

Towards a Rental Economy of the City: Calcutta Improvement Trust and Urbanisation in Calcutta in the Early Twentieth Century

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This paper looks at the urban question in colonial Calcutta from the perspectives of institutional politics of spatial organisation and practices of rent extraction after the Calcutta Improvement Trust (CIT) started its operation in 1912. CIT was founded by the Bengal Act V of 1911 or the Calcutta improvement Act, 1911 and went through many amendments and adaptations till 1983. It was described as '[a]n Act to provide for the improvement and expansion of Calcutta' by 'opening up congested areas, laying out or altering streets, providing open spaces for purposes of ventilation or recreation, demolishing or constructing buildings, *acquiring land for the said purposes and for the re-housing of persons of the poorer and working classes displaced by the execution of improvement schemes....*'¹ By restructuring the city and giving it a new look, the CIT effected two sets of urban transformation: first, it created a new discourse of improvement where the enhanced mobility of traffic (by building new roads and widening the older ones) was connected with reshuffling of the adjoined neighbourhoods – especially their commercialisation and valorisation; secondly, they planned to finance their schemes by acquiring, selling and renting out land in these commercialised zones. While the previous studies on the CIT have mentioned these unique features and discussed its autonomous organisational structure and how it invited a range of reactions from the inhabitants of the city in the wake of its establishment,² they have not focused on the shifts in the urban land market caused by the schemes initiated by the Trust. With availability of new archival materials, one may think that this aspect will come to light and we shall be able to explain the connections between urban development and everydayness of rent extraction and land speculation in the twentieth century Calcutta. In this paper, I shall attempt a study of the 'rental economy' that emanated from these interactions between ideas of urban improvement and practices of rent extraction in the early years of the CIT. The term 'rental economy' does not only refer to the domain of extraction, distribution, and circulation of revenue from land and housing initiatives, but to a series of discursive, administrative, legal and political interventions on part of the planners and urban citizens which concretised the links between urban land and improvement, mobility and expansion, speculation and standardisation, and most importantly, between displacement and development. In the course of this paper, we shall see how this concept of 'rental economy' was operative in the discourses of an 'improved' Calcutta in the early years of the Calcutta Improvement Trust.

¹ The Calcutta Improvement Act, 1911, 302. An amendment in 1955 rephrased the emphasised section by eliminating the words 'poorer and working classes' and adding 'clearing *bustees*' as a specific function of the civic body responsible for such improvement and expansion (*ibid*).

² Rajat Ray, *Urban Roots of Indian Nationalism* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1979); Partho Datta, 'Calcutta on the Threshold of the 1940s' in Tanika Sarkar and Sekhar Bandyopadhyay (eds.), *Calcutta: The Stormy Decades* (New Delhi: Social Science Press, 2015), 18-41,

On 10 December 1926, C. H. Bompas presented a paper titled 'The Work of the Calcutta Improvement Trust' at the India Section of the Royal Society of Arts, London.³ Edward Gait, the chairman of the session, introduced the speaker as 'well qualified for the task' of speaking on the subject, because not only was he the first Chairman of the Trust until his retirement in 1922, he was also 'placed in charge' of the Bill in the Bengal Legislative Council that constituted the Trust.⁴ Bompas' paper introduced the Trust to the members of the Society – and to a wider public when it was published in the Journal of the Society in the following month – and described the difficulties that one had to face while envisioning and managing the growth of the town. Bompas' paper was perhaps the first of its kind to speak in detail about the working of the Trust in front of a western audience, but its importance lay elsewhere. This was one of the earliest accounts of the Trust which drew attention to the centrality of the 'land question' in Calcutta's improvement.

Bompas started his account with how the plague epidemic of 1896 made the city authorities aware of the 'insanitary' conditions and led to constitution of the Calcutta Building Commission in 1897, 'which reported on the amendments needed in the law relating to buildings and streets in Calcutta, and in particular insisted on the need of stricter enforcement of the law.'⁵ It was the same commission which recommended expansion of the city to solve the problem of congestion of population by way of creation of an Improvement Trust along the line of the Bombay Improvement Trust (BIT). The BIT was founded in 1898 under similar conditions and successfully adopted a number of improvement schemes. 'Calcutta was not so fortunate,' Bompas commented with some disappointment.⁶ The reason why improvement works went quite smoothly in Bombay was the existence of huge acreage of land under the possession of the government which was passed over to the Trust without any protest or discontent among the citizens. Bompas informed the members of the Royal Society:

In Calcutta under the Permanent Settlement there was no land at the disposal of Government; money had to be found; and Calcutta, while consenting to be improved, desired that anyone but itself should pay the piper.⁷

Bompas' aggravation was understandable. The government's unwillingness to spend much on acquiring privately owned plots of land dragged the process of constituting the Trust to the point when the dread of plague almost disappeared from public memory, until by chance a decision was passed to levy duty on jute exported from Calcutta. The export duty added substantially to the exchequer and a way of financing the bulk of improvement activities was found. Thus came in existence almost 15 years after the outbreak of the plague an institution which would soon become one of the most controversial agencies of urban improvement in the country.

Bompas was quite clear in describing land as the major bone of contention in all the schemes undertaken by the Trust since its inception, but we shall come to his narrative later. Let us now talk about few snippets from the board meetings held in the office of the Trust at 5, Clive Street

³ C. H. Bompas, 'The Work of the Calcutta Improvement Trust', *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, Vol. 75, No. 3868 (1927), 199-219.

⁴ *Ibid*, 199, 200.

⁵ *Ibid*, 200.

⁶ *Ibid*.

⁷ *Ibid*.

in Calcutta. The first snippet is from the Second Meeting of the board on 6 February 1912 where an advertisement was drafted to welcome applications for the jobs of Chief engineer and Land Valuer for the Trust.⁸ The advertisement for the Chief Engineer stated that the selected person would be expected to ‘frame and execute Improvement schemes, whereby new thoroughfares will be driven through the congested quarters of Calcutta and new suburbs laid out to accommodate the increasing population.’⁹ The Calcutta Improvement Act did not mention the term ‘suburbs’ in its description of the functions of the Trust. However, we shall see that, in the coming years, laying out the suburbs would become one of the most distinctive functions of the Trust, as well as one of its biggest challenges. In the same meeting, Bompas – he was the Chairman then – submitted a note of recommendation for a survey of the area under the Maniktollah Municipality in the north-eastern suburbs of the city, possibly for inspecting the chances of expansion of the city in that direction.¹⁰ In the Eighth Meeting of the board, Radha Charan Pal, a member of the board who would later be elected to the Bengal Legislative Council in 1921 from Calcutta East (Non-Mohammedan), proposed re-housing of the people ‘displaced in the northern wards of the town’ to further north and north-east, as they might not be willing to move to the southern wards where already a scheme of ‘laying out the suburbs’ was undertaken.¹¹ As we shall see, a lot of time and energy would be spent over these contentions over the direction of suburbanisation in the later meetings of the Trust. This question of direction is also linked to the questions of land price and speculation and how that affected the larger blueprint of improvement.

We now move to the Fifteenth Meeting on 11 June 1912 where the board members discussed the ‘general programme of the operations of the Trust’ in consideration of replies received from the public bodies like the Bengal Chambers of Commerce.¹² Charles Banks, a medical professional and a member of the Board, contended that the focus should remain with improvement of sanitary conditions and reduction in congestion at the heart of the city by moving the ‘working classes’ to the Docks and the other places of their employment. He was in the opinion of suburbanisation in these directions as these areas already had some infrastructure to accommodate the displaced population. Bompas argued that the extent of re-housing was limited to the area under the already existing schemes. It was also pointed out that the Port Trust had already undertaken housing of their employees in these areas and any intervention from the Improvement Trust would be an unwise decision.¹³ The other important topic was the question of preference between widening of approaches and laying out the suburbs. One of the justifications for widening of the city roads was that it would facilitate movement between the city and its surrounding areas. Frederick Dumayne and Robert Anderson, both members of the board, opined that laying out the suburbs and making arrangements for accommodation of the displaced people should come before taking up extensive improvement schemes, but S. L. Maddox, the then Chairman of the Corporation of Calcutta, advised to prepare a scheme

⁸ Minutes of the Second Meeting, Calcutta Improvement Trust, Proceedings of the Board Meeting (1912-13, Valuation Department), 1.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹¹ Minutes of the Eighth Meeting, Calcutta Improvement Trust, Proceedings of the Board Meeting (1912-13, Valuation Department), 2.

¹² Minutes of the Fifteenth Meeting, Calcutta Improvement Trust, Proceedings of the Board Meeting (1912-13, Valuation Department), 1.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 1-2

immediately 'for widening the Russa Road and Bentinck Street and the Chitpore Road thereby forming a great north and south avenue.'¹⁴ Maddox's logic was irrefutable: 'it was desirable to impress the public with the idea that the Trust was doing something really important.'¹⁵

The discussion continued in the next meeting on 12 June 1912. Ram Dev Chokany, a representative of the business community, proposed to acquire a number of *bustees* at the centre of the town and erect properly sanitary buildings instead to house the evicted people.¹⁶ The rejoinder from the Chairman clarified that any haphazard act of acquisition might run the risk of jeopardizing the road schemes. He also pointed out that the imperative of the trust had been to improve the unsanitary masonry buildings, not the *bustees*, since that could be done by the other civic and administrative bodies. C. F. Payne, a member of the Board who would later become the Chairman of the Municipal Corporation, added that the street schemes would tend to abolish the bustees anyway as it would be easier to acquire bustee land where the value of the property would be cheaper. One may sense from this argument that the valuation procedure undertaken by the Trust included the capital stock invested in land in its calculation of land price, rent and compensation. However, a more interesting point was raised by Sitanath Rai who insisted that people evicted from Burrabazar would not be willing to move to the newly laid out suburban neighbourhood of Manicktollah. Payne interjected by saying that 'the population would move away in layers.'¹⁷ His vision was ingenious:

The people from Burrabazar would not go far, but they would displace others, who in their turn would go further afield till the class of people, who would be willing to live in Manicktolla, was reached.¹⁸

In a way, this vision was coterminous with the Trust's idea of urban improvement. In 1913, a Joint Report was prepared by James Maden, the Trust Engineer, and Albert De Bois Shrobbree, the Chief Valuer of the Trust, which focused extensively on the changes in land value and composition of the city population after CIT's intervention and how this whole rigmarole could be funded.¹⁹ As mentioned earlier, the schemes were geared to produce a more mobile, connected, expanded, sanitised and aestheticised Calcutta and that called for displacement of people perceived as impediments in the way of new order of things, demolition of already existing buildings and establishments, and acquisition of land. All of these also necessitated huge funding which could not be gathered through other elected civic bodies like the Calcutta Corporation. The Chapter on 'Land Values' in the Report was particularly interested in proposing ideas which would solve this problem by commercialising the vacated land and recycling it for further, more profitable enterprises. 'The operations of the Trust will cause the greatest redistribution of property values that has ever taken place in any city in India, if not in the world,' the Report observed.²⁰ It also observed that the current planning of Calcutta led to concentration of land value in the areas adjoined to the main roads. Riding on this observation,

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Minutes of the Sixteenth Meeting, Calcutta Improvement Trust, Proceedings of the Board Meeting (1912-13, Valuation Department), 1.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ James Maden and Albert De Bois Shrobbree, *Joint Report: Calcutta Improvement Trust: City and Suburban Main Road Projects* (Calcutta: Trust Engineer's Office and Chief Valuer's Office, 1913).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 66.

the authors of the Report concluded that building new roads would also lead to increase in land value in areas which were previously located in the backyards of the existing main roads.²¹ Clearly, the road improvement schemes did not only concentrate on increase in traffic and clearing of congestion in the existing roads, but they were also meant for intervention in the land market. This intervention was necessary in order to have a more cost-effective improvement mission by bringing newer areas under its schemes, demolishing the structures already existing there and realising the price of the adjacent plots in the land market: 'If the limits of the property to be acquired are determined so that, other considerations apart, all lands are acquired whose increase in value is in excess of the additional value conferred by the existence of buildings, the net cost of improvements will be reduced to the lowest possible extent.'²² If we observe closely, this argument is in conversation with the theory of rent expounded in Classical Political Economy where rent as the surplus income from land is determined as excess over the price of the produce in the least productive plot of land. To make this model of differential rent work, one needed to have knowledge of the sequence of different grades of land. Interestingly, the Report also conferred on the grading of surplus land under the Trust's acquisition and proposed reorganisation of the city space accordingly:

For example, the Trust might provide land available for the erection of bustee huts upon model lines in the suburbs, and let it to displaced tenants from the city. The cheaper bustee land in the town thus vacated would be taken up in part by displaced population of small pucca buildings in another improvement scheme, and the conditions would adjust themselves similarly throughout the whole area of the Trust's operations.²³

Payne's idea of movement of population in 'layers' was in continuum with this proposal. It had two important implications which would set the tenor of settlement practices in the city. One, redistribution of surplus land among the evicted population also adhered to a politics of spatial gradation of citizens themselves where the past inhabitants of hutments were pushed out of the city and the evictees from the pucca households were settled in the space vacated by the bustee dwellers. In effect, this would perpetuate recycling of land and zoning of the city according to the classes and socio-cultural identities of the citizens. We may argue that, in distinction with the zoning practices in the earlier times where the logic of segregation was derived from the sociality of caste, ethnic or racial hierarchies,²⁴ this new form of zoning had the principle of market and speculative capitalism at its heart. Secondly, as the last line of the quoted passage indicates, this conceptualisation of a stabilised rental economy was assumed to be auto-corrective and self-sufficient to ensure the success of the rehabilitation scheme under the CIT ('the conditions would adjust themselves...'). Indeed the authors remarked that the 'general effect' of improvement schemes would be existence of 'a more natural gradation of values' 'throughout the town.'²⁵ The recycling of urban land, hence, appears as a 'natural' mode of accumulation of speculative capital – a theme which would revisit the urbanisation drives in our time as well.

The phenomenon of gradual and graded 'movement' was integral to the concept of improvement proffered by the Trust; in fact so much so that it described a group of people

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, 67.

²⁴ Pradip Sinha, *Calcutta in Urban History* (Calcutta: Firma KLM, 1978).

²⁵ Maden and Shrosbree, *Joint Report*, 66.

having essentialised this character and incorporated this idea in its scheme of things. In the same meeting where Payne was talking about movement in layers, Radha Charan Pal argued that moving the bustee population would be easier than displacing the middleclass Bengalis, since 'bustee population was a migratory population.'²⁶ Payne also endorsed this view. Finally a reasonable solution to the problem of preference between street schemes and suburbanisation came from Payne who argued if the Engineer started working on the improvement schemes and laying out of the suburbs simultaneously, the latter would be finished earlier than the former, since acquisition of land in the sparsely populated suburbs would be easier. We shall see momentarily how this speculation fared in the actual reality of rental economy of Calcutta.

The process of land acquisition, improvement and resettlement in the first decade of CIT's career faced many difficulties, and it was the issue of land disposal which caused the most of the disturbances in the happy paradise of urban improvement. The first scheme undertaken by the Trust was improvement of Surtibagan, a neighbourhood adjacent to Burrabazar – ideal for intervention for its notorious unsanitary conditions. In the Ninety-seventh meeting of the board held on 1 June 1914, a note by Shrosbree, the Chief Valuer, on the disposal of land in this scheme was considered.²⁷ The disposal of land under CIT's possession was sanctioned by Section 81 in the Calcutta Improvement Act, 1911, where it is stated that the 'Board may retain, or may let on hire, lease, sell, exchange or otherwise dispose of, any land vested in or acquired by them under this Act.'²⁸ In the case of plural claims over a singular plot, the highest bidder would be the rightful owner according to this Act. The Chief Valuer's note on disposal of land calculated the rent of lease on the plots at 4.5 percent on 60 percent of the estimated value of the property. Sitanath Rai and other members pointed out that Bengalis would prefer to have 'freehold' on the land for erection of residence. The ensuing discussion led to the conclusion that 'it was fare to fix twenty-five years' purchase as the price of redemption when the rent was calculated on 4.5% basis....'²⁹

Radha Charan Pal, however, prepared another note pointing out few discrepancies in the Valuer's note. His note considered two points: (a) terms of disposal and (b) review of Section 81. According to the Valuer, Pal noticed, sixty percent of the estimated value of a plot should be converted into a ground rent with 4.5 percent interest and the rest must be realised as premium.³⁰ There was a difference in opinion between the Valuer and the Chairman on the issue of availability of cash in the hand of the plot-holder after payment of the premium from the compensation received due to eviction: 'The compensation money which the party will receive will undoubtedly be much less *pro rata* than what he will have to spend in making a new house, for price will go up much after the operations of the Trust.'³¹ The challenge was to match the amount of compensation and the price of land and cost of material after improvement of the area – a matter of complex calculations based on the futuristic dynamics of urban rent. Pal

²⁶ Minutes of the Sixteenth Meeting, Calcutta Improvement Trust, Proceedings of the Board Meeting (1912-13, Valuation Department), 2.

²⁷ Minutes of the Ninety-seventh Meeting, Calcutta Improvement Trust, Proceedings of the Board Meeting (1914-15, Valuation Department), 1.

²⁸ *The Calcutta Improvement Act*, 1911, 359.

²⁹ Minutes of the Ninety-seventh Meeting, 1.

³⁰ Radha Charan Pal, Note on the Disposal of Land, dated 8 June 1914, Calcutta Improvement Trust, Proceedings of the Board Meeting (1914-15, Valuation Department), 1.

³¹ *Ibid.*

concluded that the Section 81 was unclear on this matter. However, a more important concern was the question of pre-emption – giving the original owners a chance to bid for the plot before others. The Chairman was opposed to this clause as it was ‘unreasonable’ to go through this process merely for people interested in some fractions of the whole plot. The underlying assumption was of course that it bypassed the market principle of equilibrium price which was at the core of the disposal mechanism. Pal objected to this point quite subtly where he tried to establish an ethical right of the ‘original’ owners over the plots against the ‘outsiders.’³² ‘The Board ought to do all it can to minimise discontent by permitting people to retain their old houses which was the guiding principle of the legislature in dealing with ancestral holdings,’ he concluded.³³

Pal’s deposition also asked for more involvement of the public in these decisions. The rental economy of the city must not be governed by the ‘natural’ principles of political economy and the science of valuation only. Pal brought a motion for consulting the principal public bodies before proceeding with the disposal of land in Surtibagan in the next meeting on 8 June 1914, but it was ‘lost by seven votes to three.’³⁴ It was further decided in the meeting that half of the available plots to be leased and the other half sold; the rent for lease should be fixed at 4.5% on 60% of estimated value; and ‘in case of the leases the purchasers should have the option of paying the *salami* in three equal instalments’ with 5% interest on the outstanding payments.³⁵ (What is interesting here is the use of the term ‘*salami*’ instead of the earlier term ‘premium.’) It was also decided in the meeting that the right of pre-emption would exist in case of the disposable land being part of a single holding. A note by Reshee Case Law (dated 4 June 1914), a member of the Board and representative of the Bengal Chamber of Commerce, on disposable land was also circulated in the meeting.³⁶

Law’s note consisted of concerns over two major issues: (a) whether the rental system would affect the ‘small capitalists’ and (b) if there was any need to insist on a particular type of architecture for the buildings to be erected in the newly purchased or leased land. On the first point, he opined that the ‘conditions of the premiums should be made as light as possible’ to allow the ‘small capitalists’ – he did not make any difference between purchases for residential and business purposes – erect buildings. On the second point, he opposed the idea of uniform architectural style and argued for maintenance of sanitary conditions without the compulsion of having to erect ‘permanent buildings of a certain value.’³⁷ ‘As regards the disposal of the surplus land,’ he pointed out, ‘two things should always be kept in view, viz., the circumstances of the people and the conditions to be attached to the land.’³⁸ From both Pal’s and Law’s depositions, one may get a sense how the politics of urban improvement and land valuation took a specific form around concerns and anxieties regarding the location of the evicted population in the rental economy of the city. These anxieties internalised a set of dualities between movement and

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*, 2.

³⁴ Minutes of the Ninety-eighth Meeting, Calcutta Improvement Trust, Proceedings of the Board Meeting (1914-15, Valuation Department), 1.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

³⁶ Reshee Case Law, Letter to the Chairman, Minutes of the Ninety-eighth Meeting, Calcutta Improvement Trust, Proceedings of the Board Meeting (1914-15, Valuation Department), 1-2.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

settlement, permanence and impermanence, aesthetics and circumstances. The dynamism of urban improvement best captured in the vision of movement in layers and the staticity of settlement were sometimes in loggerheads especially when the question of lease/purchase made appearance. On the other hand, permanence called for standardisation, whereas any motion against that facilitated further, continuous movement which became the emblem of the Trust's idea of improvement. The early years of the Trust was marked by these unresolved anxieties on part of both the Trust and the people affected by the climate of change. As one is forced to notice, these dualities often replicated the logic of cultural ingenuity and difference already defining and articulating the modes of political mobilisation against the colonial rule. There is no doubt that the institution itself was aware of these anxieties and tried its best to resolve them within its limited capacity. Thus in the Ninety-eighth meeting of the Board, it was decided not to 'control the architectural features of the buildings'³⁹ to be erected in the disposed land.

When the Trust was busy with fixing the price of the land at its disposal, the issues of laying out the suburbs and direction of movement of the evicted people were not at rest. In a letter directed to the Chairman on 1 July 1918, Sitanath Rai complained that not much had been done to improve the sanitary conditions in the northern and central parts of the city.⁴⁰ Once again he voiced the concern that people evicted from the northern parts of the city would not be willing to move to the southern wards. He requested the Chairman to take necessary actions to buy cheap land in the northern suburbs for resettlement. Rai's deposition was discussed in the next meeting on 23 July 1918 where he was reminded of the earlier decision of laying out those parts of the suburbs where already some infrastructure like drainage was available, which was, in this case, the southern suburban areas.⁴¹ However, the issue of buying cheap land in the suburbs was not suppressed. The Chairman was asked by the Board to prepare a Report on the subject. Bompas, who was still the Chairman, wrote in his Report (dated 7 August 1918) that securing open spaces in consideration of the future of the city must be a object of the Trust.⁴² The only problem was that acquisition of land required laying out schemes for improvement.⁴³ But there was a loophole as they were supposed to be in every law of man's making. It was pointed out that the Trust could acquire land for 'purposes of recreation and ventilation without framing a Street Scheme.'⁴⁴ Such attempts, however, would demand payment of 15% extra compensation. Bompas prepared a longer note on the same topic in the next year where he compared the area of open spaces in Calcutta with other major cities like London, New York and Paris and pointed out that the former did not lag behind the latter ones because of the existence of the Maidan – the big, lush patch of greenery at the centre of the city, the proverbial lung of Calcutta.⁴⁵ Bompas did not fail to mention that this exclusive patch of open space was an isolated phenomenon and distribution of open space in the rest of the city was quite uneven. He finally opined for initiating

³⁹ Minutes of the Ninety-eighth Meeting, 2.

⁴⁰ Sitanath Rai, Letter to the Chairman, Minutes of the Two Hundred and Ninety-ninth Meeting, Calcutta Improvement Trust, Proceedings of the Board Meeting (1918-19, Valuation Department), 1.

⁴¹ Minutes of the Three Hundredth Meeting, Calcutta Improvement Trust, Proceedings of the Board Meeting (1918-19, Valuation Department), 1.

⁴² C. H. Bompas, Chairman's Note on the Cost of Executing the sanctioned Programme of the Trust, dated 7 July 1918, Calcutta Improvement Trust, Proceedings of the Board Meeting (1918-19, Valuation Department), 2.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ C. H. Bompas, Note on the Acquisition of Land for Open Spaces in the Suburbs of Calcutta, dated 3 February 1919, Calcutta Improvement Trust, Proceedings of the Board Meeting (1919-20, Valuation Department), 1-2.

schemes to install parks, squares and playgrounds in Manicktollah, Cossipore-Chitpore, Garden Reach and Howrah.⁴⁶ The journey from Sitanath Rai's deposition to acquire land in the suburbs for re-housing to Bompas' campaign for clearing open space in the same areas for recreation is curious. It indicates how the thrust of laying out the suburbs for resettling the homeless was being displaced by a makeshift concern for a greener future, and that too riding on the logic of improvement and its paraphernalia.

In this paper, I have tried to show how the early debates within the Trust enforced a notion of improvement which dealt with the question of urban land within a framework endorsed by political economy, engulfed by legal and administrative reason and perpetuated by governmental dispositions. Rent, therefore, ceases to remain an index of revenue generation – it was a combination of conceptual novelty, governmental intervention and science of valuation. The rental economy of Calcutta after the constitution of the CIT became a repository of complementary and contradictory interests and movements where the topography of the city was being adjusted to the shifting logic of governance of space. Thus the history of the CIT holds a special place in the urban history of Calcutta. The uniqueness of the CIT is not confined to the fact that it was one of the earliest attempts at urban improvement and governance of space. It also offers a chronicle of how these interactive paradigms made way for the future improvement projects which concretised and sustained the notion of urbanity in the early twentieth century.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 2.