Recycling the Urban
Migration Settlement and the Question of Labour in Contemporary Kolkata

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The paper explores the interfaces of urbanisation, settlement practices, and issues of labour migration and displacement in contemporary Kolkata. It starts with interrogating a historical narrative of urbanisation and zoning practices in the city in the 1960s and picks out few threads which still seem relevant in studies of contemporary modes of urbanisation. It studies in some detail the practice of "*thika* tenancy" in the Kolkata slums—the most prominent site of habitation of the migrant workers in the city. It challenges the hypothesis of the "bypass model" of urbanisation in Kolkata and introduces the concept of "urban recycling," which facilitates a continuous juxtaposition of displacement and accumulation of human and other resources as part of the urbanisation process.

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1 Introduction

This paper seeks to bring together two aspects of life, livelihood, and habitation practices in the city—the phenomenon of urbanisation and that of rural-to-urban migration. At the same time, it attempts to foreground the question of labour in the moments these two practices overlap, materialising in various networks of entangled kinships and plausible connections, supported by different horizontal and vertical hierarchical arrangements. The chief purpose of this exercise is to investigate the location of the category of "migrant worker" in the broader and adjacent discourses of urbanisation, to propose a scheme of research which would explore the politics of defining and stabilising this location, and find out its implications for social justice for the urban poor.

This particular area of justice pertains both to the incidence of violence against the so-called "outsiders" perpetrated by the self-proclaimed "sons of the soil" and the vulnerability of the workers coming to the city in search of a better life and better employment opportunities in the face of these incidents. Moreover, apart from the instances of physical violence, there are issues of cultural and social segregation between the insiders and the outsiders, which bring to the fore various disturbing questions regarding the politics of identity formation and construction of authentic urban experience. It is important in this respect to situate and contextualise these incidents of physical and sociocultural violence within the prevailing practices of migration and urbanisation.

As my site of study, I have chosen Kolkata (formerly, and in some quarters even today, known as Calcutta), one of the most important cities in Eastern India in terms of concentration of commercial interests and cultural aspirations. Calcutta was the capital of British India until 1911 and was one of the most sought-after locations for migrants from different parts of the country during the Raj. Even after independence, it continued to attract people from other states—especially those in the eastern part of the country like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh—and seemed to offer hospitality to members of all communities, religions, and language groups. This cosmopolitan image of Calcutta was damaged a little when a demand was raised to change the name of the city from the allegedly colonial sounding "Calcutta" to the more authentically Bengali intonated "Kolkata." Subsequently, in 2001, the name was changed, and the move suggested a degree of cultural chauvinism mixed with xenophobic impatience.

That the migrants in the city often fall prey to the xenophobic rage of locals is common knowledge; it is a well-researched area, where the attacks on the lower rung of migrant workers in urban and semi-urban settings by the cadres of militant political and cultural organisations have been documented and studied in detail. However, not much has been written about the connection between these parochial sentiments and the protocols of urban planning and spatial reconfiguration of the city in the last two decades following "liberalisation" of the Indian economy. As we shall see, this connection has a historical foundation, predating the latest urban renewal programmes like the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM).

The scholarship on the relationship between migration and the modes of urbanisation in post-liberalisation India does not take stock of this historical foundation. Most of these studies have focused on the macro-level analysis of census data, commenting on the trends in migration—whether the rate of migration from rural to urban centres is increasing or not—and speculating on the possible reasons thereof (Kundu and Gupta 1996; Kundu and Sarangi 2007). Also, there are writings on the exclusionary nature of urbanisation in India and how official policies and programmes exude an urgency to "modernise" the cities at the cost of massive dislocation and dispossession (Kundu and Saraswati 2012; Mann 2012). Although these studies command our attention due to the valuable insights they offer on the linkages between migration decisions and governmental policies, the very structure of reasoning which informs both these decisions and policies—the way of thinking which sutures the issues of urban planning, migration practices, and violence resulting from exclusionary mechanisms—remains unattended.

2 Past Studies on Urbanisation

One may encounter flashes of this way of thinking in some of the past studies on urbanisation. In the early 1960s, the famous anthropologist and Gandhian thinker Nirmal Kumar Bose conducted a study of the distribution of the city space in Calcutta among different communities (Bose 1968). Apart from preparing intricate land-use maps of the city on the basis of assessment records (1911 to 1961) of Calcutta Corporation, the objective of the study was to understand how the urban landscape was shared by the inhabitants of the city belonging to various language groups and occupations. The city population was spread over a number of municipal wards, and Bose's intention was to map the concentration of certain communities—religious, ethnic, and otherwise—in few particular wards. As early as the 1910s and 1920s, the city space was distributed in particular zones where specific groups of people lived and earned their livelihood.

Even though Bose's survey of the "social space" of Calcutta in the 1960s did not address the question of migration directly, his insistence on the need to study habitation practices of the "non-Bengali" communities in the city reflects a sense of curiosity to understand the mindset of the "outsiders." First of all, he divided the city population into two large mutually exclusive groups—Bengali Hindus and non-Bengalis (including the Muslims and people from other religious and ethnic communities). Then he noted the presence of at least four types of Hindu Bengalis in the city—commercial or artisan castes, upper castes, Scheduled Castes, and refugees from East Pakistan, with a distinctively separate "social identity" (Bose 1968: 27). The non-Bengalis included everyone else, such as the Oriya speakers (mostly involved in plumbing, gas, and electrical works) or the Hindi-speaking labourers who hailed from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh and were concentrated in the industrial area of the city. Often, they had to change their location after incidents of violence. For instance, the Hindi-speaking Kalwars, who dealt in scrap iron and machine parts and traded in ward number 53 (a predominantly Muslim locality as reported in the study), had to leave the area after the riots in 1946–47 and had to settle in ward nos 7, 10, 13, etc.

Bose took special care to describe the Rajasthanis or Marwari's in Calcutta, as they seemed to be particularly influential in the areas of trade and commerce. Although their tongue was not exactly Hindi, the Marwari community of Calcutta considered themselves to be one of the Hindi-speaking groups. They were one of the very few non-Bengali communities which showed a consistent tendency of expanding beyond the area where they originally settled, namely, central Calcutta, and continued to buy up properties in the neighbouring wards. Bose insinuated that the prosperity of the Marwaris came with the decline of the Bengali commercial castes like the Subarnabaniks during agitations against the British government—a classic example of how the locals literally lost ground to the outsiders in accumulation of resources and occupancy of the city space (Bose 1968: 36–37). "Yet," Bose lamented, "this did not lead the Rajasthanis to treat the city of Calcutta as their own home" (Bose 1968: 37). The outsiders remain outsiders and that, perhaps, gives the locals an excuse to bear grudges against them and to act on those grudges whenever possible.

As we have noted earlier, the Muslims of Calcutta were clubbed with the non-Bengali groups. Although Bose acknowledged the presence of Bengali Muslims in the city, his chief focus remained on those who spoke either Hindustani or Urdu and arrived in the city from Delhi, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar before independence. They settled mostly among people engaged in similar occupations like merchant trading, craftsmanship, or leather works in various central Calcutta wards. Some of them settled in slums in ward nos 32, 33, 34 and 35 after the post-partition riots. The importance of Bose's brief study of the Muslims in Calcutta was felt by the Anthropological Survey of India and it entrusted M K A Siddiqui with the task of initiating a full-fledged survey of the conditions of Muslims in the city. In 1974, Siddiqui brought out a volume on the sociocultural status of the minorities, which once again made it clear that most of the Muslims in Calcutta were concentrated in a few adjoining municipal wards—"ward nos 50, 51, 53, 55, 57 and 60 around Park Circus extending up to Tapsia, a newly developing slum area"—irrespective of their "varying regional, linguistic, ethnic and occupational backgrounds" (Siddiqui 1974: 25, 26).

Notwithstanding the political incorrectness of some of Nirmal Bose's observations, the significance of his study of the social space of Calcutta is evident. For the first time, it pointed to a peculiar aspect of migration settlements in the city: the tendency of the so-called "outsiders" to concentrate in an urban setting—or the distribution of the city space among its inhabitants—according to their language, religion, caste, occupation, and social status. This leads to a more crucial realisation that the politics associated with migration practices entails zoning of the city into various quarters of habitation, and the attempts to cross the boundaries of these zones are often met with anger and disquiet on part of the self-proclaimed insiders. This realisation is even more relevant today amidst the hue and cry around reshuffling of the ethnic identity of the metropolis. The emergence of a new monied class in the city endangers old, established value systems and threatens to bring about changes in the already settled habits and habitat. It is precisely at this juncture, I propose to study the migration practices in Calcutta/Kolkata, focusing on the redistribution of the city space in relation to the movement of workforce from outside the city.

3 Paradoxes of Settlement

Many studies have been conducted on the issue of migration to Kolkata, and these works offer some observations which we need to examine closely and compare with the findings of our study. Asok Sen and Alak Banerjee (1983) in their paper "Migrants in the Calcutta Metropolitan District, 1951–71," observed that the growth of the core city stalled as the population influx to Calcutta proper declined. On the other hand, the size of the non-Bengali population showed a steady growth from 34.06% in 1951 to 40.08% in 1971. The proportion of migrants from other states to the total population decreased from 25.24% in 1951 to less than 17% in 1971. In the 2011 Census, the decennial growth rate of the Kolkata district was recorded at -1.88%—an all-time minimum in the history of census in India—with the population density rate falling from 24,718 per square kilometre in 2001 to 24,258 per square kilometre in 2011. This is more or less the scenario all over the country, where the big cities are failing to draw people from outside, as the employment opportunities in these cities seem frustratingly low due to use of capital-intensive technologies in the industrial sector (Kundu 2009).

Before coming to the question of labour, I shall dwell for a few moments on the settlement practices of the migrants in Kolkata in the last few decades. More categorically, my focus will be on the experiences of settlement of workers in the informal sectors. Most of them are forced to live in the slums or bustees in different municipal wards. The decision to choose the bustees of Kolkata as a prospective site of migrant settlement is influenced by an interesting orientation in some of the documents of urban planning prepared by the Kolkata Metropolitan Development Authority (KMDA), formerly known as the Calcutta Metropolitan Development Authority (CMDA). In their various reports based on sample surveys of the slums of Kolkata, the KMDA has paid serious attention to the issues of

accommodation of the migrant workforce; their living conditions and social adjustments; and the rural–urban linkages, manifested in their frequent visits to their places of origin, in connection with the questions of urban planning and development. A full categorical definition of the "migrants" was provided for the first time in a 1996–97 study on the "socio-economic profiles" of the urban households in Calcutta (Chatterjee, Bhattacharya and Halder 2004: 397–662). But the deliberations on the issues and problems related to migration started to feature in the KMDA reports only since the late 1980s.

The first couple of studies by CMDA in 1980 on the small-scale industrial enterprises within the slums did not mention whether the workers in these establishments had come from outside the city (KDMA 2004a, 2004b). However, it was evident that the bustees not only offered shelter to the urban poor, but also provided them with job opportunities within the same premise. The plans of urban development like the "Calcutta 300: Plan for Metropolitan Development" often touched upon the issues of migration and bustee improvement, but did not make any necessary connection between the two (KDMA 2004c). It was the 1989–90 study on the "socio-economic profile" of the slum dwellers of Calcutta which identified a considerable number of them as migrants (Chakrabarti and Halder 2004). Based on a medium range sample survey (sample size: 7,810 slum dwelling families) conducted in 1989, this study dates the "origin" of the Calcutta slums to the 1930s and 1940s, when following intensification of industrial activities in and around the city to support the war efforts of the British government, a huge number of people from the eastern and northern states of India flocked to the city in search of work. "[H]uts made up of mud and bamboo" were constructed to provide cheap accommodation to these migrant workers (Chakrabarti and Halder 2004: 268). The hutments were constructed and rented out by a group of middlemen "popularly known as *thika* tenants, on land leased out to them by landlords" (Chakrabarti and Halder 2004).

Curiously, not only did the study recognise a close relation between migration and bustee settlements, it also identified migration as the primary reason for construction of these settlements. It will not be very productive to take this identification at its face value; instead, the politics of such easy associations and comfortable categorisations must be studied, interrogated, and challenged. It is also important because institutions like the CMDA participated most actively in the processes of policy design and implementation. If one wants to look into the relationship between policies of urbanisation and migration practices in post-liberalisation Kolkata, he or she cannot avoid exploring the tremendous impact that these "official" histories of migration settlement have on the government's prerogative of decision-making.

4 Phenomenon of Thika Tenancy

Two other points which interestingly came up in the 1989–90 survey of Calcutta slums were that the slums could be classified (and the city could be zoned) according to the predominance of particular language groups living in these settlements, and

the issue of rural–urban linkages, established through the migrants' visits to their native lands. According to the study, 55.94% of the total households surveyed were Bengali-speaking, 21.9% were Hindi-speaking, and 20.8% were Urdu-speaking (Chakrabarti and Halder 2004: 288). A table also classified the average size of the households among different language groups, thus making a connection between regional specificities and economic sustenance and rationality, based on the presumption that large family size is detrimental to economic well-being (Chakrabarti and Halder 2004: 289). The issue of rural–urban linkages, however, was conceptualised in terms of two "explanatory variables"—the frequency of visits to the places of origin and the remittances sent back to these places (Chakrabarti and Halder 2004: 371). Associated with this conceptualisation was the categorisation of migrants into those whose family had migrated to the city more than a generation back and those who were first generation migrants. In other words, a distinction was made between those who were more prone to share their income with the family left behind in their native village and those who were keeping the savings to themselves, and hence within the city or the state. While almost 60% of the households, the survey revealed, were present generation migrants, the rest of the 40% families were rooted in the city for more than one generation. "It is worth mentioning here," the study concluded, "that except for Dara-para and Belgachia bustees the predominant language group in the bustees belonging to the ... group of having low incidence of transfer of income away from Calcutta is Bengali" (Chakra-barti and Halder 2004: 373). Though mentioned with an indifference of statistical certainty, this comment seems to presage a cultural bias disguised in the garb of economic logic.

The above remark in some ways echoes Nirmal Bose's discontent over the non-Bengali people's lack of commitment to the interests of Bengal. In that sense, there is continuity between these two observations, but on the other hand, the latter remark appears to be politically motivated when seen in relation to the future plans for development of Kolkata. In the following decades, this attitude might have played a crucial role in translating the desires of urban zoning and gentrification into actuality by forceful eviction and displacement of slum dwellers in the name of aesthetic and ecological concerns. This could not have been achieved without a categorical fixity that has adorned the official documents and informed the policy recommendations. The 1996–97 study on the socioeconomic profiles of the households of Calcutta, therefore, attempted to demarcate the migrants from the "original residents" by proffering a fixed "historical" narrative of the development of the city. Migrants were defined as "persons who came to this metropolitan city from some other place in or after 1947 (the year of independence and partition of Bengal)" (Chatterjee, Bhattacharya and Halder 2004: 593).

The effectiveness of this historical narrative was thought to be so strong that even accounting discrepancies were ignored as minor confusions in categorisation. The percentage of displaced population (mainly refugees from East Pakistan) was recorded at only 2% of the total population of the city, while the number of displaced households was calculated to be more than 14%. This discrepancy was explained by the peculiar definition of the "displaced household:" its status was determined by the fact of its head's or his or her parents' displacement. This resulted in a beautiful paradox: "a household can be 'displaced' but some members of that household could be 'original residents'" (Chatterjee, Bhattacharya and Halder 2004). This paradox shows how the botched histories of development can play around the notion of "origin" depending on its suitability to the purpose at hand.

Labour and Hand

Meanwhile, in 1981, another interesting shift had taken place in the official discourses of city planning and urban development. It was the year in which the Kolkata Thika Tenancy (Acquisition and Regulation) Act was passed. By this act, the West Bengal government acquired all the bustee lands in the city and prescribed certain regulatory mechanisms to save the dwellers and thika tenants from the alleged exploitation by landlords. With the increase in prices of urban land property, the landlords were eager to sell their holdings to builders and realtors, evicting the thika tenants and slum dwellers (Ghosh 1992: 2). By citing the new act regarding urban land ceiling (1976), the government took hold of all these plots scattered in different parts of the city and paid the actual owners a small amount of money as compensation (Ghosh 1992: 6). The remedy to the problems created by the landlords was, as put succinctly in the act, to imagine "as if the State had been the landlord in respect of that land" (Government of West Bengal 1981). Since then, the government would collect land rent from the thika tenants against their right of collecting house rent from the actual dwellers of the bustees.

One of the main beneficiaries of the new act was the thika tenant himself, whose claim over the tenancy of a particular plot was guaranteed by registration under the act as a "permanent" rentier over generations to come: "It was for their sake that the tenancy rights were made heritable and not transferable or terminable by law, thus warranting their permanent source of income" (Ghosh 1992: 5).

This urge to become the most powerful stakeholder in the case of the bustee settlements proves how much importance was given by the state to the questions of existence and improvement of the city slums in connection with urban development. But more importantly, it points to a unique aspect of urbanisation—the connection between labour and land (and correspondingly, between wage and rent). It is to be remembered that, historically, most of the slums in Kolkata were built to accommodate the workers who came to live in the city from other districts or states. The changing patterns of land use in the city, therefore, are co-constitutive of the changing modes of production in the urban sector. In the next few sections, I shall evoke the question of labour in relation to the shifting modalities of urbanisation. Although the scope of the present paper does not allow a detailed study of this relationship, I shall try to outline a conceptual framework which brings

together some of the concerns that continue to surface in the contemporary discourses of urban development.

5 Question of Labour

It is commonly assumed that a large amount of rural-to-urban migration takes place due to the shortage of employment opportunities in the rural areas. The flip side of this assumption tells us that a decline in the rate of migration indicates an increase in such opportunities in the rural areas or its absence in the cities. All in all, the question of labour—the potential of its absorption in the city space or the challenges that it may face due to the changing nature of the cities—occupies a central position in the associated discourses.

Although the primary concern of this paper is not to contradict this centrality, I am curious as to how this centrality is constituted and sustained in these discourses, especially at a time when the cities are becoming less a space of production and more a space of circulation and restrictive elitism in the form of gentrification. The aspect of restriction is particularly important, as migration has always been considered by the "original" residents as a sort of infringement of the socioeconomic sovereignty of the city space. At one level, the migrants seem to "take away" the means of economic sustenance from the locals, and on the other, they are prone to "violate" the established social and cultural norms of urbanity. The current conceptualisation of the city space as a "gated community," manifested in various strategies of "gentrification," makes good use of these axes of fear, discomfort, and embarrassment. Though migration to the cities, induced by the hope of finding jobs, has not stopped, it has not increased; however, some cities like Mumbai or Delhi tend to attract more people than others like Kolkata.

There may be many reasons why a person chooses to move to a particular city, the foremost being the distance between the place of origin and that of migration. However, as in the case of Mumbai, this reason is often overturned by other considerations like the probability of finding a job in that city, its cosmopolitan environment, the chances of finding suitable places to settle in, etc. All these considerations add to the pull-factor of migration. The decision to migrate is also influenced by the push-factors, where the poverty and other distresses (like political turmoil) in the place of origin, force a person to explore the idea of relocation. The usual explanations for a declining rate of migration to Kolkata focus on both the push- and pull-factors.

The chief reasons for this decline are described as follows: (i) the reduction in employment opportunities in the city following closing down of many factories and industrial complexes; (ii) the growing competitiveness of local residents against the migrant workers; (iii) the "successful" implementation of the land reform measures in the state; (iv) the improvement in the networks of transport and communication has led to workers commuting daily to the city rather than settling in it. Two more points can be added to this set of explanations: (i) the shifts in urban policy geared to transform factory spaces into real estate properties; and (ii) the changes in the conventional

forms of labour in the city space. I believe that these two factors are crucial to understand the "labour question" in connection with migration practices in contemporary Kolkata.

I shall begin with the last point. Rajesh Bhattacharya and Kalyan Sanyal (2011) have argued that with the development of "new towns" around and adjacent to the old cities as more technologised centres of capitalist accumulation, a "bypass approach" has been introduced in the discourses of urbanisation in India, and has simultaneously given birth to new "immaterial" forms of labour disconnected with the earlier regimes of urban regeneration. Taking a clue from Hardt and Negri's definition of immaterial labour as "labour that creates immaterial products, such as knowledge, information, communication, a relationship or an emotional response," thriving on the conditions of aestheticised urbanity, Bhattacharya and Sanyal point out that the old metropolitan centres fail to accommodate these new forms of labour as the "presence of a large informal economy" hampers complete "gentrification" of the city space (2011: 43, 42). As a result, the construction and expansion of new towns have to bypass the old cities and mark out a space of their own. They extend Sanyal's own theory of "postcolonial capitalism" (Sanyal 2007), characterised by the distinction between "need economy" and "accumulation economy," to these new towns and show that these two apparently disjointed sectors are connected by an "economic logic" of "survival circuit:"

> If new towns are built by displacing peasants, rural and peri-urban petty producers as well as old industries whose workers lose jobs and lack the skills for immaterial production in the global circuit, the presence of a survival circuit in the new towns implies that a need economy (a production economy that supplies subsistence material goods as well as low-end services) must emerge for the social reproduction of labourers in the survival circuit (Bhattacharya and Sanyal 2011: 44).

This argument is interesting for two reasons. One, Bhattacharya and Sanyal seem to forge a structural relationship between need economy and accumulation economy, where a mutually dependent circuit of social reproduction is required to sustain the urban machine (the apparatuses and networks of urban expansion). Two, by virtue of this structurality, one may argue that the relationship between need economy and accumulation economy becomes much more complex than what was previously held by Sanyal—the one of constitutive externality.

However, it may also appear from this essay that Bhattacharya and Sanyal want to demonstrate the case of new towns as an exception which "bypasses" the "normal" course of regenerative urbanisation and gain an exclusive identity. The new towns are exceptional in absorbing the informal need economy into networks of capitalist expansion through the backdoor of survival logistics; though the development of new towns as a site of immaterial labour is necessary, precisely because the old metropolises cannot afford complete gentrification (total expulsion of the informal sector and material labour). Notwithstanding the tautological framework, this logic of exception does not allow the old cities to have a similar structural relationship between accumulation economies and need economies.

Moreover, it forecloses the possibility of any such relationship by describing the failure of the old cities to manage the informal economy as a pretext for the development of new towns.

I think that the strength of this essay lies elsewhere. The exclusivity of the new towns, if any, resides in the novelty of their mechanisms of accumulation. Bhattacharya and Sanyal mention this in passing, but they do not emphasise the exact strategies by which they are able to expand their territories and exploit labour and capital. A more comprehensive approach can be found in another study on the development of the Rajarhat Township in the vicinity of Kolkata, where the authors show how the questions of livelihood, resistance, and capitalist accumulation are intricately linked with each other (Dey, Samaddar and Sen 2013). Even though the official narratives of construction of these townships give the impression of starting from ground-zero, they actually make it happen by effacing the rooted histories of numerous, closely-knit life practices and claims. The "urban dystopia" of these new towns is such that they absorb and abate the most virulent instances of resistance in the name of a spatial vacuum, strategically manufactured through various coercive mechanisms and consent-building exercises.

6 Recycling the Urban

Now the question is: how far does this practice of effacement get repeated in the old towns? If we go by the spirit of Bhattacharya and Sanyal's essay, we may arrive at the conclusion that there is a marked distinction between the respective accumulation networks in the old and new towns. I agree with this argument only partially. There are many evidences that a similar network of dystopic accumulation is operative in old towns like Kolkata, but these networks cannot be actualised to their full potential due to certain practical/political constraints. One of them is of course the geographical limits of the city. Unlike the new towns, the old cities cannot grow horizontally. Also, any attempt to apply coercive means to appropriate urban land within the city is faced with serious civil society activism, infused with middle class nostalgia over the lost glory of its socio-cultural-economic legacy. All these add to the difficulties of absolute effacement of collective histories and memories of dwelling in the city. I think that the strategies of accumulation take a slightly different route in the case of old cities. Besides continuous attempts to create spatial vacuums by enforcing eviction of the so-called "illegal" occupants of "public space," many strategies of negotiating with the city space have come about in the last few decades, including that of recycling urban land pointing directly towards real estate speculation.

Let us cull out a few examples. In 2005, the Nagarik Mancha brought out a report on the locked-out factories in Kolkata (Nagarik Mancha 2005). The report chronicled a list of cases where factory lands were turned into real estate properties with some encouragement from the government. The list includes STM, formerly a factory complex located in Kankurgachi and owned by a sitting Member of Parliament from Krishnanagar, which is now the site of a luxury apartment complex named "Orchid Towers" and Bangodaya Cotton Mill,

owned by the Peerless Group, which itself has made a foray into the real estate business and constructed a housing complex named "Peerless Abasan" on the abandoned factory land (Nagarik Mancha 2005: 27, 29). Similarly, the Annapurna Glass Factory was locked out and turned into Ekta Heights, another apartment complex. Even the Jadavpur TB Hospital was closed down by the government, and its land was sold off to the realtors (Nagarik Mancha 2005: 40). At first glance, these instances look familiar. Is this not the same way how land is acquired by the government or private agencies and auctioned in the market to fetch the best price?

But it is not quite the same. In this case, the constructions on the lands of locked-out factories give birth to a new informal economy replete with interspersed networks of contractors, labourers, and middlemen. In a way, this is a moment of formal subsumption, where the closed circuits of capital are refurbished to accommodate the massive in-flow of a dispossessed, disgruntled labour force. If in the case of new towns, the older regimes of "subsistence" production were dislodged and later absorbed in the circuit of capitalist accumulation through survival networks of mutual dependency, here the "already" discarded means of capitalist production are revaluated to suit the demand of the day. In that sense, it resolves the paradox presented (perhaps unintentionally) by Bhattacharya and Sanyal. In the old cities, the recycling of capital (including previous and subsequent investments in land) paves the way for an informal economy whose effacement (in the form of gentrification) is not only impossible but also harmful for the continuing saga of capitalist accumulation.

The link between migration and informality in urban labour market is best explicated in Ranabir Samaddar's words when he talks about the "context where a majority of urban migrant workers are engaged in construction industry, including clearing of lands and the waste disposal and recycling industry, including garbage clearance" (2009: 37). This informality, if we look closely, cannot be gauged without taking up the issues of urban settlement and rent. There are two aspects of the recycling of urban space that bring together the questions of labour and land: the existence and burgeoning of the "other" settlements for migrant workers; and the revaluation of the urban properties as an effect of recycling.

As we have seen in a previous section, the Thika Tenancy Act of 1981 tended to "formalise" the poor-income urban settlement practices. By identifying itself as the universal landlord and initiating a hereditary network of rent extraction (both house and land rents), the government managed to distinguish between "legal" bustees and "illegal" squatter colonies—between permanent structures which could not be moved easily and non-permanent habitations which were always under the threat of eviction. Although the term "bustee" is loosely used in public discourses, in the official documents, it is defined as a settlement registered under the act. It is also provided with basic civic amenities like water, latrines, and electricity by the municipal authority (N Kundu 2003). Conversely, the slums which are not registered under the act may be declared "illegal" by the government and slum dwellers can be

evicted at whim. Usually, these colonies are not entitled to municipal services.

The distinction between registered bustees and unregistered ones becomes pertinent with the arrival of new generation of migrants. It is difficult for the new migrants to find shelter in the registered bustees. Eventually, they secure a place to stay in the unregistered squatter colonies, most of which are said to be built on the land acquired by the government. Sometimes, there are alternative arrangements made by the contractors themselves. For example, most of the construction workers in the city spend their nights at the site of construction, under the fragile roof of the half-finished buildings. But these arrangements are temporary and contingent on securing jobs at a particular site. As revealed by some studies, there are many instances of workers remaining "shelterless" for a long period of time, sleeping on the pavements of the city, looking for employment, and barely making a living (Jagannthan and Halder 1988).

At the same time, in the last few years, the policies of urban development in India have experienced some major shifts. The proper and complete implementation of the JNNURM requires repealing the urban land ceiling acts for improving "transparency and efficiency in land acquisition, which would encourage domestic and foreign investment in the real estate sector" (Ministry of Urban Development 2011). Although West Bengal is the only state which has not yet implemented this recommendation (World Bank 2013), the state government has already initiated its own drive for an environmentally "improved" Kolkata. In 2000, the Asian Development Bank sanctioned a loan for a project to stop environmental degradation in the Kolkata Metropolitan Area. Titled as the Kolkata Environmental Improvement Project (KEIP), its chief prerogative was to upgrade the sewerage and drainage networks by clearing out the city canals and adjacent areas. This plan called for the eviction of all slums located in those areas, although a promise of rehabilitating the inhabitants was made by the government (APDR 2012).

Subsequently, in 2002, Nonadanga, a place located on one side of the Eastern Metropolitan Bypass—a long stretch of road connecting the northern and the southern parts of the city—was selected as the location of rehabilitation. The distribution of low-income flats among the evicted slum dwellers started in 2006, but the conditions of these flats were questionable. Also, the promise of building infrastructure for medical and educational facilities in the area was ignored conveniently (APDR 2012).

Incidentally, some other settlements also came up in the area following the initiative of rehabilitation. These settlements were not registered under the act of 1981, but the government initially did not object to their construction. Two of these bustees were called Shramik Colony (the colony of labourers) and Majdur Palli (the locality of workers) respectively. Some of the inhabitants of these new bustees also hoped to find a place in the apartments constructed for rehabilitating people. On 11 March 2012, KMDA directed the people in Shramik Colony and Majdur Palli to vacate the land within 24 hours. On 30 March, three bulldozers of the KMDA barged into the area and demolished most of the 139 houses in the two settlements (APDR 2012: 1–7).

Apart from putting an end to the myth that Kolkata is more hospitable to its migrants than other metropolises, the case of Nonadanga demonstrates a crucial feature of today's migration and settlement practices—the introduction of a permanent state of non-permanence. Earlier, the definitions of migration and bustee settlement were juxtaposed against each other by a historicist logic of origin which, at the same time, evoked a sense of permanence for those who had been living in the city since at least before the passing of the Thika Tenancy Act. The incidents of eviction (either by consent in the canalside bustees or by force in Nonadanga) also broke this illusion and rendered everybody equally vulnerable, whether entitled to rehabilitation or not. Most of the people evicted from Nonadanga, an Association for Protection of Democratic Rights (APDR) report tells us, used to live elsewhere in the city (APDR 2012: 1–9). Some of them had to leave their earlier settlements because of the increase in rent and other expenditures, and some were evicted by the authorities for "encroaching" on government's properties. There were some families who even got flats under the scheme of rehabilitation but could not stay there because of the small size of flats (the floor area was between 150 and 200 square feet). Ultimately, they built their own huts in the nearby bustees. The same report informs us that the occupants of these settlements belonged to the lowest tier of the city's informal economy, working as carriers of goods, rickshaw-pullers, contract labourers, and housemaids.

7 Conclusions

There is no doubt that the city cannot survive without these services and, in many ways, they are intrinsically connected to the economies of urban recycling. Complete disposal of this workforce is not a feasible option for either the government or corporate capital. However, the economy of recycling of land and labour often requires unsettling the status quo and devising new mechanisms of extraction. The necessity of clearing out the land in Nonadanga is explained in a KMDA document published in early 2012 inviting "Expression of Interest" for disposal of bulk land for "comprehensive development:"

KMDA has in its possession a prime parcel of land at Nonadanga, near Ruby General Hospital along the Eastern Metropolitan Bypass (EMBP).... KMDA has more or less 80 acres of land, including a few water bodies lying in between, at this site. [...] KMDA proposes to dispose off the entire area including water bodies for comprehensive development involving commercial usages as may be permissible under the relevant Land Use and Development Control Plan (LUDCP) and building rules. The commercial usages may include, but not be limited to, residential complexes, star/budget hotels, shopping malls, multiplexes, restaurants, serviced apartments, recreational facilities and institutional uses (KDMA 2012: 4).

KMDA's definition of "comprehensive development" takes establishment of real estate hubs and recreational facilities more seriously than providing shelter to the poorest section of the society. But this does not appear shocking anymore, especially after the so-called "liberalisation" of the Indian economy. Even the same KMDA document clarifies, "With onset of the regime of economic liberalisation in the Indian economy since

the early 1990s, the need for an expanded volume of trade in diversified areas was strongly felt" (KDMA 2012: 3). But this "diversification" of trade interests cannot take place without simultaneous reappropriation of the informal economy as a contributing factor in revaluation of the urban space. One, therefore, cannot help but notice the convenient coincidence of eviction and call for investment.

However, this coincidence should not be understood only in terms of accumulation by dispossession. We must not overlook the fact that Nonadanga emerged as a potential location for real estate investment only after it was chosen as a site of rehabilitation of the slum dwellers from different areas of the city. They could fulfil the demand for low-end services in the area once it was "developed." It is of course difficult to estimate how consciously the government made this connection, but this is more an indicator of a structural relationship between recycling of urban land and informalisation of the city workforce than an instance of a conscious political decision. This structural relationship was reinforced once again in the statement made by the urban development minister of West Bengal,

where he stated in clear terms that the eviction in Nonadanga would continue but the displaced population who had been living there for more than six months would be rehabilitated under the project "Basic Services to the Urban Poor" (BSUP), which is a part of the JNNURM programme itself (APDR 2012: 10).

This constant flux between eviction and rehabilitation, dispossession and investment, settlement and unsettling, formalisation and informality has become a permanent marker of urbanisation in India. In this paper, I have tried to show how this regime of apparently unstable governmentality stabilises at the moment of conjunction between land and labour, and their potentials of being recycled through an intricate network of various policies and modes of appropriation and revaluation. The narratives of postcolonial capitalism are unfolding in many atypical conditions, unprecedented contexts, and uncharted territories. The task at hand, therefore, is to explore these narratives from the vantage point of a novel theoretical framework and study the issues of urbanisation, settlement practices, and labour with more appreciation of the contingencies of political rationalities of our time.

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