]

The Army Commission (1859-1864) that was set up to look into the sanitation condition of the British army in India triggered wider reforms in mortality statistics collection in British Indian territories and this left its imprint upon Calcutta's statistical collections. W Farr, noted for structuring mortality data representation in England, was one of the members of the Army Commission. He criticised the state of mortality statistics because of the lack of native civil statistics prevented a proper evaluation of the conditions that these soldiers were exposed to and recommended an implementation of the system in England for India which by then maintained weekly reports of mortality for major towns.[46] The Commission recommended the formation of Sanitary Commission that would look after the health of the army and the

[41] Duncan Stewart, *Report on Small Pox in Calcutta, p. 26*. The practice of vaccine inoculation was introduced in Bengal towards the end of 1802 and several vaccinators were appointed in Calcutta: See Charles Lushington, *The History, Design and Present State of the Religious, Benevolent and Charitable Institutions, Founded by the British in Calcutta and its vicinity,* Hindoostani Press, Calcutta, 1824, p. 307

[42] Norman Chevers, *A Treatise on Removable and Mitigable Causes of Death, Their Modes of Origin and Means of Prevention including a sketch of Vital Statistics, Vol. I,* Bishop College Press, Calcutta, 1852, p. 20

[43] GOI, Home Public A, 9th Oct., 1857, No. 29, NAI

[44] Government Lithographic Press at Calcutta formed in 1823 first printed revenue surveys and Atlas sheets. Vital statistics soon followed. See *Matthew H. Edney, Mapping an Empire: The Geographical Construction of British India* 1765-1853, p. 224

[45] Frederic Mouat, 'Observations on the Recent Nosological Arrangements adopted in the Recent Returns of the Bengal Army', *Read before the Medical and Physical Society of Calcutta*, April 15, 1841

[46] *Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the Cholera Epidemic* of 1861 in Northern India, Superintendent of Government Printing, Calcutta 1862, p., xxv, 281

adjoining peoples and identify problems through mortality data.[47] This recommendation echoed the demands of Norman Chevers, the then principal of the Medical College of Calcutta, who had been demanding this from 1857, citing German examples of 'medical police'.[48]

In 1864, the Government of India (GOI) pointed out that while the Army Commission recommendation to collect mortality statistics was unproblematic, they needed to consult local governments.[49] The introduction of new and special machinery was "out of the question as the cost would be considerable and opportunities for oppression great".[50] The Government of India was also concerned with public reactions. *The Oordoo Guide* from Calcutta warned that the Municipality needed great caution to prevent ill feelings upon the minds of the people because they were generally sensitive to mention names of deaths to strangers.[51] Therefore, the Indian Government saw cost and public reaction as two obstacles for a direct implementation of a system of registration of deaths. Nevertheless, the Sanitary Commission was set up to take charge of health and its statistics in India.

The Calcutta Municipality tried to incorporate a system of recording causes of deaths with greater accuracy from 1859 with the post of a Health Officer. However, this system remained unimplemented.[52] The Sanitary Commissioner took charge of this unused structure in 1865.[53] Registration of death was placed under the Health Officer who would provide data to the Sanitary Commissioner.[54] This was not a large

[47] This echoed growing ideas within England about the health of the army as dependent on the surrounding population. An 1859 pamphlet in England pointed out that the well-being of municipal areas was integral to the development of the army. See: Sidney Herbert, *The Sanitary Condition of the Army*, John Chapman, London, 1859

[48] *First Annual Report of the Sanitary Commission of Bengal, 1864-65*, House of Commons, London, 1866, p. 1

[49] GOI, Foreign, General, A, March, 1864, No. 126, NAI

[50] Ibid.

[51] *The Oordoo Guide*, Reports of Native Newspapers Bengal (henceforth RNPB), 15 October, 1863.

[52] Norman Chevers, *The Sanitary Position and Obligations of the Inhabitants of Calcutta, Lecture Before the Bethune Society in 1862*, R. C. Lepage, Calcutta, 1863, p. 10

[53] GOI, Home, Sanitary, A, No. 103 – 128, December, 1897, NAI

[54] The Health Officer could be recruited beyond the IMS as well, but in practice, that was not the case. Mark Harrison, *Public Health in British India: Anglo-Indian Preventive Medicine 1859-1914*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994, p. 12

establishment, costing Rs. 12,040, which was only one percent of the total municipal expenditure in 1865.[55]

Complaints still ran within the Bengal Sanitary Commission Reports and Municipal Annual Report of 1864 that data was insufficient to come to proper conclusions about which diseases were ailing the city, and in what numbers.[56] The government of Bengal eventually introduced the 1873 Act that would allow voluntary registration of deaths in Calcutta and the suburbs. It was hoped that this act would enable the Sanitary Commission and the Health Officers to gain access to better death statistics in Calcutta and the suburbs.[57] The 1873 Act enabled the setting up of registration offices to collect mortality statistics. The preamble pointed out that in contrast to the Birth and Death registration Act in England (1836), this new Act did not have provisions for registration of abandoned dead bodies, deaths at sea and it did not authorise the public to make searches or obtain copies of entries in the register book. It also did not note down any specific penalty for forgery.[58] The purpose was not to provide a certificate of proof of death or of the line of descent.[59]

Instead, this Act was created to collect statistical information. Further, as the economy was a priority the aim was not perfect accuracy but to set general death trends.[60] An office of the registrar was created and *chowkidars* were given the duty of reporting deaths, with a fine of rupees two for negligence.[61] One was not bound to give names of women.[62]

This act was not deliberately coercive. The Legislative and the Home Departments of the Government of India repeatedly stressed that the registrars should not be coercive and the police should not be involved in collecting information.[63] The Bengal Government made Calcutta a "special circle" of collecting statistics because it already had prior experience of some records at the *ghāts* and burial grounds. The

[55] Total expenditure for the municipality in 1865 was Rs. 10,87,264. See: GOI, Home, Public, A, August, 1867, Nos. 239-240, NAI
[56] GOI, Home, Public, A, Nos. 239- 240, August 1867, NAI
[57] *Administration Report Of Bengal, 1872-1873*, Part III, Bengal Secretariat Press, Calcutta, 1873 p. 369
[58] GOI, Home Public A, Nos. 495- 501, June, 1873, NAI
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid.

Suburbs were incorporated into "general circles" and thus the Bengal Government enabled the suburbs to record deaths as well.[64]

With a new sense of objectivity through *mortality rates* after the Census was set up, a new anxiety began to be displayed for instance about the migrants coming to Calcutta who were 'spoiling' the average death rates of the city, as one health officer complained in 1880.[65] One solution for this was to eliminate the migrant deaths from statistics. One Justice of Peace for Calcutta Municipality proudly claimed that death records from burial grounds and crematoriums were corroborated with the health officer's registrations to check domicile and weed out the migrant deaths from the statistical representations.[66] This thereby contained the seeming excesses of city mortality, and by default, erased a large number of unclaimed deaths from the available mortality records. This was however a problematic scheme, because Calcutta sustained a large immigrant population. The 1951 Census suggested that between 1891 and 1941, almost a third of the population were immigrants.[67]

However, the Calcutta public was not a passive receptor of such gaps in recording. In 1864, the *Som Prakash* wrote, "What is the use of such registration after most of the people have died?"[68] The *Amrita Bazar Patrika* in 1874 wrote that the Bengal Government collected faulty mortality data during the famine.[69] It also complained that the jail mortality reports were inaccurate.[70] The *Bharat Sangskaran* pointed out the same year that the Government of Bengal deliberately kept their eyes off deaths caused by opium.[71]

The plague in 1899 in Calcutta introduced new forms of data collection since it was a globally monitored disease where every increase counted. The government now shifted their focus on collecting information amongst the lower class deaths.[72]

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[64] GOI, Home, Sanitary, A, Nos. 103 – 128, December, 1897, NAI

[65] GOI, Home, Municipal, A, Nos. 6-8, Jan, 1880, NAI

[66] One can speculate that such a view also incorporated the idea that only a prolonged experience of a place could affect its health.

[67] Immigration and Emigration from Calcutta from and outside the state, 1891 – 1951, in A. Mitra, *Census of India 1951,* xviii

[68] Som Prakash, RNPB, 29th January, 1863, No. 13

[69] Amrita Bazar Patrika, RNPB, 21 January, 1874, No. 6

[70] Amrita Bazar Patrika, RNPB, 3 December, 1874, No. 23

[71] Bharat Sangskarak, RNPB, 3 December, 1874, No. 23

[72] Developed communication systems like international telegraphs helped these individual reports to spread to different parts of the world. The Bengal Government reported Calcutta deaths to the Secretary of State through the telegram, thereby signifying urgency in reporting deaths. In addition,

But, this system of reporting collapsed once the plague scare subsided. However, the plague scare enabled the establishment of local institutions like Anjuman Mufidul Islam and Hindu Satkar Samity, which maintained some numbers of dead bodies that they came across. Yet, since their collection of unknown dead depended on calls from the Police, they did not provide a statistical database independent of the state. This, then, is the background to the mortality data collections in Calcutta, and an indication of why archival data of published statistics must be treated with adequate scepticism.

Situating the History of the Unclaimed Bodies in Calcutta

Lewis Mumford in his classic work on cities highlighted the significance of the dead in the creation of the 'urban'. He wrote, "The city of the dead antedates the city of the living. In one sense, indeed, the city of the dead is the forerunner, almost the core, of every living city. Urban life spans the historic space between the earliest burial ground for dawn man and the final cemetery, the Necropolis, in which one civilization after another has met its end."[73]

Am I trying to rescue voices of nameless dead, generally left out of statistical accounts, in order to extend the history of the city? That, I believe, cannot be done. However, we can carve out a general picture of what happened to unknown bodies. In that manner, add a caveat to Mumford's proclamation – if urban life spans the space between earliest burial ground and the final cemetery, then how is urban life, and indeed urban politics shaped by the bodies that resist proper sites of burials, cremations and other forms of disposals? How does politics shape the dead that is discussed only as a 'subject' or a thing?

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the Bengal Government also had to report every suspected plague deaths to foreign countries within and outside the empire, which had interests in the Calcutta portIn 1899. Some of the countries that were daily informed of plague deaths included Ceylon, Straits settlements, Singapore, Hong Kong, Constantinople, St. Petersburg, Montenegro, Bucharest, Berne, La Hague, Luxembourg, Austro-Hungary, Spain, Portugal, Belgium, France, Greece, Italy, Netherlands and Germany. See: GOI, Home Sanitary (Plague), B, Nos. 30- 62, February, 1899, NAI

[73] Lewis Mumford, *The City in History*, Harcourt, San Diego, 1961, p. 7

CHAPTER ONE

THE ANONYMOUS BODY: MUNICIPAL AND LEGAL NARRATIVES IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Since the 1860s, New York City's Hart Island has been the burial site of unclaimed dead bodies found in the metropolis. An uninhabited island in Long Island and secluded from the rest of the city, no tombstones name the dead here. *The New York Times* published a series of articles from March to May 2016 on the histories of these buried people. They traced their lives and mulled over their sparse documental evidence. *New York Times* author Nina Bernstein writes, 'To reclaim their stories from erasure is to confront the unnoticed heartbreak inherent in a great metropolis, in the striving and missed chances of so many lives gone by.'[1] She adds, 'Few are more vulnerable than immigrants to this proudly international city'.[2]

The history of colonial Calcutta's dead was not far from this truth. The city had numerous immigrants venturing out for a better life. In 1823, Bhabanicharan Bandyopadhyay (1787 –1848), the founder of the conservative Dharma Samaj, named his monograph *Kalikatakamalalaya* because Calcutta was the abode of the lotus, the flower of Lakshmi, the Goddess of prosperity.[3] As a site of promise, the expanding town was also imagined as a golden land of rescue. While many migrated to Calcutta for jobs, many destitute also migrated during famines and calamities. Famines and demands of labour, known often to break family ties, made Calcutta a site of teeming strangers and new associations. They remained in the city either to survive or to suffer from an indifferent and indigent death. In the burgeoning capital of the British Empire in India, many died destitute, alone, or with families too poor to afford cremations and burials. Some were floated on the river either as forms of ritual or because 'proper' rituals had a higher price. Ranald Martin noted that the Bengal

[1] Nina Bernstein, "Unearthing the Secrets of New York's Mass Graves", *The New York Times*, 15 May 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/05/15/nyregion/new-york-mass-graves-hart-island.html [Accessed: 12 June 2016]

[2] Ibid.

[3] Bhabanicharan Bandyopadhyay, *Kalikatakamalalaya*, Samacharchndrika Press, Calcutta, 1823, p. 5, Hitesranjan Sanyal Memorial Collection, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, CSS 2000/123

Famine in 1770 left 76,000 corpses on the streets of Calcutta in three weeks. He wrote of its history through visceral descriptions:

> There was not a corner of the city or any lurking place in the vicinity of Calcutta where the living, the dying and the dead, were not heaped together in melancholy confusion. The daily employment of hundreds was to remove the dead in proportion as they became a nuisance to the living. These in cartloads and without any funeral or religious obsequies, were promiscuously plunged into the river.[4]

The aim of this chapter is to draw out the changes in the political economy that created an abundance of unclaimed deaths in the city, and to underline the contrast between claimed and unclaimed corpses. The first section highlights mortuary patterns and expressions of grief for those who died in the nineteenth century. The second section elaborates upon how the Municipality discussed unclaimed bodies as nuisances, and how they gained administrative significance from the 1850s. The third section looks at the legal procedures and practical anxieties of establishing identities of these bodies. The fifth section works on the growth of dead-houses and morgues, and their relation with the evolving ideas of unclaimed bodies.

Changing patterns of funeral and grief

Burial grounds of Portuguese Catholics, Armenian Christians, Greeks, and French developed in the eighteenth century in Calcutta. These burial grounds had a church or chapel. Mercantile elites amongst the Portuguese, Greeks, Armenians, and Jewish settlers funded their respective church graveyards. For example, in 1700, Margaret Tench established the Portuguese Burial Ground to commemorate her daughter's death, and the Armenian Burial Ground has allegedly the oldest Christian grave in the city.[5] When the British first came to Calcutta, they had a small burial ground with

[4]Extract from Ranald Martin's Notes on the Medical Topography of Calcutta", A. Mitra, *Census of India 1951,Vol VI Part III, Calcutta City,* Manager of Publications, New Delhi, 1954, p. 39

[5] The Armenian burial ground was established in 1724. Rezabeebeh's grave was the earliest marked grave of Calcutta. Current popular tales narrate that this body was exhumed and brought on a ship to Calcutta, as she was a wife of a significant merchant. Personal interview with local guard at Armenian Church on Ezra Street, Kolkata, 23 July, 2014. For more, see Mesrovb J. Seth, 'Some Eighteenth Century Armenian Graves in Calcutta', *Bengal Past and Present,* Calcutta, 1904

a chapel on a land rented from Raja Naba Krishna Deb[6]. Partho Datta pointed out that since 1765 the Company assumed any undisputed land to be government property.[7] Since the Company became the authority over allocating these undisputed lands, communities established burial grounds through their mediation. This patron-client relationship for cemeteries put the family or kin into focus because someone had to pay for the burials, and as a result, the ones without families were most likely to end up without graves.

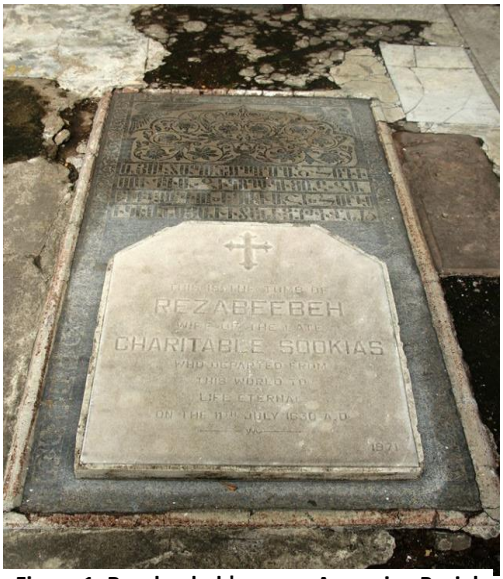

Figure 1: Rezabeebeh's grave, Armenian Burial Ground, Calcutta, since 1630

However, poor Christian families had some opportunity to bargain for burial plots. Numerous burial grounds under distinct parishes had spaces for the poor. In 1851, more than thirty such burial grounds existed.[8] As a form of patronage, the British government donated some charitable land for parishes that could not afford to buy burial space. In 1833, one Paolo de Gradoli requested land for a cemetery for poor Roman Catholics in Howrah and Calcutta.[9] Fort William enquired into the matter, concluded that many local Roman Catholics were too poor to purchase their own lands, and thus donated land for a cemetery outside Calcutta. Interestingly, the first Roman Catholic cemetery in Modern England was only established in the 1850s after famine migration from Ireland.[10] With the severely curtailed authority of the Anglican Church in India, the colonial lands were a more experimental field.

Communities also bought government property to build cemeteries. In 1855, some representatives of the Greek community in Calcutta bought burial land from the

[6]James Long, 'Calcutta in its Olden times – Its Localities', *Calcutta review*, vol. 36, R. C. Lepage and Co., London and Calcutta, 1852, p. 32

[7] Partho Datta, *Planning the City: Urbanization and Reform in Calcutta c. 1800 - 1940*, Tulika Books, Delhi, 2012, p. 31

[8]See Appendix I

[9] 'Letter from catholic missionary Paolo de Gradoli to Fort William', GOI, Home, Ecclesiastical, B, No. 9, 15 July, 1833, NAI

[10] Peter Jupp, *From Dust to Ashes: Cremation and the British way of Death*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2004, p. 25

government within the boundaries of Calcutta Municipality.[11] It had a disputable provision that the government could take back the land without paying them any compensation. The Company focused on land as the pivot of policies for disposing bodies, and negotiated with the family or the community.

In 1767, the Company established a cemetery for its officers and their families, and called it the 'Great Cemetery'.[12] Before the construction of the Fort William in 1781, this cemetery was a significant marker of colonial presence in the city. As Thomas Lacquer observed of the Great Cemetery, it was a distinct, modern turn to commemorate the dead.[13] It did not have a church, and instead of a parish, the Fort William managed it.

Surveying the history of the Great Cemetery, Ashish Chadha noted the discord between the site's pretensions as a celebration of empire (with its grandiose architecture, its many epitaphs about service to the colonial power, and so on) and its claims as a place of mourning.[14] He argued that the inscriptions spoke the language of personal affect, loss, and bereavement.[15] Therefore, the cemetery was not only an assertion of imperial power upon the capital city, but it was also a mode of affective incorporation to identify oneself as part of the city, to own it not only politically, but also through life stories. Thus, the inscriptions usually did not mention the place of birth but highlighted the cause and place of death.[16]

Eventually in 1840, the Company constructed the Circular Road Cemetery. By doing so, the Company initiated a new form of commemoration where the family and not the religious denomination (in this case, Christianity) arbitrated the rights of the dead to a proper burial space. This cemetery became the burial ground for Christians who could afford to purchase a plot. This move resonated with contemporary transformations in Europe.

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[11] Government of Bengal (henceforth GOB), Judicial Proceedings, No. 79, June 1868, West Bengal State Archives, Kolkata (henceforth WBSA)

[12] Fort William bought a part of the Supreme Court Chief Justice Elijah Impey's deer park. It is now popularly known as the South Park Cemetery

[13] Thomas Lacquer, 'Spaces of the death', *Ideas,* Vol. 8, No. 2, 2001, p. 4

[14]Ashish Chadha, 'Ambivalent Heritage: Between Affect and Ideology in a Colonial Cemetery', *Journal of Material Culture*, Volume 11, No. 3, pp. 339 – 363, DOI: 10.1177/1359183506068809 [Accessed: 17 October 2015]

[15]Ibid.

[16]Holmes and Co., *The Bengal Obituary or A Record to Perpetuate the Memory of Departed Worth*, Thacker and Company, London and Calcutta, 1851

Laqueur, in *The Work of the Dead,* wrote that burial culture in England transformed in the nineteenth century. Prior to that, critics during reformation condemned the church for profiting from the dead, but 'no one ever complained that the church existed primarily to make money'.[17] From the nineteenth century, death became inextricably linked with profiteering. To illustrate, the General Cemetery Company (1830) in London used mortality statistics to calculate profitable sale of burial ground to raise £45,000 of capital. The prospect looked good at a time when a similar Company in Liverpool was returning eight per cent, while government bonds were returning only three.[18] At a time when the Parisian private cemetery Pere La Chaise gained eminence as a model cemetery, these burial ground projects in England became popular as well. The deceased could make provisions in their will, or the families of the deceased could arrange for proper burial (depending on their means) in these cemeteries. The cemetery companies profited even more by allowing installation of names and grand memorials at a high price. As Laqueur concludes, 'capitalism thus moved into the market for memory'.[19]

This 'market for memory' came to Calcutta as well. The rule of burial ground of 1859 and 1861 highlighted precisely this by codifying the custom of paying for this land:

> The space for a pucka [permanent] grave is 10 feet by 6 feet and the **ground becomes private property-** this does not however give any right to erect a monument thereon without the sanction of the Committee obtained through their secretary and then only on payment or proof of previous payment… to the government Monumental fee of 50 rupees… the ground fee for Cutcha [reusable] grave where a coffin is ornamented or brought on a horse is 4 rupees. The payment of the above fee does not give any right to the ground, which remains **public property** [Emphasis in original].[20]

Therefore, the Circular Road Cemetery at the heart of the European quarters of the town became a coveted space for celebrated burials. The rich built the pukka graves. The *cutcha* graves of the poor were only temporary, and the rules permitted re-burials to replace them. The cheapest form of burial on this land was more expensive than

[17]Thomas W. Laqueur, *Work of the Dead: A Cultural History of Mortal Remains*, Princeton University Press, Princeton New Jersey, 2015, p. 288

[18]Ibid., pp. 288 - 289

[19]Thomas Laqueur, *Work of the Dead,* p. p. 293

[20] 'Office establishment for the dissenter's portion of the circular road cemetery', GOI, Home, Ecclesiastical, A, 9 – 11, 29 January, 1870, NAI

native cremations. In 1869, cremation cost about a rupee excluding the amount paid as levies to priests and Doms.[21]

Such expensive burial practices became sites of conspicuous consumption. Undertakers responded to this expanding consciousness with entrepreneurial skill. They orchestrated the performance of burial. James Long narrated that European pallbearers carried the coffin covered in rich black velvet as they marched down the road to the burial ground.[22] The undertaker had a flourishing trade, demanding goodwill money of Rs 20,000 on the way back to England in the 1850s.[23] Conversely, poor Christians carried their dead on their shoulders, or sometimes on bullock carts.[24]

This burial ground was to be a place of beauty.[25] In early nineteenth century, the rules for chaplains only involved details of portions he read at the funeral service, to maintain the walls, and to prevent huts from encroaching upon the burial grounds in Calcutta.[26] From the 1850s, the chaplain received additional tasks of maintaining order. The new Burial rules in 1859 and 1861 for the Circular Road and Military Cemeteries showed detailed plans of maintaining the ground suitable for what they called the 'resting ground of friends':

> Every reasonable effort must be made by the chaplain not only to keep the cemetery in decent order, but to preserve its *character* as the resting-place of the departed friends, by suggesting *appropriate designs* for monuments, and by planting the ground with suitable trees. The money procured by the sale of the grass may be laid out in such improvements.
>
> Monuments may be erected by any party, with or without the services of the appointed undertaker. The chaplain must approve of the inscription, and also of the dimension of any monument to be erected in the Church of England portion of the cemetery.[27]

[21]GOI, Home, Public, A, 78 – 81, 24 July, 1869, NAI.
[22] James Long, *Calcutta*, p. 14
[23] Ibid., p. 43
[24]GOI, Home, Public, A, 78 – 81, 24 July, 1869, NAI.
[25]The colonial state was actively involved in preserving the aesthetic value of these cemeteries through their chaplains. A similar trend was evident in the cantonments. In 1809, the walls of the military burial ground were repaired with 'the best *chunam* procurable and Herinburrow Soorky', materials incidentally used to build Wellesley's imposing 'Town Hall'. See: 'Letter from James Ward, chaplain to Fort William', GOI, Home, Public, Nos. 15 – 16, 2nd June, 1809, NAI
[26]GOI, Rules for Chaplains, Home, Public, No. 53, 28th August, 1813, NAI
[27]GOI, Home, Ecclesiastical, A, No. 9, July, 1864, NAI

In another petition to the Government of India in 1865, a government officer commented that the poor Christians 'should not be buried in public cemeteries, but have cemeteries of their own'.[28] To them, poor converts clung to old 'unchristian' observances: being poor, their graves were 'of the rudest kind', and it was hard to make them pay for the services.[29]

The market for memory evidently did not have space for the poor. An engraved tombstone cost fifty rupees. The cost of memorializing the dead was thus enough to buy 100 *maunds* or more than 3,700 kg of firewood.[30] The fees in 1861 for Christian burial grounds therefore highlighted that for the poor, impermanence and anonymity was the key to a burial space in the only public non-military Christian cemetery in Calcutta.[31]

These cemeteries also served a political purpose. With the expansion of the empire, the colonial state strongly felt the need to preserve the memory of past administrators to remind themselves of their purpose in the tropics. With 'European' population being only 0.02 per cent of the total population of the town of Calcutta, commemorating and calling them friends had a numerical value. It bolstered colonial presence in the empire's capital.[32] Obituary publications like *Thacker's Bengal Obituary* circulated along the nodes of the empire. *The Indian Mail*, 'A Monthly Register for British & Foreign India, China, & Australasia' commenced publication from 9 May 1843 contained notifications of births and deaths from the three Indian Presidencies, Aden, Australia, Ceylon, China, Cape of Good Hope, Mauritius, and Singapore. The Home Department indexes at the National Archives of India are replete with weekly news of death of European officers who died in India.

The Municipality left out the Indian cremation and burial sites till the 1860s. Local zamindars controlled cremation in early nineteenth century. They established a system of patronage by owning charitable lands for cremations and other forms of

[28] 'Burial of Native Christians in Government Cemeteries', GOI, Home, Ecclesiastical, A, Nos. 1 -3, Feb, 1865, NAI

[29] Ibid.

[30] 'Bikaneer Raja', Samachar Darpan, Vol. 19, No. 1121, Baptist Missionary Society, Serampore, 7 january 1837, p. 5

[31] GOI, Home, Ecclesiastical, A, No. 9, July, 1864, NAI

[32] In 1866, the total population of Calcutta Town (Calcutta Municipality and the Suburban Municipalities) was 681, 560. The Municipal Area had a population of 377,921. Fort William accounted for 2032 of the 11,224 Europeans mentioned in the Dowlean's Census. A. M. Dowleans, *Report on the Census of Calcutta*, Calcutta, 1866, pp. 12 - 224

funerary rites. Some built rent-free hospices in their estate for travellers to achieve holy death close to the river.[33]

However, the colonial political economy and urban planning made the zamindars negotiate their claims over these lands and rituals in religious and legalistic terms. Some used the rhetoric of religion over these lands to escape government acquisitions for road construction or expansion of the town. For example, in 1822, landowners Chunder Seker Mitter and Bholanath Mitter successfully prevented the acquisition of their land along the river by claiming that selling the 'sacred' strip of crematory land would be equivalent to the 'heinous sin of selling a man's own wife and child'.[34]

Among other Hindus, public rituals and condolences underwent changes as well. When Ramakrishna Paramhansa was cremated at the Cossipore Ghat in 1886, his followers engraved a stone to commemorate his death. This was distinctly a new practice at cremation grounds. In several upper caste Hindu deaths, condolence meetings accompanied *shraadh*. When Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay died in 1891, many held memorial meetings to talk about his life and works.[35] Nabinchandra wrote, 'Imitating the English, we have now begun organizing "condolence meetings"... As a Hindu, I do not understand how one can call a public meeting to express one's grief. Such was not 'our way of mourning for the dead'.[36]

The denial of memorialization, to the poor, in contrast, *anonymized* bodies that were in reality claimed by their families even by new governmental standards of claiming. Anonymity, once again, was a crucial factor in defining an unclaimed body. In this sense, the family's poverty pushed the poor 'claimed' body to

[33]Sumbhoo Chunder Halder of Aeretollah (Āhiritolā) entered into an agreement with GOB during the construction of Strand Road along the river that he would be permitted to maintain a hut to accommodate sick Hindus who came to die close to the river. It was to be a temporary structure with no brick works, and Halder agreed to not levy any fee or rent, and keep the site clean: GOB, Judicial, Judicial, A, No. 70, 19 April, 1855, WBSA

[34] GOB, Petition of Mitters of Aurpooly in Calcutta to the Government, Judicial, Criminal, A, No. 36, 22nd August, 1822, WBSA

[35]As Partha Chatterjee points out, the Chaitanya Library and Beadon Square Literary Club held a condolence meeting at Star Theatre in North Calcutta, and invited contemporary noted men of literature – Rabindranath Tagore, historian Rajanikanta Gupta and literary and ICS contemporary Nabinchandra Sen. Nabinchandra refused, and eventually Calcutta High Court judge Gurudas Banerjee presided over the event. See: Partha Chatterjee, 'Two Poets and Death: On Civil and Political Society in Non- Christian World', in Timothy Mitchell ed., *Questions of Modernity*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2000, pp. 35 - 48

[36]Quoted in Partha Chatterjee, 'Two Poets and Death', p. 36

anonymity. The *Calcutta Review* in 1850 reported that locals complained that a thief robbed a corpse at a burning ghat.[37] The Sanitary Commissioner in 1864 complained that some Doms procured dug out corpses from burial grounds and ghats at night, to send them to dissection rooms.[38] In practice then, the poor claimed bodies were susceptible to the same fate as an unclaimed corpse.

The unclaimed corpse as nuisance

The corpses of the poor without recognizable families were left out of discussions of commemoration. Instead, the government discussed them as nuisances. The Police Hospital that mostly had poor dying people, for example, was called a 'Charnel House', a phrase used to describe a vault that had bones and corpses.[39] Some also referred to it as a 'refuge to die'.[40] After death, Doms carried these corpses to the salt-water lakes, the river, or sent them to anatomists.[41] As nuisances, they have scanty archival presence. In the Famine of 1767 – 1770, the dead have flimsy documental presence, and absent as physical forms of commemoration. In current historiography, the overall count of mortality ranged from Eric Jones' at ten million deaths to Rajat Datta's more modest estimate of one million.[42] Their unaccountability is implicit in the corpus of our written archive, which makes us necessarily complicit with the voice of the colonizers. The archives refer to them as 'bodies floating in the river', 'bodies found in street', 'putrefied corpses' or 'promiscuous heaps'. They tempered nineteenth century discussions in the municipal proceedings as sources of diseases, epidemics, and nuisances.

As early as 1771, one Mr. Hancock wrote in the context of the famine in Bengal, 'The diseases which have been and continue to be very fatal here are chiefly owing to putrefaction occasioned by the prodigious number of dead bodies lying in

[37]'From Local Newspapers', *The Calcutta Review*, Vol. 13, Sanders and Cones, Calcutta, 1850, p. 160
[38] GOB, Judicial Proceedings, A, Nos. 183 – 187, March 1864, WBSA
[39]GOI, Home Public, Nos. 64-69, November, 1864, NAI
[40]Ibid.
[41]Ibid.
[42]Prasannan Parthasarathi, *Why Europe Grew Rich and Asia Did Not: Global Economic Divergence, 1600 – 1850*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge and New York, 2011, p. 78

the streets and all places adjacent'.[43] He expected the Company to find ways of clearing them from the streets. This strongly resonated with contemporary miasma theories in England. As Veena Talwar Oldenburg pointed out, early nineteenth century Indian public health advocates were trained in England and read John Pringle's (1707 – 1782) book *Diseases of the Army* who at length described the 'putrefactive processes in the production of disease'.[44] Pringle stated, 'Miasma, emerging perhaps from dead corpses or other rotting matter in the earth… encountered appropriately weakened constitutions … [and] disease resulted'.[45]

As Michael Worboys showed for Britain, historically, these 'miasma gases' were amongst the most well-grounded ideas of the Victorian period.[46] This idea assumed the source of disease to be in mists or clouds, which the organic and inorganic matters produced. The dead body was one such disease- producing organic matter. By the 1830s, the miasma theory incorporated both contagious and airborne diseases.[47] Miasma theory was one such that continued to gather influence throughout the nineteenth century in Calcutta.[48]

Ranald Martin in 1832 cited numbers of corpses in the streets as a marker of the bad state of health management.[49] As Partho Datta has pointed out, Martin first defined a paternalistic public health system by bringing native health into its ambit. To him, the corpses in the streets and rivers did not indicate that the government was inefficient, but rather that the 'natives' were incapable of managing public health

[43]H. Beveridge, 'Warren Hastings in Lower Bengal, Part II', Roper Lethbridge ed., *The Calcutta Review,* Volume 66, No. 132, 1878, Thomas S. Smith: City Press, Calcutta, 1878, p. 286

[44]Quoted in Veena Talwar Oldenburg, *The Making of Colonial Lucknow: 1856 – 1877*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1984, p. 97

[45]Ibid. p. 98

[46] Michael Worboys, *Spreading Germs: Disease Theories and Medical Practices in Britain: 1865 – 1900,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000, p. 38

[47]Ibid.

[48] Idea of miasma or polluting atmosphere was gaining currency in the tropics and the metropole. Elisabeth Fenton, travelling to Calcutta from England between 1827 and 1830 therefore talked of 'fever in the air of the river' as she reached Calcutta. See: Elisabeth Fenton, *The Journal of Mrs. Fenton, A Narrative of her life in India, the Isle of France and Tasmania during the year 1826-1830*, Edward Arnold, London, 1901, p. 23. Salubrious spaces included open spaces like the sea side whereas congested spaces like slums were beginning to be seen as the hub of diseases. By nineteenth century, the green space around Fort William came to be known as the "lungs" of the city: Henry Blochmann, *Calcutta During the Last Century: A Lecture*, Military Orphan Press, 1868, p. 16 ; In 1892, the health officer reported that two theories of cholera prevailed in Calcutta, one diagnosing the cause in air and the other in the water. See: GOI, Home, Medical, A, Nos. 140-143, July, 1892, NAI

[49]Martin, *Medical Topography*, p. 37

themselves, and it needed British intervention.[50] Works of Sir Edwin Chadwick in England, who served as an assistant Poor Law Commissioner, strengthened such miasma theories in England. The 1849 London outbreak of cholera seemed to confirm his theory. In London, medical officers complained that less maintained graves gave out a 'graveyard smell'. This 'noxious effluvia' was a source of cholera.[51] According to Oldenburg, Chadwick's *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population in Great Britain* (published in 1842) had a strong influence on British administration in India.[52] In 1846, the influential *Journal of Natural History* in Calcutta pointed out that 'miasmatic–contagious diseases' were most prominent, something which infected both through the air and the sick/dead body.[53]

In 1854, the Municipality attempted to ban the burning and floating of corpses from Nimtolla and Kashi Mitra burning ghats not on public health grounds, but because the Municipality thought, it was unbecoming of a commercial capital.[54] Moffat Mills, a member of the Legislative Council, consulted Prosanna Kumar Tagore, a law advisor to the Bengal Government and a member of the Landholder's Association.[55] He advised the Municipality not to interfere in religious rituals and prevalent custom.[56] The floating of corpses was such an existing custom.[57]

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[50] Partho Datta calls this Utilitarian Reformism: Partho Datta, 'Ranald Martin's Medical Topography', in B. Pati, M. Harrison, *The Social History of Health and Medicine in Colonial India*, Routledge, New York, 2009, p. 20

[51] Report of the General Board of Health on the Epidemic of Cholera of 1848 and 1849, London, 1850, *House of Common Papers Online: Proquest*, 2005, p. 59, http://catalogue.nla.gov.au/Record/5093526/Offsite?url=http%3A%2F%2Fgateway.proquest.com%2Fopenurl%3Furl_ver%3DZ39.88-2004%26res_dat%3Dxri%3Ahcpp%26rft_dat%3Dxri%3Ahcpp%3Arec%3A1850-026632 [Accessed 19 March 2016]

[52] Veena Talwar Oldenburg, *The Making of Colonial Lucknow: 1856 – 1877*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1984, p. 98

[53] John McClelland et all ed., "Abstract of Labours in Rational Pathology since commencement of 1839 by Prof. Henle", *Calcutta Journal of Natural History, and Miscellany of the Arts and Sciences in India*, 6, Bishop College Press, 1846, p. 237

[54] GOB, Judicial Proceedings, A, Nos. 183 – 187, March 1864, WBSA

[55] *Annual Report on the Administration of the Bengal Presidency for 1863 – 1864*, Military Orphan Press, Calcutta, 1865, p. 88

[56] IMS officer Frederic Mouat pointed out that to put a stop to such a system as this would interfere with no religious or other prejudice of the natives, since neither the Shastras nor Vedas countenance any such murders. Frederic John Mouat, *Observations on the Nosological Arrangement of the Bengal Medical Returns, with a Few Cursory Remarks on Medical Topography and Military Hygiene*, Read before the Medical and Physical Society of Calcutta, 15th April, 1841, Calcutta, p. 42

[57] One essayist identified the origin in Skanda Purana, and used William Ward's interpretation to come to his conclusion, which said that by dying in the Ganges, a person will merge with Brahma, apart

Such advice echoed in contemporary literature where many saw death as the ultimate merger with nature. In 1837, an anonymous letter to *Samachar Darpan* mentioned that one let go of ones 'deceitful body' by surrendering the body to the Ganga, and it was an uncommon but acceptable practice. [58] These echoed thoughts also evident in the high literature of journals like *Tattvobodhini Patrika*, a mouthpiece of a reformist Brahmo group. In 1843, the *Tattvobodhini Patrika* suggested that the body was made up of parts and molecules, and on death, it merged with nature.[59] In another article, it pointed that 'the soul's departure from the body was the ultimate quest for truth'.[60] Such high literatures, to a point, philosophized the body's mortal remains into non-significance, as part of nature and religion, but untouched by the reality of everyday life of the living, governance, and even waste management.[61] The Municipality ultimately abandoned the project of banning the floating of corpses because they did not want to interfere in religious matters.

This engagement with the unburied and unburnt corpses bolstered after transfer of power to the Crown in 1858. The prospect of international quarantine following strong indictments against Bengal in the International Sanitary Commissions threatened the commercial enterprises of the British Empire.[62] In addition to this the Army Sanitary Commission (1864) pointed out that European soldiers in India died more due to fever and cholera than in combat, and the Government of India established a Sanitary Commission in the three presidencies to advise governments on public health. The first Sanitary Commissioner of Bengal, John Strachey wrote in 1864 that the presence of unknown corpses in street and river made Calcutta unhealthier, and how cities of Punjab and Central Provinces appeared flawless in

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from dying of cholera or leprosy. See: *Calcutta Review,* Vol. 66, R. C. Lepage and Co., Calcutta and London, 1867, p. 402

[58] Correspondence to the Editor, 'Astonishing Death', *Samachar Darpan,* Vol. 19, No. 1135, Baptist Missionary Society, Serampore, 15 April, 1837, p. 119

[59] Unknown Author, *Tattvabodhini Patrika,* vol. 1, 1843, http://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/savifadok/volltexte/2010/1250 [accessed: 7 September 2015]

[60]Ibid., p. 7

[61]To quote Judith Farquhar and Margaret Loch, 'The body offered to social thought by nineteenth- and twentieth-century biomedical specialties, though a complex materiality in its own right, was easily appropriated in social thought as a capsule of nature that could be inhabited, but not altered, by culture', Margaret Lock, Judith Farquhar, Introduction, Margaret Lock, Judith Farquhar ed., *Beyond the Body Proper: Reading the Anthropology of Material Life, Duke* University Press, Durham and London, 2007, p. 1

[62]*Report of the International Sanitary Conference, of a Commission from that Body, To which were reserved the question relative to the Origin, Endemicity, Transmissibility and Propagation of Asiatic Cholera*, Office of the Superintendent of the Government Printing, London, 1866

comparison.[63] He wrote to London, 'More than 5,000 human corpses have been every year thrown from Calcutta into the river which supplies the greater part of the inhabitants with water for all domestic purposes, and which for several miles is covered with shipping… That such thing should be true seems really to be hardly credible. I am referring to it because it seems as a good index to the state of things'.[64]

In the broader milieu, London raised concerns against burning corpses in Hooghly along Calcutta - the channel that sustained commercial enterprises and linked the broader empire. The Secretary of State for India, Charles Wood, commanded to stop the throwing of corpses into the river and cremations on the banks of Hooghly, as he perceived that these corpses outsourced cholera and fever to sailors at the port, and the British soldiers in the nearby Barrackpore cantonment. His first targets were therefore cremation ghats that harboured half-burnt bodies and practiced throwing corpses into rivers.

Initially, the Municipality and the Government of Bengal focused on cremation ghats. The Nimtolla and Kashi Mitra burning ghats in Calcutta became the site of these concerns.[65] Along with cremation, they questioned the presence of dead bodies in the river, and uncremated corpses in the ghats. Following Wood's concern, the Municipality proposed some by-laws in June 1864 to prevent the throwing of corpses in the river, but it lacked punitive measures.[66] Not satisfied with Bengal Government's response, in November 1864, Wood despatched another request for complete prohibition of burning of corpses within Calcutta and the throwing of corpses in the river. He further complained that the Municipality and the government were not doing enough.[67]

Charles Wood's insistence in 1864 and the establishment of Sanitary Commission forced Cecil Beadon, the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal to create a *Special Committee for the Improvement of the Burning Ghats*.[68] The Committee

[63] GOB, Judicial Proceedings, A, Nos. 183 – 187, March 1864, WBSA
[64] Ibid.
[65] GOB, Judicial Proceedings, B, Nos. 341 – 342, October, 1864 and Nos. 413 – 414, November, 1864, WBSA
[66] 'Section 218 of Act VI of Bengal Council of 1863', see GOB, Judicial Proceedings, A, 21-23, June, 1864, WBSA
[67] GOB, Judicial Proceedings, B, Nos. 341- 342, October, 1864, WBSA
[68] Unknown, *Bengal under the Lieutenant Governors Being a Narrative of the Principal Events and Public Measures During Their Periods of Office, from 1854 to 1898*, Kedarnath Bose, 1902, p. 299,

advised the Municipality to burn the corpses of paupers at the expense of the town to prevent them being disposed in the river. In this way, disposal of unclaimed corpses came under the jurisdiction of the Municipality.

Cantonments already had specific rules to manage unclaimed corpses since the 1830s.[69] In cantonments like Barrackpore near Calcutta, in 1865, the Public Works Department (PWD) had standing orders that directed executive officers to supply ropes, wooden boards, and other necessary appliances for Christian burials at stations where there was no Christian government appointed undertakers.[70] There was no special means of providing coffins for paupers; but the executive engineer supplied them during cyclones or famines nevertheless.[71] The rule entrusted local civil officers to provide means for disposing corpses of Indians irrespective of religion.[72] The military had a better system of managing unclaimed corpses in place. This was because the health of the European soldier was of crucial concern, as replacing them was both difficult and expensive.

In the city however, unlike Charles Wood's other famous dispatch on Education ten years ago, this one fell on deaf ears. People continued to dispose corpses in the river. As members of the British Association remarked, throwing corpses in the water was a religious practice. The government could not ban it.[73] The Municipality resorted to inexpensive ways of managing the floated corpses. Instead of destroying them, they tried to make the corpses invisible. The bylaw that proscribed floating of corpses remained ineffective, as it would need an expensive police force.[74] Instead, from 1864 the Municipality employed five *murda farashis* (caste group that specifically worked with corpses) for a sum of twenty rupees to sink these bodies. This establishment was acutely understaffed. In 1864 for example, there were more than 4,000 bodies.[75] Thus, the Doms refused to work without higher

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See: http://www.southasiaarchive.com/Content/sarf.142403/207907/004 [Accessed: 10 November 2014]

[69] 'Source from which the charges for burials of paupers in Cantonments should be met', Home, Public, A, 78 – 81, 24 July, 1869

[70] Ibid.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Ibid.

[73] British Indian Association, *Proceedings at the fourteenth Annual General Meeting of the Association*, British India Association Office, Calcutta, 1866, p. 8

[74] GOB, Municipal, Marine, A, Nos. 212 -214, Collection 2, File No. 9, May, 1887, WBSA

[75] GOI, Home, Public, A, Nos. 51-52, February, 1864, NAI

fees.[76] The government took four years to listen to their demands. In 1868, the Marine department of the Bengal government took charge from the Municipality, and increased their salaries to five rupees a month.[77] This revealed the shoestring budget of the Municipality for this purpose. The cost of burning a body was approximately one rupee, and burning about 4,000 bodies that floated per year would amount to Rs 4,000, much more expensive than sinking these bodies at Rs 300 annually. The objective was clearly an economic mode of erasing the bodies from sight while letting them be disposed there in spite of laws, rather than a stringent sanitary (yet expensive) approach to clean the river. It was an inexpensive way of getting rid of nuisances, and the government compromised with religious beliefs of the time, by clandestinely sinking the bodies. The practice continued into the late nineteenth century. The Marine Department complained that the River Police had to clear regularly corpses from the river.[78]

Establishing identities

Other than questions of public health, unclaimed bodies became grounds for discussions on crime and justice. The unclaimed bodies produced an anxiety that was hard to resolve: that of establishing identities. This was necessitated by a practical problem in hand. In 1856, Norman Chevers, a strong advocate of medical jurisprudence pointed out that unclaimed bodies served criminals, and made judicial procedures exceedingly tricky.[79] He wrote in his *Manual for Medical Jurisprudence*, 'A very prevalent crime amongst the natives of Bengal, is that of causing a person to disappear, and of charging some obnoxious individual with his murder; a putrid

[76] Ibid.

[77] GOB, Marine Department, B, Nos. 16 – 17, June 1868, WBSA

[78] GOB, 'Annual Report of the Health Officer of the Port of Calcutta for 1886', Judicial Proceedings Nos. 212 – 214, Collection No. 2, File No. 9, WBSA

[79]Norman Chevers was a member of the Indian Medical Service since 1848, and his works were predominantly based on Bengal. He became Principal and Professor of Medicine at the CMC and President of the Faculty of Medicine, University of Calcutta. He published numerous papers and monographs on tropical medicine, public health, death registration, and was one of the first writers on medical jurisprudence. See brief biography in Ivan A. D'cruz And Robert A. Miller, 'Norman Chevers: a Description Of Congenital Absence Of Pulmonary Valves And Supra-valvular Aortic Stenosis in The Eighteen-Forties', *British Heart Journal*, No. 26, 1964, p. 723

corpse, readily procured from the river and disfigured with wounds being, perhaps, brought forward as that of the lost individual'.[80]

The authors of *The Calcutta Review* concurred. They pointed out that often death by poison was undetected because of the easy facilities available to dispose of corpses secretly.[81] The Indians continued to use the corpses creatively for such purposes, and these examples became the premise upon which advocates of medical jurisprudence asserted their might over legislature related to the identification of unclaimed bodies found in streets and rivers. Norman Chevers continued, 'The identification of dead bodies is among the most difficult of the tasks which fall within the province of the medical jurist… in India, where the truth almost always lies deeply concealed, our means of detection should often falter.'[82]

Post-mortem manuals since the 1850s highlighted rules regarding identification of dead bodies. As Mark Harrison pointed out, Indian Medical Service officers were underpaid and understaffed.[83] Post-mortems were a way to point out the importance of medical officers in delivering good governance. Correlated with the hunt for identity was the desire to return the body to the family. Earlier Regulation XX of 1817 stipulated that 'after the inquest, the body or bodies shall be given up to the relations, or be buried or burnt, and shall not be sent to the magistrate except in cases of poison or doubt and then only if the weather or distance will allow of their being sent without the risk of putrefaction'.[84] This would also reduce government expenses of burning them. While the family was the broadest marker of identity, more often than not, religion was a close second. Norman Chevers continued to point out in 1856 certain cultural markers of identifying a Muslim and a Hindu person, shaping the Hindu and the Muslim through embodied identities. A political heavyweight in Fort William, Chevers pointed out, promoting medical jurisprudence, that 'the medical officer could distinguish, in any body that might be brought to him, not only the age, constitutional state and cause of death… but also his caste and condition in life'.[85]

[80] Norman Chevers, *A Manual of Medical Jurisprudence for Bengal and the North-Western Provinces,*Bengal Military Orphan Press, Calcutta, 1856, p. 33
[81]'Poisoners and their Craft', *Calcutta Review,* Vol. 81, Thomas & Smith, Calcutta, 1885, p. 93
[82]Chevers, *A Manual of Medical Jurisprudence*, p. 45
[83] Harrison, *Public Health,* p. 8
[84] Ibid., p. 30
[85] Ibid., p. 34

The manual of jurisprudence had curious ways of identifying religion. He wrote that Hindus wore a necklace of beads and every Hindu after eleven years of age had both his ears pierced. A Muslim man on the other hand, had only one earlobe pierced. The Hindu female wore a double *saree* and a Muslim woman wore a single *saree.* The male Muslim man was circumcised, and this was a crucial marker if the body turned up headless.[86] He continued that due to extensive hours spent to pray, there were alterations in bone structures on foreheads of Muslims. Some Muslim men would even stain their palm or finger with henna, which a Hindu man would not. Hindu women of bad character wore henna, while the palm of every Muslim woman irrespective of their character, had henna on it.[87]

However, such cultural markers only remained as broad indicators of identities to solve crimes; post-mortems became a more important method of establishing identity than religious markers. By 1861, the government produced a post-mortem manual that stipulated the right of the police to conduct post-mortems on bodies found under suspicious conditions. In 1867, J. R. Pughe, the Inspector- General of Police of Lower Provinces suggested that once an unidentified body was found, the police was to be informed of all the necessary details like the cause of death and bodily markers, so that it could proceed to identify the person or relations.[88]

With the expansion of railways in Bengal, the government imposed similar rules for autopsies and identities of persons meeting violent death in railways.[89] In fact, by 1879, Government of Bengal issued a circular, which made it mandatory for a post-mortem of all cases of dead bodies found in railway lines.[90]

Such procedures rested in theory with the civil surgeons, but in practice with a myriad number of native medical officers, apothecaries as also medical scavengers. Between 1881 and 1886, about 350 bodies underwent autopsies each year on an average, and many were unclaimed bodies.[91] In the legislative procedure, identities of the dead came to be associated with evidence based on visceral details. This was part of a larger transformation of ideas where human organs provided objective truth.

[86] Ibid., p. 43
[87] Ibid.
[88] J. R. Pughe, *Report on the Police of the Lower Provinces in Bengal for the Year 1867,* Vol. 1, Thomas S Smith, Calcutta, 1868
[89]GOB, Police Proceedings, B, No. 8, November 1868, WBSA
[90]GOB, Police Proceedings, B, No. 74, File No. 558, August 1879, WBSA
[91]GOB, Municipal, Medical, A, No. 90, May 1887, WBSA

Post-mortems for identification was a grand project aiming towards gathering knowledge. In reality, most were not identified. While unclaimed bodies emerged as grounds to justify medical jurisprudence, and to solve crimes, most of them were disposed as waste. Yet, the importance of post-mortems led to development of morgues in the city. They were temporary sites of unclaimed bodies.

Morgues and dead-houses

While the government constructed the morgue to keep all corpses of those who the police suspected to have died of murder, the police brought many unclaimed bodies to it, especially those that showed signs of violence.[92] These sites were termed the 'dead house' or morgue rather than the more prevalent mid-nineteenth century term 'mortuary', the latter implying a resting place for the dead. The word 'morgue' was more exotic. It was a contemporary anglicised term borrowed from the French 'La Morgue' in Paris (1803) which housed unidentified dead bodies, much popularized in writings of Dickens and Emile Zola.[93] The Parisian La Morgue aimed at identification of the person by displaying the body to the public. It was also an exhibition. People also came to the Paris Morgue to look at the vagaries of death. In Calcutta, the morgue was a quieter phenomenon, yet it was distinct from existing local practices of resting place for the dead.

It was conceptually paradoxical to the resting place of Hindus on their *Ganga – yatra*, or journey to the Ganges to die, and hospices localy called *Ganga-yatra Nivas* that many local property owners built for families to accompany the dying to the river. For example, Sumbhoo Chunder Halder of Aeretollah (*Ahiritolā*) constructed a free hut to accommodate sick Hindus who came to die close to the river. It was to be a temporary structure with no brickworks.[94] Rajachandra Das, local zamindar of Janbazar founded a large hospice near the upper caste oriented Nimtolla burning ghat[95]. While local zamindar funded these *Ganga-yatra Nivas,* the government

[92] In 1887, the principal of Campbell school asked if they could get all bodies for post mortem to use for dissection. See: GOB, Judicial Proceedings, Nos. 6 – 8, Collection 2, File No. 4, 12 May 1887

[93]Taryn Cain,'Paris Morgue', Wellcome Collection Blog, 1 June 2015, http://blog.wellcomecollection.org/2015/06/01/paris-morgue/ [Accessed: 6 July 2014]

[94] GOB, Judicial, A, No. 70, 19th April, 1855, WBSA

[95]Radharaman Mitra, *Kolikata Darpan,* Subarnarekha, 1980, p. 54

through the Police and the government-affiliated hospitals funded morgues and dead houses in the nineteenth century. The *Ganga-yatra Nivas* focused on the dead with their families, and on rites and mourning, while the morgue remained an alien concept and a disrupted territory where the government temporarily laid claims upon unclaimed bodies.

The Municipality established a police morgue with the College. The CMC established a separate morgue for itself. In two decades, Dr. Wilson, the superintendent of the CMC submitted a resolution to College Council regarding the inadequacy of the present morgue in holding all the dead bodies, and eventually the Bengal Government constructed a larger room.[96] In 1869, Norman Chevers, then the principal of Medical College, complained that this dead-house was particularly inadequate to hold all the dead bodies in the College.[97] The Bengal Government also constructed a new dead-house at Howrah in the same year.[98] Health Officer Arthur Payne constructed a morgue near the local Dullunda Asylum. During a cyclone in 1886, the Bengal Government constructed a temporary morgue in Diamond Harbour. [99] Such temporary morgues became common deposits of bodies during emergencies and calamities. In 1903, the Public Works Department constructed another morgue with Doms' quarters at Mominpur in 24 Parganas district. It cost about Rs. 18,000.[100]

Colonial officers systematically planned and discussed the construction of these morgues. Health Officer Arthur Payne's morgue was known to have resembled an ordinary bungalow, but its walls and door were made of thick iron gauze so close-meshed as to exclude flying insects. Chevers wrote, 'the arrangement, which was literally that of a large meat-safe, was so accurate that, while the bodies were completely protected, the medical officer did his work within, perfectly free from all avoidable inconvenience.'[101] Chevers wrote that it was possible to preserve the remains against attacks of insects and vermin, and they were willing to spend a

[96] GOI, Medical Board Proceedings, 18 December, 1855, No. 19, NAI
[97] GOI, Home, Public, B, 4 Sept, 1869, 16-17, NAI
[98] GOB, Finance, Public, B, 227 – 230, File number 107, March, 1875, WBSA
[99] GOB, Finance, Public, B, 102 – 104, File number 34, August, 1886, WBSA
[100] The morgue and the adjoining Doms' quarters cost Rs. 17,920. See: Public Works Department, *Register of Buildings Borne on the Books of the Public Works Department,*Bengal up to 1912, p. 80 http://www.southasiaarchive.com/Content/sarf.145984/220908/003 [accessed 24 Dec 2015]
[101]Norman Chevers, A Manual of Medicla Jurisprudence, pp. 44 - 45

substantial amount on the preservation of the body and prevention of smell so that the body did not become deformed and beyond identification.[102]

Chevers did not refer to the word morgue but Dead-House. Frederic John Mouat asserted that every jail hospital was to have a dead-house which should be at least 20 feet wide and lighted from the roof or high windows so that no one could see the interiors from outside. A small palisade with a communicable door surrounded it so that dissected bodies were not visible to the jail compound.[103] The aim was to keep these morgues away from the public. Unlike La Morgue in Paris, these seemed to serve quieter and covert functions. Mouat added in 1883 that it could be in basements of hospitals, hidden and away from any living quarters.[104]Like New York's Hart Island where the unclaimed dead rests, morgues in Calcutta was also away from public eye, while European graveyards were not.

Like Hart Island in New York, the unclaimed bodies, and such dead-houses were also the product of Calcutta's growing status as a cosmopolitan city. Bodies of immigrant and the poor filled such morgues. They were institutions created to fill a gap between the ethics of religion and the ethics of science.

If structures like the dead-house was such a reality, why then does the colonial archive resist serial discussions on unclaimed bodies, or provide statistical evidence? The easy answer is because no one really cared about it in the nineteenth century except as public health and visual threats. The other answer would be that they emerged in archives more often in their more productive form – as objects of medical anatomical education. The Municipality did not treat all dead bodies as nuisances. Some received a second life as subjects of research in medical institutions where they received new claimants, new identities, and were ascribed new values.

[102]Chevers wrote, 'I would recommend, that supplies of strong acetic acid, or of the solution of the chloride of zinc* be sent to each thannah in the station. The free application of either of these fluids over a body will tend to delay somewhat the progress of decomposition externally, and will be very effectual in protecting the corpse against the destructive attacks of insects and small animals'.See: Norman Chevers, *A Manual of Medical Jurisprudence in India,* Thacker Spink and Co, Calcutta, 1870, p. 42

[103] Frederic John Mouat, *Reports on jails visited and inspected in Bengal, Behar, and Arracan*, Military Orphan Press, Calcutta, 1856, p. 256

[104] Frederic John Mouat, Henry Saxon Snell, *Hospital Construction and Management*, Churchill and Co., London, 1883, p. 103

CHAPTER TWO

THE UNCLAIMED BODIES IN MEDICAL INSTITUTIONS

Medical institutions were the largest acquirers of unclaimed dead bodies. In 1853, the Medical Board at Fort William stated that procuring bodies for dissection was a socially volatile project. The Board observed that the unregulated requisition of dead bodies from rivers, ghats, and streets was dangerous and harboured great potential for igniting social disturbances. Scared of protests from families, the Board informed the local police that they were to 'deliver [for] anatomical lectures…only the bodies of unclaimed and unknown persons.'[1]

The Medical Board members comprised of high-ranking European men in the IMS. To them, the unclaimed bodies were 'safe' bodies to dissect for education and research because they had no remaining social purpose unlike corpses that served some social purpose for their families through rituals. Therefore, unclaimed corpses were socially less volatile, easier to procure silently and less prone to arouse religious sentiments.

Since 1835, when the CMC was established, teachers and students dissected human cadavers to learn about human physiology. Through this education, unclaimed corpses became objects that medical teachers, students, and traders of skeletons coveted. Medical education created an epistemological shift that transformed unclaimed corpses from nuisances to objects with economic and educational value. They were economically and intellectually valuable in medical institutions as dissected parts, denuded bones, and representations in drawings, anatomical charts, newspapers, or school textbooks. Unlike the Municipality, the medical community did not regard unclaimed bodies as nuisances. The CMC became the inaugural site of this intellectual exercise with the dead.

The questions that preoccupy this chapter include: How many unclaimed bodies did the medical colleges use? Who brought them to these colleges? How did the colonial medical teachers perceive those who worked with and touched these bodies? How did the medical students and teachers address these unclaimed bodies

[1]GOI, Medical Board Proceedings, No. 25, 1 November 1853, NAI

and how do the official documents record them? How did a growing literary public perceive such bodies?

Numbers in circulation

Before 1835, military surgeons dissected bodies of dead soldiers.[2] The CMC, followed by the Madras Medical College, became the first to use unclaimed bodies as a pedagogic exercise for the Indians and civilians. In 1836, CMC used twenty bodies for the purpose.

In the history of unclaimed bodies, significant increase of use of dissection is noteworthy, because it shows the ways unclaimed bodies were becoming valuable. From twenty bodies used in the first year, it rose to 900 in the next two decades. The numbers matched and then exceeded the increase in the number of students.

Table 2 : Number of Dissections by Students of CMC (from various sources)

Year	Number of dissections
1835 – 1836[3]	20
1837 – 1838[4]	60
1838 – 1839	120
1839 – 1840	170
1840 – 1841	174
1841 – 1842	521
1842 – 1843	304
1843 – 1844	344

[2] Mark Harrison has revised the chronology of the advent of practical anatomy in British medicine by bringing empire into focus. He argues for the case of the military surgeons who studied morbid anatomy, often using them to augment racial notions within the colony, thereby incorporating their contribution to medical knowledge in the West. See, Mark Harrison, 'Racial Pathologies', B. Pati, M. Harrison ed., *The Social History of Health and Medicine in Colonial India*, Routledge, New York, 2009.

[3]Jayanta Bhattacharya, 'The first dissection controversy: introduction to anatomical education in Bengal and British India', *Current Science,* Vol. 101, No. 9, 10 November, 2011, p. 1229

[4]1837 to 1845 from Frederic Mouat's statements in General Report on Public Instruction in the Lower Provinces of the Bengal Presidency for 1843–44, Military Orphan Press, Calcutta, 1845, quoted in Ishita Pande, *Medicine Race and Liberalism in British India*, Routledge, New York, 2010, p. 211

1844 – 1845	508
1845 – 1846[5]	460
1847 – 1848[6]	500
1852[7]	628
1854 – 1855[8]	900
1871 – 1872[9]	743
1877 – 1878[10]	1100 – 1500

Calcutta's doctors and students believed they were privileged for its abundance of unclaimed bodies because it enabled a fast growth of the CMC, and bolstered the reputation of the IMS officers in the city. In 1879, an article in *The Lancet* claimed, 'the dissecting rooms of the Medical College of Bengal are not surpassed by similar establishments in other parts of the world'.[11]

In contrast with the Madras Medical College or medical colleges in London, the CMC had enough bodies to select the ideal one and discard the rest. In 1866, the Madras Medical College had eighty-eight students in anatomy classes (forty-six from Junior and Senior Departments, and another forty from a second department) and they dissected fifty-one bodies after they discarded thirty-six because they rotted away.[12] The junior students could not dissect because of the shortage, and the

[5] Allan Webb, *PathologicaIndica or the Anatomy of Indian Diseases,* Allen and Co., London, 1848, p. 237

[6]General Report on Public Instruction in the Lower Provinces of the Bengal Presidency for 1847 - 48, Military Orphan Press, Calcutta, pp. 78 - 79

[7]"Medical News", *The Medical Times and Gazette – New Series*, Vol. 5, John Churchill, London, December, 1852, p. 7

[8]*The Centenary of the Medical College Bengal*, Centenary Volume Sub-Committee, Medical College, Calcutta, 1935, p. 39 See: http://www.southasiaarchive.com/Content/sarf.143574/210178/004 [Accessed: 7 November 2014]

[9] Appendix A, *Reports of Colleges for Special Instruction, General Report on Public Instruction in the Lower Provinces of the Bengal Presidency for 1871 - 72*, Central Press Company Limited, Calcutta, 1873, p. 500

[10] George Smith, *Life Of William Carey: Shoemaker And Missionary*, John Murray, London, 1885, p. 218

[11]Kenneth McLeod, "Calcutta Medical College", *The Lancet*, Vol. 117, October 1879, p. 558

[12]*Annual Report of the Madras Medical College, Session 1866 – 1867*, Gantz Brothers, Madras, 1867, p. 79

teachers taught them from the dissected parts that the Senior Department students produced.[13]

Between 1848 and 1872, CMC had dissected about 30,000 bodies.[14] It was an average of about a 1,000 corpses per year, a quantum leap from the average of about 300 in the previous decade. The college could procure this number despite social precautions. As Frederic Mouat (1816 – 1897) then an Assistant-Surgeon in Bengal and a Professor in the College, pointed out in 1848, the College did not use cadavers from the CMC Hospital, as they feared knowledge of this could drive away patients.[15]

This becomes more significant when we look at numbers of bodies that simply rotted away. In 1848 CMC used only 28 per cent of the cadavers for dissection, which meant that they collected about 1,700 corpses before rejecting seventy-two percent of them on account of various stages of decomposition.[16] In 1852, the wastage was less—out of 722 procured, they rejected sixty-eight.[17] The students could leave dissected parts only for two or three days.[18] Therefore, the cadavers were divided into several parts, and each student worked on different parts of the body. This required a large number of cadavers, and a student could not work on a complete cadaver. Therefore, teachers at CMC made regular attempts to find ways of preserving a whole body. In 1889, a new preservative could preserve a cadaver for up to six weeks.[19] Eventually, CMC and the attached Police Morgue were one of the earliest to get a refrigeration plant in the city.[20] While the Grant Medical College in Bombay got a refrigeration plant in 1908 at the cost of Rs. 9,000, CMC also got one at the same year.[21]

[13]Ibid.

[14] CMC dissected 21,767 bodies between 1848 and 1872. See: Appendix A, *Reports of Colleges for Special Instruction, General Report on Public Instruction in the Lower Provinces of the Bengal Presidency for 1871 - 72*, Central Press Company Limited, Calcutta, 1873, p. 500

[15]IshitaPande, *Medicine Race and Liberalism*, p. 83

[16]Ibid.

[17]"Medical News", *The Medical Times and Gazette – New Series, Vol.5*, John Churchill, London, December, 1852, p. 7

[18] Minutes of the Faculty of Medicine. for the Year 1888-89. No. 3. 25 March 1889, University of Calcutta, Minutes of Syndicate and Senate, Baptist Mission Press, Serampore, 1889

[19] Minutes of the Faculty of Medicine, 1889

[20]GOI, Public Works, Civil Works – Miscellaneous, A, Nos. 1 – 4, January 1908, NAI

[21]Ibid.

The infrastructure at the CMC proved to be a continuous challenge, as cadavers required special care in order to be maintained well enough for thorough dissection. A professor from the CMC complained in 1855 that two carts were insufficient for carrying the dead to the ghats and the cadavers from the ghats to the dissecting rooms.[22] Horace Wilson submitted a resolution to College Council in the same year regarding the inadequacy of the Post-Mortem Examination Room attached to the CMC Hospital, where Police Surgeons demonstrated autopsies to the students as part of the Medical Jurisprudence course.[23] The Police Surgeons had the authority to perform autopsies as part of criminal justice, and could adequately teach the students of the legal outcome of post-mortems. Norman Chevers, the principal of CMC complained in 1869 that the dead-house was particularly inadequate to hold all the cadavers brought to CMC.[24] However, the archival trails to these structural difficulties are limited. In the official reports that prided themselves over the triumph of Western anatomy in medical education at Calcutta, the writers of the reports glossed over the practical and structural difficulties of getting cadavers.[25]

Other than lectures on dissections, the College used cadavers for demonstrations on anatomy, anatomy examination, maceration (skeleton making), lectures in operative surgery and export of skeletons to other parts of the country.[26] Before the establishment of CMC, in 1824, one articulated skeleton, usually imported, used to cost Rs 350–400.[27] This was ironically significant when we see that the lowest life insurance returns for a post office employee were Rs 50 in even in 1884.[28] Anatomists in the 1850s could only procure skeletons through the intervention of the Medical Board at the Fort William, hinting at how government institutions held the rights over the cadaver, granting it to the medical college to 'prepare' the skeleton. The preparation involved a process called 'maceration' where the body was soaked in water for several days for the skin and muscles to rot and

[22] GOI, Medical Board Proceedings, No. 20, 27 November, 1855, NAI

[23]Medical Board Proceedings, No. 19, 18 December, 1855, NAI

[24]Home, Public, B, Nos. 16-17, 4th September, 1869, NAI

[25]Ishita Pande writes pointedly, that, 'These practical obstacles and structural defects at the college proved far less interesting than the meta-narrative of Hindu civilization built on caste'. See: Ishita Pande, *Medicine Race and Liberalism*, p.83

[26]"Annual Report on the Working of the Medical College during the year 1904 - 1905", GOI, Home, Medical, A, Nos 94 – 95, September 1906, NAI

[27]Ishita Pande, *Medicine Race and Liberalism*, p. 73

[28]Poorva Rajaram, Get a Life: Pensions in the Nineteenth Century, Unpublished MPhil dissertation, Jawaharlal Nehru University, 2016

loosen.[29] In a tropical climate, the process of maceration took about ten days, after which the assembler who was usually a medical student, cleaned and re-assembled the bones.[30] Due to the ubiquity of cadavers, CMC became a supplier of skeletons to different parts of the country. This process of supply initially had some bureaucratic networks to prevent foul play in the production of skeletons.

When one Dr. Mountjoy from Akyab wanted an articulated skeleton, he wrote to the Medical Board at Fort William. Norman Chevers, the Secretary of the Medical Board forwarded the order to the CMC. The college prepared the skeleton and then sent it to Akyab through the Medical Board. Dr. Mountjoy received the skeleton in three months.[31] The Military Board also sanctioned some skeletons to the Medical Board for distribution, using corpses of soldiers who died of undiagnosed diseases. In 1852, one Major Banks sent the Medical Board four skeletons and some prepared bones from the body of four soldiers who died in the hospital.[32] After the Government of India dissolved the Medical Board and the CMC became affiliated with the University of Calcutta in 1858, it received the autonomy to sell or donate skeletons to other medical institutions.[33] By 1878, the process of distributing skeletons had simplified, and skeleton cost only twelve rupees. Soon enough, new rules and regulations steered the distribution of skeletons and body parts.

The Railway Department, habituated to asking for tickets from the living, now had to decide fares for the dead. The *Book of Fares* in 1884 charted out prices for dead animals but did not specifically mention rates of skeletons.[34] Members of the *Indian Railway Association Conference* in 1918 concurred that a skeleton was a parcel in itself, but a person had to accompany it. 'Human skeletons, securely packed and covered by a medical certificate may be booked at full parcel rate by passenger

[29]Frederick John Knox, *The Anatomist's Instructor, and Museum Companion, being practical directions for the Formation and Subsequent management of Anatomical Museums*, Adam and Charles Black, Edinburgh, London, 1836, p. 42

[30] Ibid.

[31] Medical Board Proceedings, C, No. 15, 2 October 1856, NAI

[32]GOI, Military Board, C, No. 240, 6 February 1852, NAI

[33]

[34]The railways however specifically charted rates of corpses transferred from one part of the country to another. It stated, 'a corpse will not be conveyed by Train, unless it is a properly secured air-tight Coffin, and is accompanied by a Doctor's certificate, that death has not been caused by any infectious disease. Some responsible person who will be required to pay his ordinary fare… must in all cases travel with the corpse'. *See: Book of Fares, Rates, Rules & Instructions: For the Conveyance of Passenger and Coaching Traffic and information as to Through traffic Arrangements with Connected Railways*, Sindh, Punjab and Delhi Railway Press, Lahore, 1884, p. 69

train, subject to a minimum of 5 *maunds*. Freight was to be prepaid and a man in charge to travel by the same train, paying his own fare.'[35]

The Anglo-American historiographies of cadavers for anatomy did not have this sense of abundance, but instead recorded a sharp sense of scarcity. This was also evident in David Arnold work *Colonizing the Body*, a book widely and popularly read as an introduction to the history of medicine in India.[36] He cited Edmund Parkes (1819 – 1876) who was part of Madras and Moulmein regiments between 1842 and 1845 to draw the conclusion of a lack of cadavers in India. Parkes wrote, 'Given the extreme difficulty colonial physicians encountered in obtaining corpses for dissection and the intensity of Indian opposition to this practice, the jail was one of the few possible sources for cadavers.'[37] Parkes blamed religious conservatism for this shortage. However, the shortage was not true of CMC in the nineteenth century because Calcutta's urban structure maintained a steady supply of unclaimed corpses. In fact, CMC enabled Civil Surgeons greater access to cadavers. The Murda Farashis and the Doms maintained this supply to the medical institutions.

The 'resurrection men'

That the Doms and their religiously amorphous caste Murda Farashis maintained this supply is not a new story. What however is new, in consideration of a historiographical limitation of these castes' role in medical history, is how the medical college administrators negotiated with their presence, and discussed their role in managing unclaimed corpses. In theory, shastric texts did not allow them to preside over funeral ceremonies, which were a prerogative of the *Mahabrahman* priest—the head funerary priest whom people generally considered as the lowest and most impure of Brahmins.[38] The Doms on the other hand were funeral attendants who constructed the pyre and provided fuel and fire. They would often earn through

[35] GOI, Delhi Records 3, Railway Department (Railway Board) Traffic, A, Nos. 1-4, March 1918, NAI

[36]David Arnold, *Colonizing the Body: State Medicine and epidemic Disease in Nineteenth Century India*, University of California Press, Los Angeles, 1993, p. 106

[37]Edmund Parkes, *Remarks on the Dysentery and Hepatitis of India*, Longman, Brown, Green and Longman, London, 1846, preface, x

[38]Jonathan Parry, *Death in Banaras*, p. 2

kar, a tax they levied, and demand the shroud. They could also sift the ashes for gold or other precious metals.[39]

While many Doms worked as scavengers and weavers, the Murda Farashis specially managed the dead bodies. Drawn mostly from the Dom caste, they were a group whose nomenclature was religiously amorphous, and numerically small. In 1864, the Police Commissioner pointed out that the number of Murda Farashis was limited, and no other caste group would take up their work.[40] Their significance to the colonial administration further emerges in the 1881 Census which listed them, even though the Port of Calcutta and the Municipal area had only six Murda Farashis (four male, two females).[41] Moreover, in practice, the municipality and CMC identified 'Mussalman Doms' and 'Hindoo Doms'. In 1864, CMC employed two Muslim Doms and two Hindu Doms at a salary of four rupees each month.[42]

Table 3: Number of Doms (including Murda Farashis) in Calcutta

Year	Doms in Calcutta	Doms in Calcutta and Suburbs in 24 Parganas
1881	3,347	NA
1891[43]	3,353	NA
1901[44]	9,625	10,546
1911	5,490	6,024
1921	3,928	4,444
1931	3,757	3,837
1941[45]	3,008	4,140

[39]Ibid. p. 72

[40] GOI, Home, Public, A, Nos. 51-52, February, 1864, NAI

[41]'Table XII: Caste of the Hindu Inhabitants and Mohammedan Sects', *Census of India: Calcutta Town*, Bengal Secretariat Press, Calcutta, 1881

[42]Home, Public, Nos. 64-69, 30 November, 1864, NAI

[43] 'Table XIV: Caste of Hindus, tribes of Mohammedans, Sects of Christians', *Report on Census of Calcutta taken on 26 February 1891, Census of India*, Bengal Secretariat Press, Calcutta, 1891, xciii, lxxxvii

[44] 'Subsidiary Table I – Variations in selected castes, tribes, etc. 1901 – 1931', in A. E. Porter, 'Calcutta :Part I and II', *Census of India, 1931*, vol. 4, Central Publication Branch, Calcutta, 1933, p. 122

[45] R. A. Dutch, Census of India, 1941, Vol IV Appendix Bengal Caste Tables, Bengal, Manager of Publications Delhi, Simla, 1942, p. 2

As David Arnold pointed out, helping with dissection was not a customary task of the Dom, but their association with the dead fitted the role.[46]Administrators of CMC and the Medical Board believed that the Doms would understand or willingly participate in the rationale of dissection. They believed, through discussions with orthodox Brahmins and reliance on proliferating translations of Hindu law digests, that the contempt for the dead body lay with the upper castes. In spite of suspicion generated by disdain for the lower classes, the colonial administrators realized that the Doms were indispensable. Unlike the upper castes, the Doms were the allies and the ritual specialists. The CMC employed Doms to bring corpses to the hospital, clean them, assist students continuously, carry them to and from the dissection tables, and eventually throw the dissected parts. Until 1855, it employed four Doms for this purpose.[47] The College also assigned hand-pulled carts to Doms, who brought bodies from the riverside.[48] Their presence at the CMC ensured that the 'higher' caste students themselves did not have to go out and collect corpses from streets, rivers, or ghats. Balai Chand Bandhopadhyay wrote about one Munna Dom during his college days in the early twentieth century, 'Munna Dom would help me a lot. He lived in the balcony outside the dissection room. He was always present when one calls for him.'[49] Such rare personal narratives give us insights into the lives of the Doms, where they lived, and the attitude of the students towards them in medical colleges, at a time government archives shun their presence to a shadowy margin.

In brief, the colonial authority was not playing into the local caste hierarchies, accepting the Doms as allies, yet neglected to mention them in official documents. This was a conscious decision. The Medical Board in 1855 declared:

> The government was and is still desirous of affording to medical subordinates the advantage of professional lectures but it by no means desires to do so if the measure involves the necessity of reviving the exploded trade of Resurrection Men. His lordship in Council apprehends that such a practice is calculated to create disgust and excitement among the population, possibly to the disturbance of the peace, and certainly to the creation of discontent and dislike.[50]

[46] David Arnold, *Colonizing the Body: State Medicine and epidemic Disease in Nineteenth Century India*, University of California Press, Los Angeles, 1993, p. 5,
[47]Medical Board Proceedings, No. 20, 27 November, 1855,
[48]Ibid.
[49]Balai Chand Bandyopadhyay, *Paschatpat*, Banisilpa, Kolkata, 1999, p. 114 [translation mine]
[50]Ibid.

The Medical Board was afraid that grave digging would affect Muslim and Christian burials, and lead to protests against medical education. Grave digging received renewed notoriety more than a century later in the 1980s leading to a ban on skeleton export from India. Gravediggers who sold corpses to anatomists were popularly known as 'Resurrection Men' in nineteenth century England, and the Anatomy Act of 1832 curtailed their role by allowing the a legal frame for steady supply of corpses to medical colleges from workhouses and the streets. By equating the Doms with the gravediggers who had earned notoriety in England for assisting anatomists, the Medical Board delinked the relationship that the Doms as a social group shared with the rest of the population, built within frames of caste hierarchies, which involved mutual ritualistic complicity to dispose of the dead.

In 1864, the Sanitary Commissioner John Strachey emphasized upon the role of the Doms in medical education but he clarified his disapproval of the 'prevalent custom'.[51] He said that as per local 'custom', four Doms carried corpses to the CMC dissection rooms from the hospital – he 'understood this to be the system'. Strachey's statement was a curious case of co-option and disavowal – he disavowed the role of the Doms by writing that 'he understood' but did not have explicit knowledge.[52]He also distanced himself from the network of procuring corpses that smelled of complicity with the untouchable castes and lower classes. He carefully pointed out the problems with the Doms—he complained that they used dissected parts of corpses to extort money.[53] They would display the dead body or its parts in front of local shops until the shopkeeper bribed the Doms to remove the corpses, and they invariably returned in a 'state of intoxication' from the cremation ground. Citing these instances, he asserted that he strongly abhorred their role in this process.[54]

By situating the practice of the Doms as customs, the government officers were erasing an official relationship with them. The use of the word 'custom' legitimized these Doms as the natural workers of disposing of the dead. The role of the Doms in bringing the bodies remained unacknowledged. Published reports like the Annual Report of CMC did not mention their task. At the same time, the medical archives

[51] GOI, Home, Public, A, Nos. 27-29, 28 July, 1864, NAI
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid.

only have them on the fringes of their records. Since they were not entitled to a pension, our records are even more silent.

The Medical Board members at Fort William saw 'proper/officially acknowledged' channels of supply of cadavers for educational purposes limited to unclaimed corpses in prisons or corpses under the charge of the government, and not brought through Doms into medical spaces. In the descriptions of castes and their works in Risley's Census of 1901, the Doms and the Murda Farashis' roles in medical institutions or even municipal employment was absent.[55] The British were developing medical education in India as a classical subject, and a classical education would not benefit from a socially radical untouchable nexus.

Medical students and vocabularies of managing cadavers

Such forms of medical education created new ethos of touching the corpse. While on one hand, the roles of Doms slipped out of archival narratives as CMC grew in its stature, on the other, a new class of medical students emerged, as part of the state medical education. They received legitimate sanctions to touch the unclaimed dead. Caste played out differently for each. While how the Doms brought cadavers to medical colleges became publicly unacceptable, medical education trained new students to develop a new rationality bereft of caste-based ties to touch the dead body. The caste of the Doms tied them to the work with the corpses. The abjuration of caste however defined the relationship of the medical student with the dead. In the House of Commons, a Company doctor, T. A. Wise in 1853 claimed that touching cadavers completely eradicated caste ideas amongst practicing doctors.[56]

These medical students practiced dissection with English idioms and vocabularies. In this sense, it resonated with the larger ramifications of Macaulay's education minute of 1835.[57] The Committee appointed in 1833 by the Company to

[55]H. H. Risley, 'Ethnographic appendices, Being the Data upon which the Caste chapter of the Report is Based', *Census of India, 1901. Vol. 1,* Superintendent of Government Printing, Calcutta, 1903

[56] House of Commons Proceedings of 30 June 1853, *Parliamentary Papers 1850 – 1908,* H. M. Stationary Office, London, 1908, p. 228

[57]'The question now before us is simply whether, when it is in our power to teach this language, we shall teach languages in which, by universal confession, there are no books on any subject which deserve to be compared to our own, whether, when we can teach European science, we shall teach

explore the prospects of medical education in India wrote that the Company should establish a medical college 'in which the various branches of medical science cultivated in Europe should be taught, and as near as approved of the European system'.[58] Scottish Missionary Alexander Duff further affirmed, 'The popular language (Bengali and Urdu) does not afford an adequate medium for communicating knowledge of higher departments of literature and science.'[59] The founders also expected that acquaintance with English was a 'grand remedy for obviating the prejudices of the natives against practical anatomy'.[60] Initially, these medical students were supposed to come from the class of people aware of a British sense of pedagogy, a necessary ingredient to the creation of Macaulay's subject: To enter CMC in 1835, all candidates were required to possess some particular skills that one currently does not associate with medical education. The first book of *Rules and Regulations* of the CMC stated that:

> All candidates will be expected to possess a thorough knowledge of English so as to be able to read, write and enunciate it with fluency and facility. They must be able to analyse a passage in Milton's Paradise Lost, Robertson's Histories or works of a similar classical standard.[61]

In 1851, when the CMC opened a Bengali class, they again looked for proficiency in Bengali literature as a marker of excellence.[62] Medical colleges were supposed to be the site of classical learning, in conjunction with other branches of liberal arts education. Dissection therefore did not just serve the purpose of teaching these students the skills to cut cadavers open, but they also served the purpose of opening up a new culture. The Bengal Government reported dissection examinations results of CMC to the British Parliament. One such report to the House of Commons

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systems which, by universal confession, wherever they differ from those of Europe differ for the worse, and whether, when we can patronize sound philosophy and true history, we shall countenance, at the public expense, medical doctrines which would disgrace an English farrier, astronomy which would move laughter in girls at an English boarding school, history abounding with kings thirty feet high and reigns thirty thousand years long, and geography made of seas of treacle and seas of butter.' In MaCaulay's Minute on Education, 1835, See http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00generallinks/macaulay/txt_minute_education_1835.html][Accessed: 25 Nov., 2014]

[58] Charles Edwards Trevelyan, *On the Education of the People of India*, Longman, Orme, Brown and Longmans, London, 1838, p. 207

[59] Ibid., p. 209

[60] Ibid., p. 218

[61] *Rules and Regulations of Bengal Medical College*, Printed by Order of the Council of Education, Calcutta, 1844, p. 5

[62] Medical College, *Centenary Volume*, p. 30

in 1846 noted, 'with regard to the last day's examination on practical anatomy and surgical operations performed on the dead body, it may be stated that several exceedingly neat dissections were made in a very short space of time.'[63]They also became markets for British dissection tool companies. The Medical Board purchased dissection tools and delivered them to the College. In 1856, CMC sold twenty-five dissecting cases at Rs. 174, and some could buy them at monthly instalments.[64]

Nevertheless, the Englishness of dissection gave way to local vocabularies as well. Madhusudan Gupta translated the *Materia Medica* in Bengali, and Frederic Mouat produced a bilingual *English and Hindustani Anatomical Atlas*. In this way, they translated ideas into local languages. Civil Surgeon Uday Chandra Dutt wrote *The Materia Medica for the Hindus* in 1877 and he emphasized that Hindus were aware of anatomy and anatomical structures of the human body.[65]

These new students who entered this new pedagogy officially adopted and learnt through the vocabularies and pools of concepts that addressed the unclaimed body in a way that did not ponder upon its status as an individual person with a name. They became emblematic of the human body at large.

This new pedagogy permeated into the curriculum of a number of students. The Hindustani Class, which consisted chiefly of inhabitants of the Central and North-Western Provinces of India, mainly then became Subordinate Doctors for the Army. The British Government established the Bengali Class to furnish Subordinate Doctors for the Civil Hospitals and Jails and to meet the general scarcity of 'native doctors' in Bengal.[66] Proficiency in Bengali therefore relegated the student to a less lucrative prospect, even though they studied similar classes. In 1847, students from the Military Sub-Medical Department who furnished apothecaries and stewards at hospitals for European troops joined the CMC for two-year courses on anatomy, dissection, *Materia Medica*, chemistry, and surgery, after two years of military duty. In 1887, the Government of India abolished this military duty. They mostly came from Bihar, Orissa, and the United Provinces.[67] A resolution of 1883 allowed women to join the college. Unlike Madras, the women at CMC occupied separate dissection

[63]"Medical College – Ninth Year", *Parliamentary Papers, 1850 – 1908*, Vol. 32, Appendix N, p. 515
[64]GOI, Medical Board Proceedings., No. 17, 21 June, 1856, NAI
[65]Uday C. Dutt, *The MateriaMedica of the Hindus*, Thacker Spink and Co., Calcutta, 1877
[66]Medical College, *Centenary Volume*, p. 30
[67]Ibid., p. 28

rooms, and ideological commitment to gender segregation was a chief assurance given to protesting elites.[68]

Table 4: Number of Medical Students in the English Class at CMC

Year	Number of Students in the English Classes
1835-36[69]	50
1836-37[70]	50
1844-45[71]	300
1846-47[72]	300
1854-55[73]	300
1878[74]	200

The students' enthusiasm for dissection is present in some literary narratives of the early twentieth century. Balai Chand Bandopadhyay wrote that in his final years while studying surgery in his fourth year in the 1920s, he realized that he had almost forgotten his anatomy lessons. He went to his professors Nonilal Pal and Nogen Chatterjee. He asked them if he could get a body for dissection. They informed him that to repeat a class, he had to pay Rs 40, and he would get a body to dissect. He wrote, 'Within a few days, Nogenbabu also got me a "body"'. I was given a body at the Prosector's (the anatomical demonstrator's) room. I went there to dissect every time I got some time to spare.' The descriptions illustrated how the students internalized dissection as a sign of diligence. Bandopadhyay continued:

> I tried to dissect fast, but still, the Thorax and the Abdomen remained unfinished – which meant chest and stomach. Then I proceeded to do an ingenious thing. It was not only ingenious, it was also illegal – I cut off the lungs, liver, spleen and kidney and put them in a big pot with formalin. I wrapped the thorax and the abdomen in paper, put them all in a trunk, and took them all to my Diamond Boarding House fourth floor room. No one knew about it except my friends

[68] Samita Sen and Anirban Das, "A History of CMC and Hospital, 1835 – 1936", Uma Dasgupta ed., *Science and Modern India: An Institutional History, 1784 – 1947,* Pearson Longman, Delhi, 2011, p. 498

[69] Jayanta Bhattacharya, 'The first dissection controversy', p. 1229

[70] Smith, *Life Of William Carey*, 218

[71] Ibid., p. 218

[72] Allan Webb, *Pathologica Indica,* p. 237

[73] Medical College, *Centenary Volume,* p. 39

[74] Smith, *Life Of William Carey*, p. 218

> Samaresh and Shibdas, and Dr. Bonbehari Mukhopadhyay. No one at the Boarding knew about it. In the afternoon, I would lock the door and continue with the dissection. Shibdas named my room the 'devil's den'.[75]

This narrative indicated how the student tried to replicate the dissection room beyond the medical space. However, the narrative also opened up questions of how the students would address the dead body. The fact that his friends emphasized on the room as the 'devil's den', albeit jokingly, hinted at how the body as parts or as a whole was seen as displaced if it was outside the medical college dissecting rooms, which were more legitimate spaces. By addressing it as devils room, one could always hint at the inappropriateness of the act, even in humour. This was also evident in their pranks. The autobiography continued:

> One night, I got into a bit of trouble. I was dissecting at night when the lights went off. I waited for a while, but could not hear anyone. I called Munna Dom, but he did not come. After a while, I heard a rustling noise. The Prosector room's door creaked open. My body shivered, but I mustered the courage to shout, 'I will kill whoever comes close. I have a knife'. Instantly, the lights turned on, and in front of the door, unprepared with the sudden light, stood Samaresh and a friend. They had come to play a prank but got spooked instead.

Such humour played on the popular belief that the 'subject' could very well come alive as spirits or ghosts – what folklore and prevalent ghost stories suggested became of the person who died a 'bad death'. A dissected body was, of course, bad in the larger context of prevalent folklore that the students grew up hearing. The CMC eventually made ragging with cadavers a punishable offence.[76] That the students set these apart as humour suggest that this pedagogy introduced new moral concepts of good ways of cutting open the body, and bad ways of doing so. In brief, it sought to transform ideas about the upper castes' relationship with dead bodies.

Identities of cadavers

With such new pedagogy and scientific vocabulary in circulation, unclaimed cadavers acquired new names when they entered the medical college premises. Apart from the usual common terms like 'dead body' or 'corpse' to refer to the unnamed, these dissected dead were referred to as 'subjects' and 'specimens'. In lists of numbers of dissections in 1906, the Medical College Annual Report stated that, '362

[75]Mukhopadhyay, *Paschatpat,* p. 113 [translation mine]
[76] GOI, 'Ragging in the Medical College Calcutta', DGIMS, IMD, Nos. 322, 1917, NAI

male students and 11 female students used 224 subjects'.[77] The reports mentioned the gender of the students and their age, but erased the gender of the cadavers. In part, this was because parts of the body were assumed as a general human prototype. (Of course, such an understanding does not take into account how food choices, nutrition, work, exercises, maternity and similar gendered social roles can affect bones and muscles formation). This was at odds with our common perception about looking at people. 'When you meet a human being,' said Freud in his comments on 'Femininity' in *New Introductory Lectures*, 'the first distinction you make is "male or female?" and you are accustomed to making the distinction with unhesitating certainty.'[78] Then this absence of distinguishing the male from the female in the anatomical subject was almost surprising. However, what Thomas Laqueur points out is useful here. He writes about *Gray's Anatomy,* which was one of the textbooks of the students at CMC that 'Even the schematically drawn cleavage lines that divide thorax from the abdomen and the markings to show the course of blood vessels are shown on a male model… It is simply assumed that the human body is male. The female body is presented only to show how it differs from the male.'[79] This was the most evident in the labels and descriptions of those dead that reached the pathological museum where very few samples had their gender marked on to them.

Many cadavers which were dissected in the CMC received a space of permanence in its Pathological Museum, where body parts and sometimes the entire body was preserved in specially imported jars to exhibit what the Indian population really looked like 'from the inside'. This became a showcase for the College. Like Samuel Morton's famous Phrenological museum in Philadelphia, CMC's Pathological Museum also displayed the drive to collect, arrange in order, label and display the body parts as an object of medical study. Allan Webb in 1848 claimed that this Pathological Museum had 'preparations' from Aden, Singapore, Moulmein, Lahore, Madras, Himalayan Range, as also local 'preparations' sent in jars from cantonment in Barrackpore.[80] Mostly these preparations came from the students performing dissections: all these added up to about 2000 jars of organs of various

[77] "*Annual Report on the Working of the Medical College during the year 1906 - 1907*", Home, Medical, A, Nos. 49 – 50, September 1907, NAI

[78] Sigmund Freud, quoted in Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from Greek to Freud*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1990, p. 70

[79] Ibid., p. 167

[80] Ibid., i

forms of curiosities.[81] For example, the content of one preparation was, 'Aneurism of the arch of the Aorta of a male Hindoo, found dying upon the road, presented by Dr. James Taylor', or Abdominal aneurysm of a native, by Kedarnauth Ghose.[82] Some labels spoke more plainly, such as 'Gangrenous lung, Hindoo.'[83]

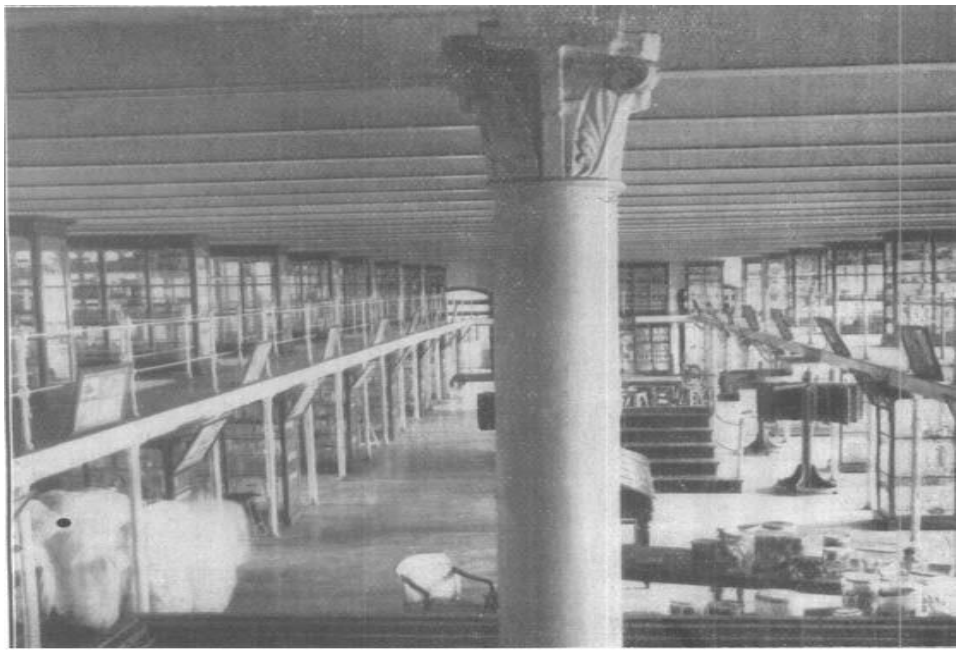

Figure 2: CMC Pathological Museum, 1930s

Out of 120 'preparations' listed in the *Pathologica Indica* for 'diseases of heart and blood vessels', 'aneurism', 'air passage and lung' and 'Liver and Biliary Apparatus', each had labels and descriptions of the body part and the dead person. Out of 120, all of them had their pathological condition listed. Nevertheless, unlike a pathological condition listed as the immediate cause of death on the death certificate, these listed one striking or peculiar condition in the body that made the dissector preserve that part and keep it in the Pathological Museum. These specimens had uses beyond teaching students. When a book in England argued that Indians did not have 'disease of blood vessels', Webb claimed that people could come and see the specimens in the Museum to confirm what the diseases Indians suffered from were. The purpose was to reveal the diseases of the people, 'where its pathology *may be seen*'.[84] He asserted that the content of the museum *'must be made known and published'* in order to

[81] Ibid.
[82] Webb, *Pathologica Indica, p.* lv
[83]Ibid. p. 135
[84] Ibid., ii

become useful for 'statistical medical science' (emphasis in original).[85] To Webb, these specimens from unclaimed cadavers not only had an internal function of teaching the students, it was also a form of revealing India to England. Therefore, the identities of the dead transformed into their pathological conditions. These jars were arranged in the museum according to diseases, and the catalogue index categorized them according to that.

The second most important identity turned out to be 'race', which included where the person was from before birth, or language spoken. Fifty-eight jars had 'races' marked on them. Predominantly, the dissector categorized them as 'native' or 'European', followed by 'native of Bengal', 'native of India'.

Twenty-four labels had the name of the surgeon or the dissector who prepared these – of them, noteworthy was the author of the *Pathologica Indica* Allan Webb, Anatomy demonstrator Dwarkanath Bose, Frederic Mouat who was then a Civil Surgeon at Madras and sent his preparations by post to the Pathological Museum.

Only seven labels mentioned religion, marked as 'Hindoo'. Five labels mentioned where the dissector found the body – two were CMC patients, one was from the dissection table, and another found the body in the streets of Calcutta. Three labels mentioned age but only to describe the nature of the 'preparation' – it had vague estimates as 'child', 'old', and 'a four-month-old foetus'. Two of them mentioned the sex of the dead – one male and one female. Only one mentioned the social cause of death, that being attempted suicide. To summarize:

Table 5: Frequency of words in labels of 'preparations' in Pathological Museum in 1848

Categories	**Frequency**
Total sample	120
Pathological Condition	120
Race/Nationality	58
Preparer	24
Religion	7
Location body found in	3

[85] Ibid.

Age	3
Gender	2
Social cause of death	1

This implied that in the 1850s, pathological conditions were the primary identifier of the dead at CMC. Right after that was racial classification at about fifty percent. Religion, a difficult guesswork, was marked for only six percent of the sample size. The other frequent word, preparation, raised the dead to a 'craft' of an anatomist. Allen Webb wrote, 'the additions to [the pathological museum] are detailed …with the name of the donor and the nature of the preparation attached, in order that they may be made known to the Court of Directors and the Government.'[86] In other words, the Court of Directors had to know who these craftsmen were. That is, such cadavers came to live on as the work of certain anatomists – the word preparation hinted at the invention of an object, a craft. CMC not only kept these within its own precincts but also sent them to Europe in jars, and 'preservations' of morbid specimens paid by the Medical Board.[87]

The identities were therefore selectively those that could reveal what the anatomists were searching. In the nineteenth century, Racial and pathological terms identified these cadavers. These unclaimed cadavers then represented and added to the idea of India that medical institutions were creating for themselves and the world. As numbers of medical colleges increased, they all sought to have a small version of the pathological museum, or at least mandated the students to visit the CMC Museum.

Public attitudes towards anatomical education

By the end of the nineteenth century, Calcutta had three medical institutions under the Bengal Government, which required cadavers. They included CMC and Campbell School, established in 1873. Belgachia Medical College, established as Calcutta Medical School by several Bengalis in 1887, initially did not have a permit

[86] *General Report on Public Instruction in the Lower Provinces of the Bengal Presidency for 1847 - 48*, Military Orphan Press, Calcutta, p. 104

[87] GOI, Medical Board Proceedings., No. 32, 19 November 1856, NAI

for dissections. In 1889, they obtained permission for dissection that eventually led to its further growth, leading to an affiliated hospital and affiliation with the glamorously named College of Physicians and Surgeons of Bengal in 1904, which a conglomerate of Bengali doctors established.[88]

Despite the fact that anatomy lessons were restricted to these institutions, terms, and vocabularies of referring to these cadavers and their identities circulated within a wider audience. The work of the dead unfolded in various forms. The Friends Necromantic Association, situated at Lakshmi Dutt Lane, which had many Bengali upper caste households, attempted to find 'scientific' ways of communicating with the dead.[89] School textbooks soon had to study the skeleton. The Calcutta University mandated that schools that wanted to have courses on hygiene and life sciences were required to buy one articulated skeleton for University approval.[90] Loreto Day School, established in 1857 at Sealdah owned a skeleton since 1880s. Biologist and school Principal Mooney Cyril, who headed the institution from 1985 to 2011 said that at present a twelve-year-old boy's skeleton hung in the biology laboratory. The school bought it in the 1930s. She discarded what appeared to be a century old skeleton when she assumed office.[91]

Rabindranath Tagore in his short story *Kankāl* (the skeleton) written in the 1920s, discussed the question of identities of the dead body as medical specimens through the story of a skeleton. The choice was interesting because skeletons were what entered schools and households – a product of dissected unclaimed cadavers but not the flesh in itself. Skeletons hung for demonstration displayed a sense of distance that comes with the stripping of every personal attribute, as one knows from its outer frame: stripped of skins, muscles dried of blood and fluids and organs, only the structure remained. This removed identities in ways a fleshy cadaver could not. On a

[88] 'The Belgachia Medical College', *British Medical Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 2905, September 1916, pp. 333- 334

[89]*Thacker's Indian Directory 1933 Embracing the Whole of the Indian Empire, Calcutta Streets,* Thacker's Press & Directories, Ltd, Calcutta, 1933 http://www.southasiaarchive.com/Content/sarf.141388/203436/024 p. 121 [accessed 17 Dec 2015]

[90] University of Calcutta, *Text Books for Matriculation examination, Arts and Sciences,* University of Calcutta Press, Calcutta, 1935, p. 851, http://www.southasiaarchive.com/Content/sarf.145032/214123/023 [accessed 7 November 2014]

[91]Personal correspondence with Sister Mooney Cyril, Loreto Convent, Entally, Kolkata, 23 December 2014

more practical level, they were dry, sustainable, and lived longer than any fleshy cadaver ever could.

Rabindranath Tagore's short story grasped the presence of the objectified body in the *bhadrolok* household in all its starkness. The story captured a sense of irony in denuding the body of its identity. In this story, the narrator had a skeleton in his room, used to demonstrate anatomy to the children by the home tutor. Its presence was unquestioned, unassuming, and neither the object of fascination nor fear to the students. The narrator, now grown up, returned to his old room where the skeleton was kept away as it was no more used. At night, a woman came to him. She claimed to be the ghost of the skeleton, proud of her beauty and passionate about her love and consequential death. When the man wished he had seen her, she sardonically laughed by remarking that he had of course seen her beauty in all its glory, all vested in the nude bones of the skeleton.

The narrator's response was not that of fear but a romantic yet rational curiosity about the woman. Tagore left the story unresolved. We do not know if it was a dream of the man, apparition, or the ghost of the skeleton. Even in his open endedness, Tagore hinted at the erasure of the identity and the past life from corpses thus objectified by science. Tagore's resolve to keep it open ended was not because he wanted to avoid calling it a ghost and claiming superstition. His short story *Monihara* showed his comfort in writing about spirits. Instead, *kankal* is almost as a critique of scientific modernity that has reached the households to a degree strong enough to remove affect from the body in the living's consciousness. However, paradoxically, Tagore also highlighted how it is almost impossible to suppress affect and identity from such denuded bones. In this way, Tagore pried open the fissures within scientific medical enquiries. The irresolute ending showed the bhadralok's acceptance of the skeleton, the de-humanised human form, the material attributes of the dissected body, as a material reality people must acknowledge, yet it also showed the questions one could ask in the process.

While these stories are only illustrative, if not households, skeletons had surely reached many institutions by 1940s. One can only imagine the number of people who must have encountered it. The obvious male students with a private tutor, the occasional female students or relatives, the domestic help who would dust or clean it, the patients coming to doctor chambers gazing at charts of anatomy; the potential for

imagination was endless. One man, Sanker Narayan Sen, captured the economic potential in the mass of corpses due to the famine and he established Reknas in Calcutta in 1943. Reknas became a leading center of exporting skeletons, which he collected from Calcutta and Bengal's outlying districts.[92] Until 1986, Calcutta fed the vast majority of the world's skeleton demands.[93]

Figure 3: Office of Reknas Warehouse, Calcutta (undated)

Rabindranath and Balai Chand's acceptance of scientific institutionalization complicates the idea that the corpse was only an abject amongst the imagination of upper caste Bengali. Imageries of skeletons and body parts in newspapers show that rather than sheer abjection, they were becoming parts of a broader medical discourse. Dictionaries of the 1920s featured Bengali translations of dissection (*shab-byabachcheda*) and morgue (*shabagar*). It is interesting to know that the root of the words (shab) came from the Sanskrit *shav*, or body, but the stem remained a descriptive additive. Dissections received a hyphenated identity in Bengali.

[92] Indranil Banerjie, 'Skeleton Exports: Bizarre trade', *India Today*, 30 Nov 1985, http://Indiatoday.intoday.in/story/government-bans-export-of-human-skeletons/1/354694 [Accessed: 21 January, 2015].

[93] Mary Roach, *Stiff: The Curious Life of Human Cadavers*, Viking, London and New Delhi, 2003, p. 194

Nevertheless, the language did acknowledge the material value of the dissected corpse as an object of knowledge by bringing dissection into the vocabulary. Moreover, the idea of the body as composed of parts reproduced itself through metonyms and metaphors. For example, a Muslim-dominated Bengali newspaper 'Mohamadi' advertised a pain relief ointment by pointing out various parts of the body (with English nomenclatures) on the outlines of a woman's body.[94] Incidentally, this newspaper did not follow general stereotype of showing male body outlines as was present in Frederic Mouat's Anatomical Atlas. This convergence of the living with their interior anatomical structures was a part of the anatomical and surgical knowledge production. Some dominant Hindu groups were also tracing dissection as sanctioned in Sanskrit literature. By the 20th century, even Hindus who were not physicians compiled and translated ancient texts to invent dissection as a tradition within Hinduism.[95] A 20th century English translator of *Susruta-Samhita* wrote, 'Susruta, himself a practical surgeon, was the first to advocate dissection of dead bodies as indispensable for successful students of surgeries'.[96] This indirectly shows, following the narratives in this section, that idea of cutting open was already in place and an accepted practice.

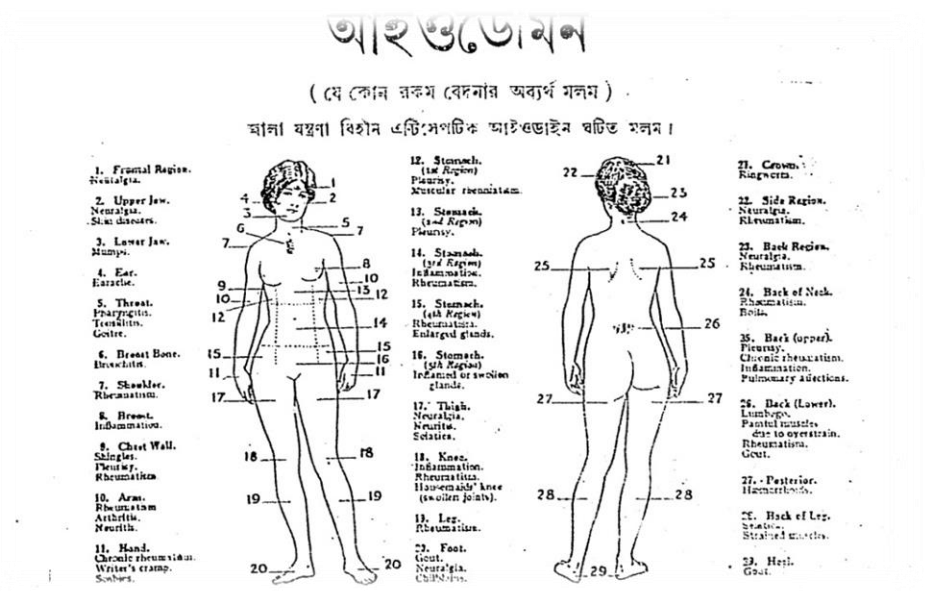

Figure 4: Advertisement in Mohamadi, 1938

[94]Mohamadi, 1938, http://crossasia-repository.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/1632 [Accessed 13 March 2015].

[95] Kenneth G. Zysk argues that many such traditions later claimed to be Hindu had Buddhist antecedents. See Kenneth G. Zysk, *Asceticism and Healing in Ancient India*, Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, 1991.

[96]Kunjalal Bhishagratna, *An English translation of the Sushruta Samhita*, J. N. Bose, Calcutta, 1907.

Such unclaimed corpses became valued *because* it was human, yet material because it was dead. However, such acceptances were not universal. This acceptance of the motif of the unclaimed body as a site of knowledge ran counter to another narrative of the uncared for the corpse in the twentieth century. The unattended corpse emerged as a useful metaphor often in sync with other religious metaphors of the dead. At a time when many bhadralok Bengalis associated colonialism with degeneration of culture, the degenerative and sick attributes of the human body became the site and symbol of everything that was wrong.[97] An 1883 periodical *Nabyabharata* illustrated the uncremated corpse as a source of disgust and evil. As early as 1883, this Bengali prose captured the repulsiveness of the corpse, and described it in terms of the abject[98]:

> The grotesque and the hideous sight that envelopes one from all sides as one enters the cremation ground, the putrid smell from every place that stifles one's breath, the joyous cackles of the sinful flesh eating animals that ring in one's ears, all grief, sadness, fear, disgust all mingle to create a sense of revulsion. The viscera stifle the senses.[99]

Therefore, at the cost of over-simplification, one can argue that Calcutta's literary public had two predominant strands of thoughts regarding the unburied and uncremated corpse. The corpse that had no use was a promiscuous abjection, public health threat, and a nuisance. However, the corpses that were useful, or the dissected cadavers, were the productive materials that became commodities, and had economic and educational values attached to it. Both of these acquired different identities. While one remained as 'promiscuous heaps', the other became subjects and specimens. Government officers and predominantly upper caste Western-educated Indians officially claimed the latter for

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[97]I use the term bhadralok in the way Joya Chatterji has used it. Chatterji writes, 'The Bengali bhadralok were essentially products of the system of property relations created by the Permanent Settlement. They were typically a rentier class who enjoyed intermediary tenurial rights to rents from the land. There were many differences within the bhadralok, reflecting the variety in size and quality of their holdings in the land, and in part the result of subinfeudation and the proliferation of intermediary tenures. But from the landed magnate down to the petty taluqdar, this was a class that did not work its land but lived off the rental income it generated. The title "Babu" - a badge of bhadralok status - carried with it connotations of Hindu, frequently upper caste exclusiveness, of landed wealth, of being master (as opposed to servant), and latterly of possessing the goods of education, culture and Anglicisation.' See: Joya Chatterji, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932 – 1947*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994, p. 5

[98] As Julia Kristeva had theorized, 'It is…not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order'. See: Julia Kristeva, (tr. Leon S. Roudiez) *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1982, pp. 4-5

[99]Sribishnucharan Chattopadhyaya, 'Agnimayajwalantapurushá', *Nabyabharata*, Vol. 1, Bhubanmohun Ghosh, 210/1 Cornwallis Street, Calcutta, 1883, p. 124 [translations mine]

medical education. A new thought however also showed itself in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century literature. They indicated a growing desire to claim ownership of unknown corpses by performing their last rites. The identities and claiming of the unclaimed corpses were being questioned through new idioms mediated by political aspirations.

CHAPTER THREE

THE POLITICS OF CLAIMING IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

In 1881 and 1889, the Municipality established the Christian and Mohammedan Burial Boards respectively. From 1905, the Anjuman Mufidul Islam began to identify and reclaim dead bodies of Muslims. In 1932, Hindu Satkar Samity began to identify some dead bodies as Hindus. While the *Pathologica Indica* in the nineteenth century distinctly identified bodies with race rather than religion, religious organizations emerged in the twentieth century to identify them by faith. The Hindu Satkar Samity began to claim bodies identified as Hindus from municipality and medical institutions. They argued that medical colleges should not dissect corpses identified as Hindu since they did not dissect corpses of Muslims and Christians. This made unclaimed corpses the sites of contestations. Within a background of development of religion specific burial boards, plague and communalization of politics, this chapter studies the development of the idea of identifying corpses communally.

Consolidating communities

In 1875, A Municipal Act empowered taxpayers to elect two-thirds of the Calcutta Corporation representatives.[1] Earlier, the European dominated Municipality sought Indians' advice on matters concerning religion, but the Indians in the Municipality actively took up religious issues including managing the dead. Following this, the Municipality took over the cremation grounds of *Kashi Mitra* and *Keoratola*, managing their records and finances by fixing the rate of fuel and wood. The Municipal Consolidation Act (1889) brought areas of Entally, parts of Maniktolla and Beniapukur within Calcutta Town. They were earlier part of the Calcutta Suburbs. Most of the Muslim burial grounds were in these areas. Therefore, they now came directly under the Calcutta Municipality jurisdiction. This brought the graveyards and cremation grounds under a uniform administration.

[1] Harrison, *Public Health in British India,* p. 207

This came at a time when Indians were contesting public offices on grounds of their faith. This was evident in the municipal elections of the 1880s and 1890s. As Mark Harrison pointed out, the largely silent Muslim groups in Calcutta began to increase their influence in municipal politics by 1880s.[2] Muslim participation increased in opposition to 'Babucracy' of the Hindus. Although the number of Muslim commissioners had increased from five in 1876 to thirteen in 1895, the community still felt under-represented. The editor of *Moslem Chronicle* wrote, 'As it is in the Calcutta Corporation, so it is everywhere'.[3]

In 1881, the Bengal Government passed the Burial Board Act that allowed municipalities to set up burial boards to govern all burial grounds in Calcutta, and consequentially, a Christian Burial Board was formed in 1881.[4] This was the first Burial Board in the city, as also in British Indian territories. Its members included the Health Officer of Calcutta, an officer from the Public Works department, senior chaplain of St. Johns Church, a clergyman from Church of Rome, and a non-conformist minister.[5]

In England, municipalities established burial boards as a collective move towards commercializing and sanitizing burial space and were one of the successful features of Edwin Chadwick's public health oriented burial reforms in 1852 and 1857.[6] These boards in England were named after their location, like the Bolton, Toxteth, and Middleton Burial Boards.[7] In Calcutta, the story of burial boards unfolded differently. Christians were a minority, representing five per cent of the

[2] Ibid. p. 214

[3] Quoted in Harrison, *Public Health*, p. 215

[4] 'The Calcutta Burial Boards Act, Bengal Act V, 1881', PRS Legislative Research, pp. 455 - 457 http://www.commonlii.org/in/legis/wb/act/cbba1881204.pdf [accessed 27 April, 2016]

[5] Ibid., pp. 455 - 456

[6] Laqueur, *Work of the Dead*, pp. 181, 235. Edwin Chadwick, secretary to the New Poor Law Commission from 1834 to 1842 and commissioner for the Board of Health from 1848 to 1852, identified and represented the problem of corpses and graveyards in his 'A Supplementary Report on the Results of a Special Inquiry into the Practice of Interment in Towns' (1843). For more on Chadwick and Burial Reforms, see Mary Elizabeth Holz, 'Down Among the Dead: Edwin Chadwick's Burial Reform Discourse in Mid-Nineteenth Century England', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (2001), pp. 21-38.

[7] Julie-Marie Strange extensively uses Bolton, Toxteth and Middleton Burial Board records to argue about an alternative history of grief in working class families in England. See: Julie-Marie Strange, *Death, Grief and Poverty in Britain*, 2005.

total population of the city.[8] Therefore, unlike the geographical nomenclature of the burial boards in England, religion became the predominant term for the first burial board in Calcutta – the Christian Burial Board. This set the precedence for a separate burial board for the Muslim, a similar move that several Muslim members of the Municipality made to consolidate all Muslim public burial grounds.

The Bengal Government considered this bill for a Muslim Burial Board the harbinger of new administrative practice. C. H. Reily, Barrister in the Bengal Legislative Department, pointed out that while about 200,000 Muslims resided in Calcutta and their burials were worthy of legislature, it was all earlier avoided because of the 'wise policy of the government to abstain to interfere, as far as possible, in all religious matters'.[9] Now the Bengal Government could interfere in religious matters due to pressure and petition from its Indian members in the Municipality. To begin the process, the Municipality employed a surveyor to map all the Muslim burial grounds in the city.[10] The idea then also received support from Mohammed Farukh Shah in the Legislative Assembly. The grandson of the last son of Tipu Sultan, Muslims in Calcutta considered him a respectable nobleman.[11] Mahendralal Sircar, famous for establishing the Indian Association for Cultivation of Science (1875) and as a social reformer, was also a prime mover for the bill. His presence highlighted the syncretic relationship that marginalized castes and Muslims shared through their burial practices, with several caste groups sharing burial spaces at predominantly Muslim grounds. He expected that the practice of Hindu burials in these grounds would continue.

Under these people's initiatives, the Bengal Government formed the Muhammedan Burial Board (1889) and it brought nine public Muslim burial grounds under its jurisdiction. These were incidentally the burial grounds where the poorer sections of the city would rest their dead. Altogether, these covered sixty-two *bighas* of land. Such a consolidation indicated the interest of elites to assume older alliances

[8] There were 23,885 Christians in Calcutta (including the Port and Fort William) in 1876 according to Beverley's Census. H Beverley, *Report on the Census of the Town of Calcutta taken of the 6 April 1876*, Bengal Secretariat Press, Calcutta, 1876, p. 20

[9] GOI, 'Bengal Mohammedan Burial Board Act, Legislative', Nos. 1-19, September, 1889, NAI

[10] GOB, Municipality, A, Proceeding Nos. 9 – 17, Miscellaneous, Collection 2, File 3, April, 1888, WBSA

[11] See for example, Mesrovb J. Seth, *The History of the Armenians in India*, Gorgias Press, New Jersey, 2004, p. 119

of patronage and re-pack it under a single religious umbrella – the board became the ultimate custodian of these buried dead.

The Bengal Government was not interested in controlling the hundred privately owned burial grounds, which they did not consider a sanitary problem.[12] It instead sought to control the public burial grounds that were under the Municipality, and which most of the common people used.[13] It again highlighted an old issue in a new garb: their families, in their family-held land, could justifiably claim those who could afford to have private burials. On the other hand, governmental claims lay particularly on bodies of the poor, if not yet anonymous.

Almost immediately, the Board demanded inclusions of new grounds, as that fitted well with an expansive provision in the law that allowed it to open, include, and close other burial grounds. Eventually, the Burial Board advised the Municipality to close several *ghoristhans* that became part of the Calcutta Municipality. Those burial grounds in the non-elite neighbourhood became the first target: for example, they closed Kasiabagan and Talbagan *ghoristhan* in 1897, predominantly used by the poor locals.[14] In 1897 again, the Municipality closed the Gori Ghariban Burial Ground under the Board's advice.[15] The Board again advised the Municipality to convert Kasiabagan *ghoristhan* to a public park in 1902 even though local public protested against it.[16] This subsumed local differences in burial patterns and aimed to forge a citywide unified plan. Petitions, particularly from the Muslim-dominated West of Calcutta complained against such rapid closing of burial grounds where the local people had local allegiances and local affective ties.[17] The Bengal Government had to legislate that Municipality with the advice of the Board could only advise shutting down on sanitary grounds, and only the Government had actual powers to do

[12] There were some only for Sunnis, some for Shia, some like that of the Oudh family was sustained through endowments from Awadh, there were private family burials, and private charitable burials for lascars and sea-captains. GOI, Legislative, Nos. 1-19, September, 1889, NAI

[13] Some burial grounds were split into private and public. The most important private burial ground was that of the Oudh family. Though the government managed the endowments made for it, it was a private burial ground and therefore beyond the purview of this Burial Board, yet the extended Sola Ana Ghoristan came under the Burial Board.

[14] GOB, Municipality, B, Proceeding Nos. 194 – 201, File M- 1R – 41, May, 1897, WBSA

[15] GOB, Municipality, B, Proceeding Nos. 194 – 201, File M – 2B – 5, May, 1897, WBSA

[16] GOB, Municipality, A, Proceeding Nos. 8 – 14, File M – 1L – 57, October, 1902, WBSA

[17] For burial grounds at Kasiabagan and Talbagan. See: GOB, Municipality, A, Nos. 8 – 14, October, 1902, WBSA

so.[18] This rhetoric failed to resonate with practice as the Municipality continued to close burial grounds and planned to have public burial grounds only outside the city.[19] All this directed towards removing local allegiance for those who accessed public grounds for burials.

Some members expressed concerns over Hindu burials in these *ghoristhans* (burial grounds) Some municipal representatives like H. Harrison, Mohammed Farukh Shah, and Mahendralal Sirkar wanted to leave out the term 'Mohammedan' and title it the Non-Christian Burial Board Act.[20] Harrison pointed out that different sources suggested that members of a formal Mohammedan Burial Board would refuse to bury Chamars and Vaishnava, caste groups who traditionally buried their dead.[21] These voices were however in a minority. Eventually, the many European legislative council members insisted on having the word 'Mohammedan' in the title of the Act. Charles Allen of the Corporation commented that otherwise a Chamar or a Vaishnava would start to demand their own burial boards.[22] Therefore, legislation finally separated the two by making religious differences written in legal terms.[23] Eventually, the Calcutta Corporation in 1912 established a separate burial board for Hindus and attached two new grounds to it.[24]

Ideas of religious segregation of the dead were manifest in contemporary newspapers. For example, the Calcutta-based upper-caste Dominated newspaper *Bangavasi* in 1898 objected to the cremation of a European woman at the Nimtala burning ghat, asking, 'will a Hindu be allowed to be buried in a Christian or Mussalman burial ground? A Hindu cannot, of course, be buried, and this question is asked only in the way of an argument. Hindu society is now without a leader, and this is why it has to submit to such acts of high-handedness'.[25] It betrayed a notion that bodies were to have spaces and claimants of their own communal affinity, and even the personal choice of the deceased did not have a say in this re-ordering of different

[18] See: GOB, Municipality, A, Nos. 31 – 34, File no. M – 2B – 1, January, 1903; GOB, Municipality, B, nos. 177 – 78; GOB, File no. M – 2B – 7, November, 1902, WBSA
[19] Ibid.
[20] GOI, 'Bengal Mohammedan Burial Board Act', Legislative, Nos. 1-19, September, 1889, NAI
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid.
[24] GOI, 'Letter from GOB Municipal Department to GOI Education Department', Education, Ecclesiastical, B, Proceedings 15, Dec 1912, NAI
[25] Bangavasi, 10 September 1898, *RNPB*, No. 38

universes of religious exclusivity.[26] Therefore, ideas made legal in the Burial Board Act was not born out of a social vacuum. This reordering of space did not include unclaimed bodies. They were still nuisances, better off disposed in heaps, or given to medical colleges.

Plague: All the dead could become unclaimed

The outbreak of plague in 1898 resulted in panic across governmental circles and amongst people who feared extensive governmental intrusion. The Bengal government observed that nearly 150,000 persons out of 800,000 fled from Calcutta in fear of anti-plague regulations.[27] In its anticipatory measures, the corpse – socially accepted as a vital source and indicator of spreading plague along with the living infected body – became the focus of public health surveillance.[28] Public health administrators merged existing piecemeal policies for different communities, and came up with recommendations for systematic and uniform methods of identifying and disposing of corpses. It combined the interests of the Bengal Government with the municipalities, Government of India, Sanitary Commissioners, and London. The exigencies of plague raised the need to interfere in ritual and religious matters, a path where the colonial government had earlier preferred to tread safely. The Government of India instructed the provincial governments to conduct surveys of people's attitudes towards corpses and their disposals.[29] The investigations in Bengal revealed

[26] This was evident in police investigations as well. It identified religion based on sartorial choices, even though it admitted that the identity was not established: The Calcutta Police Annual Report of 1907 noted, "The dead body of a *Muhammadan* woman aged about 25 years dressed in a white coorta was found in a gunny bag lying on the foreshore of the River Hooghly. No clue to the identity of the woman or the offender was obtained."[26]

[27] Quoted from Dr. Cook's Report on Plague in Calcutta, pp. 464 – 65, in Subho Basu, 'Strikers and Communal riots in Calcutta in the 1890s: Industrial Workers, Bhadralok Nationalist Leadership and the Colonial State', in Sumit Sarkar, Biswamoy Pati ed., *Issues in Modern Indian History*, Popular Prakashan, Mumbai, 2000, p. 195

[28] The Plague Reports focused on roles of rats and rodents, but infected bodies, dead or alive, were considered contagious carriers and therefore their management became crucial to prevention of plague.

[29] The survey on examination of corpses during plague byRrisley revealed that local people did not like the idea of their families' corpses being interrupted and intercepted. The Report pointed out: 'At present Hindu feeling is absolutely opposed to a corpse being touched, and the Muhammadans object with equal vehemence to inspection at the burial ground, which would necessitate the removal of the cere clothes… mere inspection, in case of males at any rate, is not, it is believed, regarded with such

that they had scanty information on local mortuary practices, particularly in outlying districts of the city.[30] Ethnographer Herbert Risley from Bengal advocated the need to monitor corpses in Calcutta, its port, and other areas of a plague outbreak in Bengal. Risley charted out his plans of investigating corpses, and delineated the possible outcome of such exercises:

> If an attempt is made to force upon them a system of examination of corpses, which is repugnant to their feelings, the inevitable reaction will be that secret burials in compounds and courtyards of houses will be very largely resorted to. Such burials will be conducted without any special precautions, and it may be assumed that they will tend to spread and perpetuate infection... Persons who die of smallpox are usually buried, a special reason being assigned to this practice, and with this precedent before them, and with the special inducement of avoiding examination of the corpse, it seems not unlikely that Hindus may be induced to substitute secret burial for cremation during an epidemic of plague.[31]

He realized a new problem. To evade plague segregation, people could voluntarily give up claims to corpses in the usual legalistic ways of claiming, like of public cremation or burial, documenting and memorializing. They could resort to secret burials and cremations instead.

> Omission to procure a certificate of the cause of death and refusal to allow a corpse to be examined sufficiently to ascertain that the cause of death was not plague would entail a strict search of the house and the quarter, and possibly the removal of all the inmates to a camp … At present Hindu feeling is absolutely opposed to a corpse being touched, and the Muhammadans object with equal vehemence.[32]

In this scheme, examination of corpses became central to plague control because the colonial state believed that the common people would attempt to abandon corpses to evade investigation. Suddenly, all infected body, the government feared, could become unclaimed bodies. This fear was a case of 'plague logic' at play. As Arnold Weinstein had defined, "Plague Logic" denoted the fear that certain groups were secretly boring their way into attacking the collective vital organs by holding on to their 'unscientific' beliefs.[33] This fear assumed that potentially the entire province could be a ground for uncertified, unknown, abandoned,

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horror, and might possibly be agreed to, provided that it took place in the house' GOI, Home, Sanitary, Plague, A, Nos. 670 – 696, December, 1898, NAI

[30] GOI, Home, Sanitary, Plague, A, Nos. 670 – 696, December, 1898, NAI

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Briefly described in Peta Mitchell, *Contagious metaphor*, Bloomsbury, London and New York, 2012, p. 44

uninvestigated – *unclaimed* – corpses. To monitor this, each of Calcutta's burial and cremation grounds now had a medical officer to investigate every corpse that was brought in.[34] Every corpse had the potential to become anonymous to the state (notably not anonymous to the family) and thereby dangerous because the government thought they could be hidden sources of plague. Therefore, the Bengal Government attempted to identify and track every plague death. The Plague Department was set up to enquire about every plague death in Calcutta. To show their competence, they sent individual plague reports with names of the deceased to the Secretary of State in London through telegrams.[35] Plague Health Officer under the Bengal Government also collected individual reports.[36] Similar the plague officers made inquiries into the causes of death of persons dying in Calcutta whose bodies were disposed of in districts outside the limits of the city's Municipality.[37] The fear of plague once again shifted attention to unknown and unclaimed corpses. It also opened to the public the prospect of bodies being disposed of without 'proper rituals', or in other words, people falling into the trap that was generally only reserved for unclaimed bodies: *Basumati* wrote on 8 January 1898:

> The Bengalis are alarmed. And who would not be alarmed if he were told that, in the event of an outbreak of the disease, son would be separated from mother, mother from son, and wife from husband? People who know nothing of the plague are as yet being told that they will die of it, and will be burnt at Maniktala instead of on the banks of the Ganges. Is not this enough to fill their minds with horror? … don't say that… those who will die shall not be allowed to draw their last breath by the side of the holy river Ganges, but will be cremated at Maniktala".[38]

Maniktala was indeed the last place where a respectable Hindu wanted to be cremated. It was a Muslim dominated area named after Manik Pir, a Muslim saint with syncretic followers. It had most of the Muslim graveyards and had saltwater lakes. Common people irrespective of religion devised new ways of hiding the dead

[34] GOI, Home, Sanitary, Plague, A, Nos. 670 – 696, December, 1898, NAI
[35] GOI, Home, Sanitary, Plague, A, Nos. 30- 62, February, 1899, NAI
[36] Ibid.
[37] A complete list of deaths at burial grounds and *ghāts* were recorded daily, and extracts of this are sent early morning to the four health officers then employed due to the exigencies. Medical inspectors were deployed by them to call at the addresses given and make clinical histories of relatives and these cases. In the course of a few hours these reports were submitted to the District Medical Officers who record their opinion as to the cause of death. See GOI, Home, Sanitary (Plague), A, October 1905, Nos. 278-285, NAI
[38] *Basumati,* 13 January 1898, RNPB, No. 3, NAI

from the state because it feared that the public authorities would treat the bodies of their dear ones like the corpses of paupers.

In this way, common people tried to make their dead anonymous to the state *as a form of claiming* and to protect the bodies of their loved ones from an irreligious fate. On the other hand, because they were anonymous to the state, the state would treat them as they would treat the unclaimed, by actively trying to reclaim them for sanitized disposal. Plague measures were indeed a double-edged sword. *Education Gazette* in 1898 summarized people's fear about state's interference in their dead and devised a compromise. It wrote on 18 May 1898 that:

> Only experienced physicians will be asked to ascertain whether one has got the plague or not, and when they pronounce one to be plague-stricken, he will be as good as a dead man, so that his removal to the hospital ought not to cause any extraordinary anxiety. Do we not ourselves have our moribund carried to the river bank and lodged in the vara daori room there? Let government only call these hospitals vara –daori or Ganga yatri nivas instead of isolation hospitals, let the assurance be given that the patient (Ganga yatri) there will be treated by his family doctor as well as by a European doctor sent by the government; let the segregation of the patients family amount to asking them to live for a time with the Ganga-yatri, in a house set apart for the purpose, near the Ganga yatri nivas, and all these apparently insufferable difficulties will be at an end. It is the name, hospital, and the fact that it is not being set up at the riverside which has more than anything else frightened the people into thinking that it is a place, where native caste, customs, and feelings will be grievously outraged.[39]

In other words, the author of the *Education Gazette* advocated that disposal of bodies by plague officers had to use local religious terms rather than medical terms to prevent protests. Protests generated from the idea of an ignoble death – the fate that was only otherwise restricted to unknown labouring migrants and paupers, the necessary casualties of an exploding urban area. Local people suddenly asserted how methods of disposal of unclaimed bodies throughout the century were governmental acts of caste transgressions. They brought the unclaimed dead's fate into question once the remaining population realized that it could also happen to them.

In Calcutta, such sentiments following the plague, along with the growing sense of community formation and political advantage through social work led to the formation of local clubs. They were ready to help cremate or bury the dead, and see the process as a form of charity and selflessness. Contemporary popular novelist

[39] Education Gazette, 18 May 1898, RNPB, No. 21, NAI

Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay through his rebellious character Srikanto wrote of a young man who touched the corpse of a child, to save it from jackals or other ways of mutilated and ignoble death. Sarat Chandra used this plot to write on caste pollution, suggesting that a good person transgressed it for charity and to save his people. These locals began to use the streets of Calcutta, or 'para/mohalla' as they came to be known, as their sites of alternative politics. Eventually, they became sites of political mobilization of young men by social and political organizations who attempted to move beyond colonial politics by mobilizing in these alternative geographies.

From these local clubs and informal congregations were born registered societies that performed funerary rites for unclaimed dead bodies. Organizations like *Swasan Paritran Society* (1899 - 1934), *Gurkha Stri Dukh Sudharak Samaj*, and various individuals helped poor families to bury or cremate their dead, or assist the funerals. The *Anjuman Mufidul Islam* was one such organization. Founded in 1905, it was the first organization in the city to focus primarily on claiming the unclaimed dead bodies. The Anjuman was a perfect culmination of these strands of movements surrounding the dead. First, it criticized the Municipality's disregard for rituals in disposing bodies. Second, and correlated to the first, it emphasized on assisting the city's public health managers by taking up and funding the work of disposal of those bodies with local and religious idioms – incorporating into practice the suggestion in the *Education Gazette* of 1898. Third, resonating with the growing move from the 1880s to categorize the dead according to religious communities, it declared that it would only handle Muslim bodies in streets and hospitals. People in life, as in death, were entitled to only one religious identity.

Their new emphasis on religious practices, however, clashed with the common practice of using unclaimed bodies for medical education in medical schools and colleges. The Anjuman now claimed them as well. This was well rooted in contemporary Muslim voices against dissection. In 1898, The *Gauhari Asfi,* an Urdu newspaper from Calcutta reported that the dead bodies of native patients in government hospitals were very badly treated and kept in the dead house in an uncovered state, and eventually dissected.[40] It was to be wondered how the government could allow such a treatment of the dead bodies when it did not allow the sale of obscene books and pictures. It stated, 'Some arrangement should also be made

[40] General and Gauhar Asfi, 8 September 1898, RNPB, No. 38, NAI

for performing the funeral ceremonies of such patients as have no relatives to claim their dead bodies, in accordance with the customs of the religion to which they belong.'[41] It did not assert that only Muslim bodies were to be rescued. The Anjuman took up this task in 1906. As a Muslim organization, it asserted rights over Muslim bodies. Since then, medical colleges and hospitals gave over the corpses they identified as Muslims to the Anjuman.[42]

Corpses, workers, and charity

Ibrahim Dooply, a merchant from Surat, founded the Anjuman to claim the corpses of Muslims that had no family so that they would not become cadavers for dissection, or be 'thrown into the river or ditches or burnt through *Doms*'.[43] In 1906, the Anjuman hired Muslim men to replace these Doms. The Anjuman referred to these men as 'volunteers'. These workers carried the body on their shoulders. Eventually, they transported the bodies on a bullock cart. In 1934, a motor van replaced it.[44] This van was their prized symbol of efficiency and marker of modernity, and they lauded it as one of the first Muslim hearse-motors in India; congratulating themselves for making an elite mode of transport accessible to the poor.[45]

In 1932, The Hindu Sabha established the Hindu Satkar Samity. The Samity members complained that Doms performed the rituals, while in Shastras they were only supposed to do the menial task of making arrangement for the funerals.

> A large number of dead bodies were found in the streets and lanes of Calcutta… and other places, which were generally disposed of, by the police or the Corporation of Calcutta with the help of *Doms*… It is a matter of great regret

[41] Ibid.
[42] *Anjuman Mufidul Islam Rules and Regulations,* Anjuman Mufidul Islam, Calcutta, 1953, vii.
[43] Ibid., iv.
[44] Ibid.
[45] 'Excerpts from first Annual Report of *Anjuman-I Mufidul Islam*', Anjuman Mufidul Islam, Calcutta, 1906. To add to this discussion, ones notices an undeniable fascination of workers of the dead with modes of transports. James Long wrote that in 1830s, Christian undertakers advertised coaches as markers of their elite stature. Even in the Calcutta Christian Burial Rules of 1861, lack of coaches marked poverty, and presence of coaches and carriages invariably exempted them from free burials. See James Long, 'Calcutta in its Olden times – Its Localities', *Calcutta review*, vol. 36, 1852, pp. 14-32.

> that such unclaimed dead bodies are removed by *Doms* which is *strictly against the Hindu Shastras*.[46] [Emphasis mine]

The Hindu Satkar Samity disposed 78 unclaimed bodies in their first year. Their outreach expanded when the Municipality granted them a motor van, and like the Anjuman, they too claimed that they had the first motorized hearse-carriage in India.[47] The motorized hearse carriage allowed the Samity to dispose of more corpses. In 1935, they disposed 545 corpses. By 1940, they disposed more than 2000 unclaimed corpses in a year. The police, orphanages, hospitals called the Samity and the Anjuman on their phone: what the Anjuman and Samity proudly advertised as another marker of modernity.

Like the Anjuman, the Samity also hired workers, whom they called 'volunteers'. The workers initially carried the bodies on their shoulders. The Samity provided these corpses with fresh sheet of white cloth to cover it and wooden *khāt* or bed upon which the corpse was laid.[48] These workers particularly faced difficulties in summers, as they walked on hot roads while carrying bodies on their shoulders.[49] From 1934, the Samity employed six workers on a salary of fifteen rupees each month.[50] Eventually, the number of workers rose to twenty-two.[51] This was similar to the salary of a *chowkidar* (village guard or watchman) in rural Bengal, who received six to fifteen rupees each month to collect birth and mortality data.[52] The amount was barely enough to sustain a healthy life.[53] Apart from a renewed sense of charity, many volunteers probably joined because the Samity allowed the workers to live on their premise. This helped both, as the workers got a place to live and the Samity got workers round the clock. After all, death was known to call even at odd hours.

As the salaries suggest, these workers were poor. One report carries a brief obituary of a worker. Prafulla Chandra Chakravarty came from Tripura at the age of

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[46] Hindu Satkar Samity Annual Report of 1932-1933, *Sachindra Chandra, Murlidhar Sen Lane*, Calcutta, 1934, (henceforth, Samity Report), p.1.
[47] Ibid.. v.
[48] Samity Report of 1932 – 1933, p. 3.
[49] Ibid., p. 5.
[50] Samity Report of 1934, p. 3.
[51] Samity Report of 1940, p. 4
[52] Evidence of Lt. Col. E. Cotter, Public Health Commissioner of Government of India to Famine Inquiry Commission, Nanavati Papers, August 1944, Private Paper Collection, National Archives of India, p. 383.
[53] A. C. Ukil, 'Problem of Food and Nutrition and epidemics' in Memorandum to Famine Inquiry Commission by Bengal Congress parliamentary Committee, Nanavati Papers, NAI, p. 23.

sixteen to study in Calcutta.[54] Like many other migrants, he was poor, leaving his widowed mother to study and eke out a living in the city. He worked at the Samity from 1934 and lived on its premises. After receiving his salary, he enrolled as a commerce student at the nearby Vidyasagar College. One day while returning from the ghat after cremations, he contracted fever and eventually succumbed to it at the age of twenty-one. The members of the Samity were alarmed that he might have died due to contact with infectious corpses.[55] The annual reports of the Samity extolled his sense of sacrifice for the 'national cause'.[56] They wrote that these 'sacrificing youths' picked up rotting and decomposed bodies with 'highly offensive discharge'.[57] The reports highlighted the workers' 'devotion', 'sacrifice' and 'efficiency', words that recurred in descriptions of the military but often other workers like postmen employed by the British Government.

In structure and belief, these organizations were masculine, homosocial organizations functioning as modern establishments with accountants, telephones, auditors and published annual reports in English. I call them homosocial for two reasons. First, men exclusively held the posts. Second and more importantly, by institutionalizing elite textual rituals which shunned females and feminine roles to private spaces, and by claiming public ownership of the corpses, they were transforming it into an 'ordered', stoic and 'efficient' and public masculine grief. As Jonathan Parry had pointed out, men mourned in silence and through public rites, women wept in their homes.

The Anjuman and the Samity only employed workers from their own faith. Changes elsewhere echoed this trend. In 1938, Al-Haji Hafiz Mohinuddin Al-Makki, Imam of the Shahi Jami Mosque at Dharamtala presided over a meeting where they passed a resolution for the immediate removal of non-Muslim grass-cutters and other non-Muslim employees from Muslim burial grounds. The Times of India reported that they deemed it was 'sacrilegious to allow non-Muslims to look after Muslim cemeteries', and that the Secretary of the Burial Board was 'chief instrument of this sacrilege'. Nausher Ali, Minister for Local Self-Government responded that he would

[54] Samity Report of 1936, p. 5.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Samity Report of 1937, p. 6.
[57] Samity Report of 1937, p. 7

be glad to discuss this matter with the Imam.[58] This indicated a shift in claiming bodies, where the claimants themselves, or the ones who actually performed the rites, also had to adhere to strict demarcations of their religious identities.

A ritualistic cremation in 1941 required eight rupees. [59] Other costs like donation to the priest, Doms and forms of extortions increased the cost. Burial costs for both Muslims and some castes were less expensive in the suburbs, but those graveyards were full, and bodies often had to be interred by shuffling newly buried flesh and bones out of it.[60] The city sustained a large number of people whose monthly wages would not allow for such expenses. In 1911, the Census categorized about sixteen percent of the population of Calcutta as domestic workers, jail inmates, 'prostitutes', vagrants, beggars.[61] As for salaries, in 1941, the average income of an individual jute worker in the suburban municipalities of Calcutta was sixteen rupees.[62] This is only illustrative of the potential poor clientele of the Samity and the Anjuman. In the nineteenth century, the Municipality burnt bodies of these itinerant and poor people as promiscuous heaps or sent to the dissection tables, but politics had largely ignored them. Now, these societies claimed these bodies through a sense of sanitized claimants with upper caste or elite rituals. Elite rituals however needed funding, and these organizations supported themselves by enabling people to donate money to them.

While wealthy landowners and merchants constituted both these organizations, they financed them through public subscriptions. In the case of the Samity, the contributions came from various sources like the Hockey Association, riding high on Indian hockey team's Gold at Los Angeles Olympics in 1932, Indian Football Association and several private subscribers.[63] In 1937, it became the trustee of a

[58] Non-Muslims in Graveyard: Removal Demanded, *The Times of India*, 15 June 1938, Proquest Historical Newspaper (all references from The Times of India are from Proquest, unless mentioned otherwise), p. 12 [Accessed: 5 June 2014]

[59] Samity Report of 1941, p. 7.

[60] 'Burials in Calcutta', *The Times of India*, 9 Oct, 1909, p. 10.

[61] L. S. S. O'Malley, 'City of Calcutta, Part II – Tables', *Census of India 1911*, Vol. 6, Secretariat Book Depot, Calcutta, 1913.

[62] H. K. Chaturvedi, 'On the Change in Standard of Living of the Jute Mill Workers of Jagaddal between Years 1941 and 1945', *Sankhya: The Indian Journal of Statistics*, Vol. 8, No. 4, 1948, pp. 364 – 370.

[63] Samity Reports, 1936 – 1950.

Shiva temple at the popular *Nimtolla* cremation ghat. [64] This was a tremendous financial gain for the Samity members. The Secretary of the Samity for 2015, Sanjoy Roy, recalls how the institution survived due to the blessings of *Baba Bhuteshwar*, 'God of the ghosts', a popular name for Shiva.[65] The Anjuman was financed by collecting zakat from members and subscribers, and it received donations from Islamic networks across Bombay, Dhaka, Karachi, and the Middle East.[66]

Because of their large subscription pool and expanding political network, soon they gathered influence amongst administrative circles. The Samity and the Anjuman became more famous in the government circles during the air raid strikes and evacuation from Burma in the course of the Second World War. The government also took their assistance to dispose of bodies of Burma evacuees who came to Calcutta on steamers, wharfs, or railways to government shelter homes.[67] Their popularity grew as politics, economy and mortality generated more numbers of such corpses. The police recognized them as official workers along with their own 'corpse disposal squad' during the air raid in Calcutta, and more so when the rural population began to migrate to Calcutta during the famine.[68] Together, between August and October 1943, they disposed around four thousand famine-stricken bodies.[69] The emphasis on rites was crucial. The Samity protested against the government's recommendation of mass cremations to cope with wartime fuel rationing.[70] In that year, the Samity cremated about 5,000 corpses from emergency hospitals alone, half of the total

[64] A brief history of the Nimtolla burning ghat is important to highlight the financial and ritualistic significance of this temple. This burning ghat had a contentious history. Cremation grounds in Calcutta began as sites of *zamindāri* patronage, beyond the financial purview of the Municipality. In 1854, the governor of Bengal Cecil Beadon attempted to remove cremation grounds outside the city, but he eventually failed. The influential Landholders' Association agitated in plea of religion and collected money to renovate and keep Nimtolla and Kashi Mitra ghats within city limits. Kashi Mitra Ghat was a site for disposal of poor and dissected bodies, many of which often floated in the river. Nimtolla on the other hand became a site where respectable families performed their rites of passages. Since then, the ground got a religious hue for not only the practices of cremation but also its very location, being next to the river Ganga. See: GOB, Judicial, Judicial, A, No. 70, 19th April, 1855, WBSA; Annual Report on the Administration of the Bengal Presidency for 1863 – 1864, Military Orphan Press, Calcutta, 1865, p. 88; Section 218 of Act VI of Bengal Council of 1863, see GOB, Judicial Proceedings, A, 21-23, June, 1864, WBSA.

[65] Interview with Sanjoy Roy, Hindu Satkar Samity, M. G. Road, Kolkata, 4 June 2015.

[66] Anjuman, *Rules*, xxii.

[67] Samity Report of 1942, pp. 4, 8.

[68] '1716 die in One and a Half Months: Toll of Famine in Calcutta', *The Times of India*, 6 October 1943 [accessed: 23 January 2015].

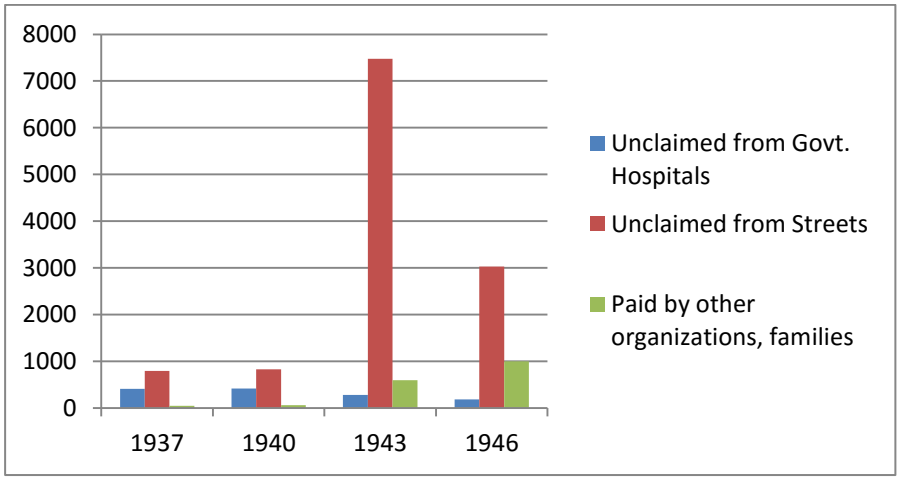
[69] Ibid.

[70] Samity Report of 1943, p. 6.

annual number.[71] On an average, this was about twenty-six bodies each day. Most of these bodies were unclaimed, due to both the costs of cremation and the breakdown of the family due to famine.[72] Thus, due to such large inflows, corpse collection was almost four times higher than their pre-famine figures.[73] By this time, the Anjuman and the Samity had become the sole official representatives of Muslims and Hindus to reclaim and dispose of the unclaimed dead, owing to their member's strong political alliances, as the next section will further elaborate. Similarly, they disposed of corpses on streets in the 1946 riots. Newspapers mentioned their charitable works, and the Municipality accounts lauded their role in improving public health.[74] On the other hand, the Samity's own narratives emphasized their role in democratizing high rituals.[75]

The following table highlights the increase due to famine and its debilitating effects on the health of the migrating population:

Table 6: Numbers and Types of Bodies disposed by Hindu Satkar Samity, 1937 - 1946



[71] From Emergency Hospitals, it cremated 4820 bodies. In 1943, the total number of bodies that the Samity cremated was 9280. See Ibid.

[72] Lt. Col. E. Cotter, Public Health Commissioner of Bengal remarked, 'what had occurred was a breakdown of social and economic life of a large portion of Bengal's population', Evidence of Lt. Col. E. Cotter, Public Health Commissioner of Government of India to Famine Inquiry Commission, Nanavati Papers, August 1944

[73] The famine had a prolonged impact upon health of migrants. The sustained high number of bodies that these organisations had to dispose after 1943 proved this all the more. The Samity cremated 4082 bodies in 1944, 4033 in 1945, almost double the pre-famine numbers. See Samity Reports of 1944 and 1945.

[74] GOB, 'Action Taken by the Department of Health and Labour', Home, Confidential, B, , File No. W-351/46, WBSA

[75] Samity Report of 1947, pp. 1-3

While in their own narratives, the Samity and Anjuman claimed to collect all Hindu and Muslim bodies, this was probably not so. It was difficult to identify a 'Muslim' dead from a 'Hindu' or 'Christian'. While police manuals gave a rough guideline that bodies could be identified by observing clothing, circumcision etc., in practice, cultural practices of clothing were fluid, and in cases of unknown corpses, most were poor or destitute, and hardly had clothes on them.[76] Present members of Anjuman and Satkar agrees that usually, the police decided which bodies were Muslim, and which were Hindus, and both the organizations often have to assume the religion and proceed with the rites.[77] They also inform the other organization if they believe it is a case of mistaken identity, or proceed with the rituals anyway, indicating an unsaid, unspoken cooperation that their annual reports do not represent.

Reading beyond their everyday roles in the society, who were these people and why did the 20th century suddenly see a rise in such organizations for corpse disposal? More importantly, why did they assume such authorities over the unclaimed dead? In their reports, they strictly claimed to cremate or bury only bodies of their respective religious affiliations. This strict rhetoric in their reports reveals clues to these organizations' public image and their socio-political aspirations in the 20th century.

The politics of the Anjuman and the Samity

The twentieth century provided transformative moments to the development of politics in Bengal in many ways. First, as Sumit Sarkar has written, the *Swadeshi* movement betrayed upper-class paternalism and the different channels that Hindu and Muslims in the city were willing to take reflected this.[78] The Anjuman was founded during the *Swadeshi* movement. While periodicals like *Mussalman* categorized it as a non-political organization, some alleged that pamphlets published by the Anjuman-i Mufidul Islam (its initial name before they renamed it to Anjuman

[76] Evidence of J. K. Biswas, Representative of Rotary Club of Calcutta, to Famine Inquiry Commission, Nanavati Papers, 14 September, 1944.

[77] Interviews with Mohammad Karim Nawaz [7 June 2015] and Najmul Hasan [10 July 2015] of Anjuman Mufidul Islam, Noor Ali Lane, Entally, Kolkata 700014; Sandeep Mukherjee [14 – 18 June] 2015 of Hindu Satkar Samity, M. G. Road, Kolkata 700026.

[78] Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal,* People's Publishing House, Delhi, 1973.

Mufidul Islam) urged Muslim tenants to distance themselves from Dominating upper-class Hindu Bengali landowners.[79] According to Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, the 1920s provided another watershed moment, with the rise of political parties in municipal elections and growth of a Hindu nationalist group, led by the *Hindu Sabha* (1924), the parent body of Hindu Satkar Samity. Indian political leaders had a more informed consciousness of what nationalism could be, and Bengali nationalism began to be rooted in culture.[80]

During what became known as the First Balkan War between the 'Balkan League' and the Ottoman Empire, the Anjuman was the largest contributor from Calcutta to the Red Crescent Society, a charity assisting hospitals in Constantinople, thereby indicating its global networking.[81] Financial constraints compelled the Anjuman to limit its reach, but several political patrons revived it, making them rooted to local politics from the 1930s. Its leadership reflected its complicated political patronage. A. K. Fazlul Haque was its President in 1912 when he was a member of the Congress. He also served as the President when he founded the Krishak Praja Party (1929) or became the mayor of Calcutta, or when he became the Prime Minister of Bengal (1937). From 1931 – 1934, the Anjuman was headed by Muslim League member Khwaja Nazimuddin (Prime Minister of Bengal from 1943 – 1945, later succeeded Jinnah as Governor-General of Pakistan in 1948).[82] Eventually, Hussain Suhrawardy of Muslim League became the President in 1947.

The Hindu Sabha and the founders of Hindu Satkar Samity comprised of landed Bengali elites and part of the Congress faction that was disenchanted with Gandhi-Nehruvian politics.[83] By 1937, board members included several Mayors of

[79] There is only a passing reference to this in: Sukharańjana Senagupta, *Curzon's partition of Bengal and aftermath: history of the elite Hindu-Muslim conflicts over political Domsination leading to the second partition, 1947*, Naya Udyog, Kolkata, 2006, p. 182. For the 'Mussalman' reference, see *Selections from the Mussalman: 1906 – 1908***,** Papyrus, Calcutta, 1994, p. 14.

[80] Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, *The Defining Moments in Bengal*, Oxford University press, New Delhi, 2014, p. 6.

[81] "Latest Telegrams: Adrianople on Fire, bombs from the Air", The Times of India, *Proquest Historical Newspapers*, 29 November 1912, p. 7 [Accessed: 23 January 2015].

[82] Khwaja Nazimuddin is more famous as the second Prime Minister of independent Pakistan. But during 1930s and 1940s, Fazlul Haque was critical of Nazimuddin and Suhrawardy's politics.

[83] Its President, Hari Sankar Paul, was the Mayor of Calcutta (in 1936) as well as President of the Bengal National Chamber of Commerce. Calcutta Corporation Councillor Indra Bhusan Beed became the first General Secretary, also member of Congress. Probhu Dayal Himatsingka became a Corporation representative; he was part of the Bengal Legislative Assembly from 1926. He was later a Congress Lok Sabha Member of Parliament.

Calcutta, the President of Bengal National Chamber of Commerce, and a member of Legislative Assembly. It also had G. D. Birla, then a prospering merchant as a lifetime board member and the Vice President until 1950. The Marwari community was growing in spheres of political importance, and their presence was in tune with their broader politics and relationship with parties for opportune circumstances.[84] It also reflected a growing sense of 'social work'. Thus, a large number of cotton mill owners began to contribute cloth pieces to the Samity.[85]

While Anjuman's annual reports housed in their Calcutta office are now lost in a fire, the Satkar Samity has series of reports that can help us understand their politics. The Samity focused on upholding the *Shastras* or religious texts, and in creating a 'much-desired solidarity of the Hindu community' by foregrounding two sets of wrong.[86] One pointed out the lack of rituals and order, as the previous section charts out. The other was the complaint that only Hindu bodies were dissected:

> There must be many amongst the citizens of Calcutta who have never been inside the Dissection Halls of the numerous Medical Colleges and Schools of the City. Those who have been will recollect with horror the sight presented to their eyes of all parts of the human anatomy lying bare on tables. They must have seen stark naked bodies (male and female) of unfortunate people being dismembered by students of medical science. *If they had cared to enquire… they would have come to know that it is only the Hindu dead bodies which are so treated*… People who have not seen must have smelt the stenches issuing from the pyres where the head of one person was burning with the leg of another and the hand of a third… Obsessed with what the Bengalee Hindu thought was the crying need of the hour, he never found time to apply his mind to this problem with the result that this disgraceful state of things continued for about 100 years and continues to this day [emphasis added].[87]

Complaint against the absence of rituals further took note of disregard for caste boundaries:

> The work of performing the last rites… so long lay with the Doms- people whose touch rightly or wrongly is considered as defilement and against the principle of Hindu Sastras prevailing from time immemorial. This work has

[84] Ritu Birla, *Stages of Capital: Law, Culture and Market Governance in late Colonial India*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2009, p. 89.
[85] Samity Report of 1934.
[86] Samity Report of 1932- 1933.
[87] Samity Report of 1935, p. 1.

been taken up by the Hindu Satkar Samity and every body received the services of a Brahmin.[88]

This growing emphasis on rituals was symptomatic of larger democratic battles. As Joya Chatterji has argued, Bengal's regional political aspirations vis-à-vis Congress's central high command led to the use of new idioms in which one could highlight regional aspirations.[89] Hindu upper caste idioms proved to be a strong, confidence-generating metaphor for this new Congress faction. A strong emphasis on functional values of ritual texts gave the notional values of caste categories a practical ritualistic function, through which many Bengali Hindu members of Congress (as most in Hindu Sabha were), framed their Hindu upper-caste regional aspirations. These ritual injunctions in *shāstras* clashed with existing medical and municipal practices of disposing unidentified dead bodies. Therefore, twentieth century politics brought forth the utilities of *shāstras* in ways that had earlier left unclaimed and dissected bodies outside its purview.

The injunctions against the Doms was only repeated till 1935 and were removed from the reports when Ambedkar's anti-caste movement showed potentials of dividing Hindu votes in provincial electoral politics.[90] In its sixth congress at Kanpur, the All India Hindu Mahasabha highlighted the importance of mass appeal.[91] The Communal Award and Ambedkarite movement had exposed its limited reach amongst the marginalized castes. The Mahasabha agreed at its Kanpur Congress that, 'Its contact with the vital batteries of Hindu India is but slightly and weakly established'.[92] It also admitted that it should establish 'vital contact, through actual service, with the masses including the Harijans… the Mahasabha must have its centres of work (mainly service) in every village. As regards untouchability, it should primarily establish heart-touch and soul-touch which is more than anything essential'.[93] Mayor of Calcutta, Sanat Roy Chowdhury was one of the prominent people on the dais at the Kanpur meeting. Incidentally, he was the founding treasurer and lifetime member of the Hindu Satkar Samity.

[88] Samity Report of 1935, pp. 4-5.

[89] See Joya Chatterji, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932 – 1947*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994 (2002).

[90] The electorate had increased following Government of India Act of 1935.

[91] N. N. Mitra ed., 'Proceedings of the All India Hindu Mahasabha', *The Indian Annual Register*, Annual register Office, Calcutta, June 1935, p. 328, http://www.southasiaarchive.com/Content/sarf.100017/210322/007 [Accessed: 9 July 2015].

[92] Ibid.

[93] Ibid. p. 328(d).

Moreover, the Municipality was happy to hand over the bodies that the medical institutions did not claim, as many members of the Samity held political positions in the Calcutta Municipal Corporation. While the Anjuman since 1905 had already claimed the Muslim bodies, the Samity relieved the Municipality of its remaining expenditure on Hindu corpses.[94] In this way, their problem with the Doms who were working with the Municipality was resolved. Both the Samity and the Anjuman did not face any hurdle in reclaiming the unclaimed bodies which the medical institutions did not claim. These led to a silencing of their issues with untouchable caste groups- even as it continued it in practice through the very act of emphasizing upon Brahmins and imams in the rituals, and commanding the Doms to practice only the parts assigned in ritual texts.[95]

While the Satkar Samity had successfully laid claims upon corpses from several private hospitals, unlike the Anjuman, they could not get most of the unclaimed bodies from the government medical colleges. These institutions included the CMC, Carmichael College, Campbell School, and Lady Dufferin Hospital. These institutions only handed over unused bodies, while refusing to hand over the ones with potentials for utility.[96] The Samity's politics thus shifted to the unresolved arena of dissection where they still could not affect a procedural change. Moreover, it was a persuasive and provocative site to debate larger politics in relation to Muslims in the city.

These medical colleges were under the Government of Bengal where the Congress failed to form a ministry and A. K. Fazlul Haque of Krishak Praja Party managed to form a government in 1937. In addition, the Indian Medical Services were predominantly European. Therefore, the Municipality had limited authority over them. The Samity members escalated their agitation from 1937 onwards, asserting that only Hindu bodies were dissected, which the Legislative Assembly admitted being true.[97] In 1946, they pointed that the government 'authorities are taking advantage of the Hindus being a minority community'.[98] We, therefore, see how they

[94] The Police Gazette notified that the Samity could receive all unclaimed Hindu bodies that Medical Colleges did not use for dissection: Samity Report of 1935, p. 33.
[95] They could only handle the body, but not chant rituals or to officiate any rites of passage ceremony.
[96] Campbell School handed over all unclaimed bodies from 1940, but the rest refused to do so: Samity Report of 1940, p. 23.
[97] Extract from Samity Report of 1947, pp. 6 – 8.
[98] Samity Report of 1946, p. 3.

played out the arguments which were generally forged against the Communal Award and the non- Congress provincial government.

Eventually in the history of more than 100 years of dissection in civil medical institutions of Calcutta, the Samity managed to bring anatomical education to a crisis. This was possible because the government colleges often relied on supplies of bodies from other private hospitals. These private hospitals, however, began to hand over bodies of Hindus to the Samity as well. For example, earlier, the Sambhunath Pandit Hospital was one of the largest suppliers of corpses to Carmichael Hospital: in 1919, Carmichael had received seventy-six bodies from this hospital. From 1936, they handed over all unclaimed corpses to the Samity instead of Carmichael.[99] While earlier the Medical College would hand over unused corpses as they avoided using bodies from its own hospital, they eventually had none to give as their outside sources dwindled.[100]

The Bengal Government recognized this crisis in January 1947. The Surgeon-General convened a conference. He requested the groups to allow the medical institutions to retain some cadavers. This plea did not lead to conclusive arrangements. But the country's partition in August 1947 changed their stance – the Anjuman was a politically spent force and part of the new minority, and the Samity, like many Hindu cultural groups in India, felt re-energized by the formation of two nations on the basis of religion and recognized a defeat of the Muslims in politics. Both the groups agreed in November that they would allow medical institutions to retain cadavers. The Samity declared:

> The partition of the province… and the replacement of the League Ministry by a Congress government… warranted a new orientation of policy on the part of the Samity towards the question [of dissection]. In the last conference which was convened by the Principal, Medical College, Calcutta on the 28th November 1947 … it was agreed that the hospital should set apart the required number of dead bodies for teaching purposes, but all communities should equitably contribute towards this number… The glaring injustice and discrimination under which the Hindu Community had been labouring for years were thus removed,

[99] *Annual Report on the Working of the Carmichael Medical College, Belgachia (Calcutta) for the Session 1920-21,* The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1921, p. 7, Samity Report of 1936, p. 5.

[100] For example, although CMC provided more than forty corpses each year initially, by 1943, in spite of the rising number of dead due to famine, it could hand over only one corpse. In 1946, it stopped sending bodies to the Samity altogether, complaining of a shortfall. See Samity Report of 1946, pp. 7-9.

> and the Samity had the satisfaction of finding their efforts in this direction crowned with success at long last.[101]

This final decision signified that the Samity had based its demands on grounds of governmental partiality. Once the Hindu nationalist movement resolved with the birth of the independent nation, they abandoned the claims on corpses for dissection. Instead, this political resolution led to two developments. First, for unclaimed bodies that medical institutions did not need, they received upper caste rituals. However, eventually the Satkar Samity predominantly became a group that assisted the poor to cremate their dead. While they continued to cremate unclaimed bodies which medical institutions did not need, in effect, the dissected unclaimed bodies actually emerged as sites of politics, only to be abandoned again once the politics resolved with partition.

The immediate causes of such reclaiming were political. It appeared that the Satkar Samity fought against dissection of 'Hindu' bodies as a larger political assertion against the Muslims. They indicated very clearly that they were against only Hindu bodies being dissected. This line of thought was in tune with the Hindu Mahasabha's political tactics of asserting that the Muslims accrued unfair advantage by allying with the British government. Complaints against claiming the unused corpses were based on an alternative premise of the British Government's disregard for caste order and rituals – they sought to rectify this by replacing the Doms with Brahmins, and making sure that the corpses were not burnt in Maniktala near a ditch but at the upper caste bhadralok ghat Nimtolla next to the Hooghly.

It is this sentiment that these societies and the Municipality together continued to hold authority over the dead in such a structured way that an Anatomy Law was not passed in West Bengal. At least in the case of unclaimed dead, secular laws did not replace religious authority. Nevertheless, at the same time, the moment of partition changed the internal dynamics of these two groups. The Anjuman's main office shifted to Dhaka and the Calcutta office was possibly less powerful.102 While they were opposed to the practice of dissection upon Muslim bodies itself, they had to agree to a compromise. This settled claims. Between 1948 and 1957, Bombay,

[101] Samity Report of 1947, pp. 4-5.

[102] Secretary of the Anjuman, Najmul Hasan suggests that the Anjuman began to focus on charity, pensions for widows, medicine dispensaries, and less on corpses after the partition. However, they saw again a rise in unclaimed bodies after Bangladesh War in 1971. Personal interview with Najmul Hasan, Anjuman Mufidul Islam, 10 July 2015

Madras, Hyderabad, Kerala, Himachal Pradesh passed Anatomy Acts to regulate supplies of dead bodies to hospitals as well as those remaining unattended in 'public spaces'. The Madras Legislative Assembly declared in 1951, "At present, the taking over of the unclaimed dead bodies in the streets or hospitals has no legal sanction behind it. The reason for introducing this bill is to rectify this legal defect.103" Unlike Bombay or Madras, the newly formed West Bengal already had a system that connected the state mechanism with religious institutions. West Bengal's newly elected state government did not pass legislation but agreed to continue procuring bodies through the police with the sanction of the Anjuman and the Samity. The latter worked with the Police and the Municipality to act as the final authority over unclaimed bodies.

[103] GOI, 'The Madras Anatomy Bill, 1951', Home, Judicial, 17/105/51 – Judicial, 1951, NAI

CONCLUSION

In the nineteenth century, the concept of 'unclaimed' was an attempt to give unidentified corpses a collective significance, and the term has remained till date to refer to bodies that are abandoned or are found without any family to claim them. The incompleteness of these corpses' identities, which were unattached to any other person, made these bodies potent sites for new appellations. Unclaimed corpses were referred to as promiscuous heaps or as subjects. Bodies that were claimed could not be referred in such ways. One would probably not call Bankimchandra Chattopadhyaya's body a promiscuous heap. Instead, the poor and the destitute people's corpses became the sites of such nomenclatures and politics. Colonial officers like Ranald Martin in the 1830s could address them as 'promiscuous heaps'. medical colleges could easily call them 'subjects' and mark them according to race; or as evident from the twentieth century, religious groups like Anjuman Mufidul Islam or the Hindu Satkar Samity could classify them as 'Hindu' or 'Muslim' bodies. They could emerge in politics, or be abandoned. While Thomas Laqueur argued that caring for the dead was a humane impulse, we can qualify to point out that caring for the unclaimed dead was an opportunistic political impulse as well.[1]

Since the 1860s, the Municipality became concerned with unclaimed bodies as a category of corpses that created nuisance. International Sanitary Conferences on Cholera, and the Army Sanitary Commission steered the Bengal Government and the Municipality to manage unburied and unburned bodies. Earlier they were indiscriminately treated as nuisance, but from the 1860s, there were attempts to bring them under the Municipality to ensure swift action for disposal. After all, floating dead bodies in a commercially prosperous city was a bad advertisement for a globally expanding Empire. A bylaw in 1863 proposed to ban floating of bodies in the river, but it was ineffective. In the same year, the Municipality agreed to dispose corpses of paupers through its own funds. The development of dead-houses and morgues in the city, and post-mortems for their identification since the 1860s, showed that 'unclaimed' bodies had received administrative attention. By the end of the

[1] Laqueur, 'Deep Time of the Dead', p. 800

nineteenth century, Calcutta had dead-houses in the medical schools and colleges, Asylum, jails, and nearby at Mominpore and Howrah.

The category of unclaimed bodies however was rooted in the political economy of Colonial Calcutta. In 1900, a local writer argued that people found corpses in the river not because of the Vedas but because of British rule. It was because of deforestation, urban expansion, and rising costs that prevented the peasants from cremating their dead as they had done in the eighteenth century.[2] Other graveyards too systematically discriminated between the rich and the poor. In 1907, the Christian Burial Board ordered all anonymous graves to be destroyed even in the elite Park Street graveyards that had allowed some graves for the poor.[3] In this move to create more space, graves with tombstones and epitaphs did not receive the same treatment. As it was increasingly expensive to dispose of dead bodies, they remained unclaimed more often. If Julie-Marie Strange and Nancy Scheper-Hughes' works indicate that different classes mourn differently, we can add that people whose bodies ended up being unclaimed more often than not is also constitutive of a distinct class.

The absence of an Anatomy Act revealed how the government tried to manage unclaimed bodies. An Act of State would become a public proclamation, but the colonial state wished to keep the management of unclaimed dead away from the public eye. Therefore, the Municipality clandestinely disposed corpses by burning them in heaps or sinking them in the river. The government did not want its handling of bodies to become an issue or to create protests.

Medical institutions became the primary consumers of most of the unclaimed bodies after 1835. These bodies were then referred to as specimens, preparations, or subjects. "Specimens" in these institutions were, as the word implies, seen as the typical human being. Unclaimed bodies in medical institutions were no more amorphous 'promiscuous heaps' and nuisances but coveted property of the medical colleges. Such a medical education with dead bodies had the potential to transform attitudes towards unclaimed dead bodies as skeletons reached schools, colleges, even some homes. Socially, it opened up corpses to the touch of upper caste men. It also opened up the corpse to the touch of women, who religious texts and orthodox

[2] 'Disposal of Hindu Dead: A Danger to Calcutta,' *The Times of India*, 24 march 1900, p. 9
[3] Calcutta Notes: Relics of the Past, *The Times of India*, 1 March 1907, p. 6

sections had otherwise proscribed from participating in mortuary rituals. The Doms worked in the same space as the students.

Yet, such potentials were limited. In CMC, women used a different dissection room, and gender segregation prevailed.[4] The act of dissection predominantly reached a selective group of people who came from privileged backgrounds. While the Doms brought them to the colleges, cleaned them and assisted post-mortems, they were consciously unacknowledged for these roles. Amongst many people, dissection was seen with horror: in 1909, the National Medical College had to remove its dissection shed and shift to a more secure area because, as the newspapers reported, 'it fomented a good deal of ill-feeling amongst the surrounding low class people'.[5]

From the 1880s and 1890s, new developments classified the dead into religion. The Burial Boards for Christians (1881) and Muslims (1889), hardened the erstwhile communal fluidity of burial practices. Earlier certain castes like the Chamars or Vaishnavas could bury their dead in areas reserved in Muslim burial grounds. This ceased since 1889. Instead, rituals codified in religious texts were adopted to construct the ideal way of reclaiming dead bodies back into socially accepted ways of rituals. Therefore, the Anjuman and the Samity protested against the roles of Doms in rituals. The Samity instead offered the services of Brahmins. Bodies became the ground for larger political contests. Bodies used for dissection emerged as sites of such contests. The ways in which dead bodies were classified and referred to change in our period of study.

At the start of our period of study, many bodies were unclaimed and were disposed of as nuisances. At the end of it, bodies unclaimed by the family were claimed by religious organizations. So, in a sense, all bodies were now claimed. Terms like 'Hindu bodies' and 'Muslim bodies' also gained popularity, especially during the communal riots of 1946. Constables Fazlul Kabir Chowdhury and Shakurul Hosain testified numbers of corpses as 'Muslim' and 'Hindu' corpses.[6]

The year 1947 was crucial because the religious groups agreed to give some bodies to the medical colleges. Earlier, the medical colleges collected bodies or

[4] Sen and Das, 'A History of CMC and Hospital, 1835 – 1936', p. 498

[5] 'Medical Education: The National College Dissection Rooms', *The Times of India*, 11 October 1909

[6] See Evidence from S. Husain, *Calcutta Disturbances Commission Report*, Superintendent of Government Printing, Calcutta, 1947, p. 45. http://www.southasiaarchive.com/Content/sarf.100015/205080/002 [Accessed: 9 November 2014]

gathered them from the Police or the Municipality. In 1947, the medical authorities had to seek permission from these organizations to collect their required quotas of bodies for dissection. Therefore, unlike Bombay (1949), Madras (1951), Kerala (1957), Karnataka (1957), Jammu and Kashmir (1959) Himachal Pradesh (1966), and so on, West Bengal did not need an Anatomy Act because the colonial government and religious institutions had already agreed to a compromise that allowed the medical institutions to get cadavers, and the rest to get disposed of without hassle.

On a discursive level, unclaimed corpses became sites of debates, discussions, and politics. They emerged in the archives when the Secretary of State, Bengal Government, the Municipality or the Police considered them as nuisances large enough for concerted efforts and policies. They again emerged as significant products in medical education. Predictably, the national and state archives give us instances of only those aspects of the unclaimed bodies that concerned the Municipality, Police, and so on. Private archives like the Annual Reports of the Hindu Satkar Samity however grant us a different view. They show us the middle class concerns about bodies of the poor, notions of charity, and tells us about how corpses emerged as significant markers of communities, and currencies of settling scores. They tell us about the workers who actually disposed unclaimed bodies from the streets on behalf of these institutions. Do these local archives provide us a timeline of caring for unclaimed corpses? In certain ways, it does. According to this timeline, twentieth century is the turning point with the peak evident in the 1930s when the Hindu Satkar Samity also asserted claims over bodies usually kept aside for dissections. This timeline also suggests that the unclaimed bodies rose to political significance for a brief while because of larger political battles. However, the nature of formalized reports and archives make it difficult for us to separate the experiences from the discursive.

It is almost impossible to transcend the role of the state and politics and look at people's experiences as the major focus of studies. How can we study the act of claiming at an emotional level? Government documents can only give us tangential clues. In 1944, Margaret Smethurst of Friends' Ambulance and Red Cross in Calcutta commented that even during famines, many destitute were sceptical of

going to hospitals.[7] To them, it was better to die amongst family members than not know what had happened afterwards.[8] However, the Nanavati Commission interviewed relief workers instead of survivors of famines, and people's experiences about their ideas of claiming corpses are lost to us.

However, such insights raise some questions that can guide us towards research in the future. How does claiming relate to caring for the dead? In what ways do these claiming relate to gendered roles of grief and mourning? We can ask speculative questions to think of some answers – would the acts of claiming be any different had members of the Satkar Samity been women? If the political impulse brought these bodies into the limelight, what impulse sustained caring for them after their political needs resolved? How were such acts of claiming corpses different in independent India? Can we distinguish between colonial form of claiming, and a national one?

[7] Evidence From Margaret Smethurst, Friends' Ambulance Unit and Secretary of Indian red Cross Milk Distribution Sub-Committee, Famine Inquiry Commission, Nanavati Papers, August 1944, NAI
[8] Ibid.

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Appendix

List of Burial and Cremation Grounds in Calcutta

Christian Burial Grounds in 1851[1]

1. St. John's Presbyterian Church Ground
2. The Old or Mission Church Ground
3. St. Paul's Cathedral
4. St. Peter's Church, Fort William
5. St. James Church Ground
6. St. Thomas Church, Free School
7. St. Stephen's Church, Kidderpore
8. Orphan Burial Ground, Kidderpore
9. The Union Chapel Ground
10. St. Andrew's Kirk
11. The South Park Street Burial Ground
12. The Mission Burial Ground
13. The Baptist Chapel, Circular Road
14. The Benevolent Institution, Scotch and Dissenters' Burial Ground
15. The Military Burial Ground
16. The European Female Orphan Asylum and Chapel
17. The New Burial Ground (Circular Road Burial Ground)
18. Roman Catholic Church in Boitaconah
19. Portuguese Burial Ground
20. Roman Catholic Church at Dhurmtollah
21. Roman Catholic Church of St. Thomas
22. Armenian Church and Ground
23. Greek Church and Ground
24. Armenian Philanthropic Academy and Burial Ground
25. The French Burial Ground
26. Bishop's College Burial Ground
27. Sulkeah Burial Ground

[1] Holmes and Co., *The Bengal Obituary or A Record to Perpetuate the Memory of Departed Worth*, Thacker and Company, London and Calcutta, 1851

28. Howrah Burial Ground
29. Dum Dum Burial Grounds
30. Barrackpore Burial Ground
31. Danish Burial Ground, Serampore
32. Mission Burial Ground, Serampore
33. Pultah Burial Ground
34. Hospital Burial Ground (closed in 1806)[2]

Muslim Public Burial Grounds in 1889[3]

1. Chopdar Bagan Burial Ground, Upper Circular Road, Manicktollah. Area of Public portion, 4 bighas
2. Meah Bagan Burial Ground, Manicktollah, area of public portion 3 bighas
3. Khodadad's burial Ground, Moonsheepara Lane, 4 bighas
4. Rahim-ud-deen Moonshie's Burial Ground, Canal Road West, 6 bighas
5. Chota Gobra Gorastan, Gobra Gorastan Rd, 3 bighas (For both Hindus and Muslims till 1889)
6. Gobra Gorastan, Gorastan Rd, 6 bighas
7. Talbagan burial ground, Tiljullah 1st lane, 1 bigha (closed in 1897)
8. New Kasiabagan burial ground, Tiljullah 1st Lane, 15 bighas (partly closed in 1897, another part converted into a park in 1902)
9. Gori Ghariban Burial Ground (closed in 1897)
10. Sola-anna Kobrastan, Ekbalpore Road, 17 bighas
11. Moonshee Ahmud Begg ko Kobrastan, Ramnuggur Lane, 4 bighas
12. Nakhola Burial Ground, Nakhoda Masjid*
13. Mohammadan Ramjan Lane Burial Ground*
14. Mohammadan Cemetery at Cossipore*
15. Metiabruz Imambara (Burial ground of Wajid Ali Shah, his family and descendents)
16. Old Mussalman Burial Ground (closed in 1806)[4]

[2] GOB, Judicial, Criminal, No. 23, 25 July 1805, WBSA

[3] 'Bengal Muhammadan Burial Boards Act, 1889', GOI, Home, Legislative, Nos. 1-19, September, 1889, NAI

* Thacker's Indian Directory Embracing the Whole of the Indian Empire, Calcutta Streets, 1933, Thacker's Press & Directories, Calcutta, 1933, http://www.southasiaarchive.com/Content/sarf.141388/203436/024 [accessed 17 December 2015]

[4] GOB, Judicial, Criminal, No. 23, 25 July 1805, WBSA

17. There were about a hundred private burial grounds, some even with two or three burials, which did not fall under the Mohammedan Burial Board Act of 1889[5]

Public Cremation Grounds

1. Keoratola Burning Ghat
2. Nimtolla Burning Ghat
3. Ramkrishna Mahasamsan Burning Ghat
4. Kashimitra Burning Ghat
5. Garia Adi Mahasamsan Burning Ghat
6. Sirity Burning Ghat
7. Birjunala Burning Ghat

Hindu Public Burial Grounds[6]

1. Chota Gobra Goristan for Hindus
2. Bhatchala Hindu Burial Ground
3. Muraripukur Hindu Burial Ground
4. Topsia Hindu Burial Ground

Other Burial Grounds[7]

1. Jewish Burial Ground
2. Chinese Cemetery, Tangra Road
3. Tongoon Chinese Cemetery, Tangra Road (South)

[5] 'Bengal Muhammadan Burial Boards Act, 1889', GOI, Home, Legislative, Nos. 1-19, September, 1889, NAI

[6] Thacker's Calcutta Directory: Including Calcutta's Who's who, Volume 44, Thacker's Press & Directories, Calcutta, 1981

[7] Thacker's Indian Directory, *Calcutta Streets,* 1933