

Discussant's comments on the on the paper on the refugee movement authored by Paula Banerjee and Sucharita Sengupta:

The Refugee Movement had practically gone to the back-burner, with other kinds of concerns with the Partition-displaced coming to dominate academic discussion in recent years. The authors of the paper under discussion have pertinently foregrounded it and appropriately mapped it in a wider terrain of popular movements in the West Bengal of the 1950s and 60s, away from the first wave of Partition Studies with their obsessive preoccupation with the high politics of the vivisection. The paper also resonates with the shift away from the relatively recent preoccupation with the displaced population's victimhood, towards a much-needed engagement with the question of agency and its various assertions among the 'refugees'. And, as a movement is overtly oriented towards activism, it may, indeed, provide a prism through which the question of agency can be seen as reflecting more acutely than in the more placid arenas of the everyday of a refugee settlement's existence.

The paper also brings out the specifics of the historical conjuncture in which the refugee movement was embedded, thus enabling us to see it in its intimate enmeshing with the other popular movements of the day, like the food movement, the teachers' movement and so on. The authors have insightfully emphasized the reading of the refugee movement as crucially informing, and informed by, the other movements, and conjointly creating an overall discursive environment specific to the popular movements of that historical conjuncture.

Rather than being conceived from a mood of supplication typical of 'outsiders' seeking 'refuge', the so-called refugee movement was really an assertion of the right to citizenship, this paper rightly emphasizes. The authors bring out the sense in which the refugee movement, indeed, supplied the idiom for the rights discourse voiced by the whole spectrum of popular movements of that period. However, the most active agency in concertedly using this idiom to string together the different popular movement of the period, were the left parties that were largely instrumental in providing the leadership and the language of agitation, as the paper shows.

A special focus on the UCRC and its success relative to the other refugee platforms is too germane to the study of refugee movement to be overlooked, and the authors have not done so. But they have been equally careful to see this collective mobilization in tandem with the significance of individual voices from the movement – albeit voices of individual leaders – to give a sense how the individual and the collective may have, indeed, dialectically constituted the movement.

This paper provides the space for raising certain fundamental questions, however.

For example, questions like what constitutes a popular movement, in the first place; what, for that matter, does the 'popular' signify! In this connection and with regard to the refugee movement, in particular, we may ask whether popular movement is about a specific form of mobilization that makes the question of class, or for that matter caste or gender, completely irrelevant or inoperative or does it not! It may be recalled in this connection that the leadership - to be more exact, the decisive thrust of the movement - came from the lower middle class milieu of the refugee colonies. The colonies, in their turn, had been established by the educated, upper caste middle class immigrants who had refused to

linger in the refugee camps alongside 'lower caste', 'lower class' immigrants. When the refugee movement under the UCRC came to arrogate the whole field of refugee agitation, it did take care to accommodate the redress of the 'inhuman living condition' in the camps in their charter of demands. But a close study reveals that the camp population was being merely spoken on behalf of by a non-camp leadership. Indeed, when it came to questions of leadership or intra-organizational policy formulation of the UCRC, the voice of the camp went by default.

This brings us to a related question: should a popular movement be assumed to be homogeneous? Or is it that a popular movement – in this case the refugee movement – is a study in solidarity at one level and fragmentation at another? The authors of this paper have themselves briefly hinted at role of rival political parties often driving a wedge into the pale of the movement. There could even be colonies confronting one another over the lines of conflicting party-political affiliation, even while they swore by their respective commitments to the refugee movement. But should we not also factor in the way in which the Matuas found their own distinctive vortex of mobilization among the Namasudra refugees around their own spiritual cult and its leadership, even while the UCRC with its commitment to a broadly left ideology dominated the (upper-caste?) mainstream of the refugee movement. Thus the point is to make our study sensitive enough to be able to factor in all the heterogeneities that make movement broad-based enough to be 'popular', and yet unstable enough to threaten rupture along the various fault lines.

At this juncture of historical research it would be wonderful to factor in the interweaving as well as the difference of the different sites of mobilization of the refugee movement – not merely the meetings of the meetings and agitations of the UCRC or even the meetings and programmes of the various colony committees or even the defense of the colony under the leadership of the local club, but also at the daily gatherings at the colony *Kali Bari* or at ashrams like the *Ram Thakurer Ashram* or even at the *jalsa* or cultural evenings organized at the colony level. That would also adequately complicate the question of agency by bringing in the role of not only the leaders but also those of the supposedly led.

Somewhat provocatively, I would suggest that instead of uncritically reiterating terms like '*jabardakhal* colony', the authors may deconstruct the inter-textual and linguistic conjunctures in which such terms pertaining to the 'refugee' existence and movement are embedded. After all, *jabardakhal* reflects the discursive grid in which the host society spoke and the police echoed in their representation of the refugee's squatting as illegal. The refugee movement, in its turn, would seek to erase the word *jabar* with its connotation of forcible and hence illegitimate occupation. The refugee movement was indeed discursively involved in legitimizing *dakhal* by narrativizing a genealogy in which they first suffered *bedakhal* in their native place, migrated for no fault of theirs, were failed by the host state's rehabilitation policy and hence acquired the right to assert *dakhal* as a matter of right to human survival. It is significant that this legitimization of *dakhal*, as component of a new rights discourse emanating from the refugee movement, left a deep imprint on all subsequent movements involving *dakhal*, including the more recent hawker's movement. It may also be asked whether this was not indicative of the refugee movement's attempt to locate its moorings in civil society rather than in its 'other', and whether it was not leaving a legacy for all movements drawing upon its signification of *dakhal*.

Talking of intertextuality, reminding ourselves of the slogan '*amara kara, bastuhara*' and recalling the increasing prominence of the left parties in the leadership of the refugee movement, I would also suggest that the authors may look probingly into the resonance between *bastuhara*, on the one hand, what appears to have been its parent paradigm, on the other – *sarbahara*. *Bastuhara* not only resonated to *sarbahara* but also enabled the welding of the refugee movement with the left-led umbrella of movements in the 1950s-60s, at time when the post-war retrenchment had already also tossed another similar-sounding term in the image of *sarbahara* into the ring – *karmahara* and the food movement, in its turn, was harping on the famine-stricken image of the *annahara*.

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