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Migration & the Urban Question in Kolkata

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Cities, Rural Migrants and the Urban Poor - I

Migration and the Urban Question in Kolkata

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2015

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Taking Refuge in the City: Migrant Population and Urban Management in Post-Partition Calcutta

Kaustubh Mani Sengupta *

This paper tries to lay bare the intertwined histories of rehabilitation of the refugees from East Pakistan and the development of the city of Calcutta in the initial decades after the partition of British India. Calcutta has attracted people from outside from its inception. Calcutta of the late-eighteenth century has been described as a 'contact zone', where people from various fields and countries, of varied descent, came to the city with their specific knowledge practices.[1] With the consolidation of the colonial rule, several classes of people flocked to the city—be it the quintessential salaried professionals or the *keranis*, the Marwari businessmen, the students from East Bengal or the upcountry labouring poor. It emerged as a cosmopolitan city *par excellence*. There were tensions among these varied groups, and each sought to define and create a city on its own terms. With the partition of the province in 1947, a new group of people came to the city to become its permanent residents. A new chapter commenced in the biography of the city. I will focus on the ways this new group sought to create a space for itself in the city and became a part of the everyday of the urban life.

The paper is divided into four sections. The first and the last section deal with broad issues of refugee rehabilitation and the condition of the city of Calcutta. In the first section, I will make an appraisal of the rehabilitation schemes of the government focusing on the way the refugees were categorised according to their background and previous occupation and what was the consequence of such a practice; the second and third section will focus on two particular groups of population—the Muslim population of the state and the women of the refugee families. The tension between the Hindu refugees and the Muslim residents of the state give us a glimpse of a complex situation and questions our understanding of violence and social justice. The third section will specifically focus on the women and the various training and job they took up to sustain themselves and their family. I will try to see if there were any changes in the location of women within the patriarchal society. In the final section, I will focus on the situation of Calcutta and how the city changed due to the massive influx of population in the initial years of independence.

Refugees and Rehabilitation

The refugees, coming from the eastern part of the erstwhile province of Bengal, spread all over West Bengal and in other parts of India. But a major concentration was in the greater Calcutta region,

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where many 'colonies' came up. These colonies were a novel and distinct spatial arrangement in the urban morphology. Most of the early refugees from east Bengal belonged to the upper or middle caste groups. They tended to gravitate towards the urban centres, more specifically to Calcutta. Almost 60 percent of the migrants up to 1949 were non-agriculturalists.[2] Acute housing problem forced them to erect squatter settlements on the fringes of the city. But waves of migrating people lashed on to the city and the state for the next decade. The massive increase in the population of the city took its toll on the urban infrastructure. There was acute food crisis, industrial disturbances, black-market activities and political agitation in the city during the late 1940s and the 1950s. In this cauldron of discontent, the refugees had to survive.

The government tried to deny the scale of the exodus at first, but by 1950 it realised the enormity of the situation and the hitherto policy of relief had to be shifted towards comprehensive programme of rehabilitation. On one hand, it viewed this large influx of population as a burden, but on the other, could not actually shake off the moral responsibility for this hapless bunch. It was caught between the two poles of providing relief and rehabilitation for the displaced person—which required money and land—and that of a programme of national development with its intensive five-year plans. The dominant strand of scholarship on rehabilitation policies of the West Bengal government clearly shows the apathy of the government in providing basic necessity of life in the government camps. The discourse of rehabilitation, it argues, smacked of insensitivity, lacked imagination and turned a blind eye towards the harsh realities of displacement.[3] In fact, in March 1948 the weekly report from Calcutta produced by the Deputy High Commissioner for the United Kingdom in India for the High Commissioner in Delhi mentioned that, "The Government of West Bengal are still vague as to how serious is their refugee problem and have announced that an office is to be established to collect information and provide help to the needy."[4] While the initial period was undoubtedly marked with much neglect, in the long run the issue of the migrant population was considered in the larger context of the development of the nation.[5] As the initial years of independent India passed by, the government realised that the East Bengal refugees were here to stay and were thus a part of the nation, though there was a hope that some of them might return to East Pakistan, especially after the Nehru-Liaqaut Pact of 1950. There was a problem of huge number, but still some of them were to be harnessed for the duty of the nation. The social welfare measures adopted looked to do that exactly. In fact, in its issue published on October 26, 1954, *The Economic Weekly* noted, "Rehabilitation of East Bengal refugees will not be easy. It will take time. It will not be completed or prove successful unless it is dovetailed into the West Bengal Government's plans for the encouragement of small townships and small-scale auxiliary industries. Even then, it is doubtful whether the problem can be solved satisfactorily without bringing about certain changes in the social and occupational pattern of West Bengal."[6]

Keeping in mind the class and caste composition of the refugees who came to West Bengal after 1950, the government put much stress on vocational training. The camp-dwelling refugees who were dependent on government doles were the prime targets of these vocational training programmes. A cornerstone of the rehabilitation plan was to categorise the refugee population in terms of their previous occupations. Thus, agriculturalists were to be settled in lands, if not available in West Bengal then in other states. This gave rise to the policy of dispersal. People were sent to other states or the Andaman Islands. In West Bengal, various agricultural colonies were established. The rehabilitation reports and various government pamphlets emphasised the point that the refugees were to be a labouring contributor to the society. Also, the huge influx of people from non-agricultural background flocking to urban areas needed to be rehabilitated through proper employment. The vocational training institutes were crucial in this respect. Many industrial training

institutes were opened in Calcutta and other urban centres of the state. But these efforts of the government could not address the entire refugee population. In the city, there were two kinds of refugee groups. First, the early migrants mostly from middle-class families, who established the refugee colonies, and the other group consisted of downtrodden population who fled during riots and took shelter either at Sealdah station or in various *bustees* in the city. The rehabilitation of this latter group was the main concern for the government. They were sent to various camps outside the city. But many deserted the camps due to the wretched condition and found their way back to the city. A large part of the migrants took up petty jobs in the city. With the sudden increase in the available manpower, the actual income received was often not enough to sustain the family in the city. The colony refugees were the vocal part of this group who could organize themselves to present a united front. The Left parties championed their cause and mobilised the refugees for various movements. As Prafulla Chakrabarti and Joya Chatterji have shown, demands of the refugees started to include the general urban poor to portray general class solidarity. This was important especially after the introduction of the Eviction Bill in 1951. I will discuss the implication of the Bill in the next section. But first let us look at one particular report put forward by a group of experts which clearly states the importance of merging the twin concern of rehabilitation and development. This was essential as conflict between the refugees and the erstwhile residents of the state was imminent. Discussion of the rehabilitation of the refugees often misses the condition of the poorer section of the population in the state. Matters become much more complicated if we take into account the situation of the Muslim population of the state. I will return to this issue when I discuss the Eviction Bill. Before that, I will persist a little with the rationale of refugee rehabilitation.

If we look at various propositions put forward by a variety of bodies, expert committees and the government, we can catch a glimpse of the mode of thinking regarding the rehabilitation of the refugees. The Committee headed by noted sociologist Radha Kamal Mukerjee categorically mentioned that,

> Although rehabilitation of Hindus from East Bengal will be our primary objective, the entire planning should be so devised and executed as to lead to the betterment of the social, economic and sanitary conditions of West Bengal as a whole. Such a planned development and utilisation of the resources of West Bengal will thus help both refugees and local inhabitants of west Bengal.[7]

This was essential and was predicated on the recent events of the subcontinent. Conflicts between various groups of people—be it based on religion, region, language—were rife. The planners were aware of the situation. The resident population of West Bengal started feeling that they were getting a raw deal in the development regime of the new nation. The committee mentioned that, "In the absence of a planned integration between refugee rehabilitation and general economic progress of West Bengal, we may sow the seeds of fresh cleavages and conflicts in a poverty and disease-ridden, truncated state, with a density of rural population and visible and invisible unemployment for greater than anywhere in the Indian Union." Not only the recent partition of the province; images of earlier episodes of human tragedy were also very much present in the minds of the planners: "Misplanned or unplanned migration and settlement of many lakhs of refugees may, under adverse agricultural conditions, even repeat the tragedy and horror of the last famine in West Bengal."[8] The Communist leader, Jyoti Basu mentioned in one of his speeches in the Assembly noted that:

> we find unfortunately [that] there are people on the Government side…who are against the East Bengal refugees…and that is why in certain districts of West Bengal…these gentlemen are going about and are trying to spread the poison of communalism on one hand and also to see that the differences between the East Bengal people and the West Bengal people are aggravated to the greatest extent. They are trying to explain to the West Bengal people that it is because lakhs of refugees have

> come into West Bengal that the West Bengal Government has been unable for the time being to solve the problems of the West Bengal people…We have found instance in certain of the working class areas in 24-Parganas, Hooghly, Calcutta and other industrial areas that, when there is a strike or threat of a strike by the workers in the particular industrial areas, the big owners of the factories, they immediately spread the propaganda amongst the striking workers or amongst the people threatening the factory owners with a strike, that, if they did so, immediately they would see to it that the refugees were brought in to break their strikes…[9]

Keeping aside the hyperbole, we can nevertheless assume the precarious condition of the working poor. With the influx of refugees, there was no dearth of cheap labour or hired goons. And they posed a major threat not only to the Bengali-speaking population, but also to the erstwhile migrant population of the city, who came from other parts of India to work in the jute mills and factories in and around Calcutta. In fact, there were a series of strikes in different factories and mills of the state during this period. Jute, tea and manufacturing industries hit a major roadblock.[10]

Reconstructing the countryside was important. Village-based farming, fisheries, and small industries were given priorities. Population from rural background comprised major part of the refugee population. For this group, reclaiming cultivable waste-lands scattered throughout the state, was suggested by the committee of Radha Kamal Mukherjee. Rehabilitation of middle-class urban population put much problem for the planners. Agriculturalist families or fishermen were put in comprehensive plans for rural development, agricultural colonies, and new townships. However, migrant teachers, lawyers, doctors, tradesmen and others—named as 'non-productive refugees' in the report—were hard to put in any rehabilitation scheme. And they mostly flocked to Calcutta and neighbouring regions. The condition of the city deteriorated rapidly in the post-partition period. We will discuss the urban situation in subsequent section. First, let us look at the ways city and the hinterland was thought to be integrated in a sustainable system. The Rehabilitation Board commented that, "The entire hinterland of Calcutta within a radius of fifty miles is today agriculturally 'depressed'. Factories, workshops and even small-scale industries are concentrated in Calcutta with her appalling congestion, squalor, disease and mortality."[11] The Board recommended a union of development for both the urban and rural areas in an integrated manner: "Agricultural recovery in the depressed areas within the orbit of Calcutta requires not merely an over-all agricultural plan into which the agricultural rehabilitation of refugees has to be integrated but also a co-ordinated Master Plan of Industry, Transport and Power Development so that the rural economy may not been victimised but integrated into the urban economy."[12] A chain of inter-related actions was predicted. Industries in the countryside for the rehabilitation would need extensive electrification. DVC and Mayurakshi multipurpose river projects would help in developing hydel-power projects. And this, the Board hoped, "will facilitate a new orientation of rural-urban relations on a planned basis."[13] Rural-urban, resident-refugee integration could be argued for and put in a comprehensive plan. But these technocratic solutions often did not take into account the social identity of a person. Often the conflicts were not between the refugee and the residents, but between *Hindu refugees* and *Muslim residents*. The next section deals with this problem. It will give us a glimpse of the relation between the migrants and the resident poor; also, it will illuminate the conflicts between the notions of violence and social justice.

Muslims in the Maelstrom

What happened to the Muslim population of the city at this point? The logic of partition made their position precarious in India. Muslims going to Pakistan and then returning to West Bengal has become a recurrent feature of this area. But to come back to India, as Ranabir Samaddar has argued,

they had to *negate* Partition and live in ghettos as their 'homeland' could not provide the sustenance.[14] Samaddar's study of the Metiabruz area of Calcutta shows how the Muslim population negotiate with the situation and are engaged in a variety of vocation—be it a tailor, a rickshaw puller or casual labour. He offers a nuanced image of the place when he writes, "Employment of migrant labour, a thriving garment industry, virtual absence of any public utility services, riots, communal tensions, criminalization and lumpenization belong to an integrated scenario."[15] How did this situation come into being in the city of Calcutta and its neighbouring areas? What changed during the initial years after partition?

The 1951 Census of India mentions that Sukea Street, Colootola, Fenwick Bazar, Maniktola, Belliaghat, Belgachia and Cossipur wards had a mixed population of Hindus and Muslims before the riots of 1950. The *bustees* were deserted during the riots, but "[b]etween December 1950 and March 1951 almost all these deserted areas were rehabilitated and filled up by large settlements of Displaced Hindus from East Bengal in certain wards and large blocks of resettled Muslims from various parts of the city and Howrah in others. *They finally sorted out no more in mixed but clear-cut blocks of communities*."[16] Tension between the Muslim population and the refugees were pretty evident in these years. Hiranmoy Bandyopadhyay writes that almost five thousand refugees who were given shelter in the government camp at Rupasreepalli in Ranaghat left it and settled down at the deserted houses of the Muslims who left during the riots. This gives us an idea of the magnitude of this phenomenon.[17] Joya Chatterji in an essay shows how the century-old graveyard of the Muslim at Selimpur was slowly encroached upon by the refugee settlement.[18]. With Partition, and influx of refugees, the Muslim population, especially the poorer section, that stayed back faced immense difficulty in maintaining their live and livelihood. "They now lived in cramped ghettos filled to overflowing alongside fellow Muslims from other, more dangerous parts of the city. The urban Muslim communities which in the early part of the century had been 'distinct sub-communal groups', became more ethnically diverse as they absorbed co-religionists who belonged to a variety of ethnic groups, who had lived by different crafts and who followed different sects."[19] Most could not stand this altered scenario, and there was a sharp change in their vocations, with alteration in their hereditary trades and status associated with them. Some tried to stay afloat by managing to get an education for themselves and getting a job. But it was not easy to survive in such a situation and the shadow of 1947 loomed large in their lives, as Samaddar has mentioned in his study.

The conflict between the refugees and the Muslims came into sharp relief during the introduction of the Eviction of Persons in Unauthorised Occupation of Land Bill, 1951. The riots of 1950 in Calcutta witnessed major changes in the social morphology of the city. Large sections of Muslim population left or had to leave their homes and took shelter in the 'Muslim' areas. Ostensibly, the new Bill was to restore the property of the landlords that were unlawfully occupied by persons posing as 'refugees'. The objective of the Bill, according to the government, was "to uphold law and order…namely, to secure possession to those persons who are the owners of trespassed lands and to provide for the eviction of those persons who are in unauthorised occupation of land."[20] The second objective was to provide alternative lands to the refugees who had occupied large portions of vacant or unattended spaces, "so that they may be rescued from their present precarious position and may be rehabilitated on a stable basis."[21] Three types of lands were squatted upon, mentioned Bidhan Roy: "One is the land of a person who may be a Hindu, a Muslim or a person of any religion, which land is the only means of his livelihood or it gives him the only shelter that he possesses in West Bengal….The second type may be a small land which is the only source of income of a person—it may be a small garden with a small tank in it which gives him that amount of produce which keeps his body and soul together….The third group…are the lands which are so costly that it

would not be possible for the Government to acquire them even on behalf of the refugees by giving the owners price of the lands…"[22] In the first two cases the government was certain that lands should be given back to the original owners. In the third case, Roy opined that if any refugee wanted to stay on that ground by paying adequate compensation—a sum that the government was not capable of paying as these were 'costly' lands—then a loan could be arranged to be paid in 30 or 40 years. The Bill did not intend to uproot *bona fide* refugees one more time; rather many unscrupulous persons were taking advantage of the chaotic situation of the province and illegally occupied vacant lands or houses thereby denying the owners their rightful claims. The Communist leaders in the Assembly saw sinister plan of government against the refugees in the provisions of the Bill. They vociferously argued that the only motive of the government was to secure the interests of large landholders and capitalists in expense of the hapless refugees. By their sheer determination and unbridled enthusiasm, the refugees build their own houses and began a new life in West Bengal. The colony-people did not wait for the government for their rehabilitation. The Communists argued that the government was turning a blind eye to the plight of the refugees by succumbing to the pressure of the landlords. This was no time for upholding the sanctity of private property, even if the Constitution of the country says so, thundered Jyoti Basu in the Assembly. In no uncertain terms, he said, "I for one am against this Bill and I should say no private property can be more sacred than human life."[23]

However, the politics of the time could not put a veil of class war on the religious angle of this Bill. If, as the Communists were demanding, no *bona fide* refugees were to be removed, and as the Government was also muttering the same thing in certain cases, some sections of the population were bound to be discriminated against. The Muslim members of the Assembly brought in new questions regarding right of property, displacement and citizenship. The Hindu refugees took hold of large portions of lands and houses left unattended by the Muslims due to riots and fear of persecution. They did not cross the border to become the nationals of another country but remained within the dominion of India. What will happen to their rights as citizens who owned property, inquired the Muslim members. Janab Md. Khuda Bukhsh, MLA from Berhampore, said, "Sir, I am agitated and I confess it that I am agitated with a feeling of frustration that the Muslims' cause has gone by default. Sir, when the Bill was first brought the emphasis was on the rehabilitation of the displaced Muslims, but now, Sir, I find that after the opposition given to this Bill the emphasis is entirely shifted and shifted from the rehabilitation of the displaced Muslims to the rehabilitation of the Hindus coming from across the border."[24] He wanted to know what will be the fate of the premises owned by the Muslims and how will they be rehabilitated. Also, the amount and the method of paying any compensation were not clearly articulated in the provisions of the Bill. He argued that, "I have every sympathy for them as refugees but that is another thing." He went on: "Here we are talking about property and the rights thereof. I am speaking here of the lands of those Muslims of West Bengal which they had to vacate and to become displaced under force of circumstances, who could not just check the onslaught, the rush of the coming refugees and had to vacate their lands and seek shelter elsewhere. They have suffered, they have suffered greatly and for them there is no indication whatsoever what the Government propose to do."[25] For many, especially the Muslim members (as evidenced by the printed debates of the Assembly), the Bill was discriminating rightful citizens of India against the newly-arrived refugees. Janab Syed Badrudduja, MLA from Jangipur, appealed to the House saying that, "By all means provide as much money for them [the refugees] as is possible, provide them lands, provide them careers, opportunities, facilities, openings and whatever accommodation you can afford to them, but not at the cost of the people of this State….Let the Government of India open up their purse strings; let the refugees be

accommodated in the best possible manner—we would share their misfortunes. But no Government will perhaps tolerate any legislation of illegal possessions, no Government in the world will ever authorise unauthorised usurpation and occupation of other's land."[26] He continued, "It appears now that not merely *bona fide* refugees but *mala fide* refugees, genuine refugees, spurious refugees, real refugees, unreal refugees, exploiters of refugees, refugees who are being utilised as pawns in the political chess-board by unscrupulous politicians—they are all to be classed into one. Unscrupulous agitators and unscrupulous exploiters of refugees must all be classed together. In other words, there is no sanctity of property, and we are at the mercy of forces of darkness and destruction."[27] Sanctity of private property or the right of the citizen of India could not be more valuable than the basic value of human lives, argued Jyoti Basu. To him, the whole issue of compensation for lands taken by the refugees was unfortunate as he believed that the Constitution, which guarantees such right, was reactionary on this particular point. He was certain that there should be no question of any compensation for rich landlords, be it Hindu or a Muslim. But if so, as accorded by the Constitution, the government should pay, not the refugees.[28] In this situation, what would happen if the land belonged to a poor Muslim? This was an important question. To Basu, the answer laid in having open dialogue with the refugees and the Muslim of particular area. He recognised that a desperate communal situation was looming large: "For instance, if the Hindus have occupied particular lands or houses belonging to the Muslims and the Government comes with a police force and ask them to quit the lands or the houses and they use force to get rid of them from those lands or those houses, then I can tell them that no Muslim will go there, because they will be afraid that in this situation a communal frenzy will be roused."[29]

The Bill also raised several other issues. What will happen to the Muslim tenants? They did not own any land or house. These were poor Muslims residing in various parts of the city. Communal riots and general fear of the majority community forced them to evict their houses and take shelter in parks or hovels in certain localities like Park Circus, Metiabruz, Raja Bazar marked by the presence of their co-religionists. Post-partition Calcutta changed drastically in terms of its social composition. The influx of refugees is the more visible picture. We remain oblivious to the steady marginalization of the Muslim population.[30]

Women and Work

Camp and Colony-life were harsh on the inmates. It pushed men as well as women to 'come out' and look for a job. In the colonies, many women started teaching in the newly-established local colony schools. Education gave the women a way to move out and share a hand in the family's income.[31] When teachers came from outside the colony, this was a step toward establishing certain contacts with the rest of the city. This was an important matter as the refugee-identity carried pejorative connotation for a long stretch of time. Other than being teachers, women started to enter a variety of professional spaces, from merchant offices to roaming sellers. The historiography on partition in the East and rehabilitation policies often does not give much attention to the role of the women. Notable exceptions are the works of Gargi Chakravartty and Uditi Sen, and the collection of essays in the volumes *Trauma and the Triumph*. While Chakravartty sees genuine emancipation of women in the post-partition years due to their activities as bread-winners of families, public appearances in meetings and processions and the role played in Left movements. For her, these experiences created an image of the Bengali women as "self-reliant, independent…who could challenge the rigidity of patriarchal domination."[32] This is a dominant mode of argument among scholars. Indeed, women were more visible in the public arena of the city. They bent gender norms within a family in taking up

jobs in offices, often due to the fact that male members lost their jobs and had to sit in the home. This role reversal obviously had inherent tensions built into it.[33] But this social role enables us to cast women as not only the victims of male violence and displacement; rather she was the active agent of her subjectivity. Partition of Bengal, in this sense, emancipated Bengali middle-class women. Jasodhara Bagchi mentions that partition accelerated the earlier trends of the twentieth century of abolishing the "purdah that had confined the Bengali *bhadramahila* to her *antahpur* (private quarters)…" To her, "The same stroke that brought this flood of uprooted marginalised women to Calcutta also opened the door to many new opportunities for Bengali middle-class Hindu women. They came out of the private domain of domesticity and child rearing to take up public duties."[34]

For the women in camps, the situation was different. They had to depend on the government schemes to get training and then a job. An important aspect in this case was the way the inmates of the camps was categorised and reorganised. In 1955, according to the need of the population, the government arranged the refugee settlements as Permanent Liability [PL] Camps, Homes and Infirmaries. The rationale behind this reorganisation often had an important bearing for the future education and training of the inmates. A Committee was formed to look after the reorganisation of the camps, PL institutions and Homes for the displaced persons, especially the aged, and infirm 'unattached' women and their dependents. For the purpose of training as well as for accommodation and maintenance, the Committee did not hesitate to recommend splitting up a family where the members did not share a 'close' relationship. Also, the committee proposed that family background was to be taken into account while selecting the subject of training. They recognised the fact that for a person staying in a camp, tradition and family occupation often did not matter or that camp-life had 'destroyed' their vocation, "but even then perhaps something of them still remains."[35]

Women up to 35 years of age were encouraged to have basic education which would help them in their vocational training. For meritorious girls, a condensed course for the school final examination was proposed so that they can pass the examination in 2/3 years and take training to become teachers, nurses, or do village-level work. If they went to higher level schools and colleges, provision was made for learning short-hand or type-writing.[36]

One of the chief aims of the committee for the reorganisation of the homes for the displaced persons was "to make them self-sufficient."[37] The committee specifically looked into the ways women could gain employment through proper training. But they had their assumptions regarding the class of women who were thought proper for the vocational training schemes. In their view, "The women from middle class families with sons above the age of ten form a class altogether, and their rehabilitation will be a difficult task."[38] They recommended that these women should be given built houses in government colonies located in industrial areas where they can go to small industries for their job. Their children could go to the local schools for their education and "later get absorbed in the industries sponsored by Government where preference will be given to the boys and girls of the middle class refugee settlers."[39] The members observed that, "In the existing factories, in the industrial area it has been found that the refugees have no place as most of the non-Indian employers are not in favour of appointing Bengali Hindu labourers but they recruit labourers from Behar, Madras and Orissa and prefer Bengali Muslims."[40]

I will look at two proposals of Central Advisory Committee which sought to train the women of the Homes and Infirmaries in various crafts so that they could gain an occupation. The reading of the propositions put a question to the discourse of emancipation of women in post-partition period and complicates our understanding of the position of women in the Bengali society. Class character of the refugee women determined their ability of learning and training. The advisory

board formed to look after women's rehabilitation formulated a scheme for the training of women in several non-official organisation receiving government grants. They proposed various craft courses and the duration of such courses. The following subjects were agreed upon in a meeting on 5 July 1955:[41]

Subject	Maximum period of training
1. Tailoring including Lady Brabourne diploma	3 years
2. Weaving, bleaching and dyeing	2 yrs.
3. Spinning and weaving (khadi)	1 yr.
4. Sebika [care-giver]	1 yr
5. Domestic aid training	6 months
6. Type writing	9 months
7. Junior teachers' training	2 yrs
8. Senior teachers' training	1 yr
9. Dyeing and printing	1 yr
10. Hosiery knitting with machine	1 yr
11. Soap making	1 yr
12. Book binding	6 months
13. Condiments and paper making	6 months
14. Compositor work	2 yrs
15. a. Laundry work	6 months
b. Domestic service (other than cook)	1 yr
16. Catering, confectionary (sweet-making, management of restaurant)	1 yr
17. Embroidery, needle works, machine embroidery	1 yr
18. Nursing governess	1 yr
19. Gardening with goat-keeping, cow rearing or poultry	6 months

The tasks were carefully chosen. Women were capable of doing these jobs. However, within two years the Committee observed that even after due course of training inmates of the Homes were not able to gain any substantial job. They were still occupying the Homes. Since the earlier proposition did not work the government thought of another set of training. This time the course would not require the women to go out of the domestic sphere to work. The idea now was to introduce "a well thought out course of intensive training in the trade/profession of "Domestic Service & Attendance"."[42] The duration of the course would be one year, and young boys (between 14 and 18 years) and widows (25 to 45 years) were to be chosen for the training. A draft syllabus was chalked out but each Home was given the freedom to draft it according to their convenience. In that case, two considerations should be kept in mind during the framing of the syllabus, opined the Committee—first, the age group of the trainees should be kept in mind, and second, "the minimum standard of attainment at the end of the course should be as near as possible to that of tolerably good domestic servant…"[43] Let us have a quick look at the draft syllabus prepared by the Committee. It included preparation of beverages like tea, coffee, fruit juice and vegetarian as well as non-vegetarian food items; preparation of 2 to 3 Indian sweets; "planning and preparation of entire meals like breakfast lunches for different groups at various income levels". Cleaning the house, especially taking care of metals, glasswares, wood and leather items. To take care of books and clothes; knowing how to disinfect a room, eradication of mosquitoes, flies, bugs and other domestic vermins; and general training in the work of an Ayah, Bearer, or personal attendant.[44] After training in the Homes, a

period of apprenticeship should be done at any first class hotel/restaurant. The employment prospects for this kind of training were good. The Committee opined that, "It is a matter of common experience that in big cities like Calcutta a fully qualified and honest person an hope to get a salary of at least Rs. 40/- p.m. or Rs. 30/- p.m., with board and lodging for the work of a cook or a bearer, respectively."[45] With experience, the salary would also get higher. The Superintendents and the teachers were instructed "to impress upon the trainees these possibilities of a good and clean life and higher prospects for them in this field of service and employment."[46] This training course clearly articulated the terms in which the women were to be a part of the working group in the city. The creation of a space for working women was circumscribed by a particular idea of the private—a hotel or the residence of a wealthy person; they could participate in the domain of the workforce in terms of the boundaries etched by the state.

Uditi Sen remarks that the notion that only the women of the refugee families were engaged in professional work is misleading. She contends that "roughly a decade after partition, there was little difference in the extent of participation of refugee and non-refugee women in the workforce…"[47] This leads her to question the 'coming out' thesis. For her, refugee women's participation in the public life was conceptualised "in her traditional role as the mother and the nurturer."[48] When women were forced to earn due to the social and economic dislocation during partition, they still had to abide by the dominant 'sexual division of labour' prevalent in the society. Sen, echoing Rachel Weber's findings from the working women of Bijoygarh colony, suggests that "the coming out of women in the public sphere of politics and professional work did not lead to a transformation of social norms or any substantive change in the woman's role ideal role within the bounds of the family."[49] But one may add that once their presence was felt in the public life of the city, in the offices, on the streets, in the crowded buses and trams, in political rallies, the terms of their participation also started changing. The figure of the middle-class refugee woman trudging across the crowded streets often evoked patronising tone of sympathy; but perhaps it also ensured respectable terms of social justice.

Cauldron called Calcutta

> West Bengal lives up to its tradition. In Calcutta, today, troubles and problems are of daily occurrence. If the city's workers are not shouting slogans in streets, its *Marwari* population is staging a demonstration against cow slaughter. If, on any day, there is no labour trouble, one may be sure of something unseemly happening in the Assembly. If there is no social or economic or political disturbance, the city's attention may be diverted to the resumed influx of East Bengal refugees.[50]

This was in 1954. Seven years had passed since the partition. The tide of initial migration had dwindled. But problems remained and were multiplying fast. The policy of dispersing the refugees to neighbouring states or to the camps far from Calcutta did not succeed. People flocked back to the city posing new challenges to the authority. The city was ill-equipped to accommodate huge number of people within a short span of time. But with partition, Calcutta faced exactly that challenge.

Post-partition Calcutta changed rapidly. The city started to burst in its seams with the fast rise in its population. The initial years of independence were marked by severe bouts of cholera. Public health system was in a sorry state of affairs. Sealdah station, where refugees took shelter in lack of any other alternative, was described as 'a veritable hell on earth'. The image of 1943 famine years was repeatedly invoked in the newspapers. Something needed to be done to avoid that situation. New structures came up in the city with the refugee colonies and camps. Religious ghettos were formed with Muslims jostling in some pockets of the city. The Calcutta Corporation and the

Calcutta Improvement Trust had an uphill task in restoring some semblance of urbanity in these years. The city also became the theatre of keen political contest, with the Congress and the Left parties, especially the Communists, vying for public attention and support. The Communists initiated a distinct form of politics of agitation that shaped the urban political milieu of the state. Here, I will focus on the issues of housing and general density of population of the city during the first two decades after independence.

In his numerous writings on the condition of Calcutta, the chairman of Calcutta Improvement Trust [CIT] from 1950-60, Saibal Kumar Gupta repeatedly harped on the issues of housing, slums, and the general high density of population in the city. These features posed immense difficulty in the urban management system. Scarcity of land in the area within the city forced administrators to look into the neighbouring districts. New townships like Kalyani were built for the rehabilitation of the refugees. The concepts of greenbelts or satellite townships were part of the new planning regime of independent India, Chandigarh being the prime example. In West Bengal similar model was emulated with Kalyani or Durgapur. But they had their problems with various instances of delay and procrastinations. As a report by the West Bengal Commission for Legislation on Town and Country Planning (of which Gupta became the Chairman in 1961) mentioned,

> The years that were lost even after the principle was accepted, in obtaining financial appraisal to even the pettiest of expenditures raised costs, made capital scarce because of other demands that came up in the meantime and greatly reduced potential demand because the East Bengal refugees who could have settled there instead of squatting anywhere they liked had by then run through the slender stock of cash they had been able to bring with them. After that foreign exchange restrictions between India and Pakistan dried up a source which might have fertilised and improved town development in West Bengal at Kalyani or elsewhere.[51]

But migrants—not only from East Pakistan but from various other neighbouring states[52]—flocked to the city and wanted to stay as close to the urban centre as possible. This put stress on the urban infrastructure. Saibal Gupta was really perturbed with the massive proliferation of slums in the city. A survey conducted by the State Statistical Bureau in 1958-59 showed that out of three million people of Calcutta, almost 7 lakhs lived in slums covering an area of about 1700 acres. This meant, as Gupta summarizes, "about a fourth of the city's population lived in one-fourteenth of the city's land area at a gross density of over 400 persons per acre."[53] But it would be wrong to assume that only the downtrodden population jostled in these slums. Rather, as Gupta mentioned, these *bustees* "contain[ed] not merely labourers and menials but a cross-section of various social and economic strata. A fair proportion consist[ed] of families of… middle-class culture but lower middle-class income who have been forced into slum life through acute housing shortage. A large minority consist[ed] of migrants drawn into the metropolis in search of work and living in bachelor households without any hankering for the privacy of family life. In between are intermediate groups of varying income, cultural affinities and modes of living."[54] These hovels did not have proper sanitation or water-supply. They often encroached on public spaces and roads. With complex system of rent and lease, the ownership pattern and rent-economy of the slums were impossible to dismantle. New housing schemes were devised from time to time to replace these hutments from major areas of the city. But it was not deemed possible to do so entirely in a century's time. For Gupta, a realistic approach was to distinguish between "bustees that are livable and those that are not, so that the first could be improved and the second replaced."[55] But this policy of improvement and replacement needed major financial backing and long stretch of time. However, it was not only the slums that were the bane of the situation. Gupta viewed the introduction of high-rises in the city with trepidation. He writes, "A disturbing factor is the craze for sky-scrappers which are mushrooming in central and south Calcutta. Since supply of land cannot be increased and there is no

alternative commodity to serve the same purpose, the only way is to build high or dig deep. Whether tall buildings are economically justified or aesthetically satisfying I may discuss later, but there can be no doubt that they increase density whether the purpose is residential or commercial."[56]

Most of the publications on Calcutta during the latter half of the twentieth century designated it as 'an urban disaster'.[57] The rising population, limited employment opportunities and high density within the city's area put strain on the urban management system. The authorities tried in various ways to ameliorate the condition throughout the period but problems remained. And along with these infrastructural difficulties, there was the constant pressure from the refugee population, latent communal tension with increasing shrinkage of space for the Muslims, and the escalating number of up-country migrants. Law and order problem in the city mounted. Let us end with a rather graphic statement of Sivaprasad Samaddar, the Administrator of Calcutta Corporation in the seventies. He wanted to eradicate the 'illegal' hawkers from the footpaths. On being inquired regarding the new move, he said:

> I have got fortunately a copy of my recent advertisement. It says when a bud of a baby or a girl, may be a refugee girl, on her way home from the college, or the only earning father and husband of a family gets overrun by a speeding vehicle and the end is written in letters of blood because of the victim taking to the stony roads for want of a footpath to walk upon, whom should we pronounce guilty?[58]

To Samaddar, the answer was apparent: the hawkers, who occupied the footpath, forcing the pedestrian to take the stony road. I do not wish to delve into the complicated issues of informal economy and the rights of pedestrian or the legal implication of the matter. I will only highlight a curious feature of the advertisement. We know that many members of the refugee families took part in the informal sector of the city to earn a livelihood. Major sections of the hawkers came from these families. So the eviction of the hawkers meant a direct attack on this section. Questions were raised regarding the inhuman treatment of these people who had set up a honest business. To the administrator, however, these were illegal occupation and it was time to set the record straight. This was in 1975. I was drawn to this statement because of one interesting detail. Samaddar had imparted an identity on the pedestrian—*may be a refugee girl*—returning from college, who will secure the family's future; or, she might even be the only earning member of her family, who had to venture out for a job. The city was ready to accommodate the refugees, it was conscientious enough to understand the plight of the refugee families where social norms had to be bent to send the girl out of the house, but it was not prepared to tolerate activities that questioned the threshold of the legal/illegal, moral/immoral, ethical/unethical. There was no ambiguity in the minds of the administrators. But on each instance when law was invoked to revoke the practices of the populace, new challenges were posed. We have seen this in case of the Eviction Bill/Act XVI of 1951. The right to the space of the city was articulated in various ways where it was not easy to fathom how to dispense justice—through legal rights guaranteed by the Constitution or by invoking moral/ethical consideration?

Conclusion

The rehabilitation policies tried to sort out the problem of huge influx of population by linking them with the development regime of the nation. The dispersal scheme was an attempt to merge the two concerns, where the rehabilitation of the refugee was not the concern for any particular state, but the entire nation. But the rehabilitation of displaced population could not be done in a cold, technical manner. Even though the government took several measures to manage the refugees, the mode in

which they were implemented left much to be desired. West Bengal was going through several crises at this point of time. There was an acute food crisis coupled with rampant black-market activities, which often led to violent clashes in the city. The situation of the jute-industry was tense with frequent labour strikes. The Congress-led government was also very wary of the growing influence of the Left political parties among the refugees. The government needed to secure its own base keeping in mind the elections. This meant looking after the refugees as well as the erstwhile residents of the state. As an article in *The Economic Weekly* pointed out, "If employment is the main aim of the Second Plan, refugee rehabilitation is the main problem of West Bengal."[59] Initial reluctance to admit the enormity of the refugee crises only exacerbated the problem and gave a space to the dissenting voices to come together against the government. Over the years, the government through the recommendations of various committees came up with modified policies and schemes. But each new phase was accompanied by further challenges.

Notes

[1] See Kapil Raj, 'The Historical Anatomy of a Contact Zone: Calcutta in the Eighteenth Century', *Indian Economic and Social History Review,* vol. 48, no 1 (2011), 55-82. Raj borrows the notion of 'contact zone' from Mary Louise-Pratt's influential study on colonial travellers. For Pratt, a 'contact zone' is "the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict. [It] is an attempt to involve the spatial and temporal copresence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historic disjunctures, and whose trajectories now intersect... By using the term 'contact', I aim to foreground the interactive, improvisational dimensions of colonial encounters so easily ignored or suppressed by diffusionist accounts of conquest and domination. A 'contact' perspective emphasizes how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other. It treats the relations among colonizers and colonized, or travellers and 'travelees', not in terms of separateness or apartheid, but in terms of copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, often within radically asymmetrical relations of power." See M.L. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London:Routledge, 1992), 6-7, quoted in Raj, 'Historical Anatomy', 56.

[2] Nilanjana Chatterjee, 'The East Bengal Refugees: A Lesson in Survival', in Sukanta Chaudhuri ed., *Calcutta: The Living* City, vol. II (New Delhi: OUP, 1990), 72.

[3] Joya Chatterji, 'Right or Charity? The Debate over Relief and Rehabilitation in West Bengal' in Suvir Kaul (ed.) *The Partition of Memory: The Afterlife of the Division of India* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2001),74-110.

[4] Weekly Report from Deputy High Commissioner, Calcutta to the High Commissioner for the UK in India, New Delhi for the period ending 2 March, 1948, IOR/L/PJ/5/316, Oriental and India Office Collections, British Library, London, 2.

[5] See, for instance, Samir Kumar Das, 'State response to the refugee crisis: Relief and rehabilitation in the East', in Ranabir Samaddar (ed.) *Refugees and the State: Practices of Asylum and Care in India, 1947-2000* (New Delhi: Sage, 2003)106- 51; Uditi Sen, 'Refugees and Politics of nation-building in India, 1947-1971', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge (2009); Anwesha Sengupta, 'Breaking Up Bengal', Unpublished PhD Dissertation, JNU (2015), especially chapter 4.

[6] *The Economic Weekly* (26 October, 1975) 1175.

[7] 'Summary of Plan for Refugee Rehabilitation Drawn up by the Rehabilitation Board formed by the Bengal Rehabilitation Organisation', S. P. Mookerjee Papers, Ist Instalment, Sub File no. 38, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML), New Delhi.

[8] Ibid.

[9] West Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings (WBLA), vol. III, no. 3, 11 April 1951, 266-67.

[10] See Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *Decolonization in South Asia: Meanings of Freedom in Post-Independence West Bengal*, (New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2012).

[11] 'Summary of Plan for Refugee Rehabilitation Drawn up by the Rehabilitation Board formed by the Bengal Rehabilitation Organisation', S. P. Mookerjee Papers, Ist Instalment, Sub File no. 38, NMML, New Delhi.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ranabir Samaddar, *The Marginal Nation: Transborder Migration from Bangladesh to West Bengal*, (New Delhi: Sage, 1999) 135.
[15] *Ibid*. 144
[16] *Census of India 1951,* vol. VI, part III, p. xiv, cited in Joya Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition: Bengal and India, 1947-1967 (*New Delhi: CUP, 2008) 182, emphasis added.
[17] Hiranmoy Bandyopadhyay, *Udvastu* (Kolkata: Sahitya Sansad, 1970) 73.
[18] Joya Chatterji, 'Of graveyards and ghettos: Muslims in partitioned West Bengal, 1947-1967', in M Hasan and A Roy (eds), *Living Together Separately: Cultural India in History and Politics* (New Delhi: OUP, 2005), 222-249.
[19] Chatterji, *Spoils of Partition*, 193.
[20] 5 April 1951, *WBLA,* 1951, vol. III, no. 3, 124.
[21] Ibid.
[22] 5 April, WBLA, 129-130.
[23] 5 April, *WBLA,* 1951, vol. III, no. 3, 143.
[24] 5 April, Ibid, 138.
[25] Ibid, 139.
[26] 10 April, Ibid, 207.
[27] ibid, 209.
[28] ibid, 215.
[29] ibid, 217-18.
[30] See Anwesha Sengupta, 'Becoming a Minority Community: Muslims in post-partition Calcutta', in Sekhar Bandyopadhyay and Tanika Sarkar (eds.), *Calcutta: The Stormy Decades* (New Delhi: Social Science Press), 434-458.
[31] In the context of role of women in post-partition period in general, see, among others, Gargi Chakravartty, *Coming out of Partition: Refugee Women of Bengal* (New Delhi: Bluejay, 2005); Rachel Weber, 'Re(Creating) the Home: Women's Role in the Development of Refugee Colonies in South Calcutta', in J Bagchi and S Dasgupta (eds.), *The Trauma and the Triumph: Gender and Partition in Eastern India* (Kolkata: Stree, 2006).
[32] Chakravartty, *Coming Out,* 91.
[33] Satyajit Ray's film, *Mahanagar* (1963)*,* based on Narendranath Mitra's short story vividly captures this dilemma.
[34] Jasodhara Bagchi, 'Women in Calcutta: After Independence', in Sukanta Chaudhuri (ed.), *Calcutta: The Living City, Vol. II (*New Delhi: OUP, 1990), 42.
[35] Recommendations of the Committee for re-organisation of Camps, PL institutions and Homes for the displaced persons classed as the ages, Infirm unattached women and their dependents, [1955], File no. 7, Ashoka Gupta Papers, pp. 1-2, School of Women's Studies (SWS), Jadavpur University (JU).
[36] Re-organisation of homes and camps for un-attached displaced women or/and old and infirm displaced persons from East Pakistan, From: S L Dang, Under Secy to GoI, To: Secy, GoWB, Assam, Tripura, Bihar, Orissa, UP, Relief and Rehabilitation Deptt, No. 16 (1)/56-Relief, 9 February 1956, GoI, Ministry of Rehabilitation, Asoka Gupta Papers, SWS, JU, p. 4.
[37] Recommendations of the Committee for re-organisation of Camps, PL institutions and Homes for the displaced persons classed as the ages, Infirm unattached women and their dependents, [1955], File no. 7, Ashoka Gupta Papers, SWS, JU, p. 8.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.

[41] Minutes of the meeting of the sub-committee appointed by the advisory board for women's rehabilitation, 5 July 1955, File no. 7, Asoka Gupta Papers, SWS, JU.
[42] 'Supplementary agenda of the Meeting of the Central Advisory Committee to be held on 10th January, 1957', 28 December 1956, GoI, Ministry of Rehabilitation, Asoka Gupta Papers, Subject File no. 2, NMML, New Delhi.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Uditi Sen, 'Spinster, Prostitute or Pioneer? Images of Refugee Women in Post-Partition Calcutta', EUI Occasional Paper,
Available online. http://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/19216/MWP_Sen_2011_34.pdf?sequence=1 (last accessed 25 September, 2015), 15.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid., 16.
[50] *The Economic Weekly,* 26 October 1954, 1173.
[51] Cited in K C Sivaramakrishnan, 'Saibal K. Gupta as Chairman of CIT" in Partho Dutta (Ed.), *Improving Calcutta: Notes and Essays on Urban Government* (Kolkata: Bibhasa, 2000) 23-24.
[52] S N Sen in his social survey of Calcutta (1954-55 to 1957-58) clearly distinguishes between the two groups of migrants to the city. The refugees were clustered under the title 'Displaced Migrants'. Migration from other states remained high throughout the fifties, often exceeding the number of the refugees. The implication of this phenomenon is not studied in this essay. One must, however, note that the attention of the government as well as the Left political parties was mainly on the refugees during these years. What was the relationship between the non-Bengali migrants and the Bengali-refugees? This is an extremely important question and will probably churn up uncomfortable answers. See S.N.Sen, *The City of Calcutta: A Socio-economic Survey*, *1954-55 to 1957-58* , (Calcutta: Bookland Pvt, 1960).
[53] Saibal Kumar Gupta, 'An Approach to the Problems of Calcutta, [1966]', in *Improving Calcutta*, p. 136.
[54] Saibal Kumar Gupta, 'Slums', ibid, p. 48.
[55] Saibal Gupta, 'An Approach', ibid, p. 139.
[56] Ibid, p. 133.
[57] Manimanjari Mitra, *Calcutta in the Twentieth Century: An Urban Disaster* (Kolkata: Asiatic Book Agency, 1990); Sivaprasad Samaddar, *Calcutta Is* (Calcutta: Corp. of Calcutta, 1978); Jean Racine ed. *Calcutta 1981: The City, Its Crisis, and the Debate on Urban Planning and Development* (New Delhi: Concept Publ. Co, 1990).
[58] S. Samaddar, *Calcutta Is,* p. 167.
[59] Refugee Rehabilitation', *The Economic Weekly,* vol. 7, issue no 39, September 24, 1955, 1141.

Urban Planning, Settlement Practices, and Issues of Justice in Contemporary Kolkata

Iman Kumar Mitra *

Introduction: The Story of Calcutta/Kolkata

This paper seeks to bring together two aspects of life, livelihood, and habitation practices in the city – the phenomenon of urbanization and that of rural-to-urban migration. At the same time, it attempts to foreground the issue of social justice in the moments of juxtaposition of these two practices, materializing 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 urbanization and to initiate a scheme of research which would explore the politics of defining and stabilizing this location and find out its implications in the area of social justice for the urban poor.

This particular area of justice pertains both to the incidence of violence on the so-called 'outsiders' to the city 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 entail, in the long run, various disturbing questions as to the politics of identity formation and construction of authentic urban experience. It is important in this respect to situate and contextualize these incidents of physical and socio-cultural violence in the moments of conjunction of migration and urbanization practices.

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 became one of the most sought-after locations for migration from different parts of the country during the Raj. Even after the 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 task was performed with a strong suggestion of cultural chauvinism mixed with xenophobic impatience.

That the migrants in the city often fall prey to xenophobic rage of the locals is common knowledge; it is a well-researched area where the attacks on the lower rung of the migrant workers in

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urban and semi-urban settings by the cadres of militant political and cultural organizations are documented and studied in detail.[1] However, not much has been written on the connection between these parochial sentiments and the protocols of urban planning and spatial reconfiguration of the city in the last two decades following 'liberalization' of the Indian economy. As we shall see, this connection has a historical foundation predating the latest urban renewal programmes like JNNURM.[2]

The scholarship on the relationship between migration and the modes of urbanization in post-liberalization India does not take stock of this historical foundation. Most of these studies focus 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.[3] Also there are writings on the exclusionary nature of urbanization in India and how official policies and programmes exude an urgency to 'modernize' the cities at the cost of massive dislocation and dispossession.[4] 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.

A Historical Overture

One may encounter flashes of this way of thinking in some of the past studies on urbanization. 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.[5] Apart from preparing intricate land-use maps of the city on the basis of Assessment Records of Calcutta Corporation from 1911 to 1961, the objective of the study was to understand how the urban landscape was shared by the inhabitants of the city, divided into a range of 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. His study clearly shows that even as early as in the 1910s and '20s, the city space of Calcutta 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 gives out a sense of curiosity to grasp 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 other religious and ethnic communities).[6] Then he observed presence of at least four types of Hindu Bengalis in the city – (1) commercial or artisan castes; (2) upper castes; (3) scheduled castes; and (4) refugees from East Pakistan with a distinctively separate 'social identity.'[7] The non-Bengalis included everyone else – the language groups like the Oriya speakers who were mostly involved in plumbing, gas, and electrical works, or the Hindi speaking labourers who hailed from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh and concentrated in the industrial area of the city. Often they had to change their location after incidents of violence. The Hindi speaking Kalwars who dealt in scrap iron and machine parts used to trade in Ward 53 – a predominantly Muslim locality, as reported in the study – but had to leave the area after the riots in 1946-47 and settled in Wards 7, 10, 13, etc. Although their tongue was not exactly Hindi, the Marwari community of Calcutta considered themselves one of the Hindi speaking groups. Bose took special care to

describe the Rajasthanis or Marwaris in Calcutta, as they seemed to be particularly influential in the areas of trading and commerce. They were one of the very few non-Bengali communities which showed a consistent tendency of expanding beyond their original location in 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 – another classic example of how the locals literally lost ground to the outsiders in accumulation of resources and occupancy of the city space.[8] 'Yet,' Bose lamented, 'this did not lead the Rajasthanis to treat the city of Calcutta as their own home.'[9] The outsiders remain outsiders till the end, 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 with people of similar occupations like merchant trading, craftsmanship, or leather-works in various central-Calcutta wards. Some of them concentrated in slums in Wards 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 to initiate a full-fledged survey of the conditions of Muslims in the city. In 1974, Siddiqui brought out a volume on the socio-cultural status of the minorities which once again made it clear that most of the Muslims in Calcutta 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.'[10]

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 concentration of the so-called 'outsiders' in an urban setting – or the distribution of the city space among its inhabitants – according to one's language, religion, caste, occupation, and social status. This leads to a more crucial realization 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 realization 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 change in the already settled habits and habitat. However, the value system and intellectual lineage which provide justificatory explanation of zoning of the city according to 'ethnic' identities did not experience a marked shift even in the contemporary times. More than thirty years after Nirmal Bose's survey, Aditi Chatterji has performed a similar survey under the title 'Ethnicity, Migration and the Urban Landscape of Kolkata' between 2004 and 2005 and came up with the following observation in her report:

> Ethnic minorities and migratory groups entering large cities like Kolkata exhibit a high degree of cohesion and interaction amongst themselves. The report has revealed that this is true of all the ethnic and migrant groups who have good links with their communities and like to live among them.[11]

Chatterji's survey also declares that "immigrants become blended to form new, evolving cultural patterns rather than being dissolved into the majority."[12] In the same breadth she discovers presence of a 'harmonious' relationship between all the communities in the city where 'different groups have adjusted to the 'other', and they have forged an Indian identity.'[13] This remarkably

comforting scenario is hampered by the news of actual hardship faced by the migrants while looking for a place to stay in the city. It is a fact well known that Muslims – either Bengali speaking or not – are often stopped from renting rooms in a decisively Hindu neighbourhood. It is, therefore, doubtful whether this cohesive settlement practice of the migrants is actually due to their own choice to live in familiar surroundings or whether they are restricted from entering few particular zones with untainted ethnic complexion. In the next section, I shall explore few issues related to such settlement practices in the last few decades and show how the category of the 'migrant' itself is produced in and through the various deliberations at the level of urban planning and policy making.

The Paradoxes of Settlement

One of the earlier studies on migration in Kolkata tells us that the growth of the core city has been stalled since the last few decades, as the population influx to Calcutta proper has declined over the past fifty years.[14] On the other hand, the size of the non-Bengali population shows a steady growth from 34.06% in 1951 to 40.08% in 1971. The proportion of migrants from other states to the total population has decreased from 25.24% in 1951 to less than 17% in 1971. In 2011 census, the decennial growth rate of the Kolkata district is recorded at -1.88% – an all-time minimum in the history of census in India – with a falling rate of population density from 24718 per square kilometre in 2001 to 24258 per square kilometre in 2011. This is more or less the scene all over the country where big cities are failing to draw population from outside, as employment opportunities in these cities seem frustratingly low due to use of capital intensive technologies in the industrial sector.[15]

Though the chances of getting a job seem minimal, hundreds of people from other states and other districts in West Bengal come to Kolkata everyday with a hope to find employment and some sort of accommodation. 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). In their various reports based on sample surveys of the slums of Kolkata, KMDA has put serious thought 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 of the 'socio-economic profiles' of the urban households in Calcutta.[16] But the deliberations on the issues and problems related to migration started to feature in the KMDA (erstwhile CMDA, until the name of the city was changed) reports 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.[17] However, it was evident that the bustees did not only offer shelter to the urban poor, they also provided them with job opportunities within the same premise. The plans of urban development like 'Calcutta 300: Plan for Metropolitan Development' often touched upon both issues of migration and bustee improvement, but did not make any necessary connection between the two.[18] It was the 1989-90 study of the 'socio-economic profile' of the slum dwellers of Calcutta which identified a considerable number of them as migrants.[19] Based on a medium range sample survey (sample size: 7810 slum dwelling families) conducted in 1989, this study located the moment of 'origin' of the Calcutta slums in the nineteen-thirties and -forties 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 eastern and northern states of India started to flock into the city in search of work. Slums were constructed for cheap accommodation of these migrant workers in the form of 'huts made up of mud and bamboo.'[20] 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.'[21]

Curiously, not only did the study recognize a close relation between migration and bustee settlements, it also identified migration as the primary reason of 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 categorizations must be studied, interrogated, and challenged. It is also important because institutions like CMDA participate most actively in the processes of policy design and implementation. If one wants to look into the relationship between policies of urbanization and migration practices in post-liberalization Kolkata, he or she cannot avoid exploring the tremendous impact that these 'official' histories of migration settlement have on the government's prerogatives of decision making.

Two other points which interestingly came up in the 1989-90 survey of Calcutta slums were: (1) the observation 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 (2) 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.[22] 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 wellbeing).[23] The issue of rural-urban linkages, however, was conceptualized in terms of two 'explanatory variables' – the frequency of visits to the places of origin and the remittances sent back to these places.[24] Associated with this conceptualization was categorization of migrants into those who stayed back in the city for more than one generation and those who were present generation migrants. In other words, a distinction was made between those who were more prone to share their income with the family behind 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, 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 Darapara 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."[25] Though mentioned with an indifference of statistical certainty, this comment seems to presage a cultural bias disguised in the garb of economic logic.

One may find in this remark a reverberation of Nirmal Bose's discontent over 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, latter remark is more politically motivated in relation to the future plans of development of Calcutta. In the following decades, this attitude might have played a crucial role in translating the desires of urban zoning and gentrification into the harsh reality of forceful eviction and displacement in the name of aesthetic and ecological concerns. This could not have been achieved without a categorical fixity that must adorn the official documents and inform the policy recommendations. The 1996-97 study of the socio-economic profiles of the households of Calcutta, therefore, attempted to demarcate the migrants from the 'original residents' by proffering a fixed 'historical' narrative of 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).'[26]

The effectiveness of this historical narrative was thought to be so strong that even accounting discrepancies were ignored as minor confusions in categorization. The percentage of displaced population (mainly refugees from East Pakistan) was held to be only 2% in relation to 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'.'[27] 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.

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 the thika tenants from the alleged exploitation by the landlords.[28] With increase in the prices of urban land property, the landlords were eager to sell their holdings to builders and realtors, evicting the thika tenants and slum dwellers.[29] 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 little amounts of money as compensation to the actual owners.[30] The remedy to the troubles 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.'[31] Since now on, 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.'[32]

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 urbanization – the connection between labour and land. 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. It will be apparent from the following pages that this connection between land and labour will never leave the premise of this paper and will continue to haunt it like a spectral rejoinder.

Recycling the Urban

Urbanization in the past few years has started to receive attention from both the governmental and academic circles as one of the vestiges of neoliberal reforms in India. Observing with some caution that India will experience a massive urban growth in the next 20-25 years causing 'enormous stress on the system', a document of Planning Commission (12th Plan) has added:

> Urban India today is "distributed" in shape—with a diverse range of large and small cities spread widely around the nation. India will probably continue on a path of distributed model of urbanization because this suits its federal structure and helps to ensure that migration flows aren't unbalanced toward any particular city or cities.[33]

The same document talks about incorporation of the idea of 'inclusive cities' in the regime of urban development in India: 'The poor and lower income groups must be brought into the mainstream in cities.'[34] It also says with some concern that, in the absence of properly subsidized housing schemes for the poor, informal arrangements are the only option for them, although 'it implies illegality and therefore vulnerability.'[35] At the same time, the document prescribes that reforms in urban financing should be a mandatory feature of urban growth, as it will reduce the burden of the central and state governments, focusing more on generation of revenue from internal sources by '[m]onetizing land assets; higher collection of property taxes, user charges that reflect costs; debt and public-private partnerships (PPPs),' etc.[36]

That the concepts of inclusive cities and financial reforms may sit comfortably together in the same document is not surprising. This is the exact moment where the neoliberal programmes of urban renewal like JNNURM is introduced asking for de-regularization of most of the laws pertaining to urban expansion and land use. Accordingly, a recent World Bank report argues, 'In India's otherwise liberalized economic policy environment, stringent regulations on urban development densities are pushing businesses and people out of urban cores.'[37] These firm regulations, they claim, are affecting the urban poor and the middleclass the most by hiking the housing prices at the city centre.[38] One of the reasons of a non-flexible urban land market in India, the same report points out, is the absence of an independent and reliable system of land valuation. The authors of the report recommend that India should think of exploring alternative institutions of land valuation in the absence of a national standard where cities' 'plans and zoning designations need to reflect market realities.'[39]

It is usually believed that the old cities like Kolkata and Delhi where even the strongest forces of the market may not yield efficient planning are to be discarded in the favour of new townships and urban agglomerates. Rajesh Bhattacharya and Kalyan Sanyal have argued that, with the development of 'new towns' around and adjacent to the old cities as more technologized centres of capitalist accumulation, a 'bypass approach' has been introduced in the discourses of urbanization in India and, simultaneously, it has given birth to new, 'immaterial' forms of labour disconnected with the earlier regimes of urban regeneration.[40] 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 aestheticized 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.[41] As a result, the construction and expansion of the new towns have to bypass the old cities and mark out a space of their own. They extend Sanyal's own theory of 'post-colonial capitalism'[42] characterized 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.[43]

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, i.e., 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 urbanization and gains 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 of the development of the 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 emphasize 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 of 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.[44] 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.

But 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 this 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 the old towns like Kolkata, but these networks cannot be actualized to their full potential due to certain practical and 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 at applying coercive means to appropriate urban land within the city is faced with serious civil society activism infused with middleclass 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 the old cities. Besides continuous attempts at creating spatial vacuums by enforcing eviction over 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 with a pointed direction towards real estate speculation.

Let us cull out a few examples. In 2005, Nagarik Mancha has brought out a report on the locked-out factories in Kolkata.[45] The report has 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 MP from Krishnanagar, now the site of a luxury apartment 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' in the abandoned factory land.[46] Similarly, the Annapurna Glass Factory was locked out and turned into Ekta Heights. Even the Jadavpur TB Hospital was closed down by the government and its land was sold off to the realtors.[47] At first glance, these instances look familiar. Isn't it the same way how land is acquired by the government or private agencies and auctioned in the market to fetch the best price? Same, but not quite. In this case, the constructions in 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 the 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.

Urbanization of Neoliberalism

One may be enticed to describe this moment as a regular marker of neoliberal urban planning, quite successfully reproducing the logic of market-oriented speculative capitalism. However, we need to explore this moment even more deeply to engage with its particularity in the context of, not neoliberalization of the urban, but urbanization of neoliberalism.[48] Speaking of the inherent dynamism of capitalist development, Neil Brenner and Nik Theodore observe that during systemic crisis, capital tends to reorganize its inherited sites of sociospatial accumulation and, thereby, looks for a more secure geographical landscape which will sustain its own reproduction and expansion.[49] Throughout the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, we have witnessed a continued history of sociospatial reorganization through colonial governmental practices. In a postcolonial world where fragments of capitalist accumulation need to unfold in a chain of universal dis-bordering of capital, new frontiers of resistance are presented in manifold forms. Immanuel Wallerstein points out that the success of capitalism rests on controlling three basic costs of production – costs of personnel, costs of inputs, and taxation.[50] In the twenty-first century, all these costs have escalated to such an extent that capitalists have turned towards financial speculation as an intermediary alternative, but as Wallerstein reminds us, it is only a momentary phase since confidence, which is the foundation of speculative investment, 'in the medium run is undermined by the very speculation itself.'[51]

However, the story of real estate speculation is slightly different. First of all, it belongs to a twilight zone at the intersection between material production and immaterial speculation. Secondly, it deals mostly with non-virtual elements of production, including labour and raw materials. Therefore it inherits all the problems that any form of material production has to face today: rising costs of personnel due to increment in collective bargaining power of the workers; rising costs of inputs due to difficulties in externalizing costs of production, i.e. shifting principally costs of detoxification, renewal of primary resources, and infrastructure; and rising rates of taxation due to growth of governmental expenditure for administration, collective security, and welfare.[52] Neoliberal reforms, if we consider them in this light, are precisely attempts by the capitalist class to bring down these costs to smoothen the path of unbridled accumulation. In case of real estate, the costs of personnel are reduced by informalizing the labour market; the input costs are lowered by de-regularizing laws that

resist externalization; and taxation rates are brought down by introducing various discounts and extra-legal arrangements. The interesting part of this story is that all these attempts of informalization entail drawing out multiple spaces or zones of irregular material practices. Brenner and Theodore are right when they point out the intrinsic and essential connection between neoliberalism and urbanism. In fact, they stretch this observation to its logical limit by saying 'cities have become increasingly central to the reproduction, mutation, and continual reconstitution of neoliberalism itself during the last two decades.'[53] But they do not engage with the political significance of this moment of urbanization of neoliberalism. It is not enough to explicate the linkages between neoliberal motifs of deregularization and mechanisms of urban planning. It is quite obvious that, since urban planning envisages various zoning practices, the neoliberal insistence on deregulation will exclusively and fundamentally find its abode in the city. We may take a step forward from this realization and argue that this urbanization of neoliberalism is possible not only because neoliberalism is a sociospatial phenomenon but also because it encourages a specific form of extraction: recycling of the urban space. In the next and final section, I shall dwell on this notion by citing a particular incident from the recent history of the city.

Rent of Violence

If we want to explore the concept of recycling further, we need to keep in mind that it is realized by two co-incidental mechanisms of accumulation – dispossession and rehabilitation. This process is deeply violent and structured in a way to ensure the mobility of capital by controlling the mobility of labour power. It is in this context we return to the questions of migration and labour informality in Kolkata. The link between migration and informality in urban labour market is best explicated in the words of Ranabir Samaddar when he speaks 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.'[54] This informality cannot be gauged without taking up the issues of urban settlement and rent. There are two aspects of the recycling of the urban space that bring together the questions of labour and land: (1) existence and burgeoning of the 'other' settlements for the migrant workers; and (2) 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 'formalize' 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 the 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, latrine, and electric by the municipal authority.[55] Conversely, the slums which are not registered under the Act may be declared 'illegal' by the government and evicted at whim. Usually, they are not entitled to municipal services. The distinction between registered bustees and unregistered ones becomes pertinent with the arrival of the new generations of migrants. It is difficult for the present generations 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 the particular site. As some studies reveal, 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.[56]

On the other hand, in the last few years, the policies of urban development in India have experienced some major shifts. The proper and complete implementation of the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) requires repealing of 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.'[57] Although West Bengal is the only state which has not yet implemented this recommendation,[58] 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 'arrest the environmental degradation and improve the quality of life in the outer boroughs of Kolkata Metropolitan Area.'[59] 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 the adjacent areas. This plan called for eviction of all the slums located in those areas, although a promise of rehabilitating the inhabitants was made by the government.[60]

Subsequently, in 2002, Nonadanga, a place on a 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 the 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.[61]

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 for rehabilitation. On March 11, 2012, KMDA has directed the people in Shramik Colony and Majdur Palli to vacate the land within twenty-four hours. On March 30, three bulldozers of KMDA barged into the area and demolished most of the 139 houses in the two settlements.[62]

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 canal-side 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 APDR report tells us, used to live elsewhere in the city.[63] Some of them had to leave their earlier settlements because of 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 the flats.[64] Ultimately, they built their own huts in the nearby bustees. The same report informs 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.

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.[65]

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 that does not appear shocking anymore, especially after the so-called 'liberalization' of the Indian economy. Even the same KMDA document clarifies, 'With onset of the regime of economic liberalization in the Indian economy since the early 1990s, the need for an expanded volume of trade in diversified areas was strongly felt.'[66] But this 'diversification' of trade interests cannot take place without simultaneous re-appropriation 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 informalization of the city workforce than an instance of a conscious political decision. This structural relationship was reinforced once again in the statement by the Minister of Urban Development 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.[67] This constant dynamic of dispossession and rehabilitation proves to be a telling sign of urbanized neoliberalism.

One commentator of the Nonadanga incident chooses to see it as symptomatic of a larger scheme of violence against the poor slum dwellers of the city anticipating a so-called real estate boom.[68] The government, she argues, is acting hand-in-hand with the real estate mafia to deprive the poor their 'right' to the city. However, it is not enough to read this incident only in terms of violation of rights, as that will drive our attention away from the structural relationship between violence and urbanized neoliberalism. Neoliberal practices do not contest the idea of rights. In fact, the excuse of protection of rights of the urban poor has been consistently used to defend de-regularization, as we have seen in the World Bank report cited earlier. A different approach may be sought in the concept of 'social justice' where the notion of justice has to be connected with systemic overhauling of the social itself. The concept of urban rent may prove useful to understand this issue in greater detail. David Harvey has once written that 'all spatial problems have an inherent monopolistic quality to them.'[69] This 'monopolistic quality' – as it is evident from the term 'quality' itself – is a relational attribute which is actualized through private property relations whereby particular individuals and

institutions like the government and corporate bodies possess full control over pieces of space. This monopoly control over space leads to formation of absolute spaces where a margin over the prevailing profit rate can be extracted quite conveniently. Harvey conceives this dynamic of control in terms of the classical political economic exposition of differential rent popularized by David Ricardo: "We can begin to incorporate considerations stemming from the conception of absolute space if we envision allocation occurring in a sequential manner across an urban space divided into a large but finite number of land parcels."[70] In this scheme, the people who enter the land market late will not be able to get as much opportunities to exercise their choices as the people who have entered the market a bit earlier. Typically, 'the poorest take up whatever is left after everyone else has exercised choice.'[71]

The most important aspect of this analysis is that it is a dynamic analysis where people enter and leave the land market not at the same time but in sequence. This dynamism also opens a possibility of an ethical interjection: how far is this sequential order socially justified where not only the people with less resources are bound have minimal bidding power but also the structure of the sequence is designed as such to push them out of the game? Needless to say, this analysis is quite pertinent to underscore the conditions of the migrants who come to the city after everyone else has exercised his or her choice. Then they have to settle in the squatter colonies or even on the streets. Interestingly, in a welfare state where the government owns most of the land where these colonies are built cannot forego the responsibility of rehabilitating them. There is one condition though: they must be made a part of the accumulation process which will also sustain the same sequential order that leaves the migrants vulnerable and fixed at a permanent state of impermanence. The city thus becomes the most promising site of neoliberal capitalist expansion because it promises continuity of this tale of production and extraction of rent. And the hue and cry over social justice that does not take account of this violence of rent turns into an empty threat of interruption in the global circuit of capital.

Notes

[1] The most pertinent of these incidents is the one that took place in Mumbai in 2008 when clashes between workers of Maharashtra Navnirman Sena and Samajwadi Party led to physical assault of North Indian migrant workers in the city. The incidents were reported in all the leading national dailies and television media. For a chronology of how the events unfurled, see 'Chronology: MNS's Tirade against North Indians', *Hindustan Times*, February 2, 2010.

[2] JNNURM or the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission is proposed jointly by the Ministry of Urban Development and the Ministry of Urban Employment and Poverty Alleviation at the Centre. It seeks to increase the rate of investment in the urban sector by initiating a range of reforms including creation of assets and development of civic amenities under the Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) model. For the statement of its objectives and scope, see *Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission: Overview* (Ministry of Urban Development, Government of India) [available at http://jnnurm.nic.in/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/PMSpeechOverviewE.pdf; accessed on March 16, 2015].

[3] See, for example, Amitabh Kundu and Shalini Gupta, 'Migration, Urbanization, and Regional Inequality', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 31, No. 52 (December 28, 1996), 3391-98; Amitabh Kundu and Niranjan Sarangi, 'Migration, Employment Status and Poverty: An Analysis across Urban Centres', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 42, No. 4 (January 27, 2007), 299-306. For a similar study on Bangladesh, see Abdullah Al-Mamun Khan, 'Rural-Urban Migration and Urbanization in Bangladesh', *Geographical Review*, Vol. 72, No. 4 (1982), 379-94.

[4] Amitabh Kundu and Lopamudra Ray Saraswati, 'Migration and Exclusionary Urbanization in India', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 47, Nos. 26 and 27 (June 30, 2012), 219-27; Preeti Mann, 'Urbanization, Migration, and

Exclusion in India', *Centre for the Advanced Study of India* (2012) [available at http://casi.sas.upenn.edu/iit/mann; accessed on March 16, 2015].

[5] Nirmal Kumar Bose, *Calcutta 1964: A Social Survey* (Bombay: Lalvani Publishing House, 1968).

[6] This categorization overlooks the existence of 'Bengali Muslims' who occupy a large section of the Muslim population in the city.

[7] *Ibid*, 27.

[8] *Ibid*, 36-37.

[9] *Ibid*, 37.

[10] M. K. A. Siddiqui, *Muslims of Calcutta: A Study of Their Social Organisation* (Calcutta: Anthropological Survey of India, 1974), 25, 26.

[11] Aditi Chatterji, *Ethnicity, Migration and the Urban Landscape of Kolkata* (Kolkata: K. P. Bagchi & Company, 2009), 128.

[12] Ibid, 130.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Asok Sen and Alak Banerjee, 'Migrants in the Calcutta Metropolitan District, 1951-71', *Occasional Paper No. 62, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta* (August, 1983), 15.

[15] See Amitabh Kundu, 'Urbanisation and Migration: An Analysis of Trends, Patters and Politics in Asia', *Human Development Research Paper 2009/16, United Nations Development Programme* (April, 2009), 2.

[16] Nandita Chatterjee, Nikhilesh Bhattacharya and Animesh Halder, 'Socio-Economic Profile of Households in Calcutta Metropolitan Area: 1996-97' in *Metropolitan Kolkata: An Anthology of Socio-Economic Studies and Survey Reports of KMDA 1970-2004,* Volume V (Kolkata: Socio-Economic Planning Unit, Directorate of Planning and Development, KMDA, 2004), 397-662.

[17] 'Socio-Economic Survey and Development of Small Enterprises in Twelve Bustees in Group I, July 1980' in *Metropolitan Kolkata: An Anthology of Socio-Economic Studies and Survey Reports of KMDA 1970-2004,* Volume II (Kolkata: Socio-Economic Planning Unit, Directorate of Planning and Development, KMDA, 2004), 61-650; 'Socio-Economic Survey and Development of Small Enterprises in Twelve Bustees in Group III, July 1980' in *Metropolitan Kolkata: An Anthology of Socio-Economic Studies and Survey Reports of KMDA 1970-2004,* Volume II (Kolkata: Socio-Economic Planning Unit, Directorate of Planning and Development, KMDA, 2004), 651-891.

[18] 'Excerpts from Report 'Calcutta 300: Plan for Metropolitan Development" in *Metropolitan Kolkata: An Anthology of Socio-Economic Studies and Survey Reports of KMDA 1970-2004,* Volume IV (Kolkata: Socio-Economic Planning Unit, Directorate of Planning and Development, KMDA, 2004).

[19] Asok M. Chakrabarti and Animesh Halder, 'Slum Dwellers of Calcutta, Socio-Economic Profile – 1989-90, March 1991' in *Metropolitan Kolkata: An Anthology of Socio-Economic Studies and Survey Reports of KMDA 1970-2004,* Volume IV (Kolkata: Socio-Economic Planning Unit, Directorate of Planning and Development, KMDA, 2004).

[20] *Ibid*, 268.

[21] *Ibid.*

[22] *Ibid*, 288.

[23] *Ibid*, 289.

[24] *Ibid*, 371.

[25] *Ibid*, 373.

[26] Chatterjee, Bhattacharya and Halder, 'Socio-Economic Profile of Households in Calcutta Metropolitan Area: 1996-97', 593.

[27] *Ibid.*

[28] This act was in correspondence with the West Bengal Urban Land (Ceiling and Regulation) Act and Rules, 1976.

[29] Swati Ghosh, 'Thika Tenancy in Bustees of Calcutta: A Study', *Occasional Paper No. 6, Centre for Urban Economic Studies, University of Calcutta* (1992), 2.

[30] *Ibid*, 6. Ghosh observes, 'Compensation payable to [the landlords] was not very high, a maximum of Rs. 10 per square metre or Rs. 668.90 per cottah, according to the location of land' (*ibid*).
[31] The [Kolkata] *Thika* Tenancy (Acquisition and Regulation) Act, 1981, West Bengal Act XXXVII of 1981, 299.
[32] Ghosh, 'Thika Tenancy in Bustees of Calcutta: A Study', 5.
[33] Planning Commission, 'The Challenges of Urbanization in India.' (http://12thplan.gov.in/12fyp_docs/17.pdf; accessed on 14 August, 2015), 1.
[34] Ibid, 2.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid, 3.
[37] The World Bank, *Urbanization beyond Municipal Boundaries: Nurturing Metropolitan Economies and Connecting Peri-Urban Areas in India* (Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2013), 3.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid, 48.
[40] Rajesh Bhattacharya and Kalyan Sanyal, 'Bypassing the Squalor: New Town, Immaterial Labour and Exclusion in Post-colonial Urbanisation', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XLVI, No. 31 (July 30, 2011), 41-48.
[41] *Ibid*, 43, 42.
[42] Kalyan Sanyal, *Rethinking Capitalist Development: Primitive Accumulation, Governmentality, and Post-Colonial Capitalism* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2007).
[43] Bhattacharya and Sanyal, 'Bypassing the Squalor', 44.
[44] Ishita Dey, Ranabir Samaddar and Suhit K. Sen, *Beyond Kolkata: Rajarhat and the Dystopia of Urban Imagination* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2013).
[45] Nagarik Mancha, *A Report on Locked-Out Factories, Plight of Workers and Urban Space* (Kolkata, 2005).
[46] *Ibid*, 27, 29.
[47] *Ibid*, 40.
[48] Neil Brenner and Nik Theodore, 'Cities and the Geographies of "Actually Existing Neoliberalism"', *Antipode*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (July 2002), 349-79.
[49] Ibid, 354-55.
[50] Immanuel Wallerstein, 'After Developmentalism and Globalization, What?' in Samir Dasgupta and Peter Kivisto (eds.), *Postmodernism in a Global Perspective* (New Delhi: Sage, 2014), 38.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid, 38-42.
[53] Brenner and Theodore, 'Cities and the Geographies of "Actually Existing Neoliberalism"', 375.
[54] Ranabir Samaddar, 'Primitive Accumulation and Some Aspects of Work and Life in India', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XLIV, No. 18 (May 2, 2009), 37.
[55] See Nitai Kundu, 'The Case of Kolkata, India' (http://www.ucl.ac.uk/dpu-projects/Global_Report/pdfs/Kolkata.pdf, accessed on August 13, 2015); W. Collin Schenk, 'Slum Diversity in Kolkata' (http://www.columbia.edu/cu/cujsas/Volume%20I/Issue%20II/W%20Collin%20Schenk%20-%20Slum%20Diversity.pdf, accessed on August 13, 2015).
[56] N. Vijay Jagannthan and Animesh Halder, 'Income-Housing Linkages: A Case Study of Pavement Dwellers in Calcutta', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXIII, No. 23 (June, 1988), 1175-78.
[57] 'Repeal of Urban Land Ceiling and Regulation Act' (ULCRA): State Level Reform' (http://jnnurm.nic.in/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/Mandatory_Primer_5-RepealULCRA.pdf; accessed on August 13, 2015).
[58] The World Bank, *Urbanization beyond Municipal Boundaries: Nurturing Metropolitan Economies and Connecting Peri-Urban Areas in India* (2013), 17.
[59] 'Kolkata Environmental Improvement Project' (http://www.environmental-auditing.org/Portals/0/AuditFiles/India_s_eng_Kolkata-Environmental-Improvement-Project.pdf; accessed on August 13, 2015).

[60] APDR, *Nonadanga Basti Uchchheder Tathya Anusandhan Pratibedan* [Fact Finding Report of the Eviction of the Nonadanga Bustee] (Kolkata: 2012), 4.
[61] *Ibid*.
[62] *Ibid*, 1-7.
[63] *Ibid*, 1-9.
[64] Most of these flats have only 150-200 square feet of floor area (*ibid*, 4).
[65] KMDA, 'Invitation of Expression of Interest for Disposal of Bulk Land at Nonadanga for Comprehensive Development' (http://www.kmdaonline.org/whats_new/eoi-trnscn_adv_nona_land-12-11_final.pdf, accessed on August 13, 2015).
[66] *Ibid*, 3.
[67] APDR, *Nonadanga Basti Uchchheder Tathya Anusandhan Pratibedan*, 10. For details on BSUP, see 'Provision of Basic Services to Urban Poor' (http://jnnurm.nic.in/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/Mandatory_Primer_6-PBSUP.pdf; accessed on August 13, 2015).
[68] Swapna Banerjee-Guha, 'Nonadanga Eviction: Questioning the Right to the City', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XLVII, No. 17 (April 28, 2007), 13-15.
[69] David Harvey, *Social Justice and the City* (Athens and London: the University of Georgia Press), 168.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid.

Migration, Street Dwelling and City Space: A Study of Women Waste Pickers in Calcutta

Debarati Bagchi *

This paper tracks the life and work of the migrant female waste pickers in Calcutta. I argue that our identification of a migrant is still largely informed by the subject's nature of 'dwelling' in the city. It is difficult to call somebody a migrant if she is born in the city and resides in a 'proper home'. On the contrary, dwelling in public refers to an ever-existing condition of rurality – irrecoverable though – in the subject that makes her a migrant. The city always hosts the pavement dweller on its own terms. Women waste pickers are often identified as migrants to the city because many of them reside on the street. In this paper, I argue that the gendered question of waste picking cannot be addressed by simply understanding the act of waste picking. Rather, it has to be seen in conjunction with their spatiality of dwelling which is often subsumed in our *a priori* understanding that waste pickers must be migrants for they do not belong to the city's formal regime of tenancy.

The paper starts with the patterns of labour migration in India in general and Calcutta in particular and then approaches the migrant labour. It first discusses some recent trends in the patterns of migration as can be gleaned from various census decades. This proceeds to develop a conversation between such macro data and the dynamics of population growth in KMC area. The idea is to see if the population trends in the KMC area conforms to the larger national trend. Next, I look at the three available surveys of pavement dwellers in the KMC area done in three different periods: in 1973-74, in 1986-87, and in 2012-13, to understand the local dynamics of migration in the city among the lower crust of the working population. As revealed in all these surveys, the trends in rural-urban migration among the lower strata of population can be discerned from the groups living and reproducing on the city streets and pavements who are usually termed in India 'pavement dwellers' and in recent years 'homeless'. The next task is to locate the waste pickers among the pavement dwellers and homeless population to understand the processes and structures of migration, occupation, life and labor conditions, vulnerabilities and the question of access to infrastructure and resources among this particular occupation group. A major corpus of literature exists on waste management, garbage recycling and urban sanitation at large in the context of the cities of the South.[1] Moreover, historical accounts of sanitation in the context of the cities of the North have given us a good picture of the ways in which civilization and modernity have approached waste since the 18th century.[2] However, we have relatively impoverished sense of such historical mechanisms in Calcutta. Only a few accounts are available as to how the city manages its waste. The work of Christine Furedy in the early 1980s describes human processes involved in the management of waste in the Asian

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cities. She talks of the specific traditions of waste management in these cities and emphasizes on the need for decentralized and participatory processes. A few recent works on waste pickers of Calcutta have pursued the question of NGOisation and unionization at length.[3] However, none of these works emphasize or discuss the spatial dimension of the dwelling places of this particular occupation group. The initial exploratory goal of this paper is limited to the understanding of some aspects of the life, labour and routine of the waste pickers through ethnographic research. I intend to see if qualitative research among a limited number of respondents creatively speaks to the larger data-set. I also seek to understand the time, territory, family structures and the pattern of shifts in occupation taking place in and around a particular dwelling area. Put differently, I am interested in the relationship between the contingencies of occupation and the question of social reproduction keeping the question of space alive.

KMC Area in the Map of Migration

First, let us accept that migration in absolute number has increased over the decades with the continued growth in population. This is clearly observed by scholars.[4] They have variously explained the phenomenon of swelling migration in connection with the larger phenomena of continued primitive accumulation, the decline of the social schemes of the state, the increasing asymmetry between agriculture and industry, informal and the formal economies and village and the town. Such processes of proletarianization are not matched by the equal capacity of the towns and industries to absorb the newly released populations. Hence is the presence of the unrealized force of the 'reserve army of labour' in contemporary liberalizing India that could be found in the swelling migration figures.[5] It has been shown that 'both the census and NSS figures indicate that the rate of migration has increased. According to the 2001 Census, the total migrant population in the country is a little above 30 crore (315 million).'[6] Also, a study has suggested the figure of about half a million in peak season from the rice belt of just one state, West Bengal.

Amitav Kundu, on the other hand, observes a different story of 'decline'.[7] He questions the proposition of growing migration by demonstrating that 'the percentage of lifetime migrants by their place of birth (PoB) to the total population can be noted to have gone down from 30.8 in 1961 [census] to 20.3 in 2001 [census].'[8] He argues that 'a declining trend in overall migration is noted over the past three decades based on the data available from the NSS as well.' To substantiate, he shows that at an aggregate level (rural-urban combined), there has been a slight decline in the percentage of male migrants (from 11.9 to 10.9) during 1999-2000 to 2007-2008, but an increase in the percentage of women migrants both in rural and urban areas.[9] Also 'family migration has increased in recent years, compared to adult male migration of earlier years.'[10] He conjectures that 'these patterns can be attributed to distress being a less important factor in the migration of adult males. They are now moving with women, children and elderly persons.'[11] Alternatively, he suggests that the reason for the decrease in the share of adult men could be because 'previous migrants are now able to bring their family members to join them'.

Reading these observations, we may have the reason to ask whether the increase of the number of migrants really hide a story of declining rate of migration. If this is the case, then one needs to explain the institutional arrangements checking migration amidst primitive accumulation. In this connection, one needs also to see the shifting patterns of migration among different registers of population such as male migrants, female migrants, children etc. I want to keep this discussion in mind before entering into the specific story of Calcutta and then moving on to the case study on migrant waste pickers.

The population figures in KMC area speak to several waves of historically contingent developments—partition, rural-urban distress migration at the wake of floods and famines in the hinterland of the city, the administrative reshuffles of the territorial limits of the KMC, the declining industrial landscape of the city, the improvement of cheap communication networks with the suburban areas, the increasing trend of converting residential spaces to retail and other commercial uses, referring to patterns of changing land use pushing existing resident population to the ever emerging margins of the city. Let us consider an exploratory framework of the history of population group in the KMC area in conversation with the figures presented in the earlier section[12].

The highest growth of population in the KMC area since independence has two distinct moments. The first one is in the census decade between 1941 and 1951. In this decade the population in the KMC area grew by 27.9% while the suburban growth in the same decade was at 30.4% and this growth can be attributed to the partition.[13] However, one should not forget that the growth in the KMC area and in the suburbs was much higher in the preceding decade i.e. 1931-41. In this decade the population of KMC grew by 84.8% and suburban growth was 51.5%. In 1961 census, the rate of population growth in the KMC area was 8.5% which indicated a drastic decline in growth compared to the previous decade. The suburban growth was rather spectacular at 55%. One should remember here between 1951 and 1961 a large number of lower caste peasants migrated to the state of West Bengal that appeared to settle in the suburbs and perhaps marginally in the KMC area. In the next census decade i.e. 1961-71, the population of KMC area grew by 7.6% while the suburban growth was at 39.7%. In the following decade, the population grew in KMC area by 5% while the suburban growth was at 37.9%. The second major growth in KMC population is registered in the census decade of 1981-91. In this decade, the population in the KMC area grew by 33.1% (highest in the postcolonial period) while the rate of growth in the suburban areas declined to such extent that the population increased by a modest 12.4% (all time low) since 1931.[14] One may argue that the KMC growth in this decade could be connected to India's aggressive embracing of neoliberal economic policies but one should also remember between 1981-91, the physical area of KMC embraced many of the densely populated southern areas like Jadavpur, Tollygunge, Bijoygarh and Garia. This also explains why the suburban population increased at a much declining rate. Between 1991-2001, the population growth in KMC area was just 3.9% while the growth in the suburban areas again shot up to 30.4% which means that new areas had been urbanized in this decade and new rural urban interfaces emerged variously connected by rail and surface transport facilities. This is the moment brilliantly captured ethnographically by Ananya Roy in her book *City Requiem, Calcutta*.[15] Roy talks of the institution of paralegal commuting by train by the women from the suburban areas to participate in the booming lower rung of the informal care industry such as domestic help in the middle class households. These women, as Roy finds, could come to the station between 5 am and 8 am and would leave the city in the evening precisely between 5 pm and 7 pm. Any census data would tend to miss this mass phenomenon in Calcutta. Therefore, the question remains whether migration is increasing or decreasing or increasing at a declining rate. The small data of ethnography talks of such institutions as daily commuting and transit labour or partial seasonal migration that complicates the larger migration question. But as Kundu suggests, the rising trend is a phenomenon of female migration and the migration of families with children. It is only in the census decade of 2001-2011 that we find somewhat of a decline in the absolute number of KMC population from 4,57,3000 in 2001 to 4,48,7000 in 2011 which amounts to a decline in KMC population growth by -1.9%.[16] But the suburban growth was still at 11.5%. The decline of population in the KMC area happened when the 2011 census reported rapid urbanization in each of the 19 districts in the state. The decadal growth of urban population was 31.89% which was higher than the national average of 31.16%. This

might reveal that the rural to urban migration within the state finds new urban centres distributed in various districts. Calcutta might have ceased to be the dream city of everyone.
In light of the declining rate of fresh migration to the KMC area, it makes sociological sense that we study the 'settled migrants'. I will take this up in the section on ethnographic findings. Before that, let us have a look at three surveys of pavement dwellers in Calcutta in three distinct census moments that can enlighten us with historically nuanced facts and figures.

Pavement Dwellers and Waste Pickers

In 1973-74 the Calcutta Metropolitan Planning Organization (CMPO), a unit of the Calcutta Metropolitan Development Authority (CMDA), undertook a survey of pavement dwellers in the city.[17] Apart from collecting information about 10,000 pavement dwellers, this report contains life histories of 100 respondents. Not only do they reflect on the exigencies of rural-urban migration between 1940s and 1970s, they also narrate how the migrant population gradually got absorbed in different kinds of informal work and also the chief places from where they hailed and the specific areas of the city where these migrants concentrated. This survey records that 98.33% of the total population living on pavements were migrants to Calcutta from different districts of West Bengal and other neighboring states.[18] From an analysis of persons willing to continue with their existing kind of occupation, it was calculated that 4.9 percent (which amounts to approximately 490 individuals) were waste-pickers.[19] However, this survey doesn't give us any clue about the spatial distribution of waste pickers, their internal social organization and territorialized pockets of activity. Another survey of pavement dwellers, also conducted by the CMDA in 1986-87, has worked with a much larger database of around 55,000 pavement dwellers.[20] This survey keeps a clear account of the ward-wise distribution of pavement dwellers in the Calcutta Corporation area. Since none of the above surveys intended to be a census survey, they might not reflect the 'actual' number of pavement dwellers given that the number might vary from season to season. But both the surveys emphasized that the southern hinterland of the city, i.e. the southern part of the undivided 24 Parganas remained the major contributor to the pavement dwelling population. The occupational pattern in the 1986 survey was divided into 'mainstream' and 'marginal' informal sectors. Waste pickers formed part of the latter which included the poorest sections of the surveyed population. Among the 3,200 respondents, 17% were engaged in the vocation of waste picking.[21] Notably, females constituted 17% of the earning population, among whom 14.4% were paper and waste pickers.[22] The average income of this occupational group was Rs. 67 which meant there was an upper and lower limit to their income. The variation depended on various locations of the garbage vats that they accessed: 'a waste picker with access to the garbage vat outside a luxury hotel or a prosperous residential complex can be expected to earn much more than another person who has to be content with the pickings from a depressed neighbourhood'.[23] As is evident from the above quote, the waste pickers indeed have a routine route to follow. Their access to garbage vats located at a place with potentially more rent value enables them to earn relatively more. The important ethnographic question that emerges from this is: what determines their differential access to vats with different grades of income potential? This leads us to a related question of the proximity of dwelling places and work places, a factor which definitely impacts the question of access. We shall come back to this point in a while.

A study of 2012-13 on pavement dwellers by Pranjal Rawat has conducted a sample survey of 196 households in Central Calcutta in order to throw light on 'the state of human development' and applicability of traditional components of healthcare, food security and education.[24] This survey retains the classification of 'mainstream' (including those employed in the transport and service

sector) and the 'marginal' (including the socially undesirable like beggars, waste pickers and domestic help) occupations. This study also distinctly records that the waste pickers are mostly women and children. It is observed that while most van pullers, cooks, cobblers, day laborers and rickshaw pullers are predominantly men, most waste pickers and domestic helps are women. Rawat also observes certain income disparities among male and female waste pickers. Average daily income of a waste picker is Rs. 68.2; while for a male waste picker the figure is Rs. 85, for a female waste picker it is Rs. 61.[25] However, the interesting thing here is the introduction of certain categories that are not consistent with the literature of previous years mentioned above. Rawat uses the term 'homeless' interchangeably with 'pavement dwellers'. Presumably, the import of the term could be tracked from the literature on homelessness in the United States and Latin America. Secondly, Rawat has ironically taken the *homeless household* as the unit of enumeration and research. If we remember Kundu's observations about the new trend of increasing family migration among the rural poor, this indeed could serve as a case in point.

Paramita Chakravarty's study of the homeless women's movement in Calcutta presented the figure of the number of homeless in the city as 37,468 as revealed in the Rapid Action Survey of 2011.[26] She indicated the growing importance of the 'household' in the enumeration of urban poor. She observed that the Census of India 2001 deployed the paradoxical category of 'houseless households' to account for the homeless population in the cities 'who do not live in buildings or census houses but live in the open on roadside, pavements, in hume pipes, under flyovers and staircases, or in the open in places of worship, mandaps, railway platforms and so on…'[27] The figure for such 'houseless households' in Calcutta was enumerated to be 8,731 in 2001.[28]

The discourse on homelessness essentially presupposes a right to home. This somehow detaches the question of occupation from the question of dwelling. All waste pickers get clubbed under the umbrella term of 'homeless'. The ethnography of a single family in a particular place in Calcutta reveals the limitations of such an approach. Before entering this discussion, a brief sketch of the existing works on waste pickers in Calcutta will not be out of place.

A Brief Survey of the Existing Works on Waste Pickers

Apart from these scattered allusions in these surveys, the first detailed study of the scavengers and waste pickers of Calcutta was carried out by Cristine Furedy in early 1980s as part of her extensive research on recovery and recycling of solid waste in Asian cities. Waste scavenging has been a very usual phenomenon in most third world cities. However, as Furedy argued, every city has its own specific ways. Scavenging had been the prevalent mode of disposal since colonial times in Calcutta carried out mostly by the Chamar castes. The first municipal dump was created in 1867, but, she presumed that the proliferation of squatters around dump sites is likely to be a post-independence phenomena following Calcutta Corporation's recruitment of low caste immigrants as sweepers.[29] Comparing it with other developing cities, Furedy teased out the specificities of the nature of squatting around Dhapa, the biggest dump site of Calcutta. Furedy's chief contention was to look into the socio-political configuration of the waste economy instead of treating the issues of collection or disposal merely as a technical process. Thus Furedy's study brought the 'people involved', the informal workers like scavengers and waste pickers to the forefront. Furedy upheld the social rights of waste workers and their involvement in the decision making processes. She critiqued the existing waste management literature to be oriented by western mechanical approaches as they did not pay heed to social considerations.[30] Furedy tried to understand the Asian phenomenon of waste management by grasping the complex networks and relationships between different stakeholders –

like the municipal workers, junk merchants, small operators and industrialists, and the largely paralegal and extralegal exchanges on which the industry thrived.[31] The street pickers were the most visible and indeed the poorest among the many participants. Her works also highlight the prevalent middle class social perceptions about scavengers as nuisance or social threat who were to be prevented from accessing dump sites.

Another set of study on municipal solid waste management in Calcutta has been conducted over the years by environmental engineers.[32] These studies reveal that in 2008, the metropolis of Calcutta with a population of about 8 million generated 3000 metric tonnes of municipal solid waste per day. In 2013, with a population of 14.12 million city people, the figure escalated to 4873 metric tonnes per day. The research papers by engineers recommend plans for an 'improved' system of collection, segregation, transportation, treatment and recycling to better handle the 'problem of increase in waste generation'. Most of these plans emphasize segregation at the source i.e. household level, transformation of open vats into closed containerized systems and more mechanized and automated transport and disposal arrangement. 'Different colour bins can be provided for recyclable waste, biodegradable waste and dry solid waste in the cities to segregate waste. … Placing community bins at appropriate locations for deposit and storage of waste is important. For MSW management garbage should be lifted frequently from these points. Frequency in lifting garbage from these points really matters otherwise garbage pile up and create other problems.'[33] In the engineers' recommendations for environment friendly and mechanized waste management system, the informal waste pickers seem to reside in the domain of these 'other problems' since efficient collection recommends increase in the number of formalized door-to-door waste collectors, either corporation employed or under private partnership. The idea of frequent collections in a way suggests making the garbage inaccessible to the 'informal' waste pickers. As early as 1990, the Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat (trade union of waste pickers) based in Pune fought for the waste pickers' right to collect source segregated scrap as this offered better working conditions and allowed the child pickers more time for education. They arranged identity cards for about thirty adult women and observed dramatic improvements in their earnings. But a private entrepreneur soon persuaded the citizens of the neighbourhood to offer doorstep garbage collection service clearing the neighbourhood of all garbage containers on roads. In protest, the waste pickers did a *bin chipko andolan* (they held on to the bins so that they could not be carted away) until the residents finally gave in.[34]

Some recent works that look into the life of the waste pickers as their subject group, capture the moment of NGO-led social movements in Calcutta. In his doctoral dissertation (2013) on labour law for the informal workers in India, Supriya Routh conducted a study of the waste pickers in Calcutta.[35] In association with the NGO 'The Calcutta Samaritans' and the West Bengal National University of Juridical Sciences, he actively participated in the process of formation of a waste pickers' union. He extensively studied the working conditions and living standards of the waste pickers to argue in favour of institutionalizing labour law for this section of the informal workforce in Calcutta. Routh's work illustrates the scenario of solid waste management in the city under the purview of the Calcutta Municipal Corporation and the role of waste pickers in this larger process. According to his observation, 'with its existing resources and waste management framework, the KMC is able to segregate and recycle solid waste in only seven of the one-hundred-and-forty-one *wards* (administrative units)… .'[36] In the rest of the one hundred and thirty four wards, while the KMC only land-fills, the waste pickers help in segregating and recycling the waste. In spite of such a 'complementary' relation, as Routh calls it, the waste pickers live in the most deplorable condition in the city.[37] Although he does not deal with migration as a primary question in his study, he briefly

observes that the waste pickers were 'typically migrant workers'.[38] And those he interviewed were mostly women.

Paramita Chakravarty finds NGO led homeless movements in Calcutta and other cities significant as they signal the emergence of homeless women as 'a visible and vocal majority with gender specific demands concerning livelihood, sexual and reproductive health, childcare, privacy, security and rehabilitation.'[39] She closely studies the recent efforts by The Calcutta Samaritans from 2001 onwards in organizing slum dwellers and homeless population in Calcutta by forming groups that worked in particular wards. As an offshoot of this movement, the Calcutta Naba Jagaran Mancha (KNJM) in which women waste pickers constituted a substantial section of the participants. They placed 'demands for livelihood and accommodation for the homeless, ration cards, voter cards and other identity documents, census and government surveys of the homeless, recognition of waste picking as a profession, protection for homeless children's rights and the prevention of child labour, the building of night shelters and a guarantee of suitable rehabilitation against eviction.'[40] Citing KNJM leaflets, Chakravarty showed that the KNJM had been successful in securing many of these demands. She argues that the homeless movement helps us discern how urban poverty and homelessness remains a gendered experience in contemporary cities. On the one hand, they create space for women's voices, on the other they reinforce the identification of 'home' with women.

Taking cue from these observations, I would like to explore the life stories of a particular family of waste pickers in a specific urban centre of Calcutta. I would be looking at waste-picking as a socio-economic livelihood practice by tagging it with the notions of homelessness. My aim would be to delve into the layered spatiality of their dwellings, an issue which remains absent in all the existing works.

Field Experiences

Stories of Women Waste Pickers in Ballygunge-Gariahat Area

I have conducted field research in the Ballygunge-Gariahat area, part of ward no. 68 of the Calcutta Corporation, among the people who live under the Bijan Setu, and the Gariahat flyover. The infrastructure of bridge and flyover creates spaces underneath that become shelter for the pavement dwellers. This arrangement is viable because it does not infringe on the movement of automobiles and pedestrian's right of passage. For the present paper, I would mention a few important points from my conversations with the women waste pickers living in these areas (primarily focusing on one particular family living under the Bijan Setu). A space is created under the Bijan Setu where two parallel roads end up in a u-turn blockade where there is a pay-and-use municipal toilet. Adjacent to the toilet, there are two floors beneath the bridge which are usually rented to shopkeepers. Although most of the shops remain closed as it does not make much economic sense for the shopkeeper to get a shop rented where pedestrians scarcely pass, where there is no neighbourhood of sedentary residence of the city. So the waste pickers, living on this part, mostly women, make use of the shaded frontage of the locked shops. They annex these spaces with pieces of tarpaulin sheet, build a notion of privacy, use these spaces as the extension of the inner spaces inside the bridge. None of the waste pickers I encountered in this particular area are new migrants to the city, they have been living here for the last two or three generations. That particular area annexed to the Ballygunge station is well-placed in the geography of rural-urban migration in Calcutta. K C Roychowdhury, a resident of Ballygunge in 1940s (and also a member of the Legislative Assembly) wrote in his testimony to the Famine Commission of 1944 how 'in June 1943', 'thousands of destitute refugees invaded

Ballygunge...from villages south and south east of Calcutta in search of food' Roychowdhury continued, 'a large number of them' took refuge to 'foot-paths of roads leading to Ballygunge and Dhakuria stations.'[41]

My principal interlocutor Tuktuki Mandal took me under the flyover. She is the third generation of a rag picker-pavement dwelling unit with a strong maternal connection. She lives with her mother and maternal grandmother who are the only Muslim family in this particular area among the largely low caste population. Her grandmother Gulbahari Purkayit must be in her early 70s. She couldn't mention the exact year of her permanent migration to the city from East Mallikpur village near Laxmikantapur in South 24 Parganas, but remembers the time as '*Naxaler somoy'* (at the time of the Naxalite Movemen), presumable around late 1960s or 1970s. One may recollect that both the survey of 1974 and 1986 on pavement dwellers refer to the southern part of the then undivided 24 parganas as one of the major hubs of migration to the city between 1940s and 1980s. The only memory she has is a near permanent state of hunger under extreme poverty in the village. Her husband used to be a *feriwala* (itinerant vendor) in the village when she got married. In a few months, he married another woman and came to Calcutta. Gulbahari vaguely knows that he worked as a cart puller and stayed with another family somewhere near Tollygunge. He used to go back to the village once in every six-seven years only to gift her with a child. There was hardly any remittance from the city to the village that could check the pace of dispossession for the family. It was in the persuasion of the ailing father-in-law that Gulbahari came to the city along with two of her daughters and a son. She initially worked as domestic help in nine households with a monthly income of 180 rupees. After a few months she drifted to rag picking. Gulbahari's daughter Putul (Tuktuki's mother) accompanied her since she was a child. From the age of 12, Putul started picking waste on her own.

Gulbahari used to pick with a group of women who came from different villages along the rail track running between Sealdah and Laxmikantapur suggesting strong pre-existing village networks in the territorialisation of this vocation. Chhabi Sardar, in her late sixties, migrated around the same time as Gulbahari from Dakshin Barasat (South 24 Parganas) with her children, unable to bear hunger coupled with the torture of her husband. Sabita Sardar, 40, who now lives under the Gariahat flyover, came with her mother and five siblings to the Ballygunge area in 1980 after her father disappeared from their village in Gocharan (South 24 Parganas). Pinki Halder of Gariahat has a similar story to tell. It is quite conspicuous to know that a large number of women rag-picker/pavement dweller in this area migrated with their mothers under different circumstances. Many of them begged for a while, or worked as domestic help and gradually shifted to rag picking.

The waste pickers of adjacent areas have an informal understanding regarding their territorial jurisdictions of picking. 'We hardly fight, rather we negotiate beforehand and settle who will cover what areas', says both Putul of Ballygunge and Sabita of Gariahat. The women of Ballygunge pick along the stretches of Ballygunge-Gariahat Road and Rashbehari Avenue. Until a few years back, Putul used to walk along the neighbourhoods in the alleys and by-lanes before the break of dawn, but after the corporation people started collecting garbage from homes, neighbourhoods have sadly become 'cleaner'. Nowadays, Putul claims, they have shifted from the residential areas to the main thoroughfares. Each day, they cover 5-6 kilometres.

I asked Gulbahari, the eldest in this area, why she preferred rag picking over domestic help. She spoke of a kind of 'freedom' of work that attracted her to rag picking. Generations of rag pickers staying in these areas I spoke to, harped on this point. They were all in a minor way boasting about flexibility in arranging their twenty four hours. The Ballygunge women usually set off for their day's work at around 3 or 4 in the morning, and come back before the sweepers arrive on the roads. Major streets and intersections are always the most lucrative stretches because of the shops and cars, 'the

more cars on a street, the more bottles we collect'. But, women of Gariahat collect all night and get back by 4. They start their work early, within a few hours after the shops close their shutters and the roads get desolate. 'The sooner we collect the litters from the shop fronts, the fresher the things are. And fresher and cleaner-looking scrap fetches more money than the soiled ones', Pinki explains.

The segregation is done at their place of dwelling. 'We can do the segregation any time of the day along with cooking and looking after the children.' It is this kind of a work-time arrangement that seems to have made rag picking a largely female dominated sector. The self employment in the waste picking sector relieves these women from the regimentation of day-time in the domestic help sector.

It is worth noting that what they call freedom, essentially presupposes that their work is intimately tied to their space of dwelling. Such freedom releases them from the little comforts for a roof above their head. My encounter with these people revealed abject conditions under which they work. They often get wounded and infected while sorting and picking from all kinds of wastes with bare hands. Monsoons are always the worst time for them. 'It is hard to sell drenched papers', they complained. During heavy rains, they usually sit on some elevated place and wait until the water recedes. However, defying all difficulties, many women like Gulbahari have stayed back in the pavements, along with their daughters and granddaughters for the last few decades. They use the pay and use toilet at the standard rates. No wonder this is the case when public infrastructure is created to sanitise the city under private management.

One reason for them to stick to this particular area is that this is close to their area of scavenging. Their work starts at early hours when no train would take them to their area of work. This is a point of major difference with those who work as domestic help whom Ananya Roy met in an ethnographic encounter. Also the second phase of the work, sorting and segregating the collected scraps, is carried out in the places where they live. The collected scraps are piled in front of their dwellings. Then every object is sorted – plastics of various kinds, glass, aluminium foil, metals, cloth etc. – and put in separate sacks. Discarded waste turns into recyclable and saleable waste only after it undergoes such processes of segregation. Thus the waste pickers try to stick to their location of dwelling amidst the threat of eviction or natural calamities. The women living in the Ballygunge station-Bijon Setu area have a little more space to store these sacks, so they can afford to sell their objects once in a week. But the women living under Gariahat flyover usually sell them daily or every alternate day. Here, the parked cars shrink the spaces for keeping the sacks.

After segregation, they carry the sacks to a nearby scrap dealer (usually a fixed one), who form the lowest rung of the chain of intermediary traders in the recycling industry. These shops are usually known among the waste pickers as *kabadi dokan* (scrap dealers), *kanch-loha dokan* (glass-iron dealers) or *kagoj dokan* (waste paper dealers). Different objects accrue different rates.[42] There are various categories of plastic. The transparent plastics in which garments are wrapped (known as PP) sells at Rs.20 per kg. if they are clean, a little less if they are soiled, the bigger plastic bags for Rs.5 per kg, mother dairy plastic containers of milk sells at Rs. 12 per kg. Plastic bottles of mineral water sell for Rs.10 per kg but the bottle caps sell at double that price. Everyday fibre items and shoes fetch around Rs.10 per kg. All kinds of alcohol bottles sell at Rs.1 per kg, except beer which is the only object that sells at Rs 1 per piece. The discarded perfume containers are expensive, they earn Rs. 80 per kg. Aluminium foils and beer cans, gathered mostly from the garbage bins of restaurants, fetches Rs. 40 per kg. Scrap tin is priced at Rs. 8 per kg., iron at Rs. 10 per kg., while discarded steel vessels at Rs. 18 per kg. Packing boxes collected from electronic and other shops constitute a chunk of their everyday objects, these are sold for Rs. 7 per kg. Elderly pickers like Gulbahari earn around Rs.300 a week. For the younger ones, the earnings vary between Rs.100-200 a day. However, some of the

women living in Gariahat earn some more (around Rs.800 a month) by cleaning the big shops at their opening hours.

My ethnography does not look into the details of the chain of traders in the waste recycling industry in Calcutta. However, the two commodity streams that Kaveri Gill speaks about seem to operate (with minor variations) in the Calcutta market as well. Gill, in her extensive study on waste recycling and plastic industry in Delhi, explores the nature of exchange relation between each actor in the vertical value chain of plastic recycling industry beginning from informal waste pickers, scrap dealers to various intermediary traders right up to the factory level.[43] The lowest rung of the informal recovery of recyclable waste in Delhi consists of the waste pickers or scavengers and the itinerant buyers. The pickers collect from a 'wet, unsegregated mix of organic and inorganic waste… only some of which is recyclable', while the itinerant buyers deal in 'dry, segregated, inorganic waste, some of which is reusable and all of which is recyclable'.[44] Owing to such differential access to waste, Gill illustrates, the pickers and buyers enter two different commodity chains. The lower waste recycling stream, of a lesser value and smaller margin, allows the shortest length of chain with the waste pickers selling to the *panni* dealers who in turn directly sell to the factories. The upper waste recycling stream involves higher margins and numerous intermediaries between the *kabadi* dealer (to whom the itinerant buyer sells) and a factory.

Some General Observations

Until now, I have presented a multi-generational account of a waste-picking unit. The following are some of the major observations:

First, the story of migration as narrated by the women I interviewed is predominantly an account of domestic/household loss—that the death of the earning husband, or his desertion compelled the women to migrate to the city for a livelihood. This account differs from the standard political-economy and demographic arguments of rural-urban migration (such as the dissociation of the peasant from the means of production) presented in a previous section of this paper. Arguably, Gulbahari's husband was already an 'urban migrant' – a non-peasant – who used to visit the village once in years.

Second, we have seen that women's migration to the city followed a loose path of some kind of prior acquaintance with each other in the sense that most of them migrated from the same area and ended up settling in particular pockets of the city. This means that migration was never a complete rupture from the past, or that of a 'new' voyage to the unknown world, though, in some of their accounts the unknown city and its structural anonymity predominate.

Third, most of my respondents agreed that waste-picking was *not* their first occupation as they came to the city. Many of them, for a while, took recourse to begging. Subsequently, some of them switched to domestic labour sector. Both begging and domestic wage work must have enabled them to understand the intimate geographies of the neighbourhoods and the local cartographies of power (e.g. who had access to what in a neighbourhood). For someone to become a waste picker it was necessary to be known to the sedentary residents as someone who was not a complete outsider (for e.g. a potential thief) to the neighbourhood. Even the stray dogs needed to acknowledge them with silence. Therefore, regular begging and the experience of domestic work provided some of my respondents with the social and cultural resources to become waste pickers. To the residents, on the other hand, this switch of livelihood occupation of my respondents represented their 'honesty'—that they didn't choose to remain beggars. In short, then, I argue that to become a 'worker' in the city is a historical process. Similarly, the life histories of my respondents show how difficult it was for them

to establish legitimacy as domestic workers as the potential employers always looked for a home address to track them. A constant allegation from the residents was that the pavement dwellers were too 'unclean' to be worthy of cleaning work in their household.

Fourth, the waste pickers I followed had enough reason to gradually move to such an occupation. It, as we have seen, gave them a flexible time to look after their children, conduct everyday domestic work and earn better remuneration. As opposed to domestic work that often entailed physical violence and humiliation, waste picking appeared to them to be "free" of such hazards. It was a dirty job. Often, it involved staying the better part of the day literally within a huge garbage bin along with violent dogs and crows. The work involved instant segregation between rejectable wastes and recyclable wastes. The next step for them was to bring the piles of recyclable waste to the place they lived. Subsequently, they had to further segregate the accumulated waste into different heads, for, each object would sell at a different price. One could even say that the act of segregation transformed an object in its post-commodity state (pure waste) to its pre-commodity state (object ready for recycling to enter again into the market). The act of segregation was also an intensely household process, for here the contribution from the children was crucial. In this entire process, the waste picker was seen to walk between the sites of collection and the place of segregation which was ideally her 'home'.

Tuktuki's Story of Transition

Tuktuki Mandal is in her third year of graduation in Jogomaya Devi College. She acts as a bridge between the ethnographer and the subject community. In the era of 'NGOisation of development', Tuktuki also acts as a bridge between different NGO initiatives and the pavement dwellers. Tuktuki is an active member of *Calcutta Naba Jagaran Mancha* (KNJM). Members like Tuktuki are implicated to lead the process of co-opting others under various agendas: demand for Annapurna Antodyaya Cards, BPL cards, voter id cards, claims for being considered worthy of the city's law and order regime, educational schemes for the street children etc. Instead of entering into a wholesale critique of the NGO moment, I would rather like to discern the complex relationship implicated in the birth of such knowledge regimes and the subjects.

Tuktuki's story is one of transition. Unlike her mother and grandmother, Tuktuki no longer works as a waste picker. Besides her college education and KNJM activism, she took up a job with an NGO. She used to teach at evening schools for street children. A few years back, she got married. Her husband also worked for this NGO. After their marriage, he came to the Ballygunge railway station area to stay with Tuktuki. When I first met Tuktuki almost a year back, she was in her fourth month of pregnancy. Despite a few medical complications, she continued with her college and NGO work. In the final months, they rented a room in Kasba, a nearby locality to Ballygunge with the desire of raising the child in a 'home'. However, while giving birth to her daughter, her condition deteriorated. She had to remain admitted at the hospital for quite a long time. Also her husband had to stay with her. They overcame the crisis eventually and came back with their baby daughter. But meanwhile both of them lost their jobs for staying on leave for a long duration. In a few months, they put up a tea and *kachuri* (a popular Bengali morning snack) stall near the flyover and the station. They run this stall from early morning till noon. It has to be noted here, that this rather quick shift in occupation was facilitated by the very location of their erstwhile dwelling. Ballygunge is one of the most important rail stations which serve as a transit centre between the South 24 Parganas and Calcutta. (It is worth recalling here that all the women staying in this area were migrants of South 24 Parganas). The road towards the station, parallel to the bridge, gets busy with a thriving fruit and

vegetable market quite early every morning. The morning *kachuri* shop caters to the sellers and buyers at this morning market. Also retailers and hawkers who open their shops around 10-11 in the morning eat at these places. Tuktuki and his husband have to pay 1500 as rent for the small corner of the footpath where they set up the stall. They have to mostly live under the bridge nowadays to stay near their shop, but they have retained their Kasba home, for which they have to pay a monthly rent of 3000. Tuktuki's transition to a 'happy heterosexual family' involved among other things the renting of a 'home' in the city. She graduated to the mainstream of the city's host population by finding a place in the tenancy regime of the city. This was also a process of sanitizing her life on the street. In many of our conversations, Tuktuki attempted to distance herself from the 'usual' women on the street. She mentioned that in various occasions, just being on the street at night was enough for the patrolling police to recognize her as a suspected prostitute.

Tuktuki's story highlights the complex dwelling economy in which a waste picker exists. The literature on 'homelessness' misses the crucial economic and infrastructural dimensions of the space of dwelling of the urban poor. Living in the heart of the city ensures access to certain public infrastructures and economic activities. Apart from proximity to work space, the women living in this area could avail the advantages of an important railway station as a transit centre and a thriving street market. Moreover, the station and bridge itself provide shade, drinking water and public toilets. So, their conditions of dwelling are structurally connected to the specificities of their occupation. How do we otherwise explain the multigenerational living in a particular location on the street? Living on the street has economic dimensions that mere recognition of a 'lack of home' might fail to take account of. If the gradual unionization among the waste pickers intensifies the process of un-informalization within the informal economy,[45] their continuing stake to that particular location in Ballygunj emphasizes that housing activism needs to engage with homelessness in a different way. Housing the homeless cannot be a pretext for their displacement to a new frontier of the city.

Clean City, Calcutta

In July 2014, the Kolkata Municipal Corporation launched the Chief Minister's much cherished 'Clean City' campaign with the opening lines: "Kolkata will soon become a garbage vat free city. Steps are being taken to abolish the open vats throughout the city and put in the service of solid waste compactors."[46] As we have already discussed, the act of aggregation and segregation of waste is at the heart of the informal waste picking economy. A growing municipalization and mechanization of waste segregation will make the living labour of the waste pickers progressively socially unnecessary. Calcutta is at the brink of such a moment. The story is not unknown. In many cities outside India, such a system has been in operation for decades. In Calcutta, this has just been set in motion with the introduction of gated compactor stations in various pockets replacing open vats. Since this process is still in its initial stage, it is ethnographically productive to track its impact on my respondents. Beneath the Bijan Setu, there is a Clean City compactor station. My respondents informed me that even among the waste pickers in Ballygunge station area, there is a mixed impact. Those who directly collect waste from the open vats appear to have been affected directly. I was introduced to one such woman who now works as a cleaner in the newly founded pay and use toilet. Before the establishment of the compactor station in the area, she used to earn Rs. 600-900 per week. In her new job she gets Rs. 4500 a month which is a somewhat increase in her wage.

When I reached the flyover area one late afternoon a couple of weeks back, Gulbahari was busy stitching a broken sole of a discarded shoe. She is usually seen cooking the first meal at this hour. Today, her daughters were taking care of that. Age has made Gulbahari feeble. She can no

longer walk long distances for picking. For the last couple of years she was picking from the adjacent vat. But now, the Clean City station shut their gates if waste pickers try to enter. 'Can you imagine?'– Gulbahari doesn't hide her shock – 'these new vats have alarm systems to call the cops'. No wonder Calcutta is becoming a smart city. Gulbahari now earns some money by mending and repairing scraps for the local *kabadi* shop before the objects are sold to the next level of intermediary.

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[10] *Ibid.*222.

[11] *Ibid.*

[12] I am indebted to Ritajyoti Bandyopadhyay for a detailed conversation on the shifting demographic trend in the KMC area and its suburbs between 1901-2011. The data is collected from http://www.newgeography.com/content/002620-the-evolving-urban-form-Calcutta-50-mile-city (Accessed on 20 September, 2014).

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[23] *Ibid.* 132.

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