

## Reining in the trickle and the floods? Migration, governance and evolving regime of shelter in late colonial Calcutta, 1939-1947

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Migration has been central to Calcutta's urban growth from its very inception. My paper focuses on a period of unprecedented fluidity and movement around decolonization, from 1939 with the beginning of the Second World War till independence and partitioning of the Indian subcontinent in 1947. I trace myriad streams of migration during this period of instability, the evolution of a governmental regime of shelter which sought to control movement and access to spaces in different ways, and strategies of low key or highly charged up resistance to the official refugee regime from below. I focus on a few identifiable groups of refugees who came to war-time Calcutta, beginning with the refugees from Far East (Burma, Malaya), the famine migrants from rural areas of Bengal, and eventually those fleeing communal violence (both Hindus and Muslims) starting with the Calcutta riots in 1946. My attempt is to show that a differential regime for shelter was being put in place through government relief mechanisms as well as private relief organisations. This differential regime discriminated between migrants displaced from *climactic* factors (factors involving immediate and physical threats of violence amidst warlike situations, communal violence etc.) which included the 'evacuees' of war and communal violence, as opposed to those displaced from more endemic factors where violence works insidiously through long term structural mechanisms. While some controlled relief was offered to the first groups (the 'evacuees'), the latter, which included the famine refugees were discriminated against and primarily sought to be contained in segregated spaces. I also trace strategies of resistance to the official regime, and attempt to show that while the divisive control mechanisms mediated migrant access to space and resources, the cumulative effect of the resistance put up by migrants to official relief in specific cases and the planning regime more generally, worked to open up the city's public spaces and public utilities in hitherto unprecedented ways.

Keywords: displacement, shelter, climactic, endemic

Migration has been central to Calcutta's urban growth from its very inception. Calcutta as the capital and the 'second city' of the British colonial empire has attracted a wide range of migrants from colonial times. My paper focuses on a period of unprecedented fluidity and movement, around decolonization from 1939 (with the beginning of the Second World War) till the arrival of independence and partitioning of the Indian subcontinent in 1947. I trace myriad streams of migration during this period of instability, evolution of a governmental regime of shelter which sought to control movement and access to spaces in different ways, and strategies of low key or highly charged up resistance to the official refugee regime from below. I focus on three identifiable population flows to war-time Calcutta, beginning with streams of refugees from Far East (Burma, Malaya), the famine migrants from rural areas, and eventually those fleeing communal violence

(both Hindus and Muslims) starting with the Calcutta riots in 1946. My attempt is to show that a *differential* regime for shelter was being put in place through government relief mechanisms as well as private relief organisations. This regime discriminated between migrants displaced from *climactic* factors (involving immediate and physical threats of violence amidst warlike situations, communal violence etc.) as opposed to those displaced from more *endemic* factors where violence works insidiously through long term structural mechanisms. While some controlled relief was offered to the first groups which included the different 'evacuees', latter groups consisting of the famished rural poor were primarily sought to be contained in segregated spaces. I also trace strategies of resistance to the official regime, and attempt to show that while the divisive control mechanisms mediated migrant access to space and resources, the cumulative effect of the resistance put up by migrants to official relief in specific cases and the planning regime more generally, worked to open up the city's public spaces and public utilities in hitherto unprecedented ways.

My paper begins with a brief recapitulation of Calcutta's urban institutions and specifically traces urban governance in Calcutta from the onset of the second world war, and through the years of the Bengal famine. The next section is concerned with three specific streams of migration to the city from the 1940s consisting of i) the rural migrants coming from famine stricken areas of Bengal, ii) the war 'evacuees' from far east and iii) finally the victims of communal violence including the 'partition refugees'. Here I dwell on how these movements were sought to be controlled and contained. The third section considers strategies of migrant resistance to wartime containment and policing. I conclude with an assessment of the implication of wartime population flows in relation to an evolving regime of shelter and their cumulative impact on the planning regime more broadly.

### **1.1 Urban governance, war and surveillance: a fearful geography**

Municipal governance in Calcutta came to its own in the early twentieth century. With the Calcutta Municipal Corporation Act of 1923, local interests found considerable representation in municipal affairs for the first time. This period saw the growth of nationalist politics and an accompanying process of communalisation of urban affairs. While the Corporation in Calcutta largely remained in Hindu control, the introduction of provincial autonomy with the Government of India Act of 1935 and the coming of a Muslim dominated coalition government in the province of Bengal in 1937 exacerbated communal hostilities at the municipal level. The dynamics of communal tensions in city governance will have a direct bearing on the evolving regime of shelter for migrants through policies of 'famine relief' and 'refugee relief', examined in more detail later in the discussion.

Governance from the late 1930s was marked by tensions that pulled the imperial authority, the newly elected provincial government in Bengal and municipal bodies like the Calcutta Municipal Corporation (CMC) in different directions. There were frequent clashes regarding policies and jurisdiction. Government and opposition in the province became clearly divided along communal lines between the Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha who formed the main opposition. The Corporation which had been largely under the control of Hindu *bhadralok* interests underwent significant changes in power and composition. In 1939, a Calcutta Municipal Amendment Act was initiated by the Haq government to put an end to Hindu supremacy in this traditional bastion of *bhadralok* power. A new seat sharing arrangement was introduced that ensured a significant Muslim

presence among other constituencies (Chatterji 1994, 107). The period was also fraught with tension between the elected provincial ministry and the British Governor of Bengal. The presence of the military in Bengal and police excesses created ground for hostilities. The imminent spectre of the imposition of the Section 93 of the Defence of India rule loomed large. Under Section 93 representative governments could be suspended and provinces brought directly under the Governor's control. That Section 93 was imposed twice in the 1940s in Bengal and ministries fell with the active intervention of the Governor is itself telling.

The powers of the Corporation were severely attenuated under war time regulations, and new ad hoc organisations came up which encroached on the Corporation's jurisdiction. Certain 'civil defence' forces were created to whom large powers were delegated. This included the Air Raid Precaution services (ARP) and the Civic Guard for the cities and the Home Guard for the countryside of Bengal. These bodies were made of locally recruited young men who functioned as loyalist native police forces. The majority of the recruits were Hindus. The ARP and the civic guard became important in Calcutta's urban context. The prime concern for the ARP was policing Calcutta and its surrounding suburbs and protection against enemy attacks. Both the ARP and the civic guard were answerable not to the Corporation, but to the Commissioner of Police, Calcutta. The creation of this body put the colonial authorities in dispute with the Calcutta Corporation over jurisdiction of the ARP and the Corporation condemned the scheme as 'unscientific and puerile' (Mukherjee 2011, 39). These defence forces came to be manned by locals who were more often neighbourhood roughs and goondas, feared and scorned by respected householders. They were among the most unpopular wartime innovations.<sup>i</sup>As the course of the war revealed, they were primarily concerned with the protection of the 'public utilities' which included the war industries, the transport network and the docks, and government establishments and services like gas, electricity etc. required for the smooth running of the war and much less the general 'public' as such. Their position and function vis-à-vis the people, seemed less protection and more policing. They were used in various ways to patrol, police and control the city, and their jurisdiction far outstripped the initial declared purpose of 'civil defence'.

By mid-1942 'Improvements' orchestrated by the Calcutta Improvement Trust (CIT) and the CMC came to a halt. The resources of the civic bodies were channelized to facilitated 'civil defence'. The machinery of the Corporation and the Trust were geared to create and sustain a 'war infrastructure.' In this new function, it was the ARP and the civic guard who had greater authority (of an undefined and ad hoc nature) than either Corporation or the CIT. War infrastructure in effect, meant despoiling the existing infrastructure to accommodate war necessities. The CIT and the CMC together with the ARP undertook works of digging silt trenches in Calcutta's newly emerging and carefully designed parks.<sup>ii</sup> Baffle walls were erected all over the city around important official buildings. Air raid shelters came up in different parts of Calcutta. From May 1941, the government put in place lighting restrictions in the city. The power of the street lamps was reduced and obstruction cones were put on the lamps all over Calcutta. From January 1943, all street lamps were extinguished at 10 pm at night (CMC Annual Administrative Report 1942-43, 50). This continued till mid-1945. The war infrastructure aimed to protect the imperial concerns and safeguard Calcutta's important 'public utilities' to facilitate the war. The people (except the so called 'priority classes')

were left to fend for themselves. There were constant demands for more light in the city, as voiced by the Corporation. But apart from small exceptions during Hindu and Muslim festivals, hardly any significant concession was granted.

Following the 'civic guards' came the military. Huge internationally constituted army contingents consisting of the Britishers, Americans, Chinese, West Africans were brought to Calcutta in large numbers. Military equipments of mechanised warfare arrived in their thousands. Endless convoys of huge lorries and giant tanks rolled through the streets of Calcutta night and day. The entrenchment of the military involved its own kinds of displacement. Presence of troops necessitated the creation of army encampments in available areas, and also 'requisition' of civilian properties. A large number of properties were requisitioned under the Defence of India rules all over Calcutta. Requisition needless to say, were forceful and was conducted with the prospect of heavy penalty under the Defense of India rule. This implied largescale population displacement. Apart from actual displacements, wartime Calcutta was rife with rumours of possible threats of displacements. For example, a rumour was doing the rounds in Ballygunge area, that a wholesale evacuation was in the offing for the entire ward no. 27 of the CMC. The government had to issue frequent declarations and press notes denying such rumours of largescale impending civil evacuation.<sup>iii</sup>

Heavy militarisation worked to create a fearful geography. The military camps, army contingents, baffle walls, slit trenches rendered Calcutta the appearance of a city under seize. With the lighting restrictions on, the city was to know many long and dark nights, dark perhaps in more than one senses where criminals had a free reign. The general population was advised to keep out of the way of the 'non-family' areas. The Calcutta gazette brought out a special supplement called 'Safety first' in 1945, with a view to giving the citizens a correct lead on safety measures on the road, at home, at school, in industrial undertakings, particularly 'at a time when accidents prevailed in the city' (CMC Annual Administrative Report 1945-46, 103).

Calcutta society as a whole came under high-handed governance and militarisation of the times. With the advance of the war in Far East, military control was augmented in the entire frontier region of eastern India. The war industries were dubbed as 'essential public service' from February 1941 onwards (Bhattacharya 82). The Essential Services Maintenance Ordinance of 1941 followed in its wake, to control the freedom of labour employed in precisely those war industries which had now become 'essential public services'. The punishments for recalcitrant labour as enacted in the new law was justified on the grounds of disruption of 'public services'. What was underway was a new construct of a 'public' synonymous with those who facilitated the war. Public relations during the entire period proved problematic. Specially the relation between the military, 'civil defence forces' and the people were fraught with mutual suspicion and hostilities. From 1940 onwards, there was a systematic effort on part of the colonial government to manage public relations through intense propaganda campaigns.<sup>iv</sup> Heavy curtailment of civic freedom, the frequent imposition of Section 93, clamping of curfew all fomented discontent. The war ended in mid-1945, but demilitarisation proved a rather long drawn affair. The public spaces and the public sphere of Calcutta was heavily surveilled, where the military and the police had a predominating presence. This was challenged in various

ways and the city's migrants also gained a considerable access and visibility in Calcutta's public space and public utilities, as deliberated in the next section.

## 1.2 'Destitutes' vs 'deserving' migrants? evolution of a differential regime of shelter

Advance of the war and the gradual unfolding of the Bengal famine of 1943, which in recent scholarship is understood to have existed for the entire duration of the war (Mukherjee 2011) meant massive dislocations. The causes of the dislocations were manifold and the direction of population flow was just as varied. Here I will briefly focus on three identifiable streams of migration of people unsettled due to various war effects, which significantly implicated the emerging official regime of shelter: i) distress migration from rural areas, ii) war 'evacuees' and iii) finally the in/outflow of victims of communal violence including the 'partition refugees'. I will try to establish that a clear separation between the first group on the one hand and the latter two on the other slowly emerged out of the confusion of the 1940s and a differential regime of shelter would be in place by the end of the 1940s.

From its very inception, migration has been intimately connected to Calcutta's urban expansion. An unequal relation between the city and its hinterland underlay much of the population movement in the region. Instead of a reciprocal relation where urban growth fosters agrarian and other types of development in the rural hinterland, and rural prosperity spills over into urban growth, the hinterland in Bengal was made subservient to metropolitan needs. Under the influence of colonialism, rural surplus was extracted from a very large area surrounding the city and siphoned off to facilitate foreign trade, much of which operated from Calcutta. The metropolitan area came to acquire a disproportionate share of industrial output and factory employment and other economic activities.<sup>v</sup> It emerged as a heavy concentration point for the urban population of the entire province.

It is in this economic and social context that much of the migration to and from the city has to be understood. Right from the early eighteenth century migration in search of work at the city's commercial and industrial sectors and services was a prominent occurrence. It includes migration of business entrepreneurs, service groups (Bates 2000, 9) and also industrial labour. Labour migration gained momentum from the later half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the setting up of the jute and cotton industries in the suburbs of Calcutta.<sup>vi</sup> Cheap non-Bengali labour force from Bihar, Orissa and the United Province, usually termed as 'upcountry' labour outnumbered the local Bengalis in the industrial labour market.<sup>vii</sup> Labour migration in Bengal in the colonial period was a seasonal activity, with the migrants often going back to their villages after working in the factories in the lean agrarian seasons. This section of the migrants would come under increasing regulation and face restrictions to their mobility under the wartime labour laws.

Somewhat separated from these are another stream labelled as 'distress' migration. They make occasional appearance in policy literature of the region on times of famine. This type of migration is

often construed as somewhat 'uneconomic' implying a disconnection with the economic development of the wider region within which the migration takes place. Colonial surveys and reports often emphasise that distress migration was a rare occurrence in Bengal, taking place only under conditions of famine. One commonly held opinion, traditionally encouraged by the colonial administration has been that the rural peasantry in Bengal were relatively prosperous all through the colonial period. The predominance of the 'upcountry' labour in Calcutta's industries and the relatively small Bengali presence in the labour force is invoked to highlight that Bengal peasantry did not need to supplement their rural income by seeking wage employment at factories in the urban areas, and the region did not see distress migration unless in rather *exceptional* circumstances.

Recent studies on rural poverty have debunked much of this colonial propaganda of assumed prosperity of the peasantry in Bengal (Bose 1986; van Schendel and Faraizi 1984; Bates 2000). But academic literature on distress migration in colonial Bengal is almost nonexistent. The studies of rural poverty and landlessness provide some idea on the existence of a floating population between the villages and cities of Bengal, often on the verge of destitution. The earliest survey of conditions of poverty in rural Bengal is the Dufferin Report formulated in 1888. The report indicates that throughout Bengal about 26% of households solely depended on wage labour for sustenance and it was considerably higher in the western districts of the province like Bankura, Murshidabad and Midnapur. But the findings of this report were kept confidential for a long period of time by the colonial administration. The estimates of different indicators of economic wellbeing in the rural areas as given out in the decennial censuses suffered from problems of definition, seriality, under enumeration and distortion (van Schendel and Faraizi 1984, 37-38). Recent studies point out that proportion of rural population dependent on wage labour, which is a significant indicator of rural poverty remained higher than the various estimates published in the decennial censuses would grant. High rate of wage labour was specifically true for middle and western districts of Bengal (Bose 1986, 30-31). Sections of the poorer groups of course met their financial needs by seasonal rural to rural migration at the time of harvest (Rogaly 1994). But it would not be incorrect to assume a steady trickle kept coming to the urban fringes, specially to the unorganised and informal sectors, and remained largely outside enumeration. The figures for rural population solely dependent on wage labour would see a steep rise in the post-independence period in both sides of divided Bengal (van Schendel and Faraizi 1984, 46; Bose 1986; Bandyopadhyay 1977)

Schendel and Faraizi in their study of rural wage labour, have argued that despite the prevalence of rural poverty, the arrangements of jotdar-bargadar landholding system which was prevalent in Bengal from the late 19<sup>th</sup> till the late colonial period, indeed generated rural indebtedness and poverty, but did not lead to large scale land alienation (van Schendel and Faraizi 1984, 32). But without a doubt, a significant number of rural proletariat existed even in non-famine conditions. I would like to stress that roughly from the time of the slump of 1930s, specially in the western and central part of Bengal, the combined effects of diminishing size of holdings (a fact emphasized by most studies of this period), lack of productivity and indebtedness had started pushing people out (with or without land alienation) to the urban centres around Calcutta. But groups who reached the city in different states of poverty and destitution, often gravitating to the informal sector, were faced with discursive invisibility. The following table provides some idea of the migration to and from the city of Calcutta in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Table 1 Migration to and from Calcutta 1891-1951 (census 1951, pg xviii)

Year	1951	1941	1931	1921	1911	1901	1891
Actual population	2,548,677	2,108,801	1,140,862	1,031,697	998,012	920,933	741,880
Immigration	1,389,023	690,550	378,776	371,575	397,274	324,914	249,891
Emigration	44,536	26,591	22,301	46,000	34,000	3,344	5,500
Natural population	1,204,190	1,444,932	784,387	706,122	634,738	599,363	497,498
Percentage variation	-16.7	+84.2	+11.1	+11.2	+5.9	+20.5	

These figures are of course an aggregate of total migration to the city, and I have not been able to locate separate figures for increasing number of poverty stricken villagers who came to the city all through the 1930s and 1940s. What can still be highlighted from Table 1 is that there was a drastic rise in migration to Calcutta during the twenty years from 1931 to 1951. This pattern of inflow and outflow is understandable in the light of economic shifts brought about by the onset of the war making an already unequal city-country relation even more drastically unequal. All through the 1930s, rural economy of the province was under severe strain. The prices of important agrarian products like rice and jute went down and the rural credit system was on the verge of collapse. With the onset of the second world war, government policies of procurement, together with 'denial' worked to cripple the countryside.<sup>viii</sup> Official procurement policies ensured that the city of Calcutta was provided for at the cost of the countryside. If Calcutta's centrality within the wider eastern region is nothing new, this state of affairs was taken to a new level altogether during the second world war. With the start of the war, Calcutta became the most important supply fronts, accounting for as much as 80% of the armament, textile and heavy machinery production used in the Asian theatre (Mukherjee 2015). Calcutta's importance further increased with progress of the war in the Far East. This process transformed the geo-political importance of Calcutta in the whole eastern region. For a large multitude of population unsettled due to war and scarcity, establishing a legitimate foothold in Calcutta came to be seen as essential for survival. Large migration ensued.<sup>ix</sup> While this migration included a large multitude of people, we may now turn our attention to the most invisible of all groups, the famine stricken people who flocked to Calcutta in large numbers from the late 1930s.

From the beginning of 1940s, inflow of rural destitutes to Calcutta gained a certain visibility which created official discomfort. By the mid 1943, the famine victims had started dying on the open streets of Calcutta and started drawing international attention through press reports. Certain relief measures were gradually being instituted. The famine victims were distributed food at the various government run and private food kitchens, and shelter were improvised either at the existing Air Raid shelters, or through the creation of poor houses. Gradually the main thrust of official policy became 'rounding up' of the 'sick destitutes' to contained spaces. In official parlance, the need of the destitutes, apparently, was less food and more 'shelter'. 'Shelter' in effect simply implied

confinement within government controlled spaces. An appeal issued by the Relief Commissioner Martin in October 1943 brings out the point. He urged the 'legitimate residents' of Calcutta to 'refrain from indiscriminate charity' that would only encourage the 'sick destitute'. 'These unfortunates are now more in want of shelter than food. As poor houses are established one after another, it will be advisable to curtail the number of food kitchens so that vagrants may become accustomed to look for relief in the poor houses rather than in other places' (Quoted from Mukherjee 2015, 133). The process of 'rounding up' 'sick destitutes' from the streets of Calcutta was a rather forceful one. They were taken in military and police lorries, and removed to receiving centres, where they were medically examined and classified before being sent on to the appropriate homes. The ration supplied in these camps were much below the required minimum level, leading to slow starvation and death. Some 'destitutes' were even formed into 'labour battalion' and sent off to serve the army in the vicinity of Assam. Many resisted these relief efforts to the best of their ability. They tried to escape or evade capture and desperately clung to the streets of Calcutta, rather than dying as detainees in god forsaken government camps which supplied only starvation rations. Efforts to sanitise the city of starving villagers, in this case were thwarted by active resistance engendered by deep mistrust of government intentions (Mukherjee 2015, 13-14.)

While one side of the policy on famine refugees tried to remove the 'destitutes' from the streets in the garb of providing 'famine relief', the other side included reformulating laws to condemn certain types of public behaviour, specially dwelling in public spaces. A new legal definition of vagrancy was being construed. Much was made of 'nuisance in public thoroughfares' as people started living on the pavements. The Annual report of the CMC for 1942-43 noted:

The magnitude of nuisance in the city caused by beggars is enormous. Apart from physical nuisance caused by presentation of ugly sores or deformed limbs to attract passers-by for alms giving, they as reservoirs of infection play an important role in the spread of disease. Acuteness of the problem drew the attention of the public and the Corporation for a long time. With the outbreak of hostilities in the Far East, this problem assumed a new importance... it was decided to establish a Vagrants Home outside Calcutta. (CMC Annual Administrative Report 1942-43, Health Report section, 3)

The report did not directly equate famine victims with beggars, but its policies implicated the very same population. Neither 'migrant' nor 'refugee' status were extended to the incoming famine stricken rural population. Rather, their presence shaped a new official stance on beggary in Calcutta. For the first time in Calcutta's urban history, beggary was conceived as a punishable 'offence' requiring municipal intervention. The public presence of deformed bodies, and the conscious use of such deformities by its victims in the city's public spaces to claim visibility, attract sympathies and alms of the passers-by was not to be tolerated. The problem of vagrancy was included in the Medical Report section of the CMC Annual administrative report, indicating a pathologizing of the beggar problem. This justified creation of Vagrant Homes *outside* or at peripheral locations of the city. Government mechanisms of providing relief to famine victims through food kitchens, sheltering them in poor houses located outside the city and the vagrancy ordinance which would come within



months of the publication of this report, with provisions for rounding up beggars were, in effect, part and parcel of the same policy of *containment*.

The Bengal Vagrancy Ordinance (1942) later became codified into the Bengal Vagrancy Act, 1943 and came into force from October 1943 in parts of Howrah, Tollygunge, Behala, Calcutta and 24 Parganas. The Bengal Vagrancy Act defines a beggar as:

A person found seeking for alms in any public place in such condition or manner as makes it that such person exists by asking for alms but does not include a person collecting money or asking for food or gift for a prescribed purpose. (People's Participation 2013, 13)

The definition of a vagrant very broadly included persons who 'exists by asking for alms' in 'any public space'. It was reported in the Statesman that the Bengal Vagrancy Ordinance 'provided for the police to arrest any person who appears to be a vagrant', with the clarification that it was not "intended in practice to apply to persons who have only recently been reduced to begging by the abnormal rise in the cost of food." For how long a person has been reduced to beggary was left to be determined by the police officer on the spot (The Statesman, 31.7.43). This in effect erased the distinction. Equating famine victims with beggars worked to erase the long term structural reasons for displacement, disease and destitution which created the vagrants in large number under famine like condition. Beggary became an offence and they were to be contained in specific spaces, where they could be given training and education to remake them into useful citizens. And it were the government's civilian police forces, that is, the ARP and the civic guard who were to perform the main task of rounding up the beggars.

While the living were sent off to confined spaces created for them outside the city like the famine shelters and vagrant homes, the large number of dead on the streets of Calcutta also posed a problem. Death on the pavements of Calcutta slowly started drawing international attention from the mid-1943.<sup>x</sup> Corporation officials lamented the difficulty of ascertaining the exact reason of such death, or keeping account of their numbers. Corporation's annual administrative reports started recording the bodies that were left unclaimed, to be cremated at the expense of the Corporation. A new category of 'pauper' was introduced in the annual reports to account these unfortunate lot whose dead bodies lay unclaimed on Calcutta streets and their enumeration started from mid-1943. The entry of 'paupers' on Calcutta's streets and sidewalks and also in the Corporation reports proved to be rather *long term* affair. After the initial few years, the street deaths that started under famine conditions had become somewhat regular and *normalised*. Table 2 provides an estimate of the number of death of paupers for the next decade or so:

Table 2: Percentage of death of 'Pauper' in relation to total annual death in Calcutta<sup>xi</sup>

Year	Total Death	Pauper Death	Percentage of Total Death
44-45	51992	8826 (average 167 per week)	One sixth
45-46	37,656	5649 (average 109 per week)	One seventh
46-47	36,859	4872 (average 94 per week)	Less than one seventh
47-48	45,310	5863 (average 113 per week)	One-eighth
48-49	44,307	4708 (average 91 per week)	Less than one ninth
49-50	43804	4756 (average 91 per week)	One ninth
50-51	55,422	6587 (average 127 per week)	One eighth
51-52	40,927	3971 (average 76 per week)	One tenth
52-53	38,501	4365 (average of 84 per week)	One ninth
53-54	36,578	4467 (average of 86 per week)	One eighth
54-55	32,197	4282 (average of 82 per week)	One eighth
55-56	32,223	4993 (an average of 96 per week)	One sixth
57-58	32,197	5315 (an average of 82 per week)	One eighth
58-59	33,269	4833 (an average of 94 per week)	One seventh
59-60	34,383	5,102 (an average of 98 per week)	One seventh

The official closure of the Bengal famine was marked with the Famine Enquiry Commission's report published on May 1945. What this huge and consistent number of the unclaimed bodies to be picked up from the streets and pavements of Calcutta indicate is that starvation, destitution and death raged throughout the period. The living perhaps eluded official enumeration and confinement, or became distributed under different official/unofficial categories like pavement dwellers, beggars and squatters.<sup>xii</sup> The dead registered a consolidated and consistent presence.

I would like to highlight the implications of the policy regarding the famine stricken migrants in Calcutta. All that was offered by way of relief was primarily aimed at removal of these groups from the visible parts of the city and confinement at different types of shelter located outside the city. Apart from such measures responding to a 'crisis', a policy of a broader and more permanent sort was being constructed through a new law for vagrancy, whereby begging was criminalised, to be dealt with confinement. The legal definition of begging remained sufficiently broad for it to be invoked in a variety of different context.

Around the same time that famine migrants were coming to Calcutta, the city was receiving other fleeing people, whose displacement was more obviously and directly related to the war and associated violence. A *separate* regime of shelter was being evolved for these *climactic* migrants. A prevalent term in use in the official archives for distinguishing these groups were 'evacuees', implying a population that evacuated in the face of *direct* threat of violence. The term of course precluded any straightforward acknowledgement of the fact that these groups could have claims to 'refuge'. Use of the term 'refugee' was avoided all through the colonial period. The first major group of 'evacuees' to come to Calcutta were those from the far east, Burma from early 1942. When Japan began bombing Rangoon from December 1941, this generated a great exodus of population. The British military establishment secured their own flight to safety, leaving the locals to fend for themselves. The Indian population in Burma undertook a long and perilous journey, crossing the hill tracks from Rangoon to the Bay of Bengal where they could board coastal ships bound for Calcutta and Chittagong on the eastern coast of Bengal.<sup>xiii</sup> The Burmese Indians who made it to Calcutta arrived in different stages of destitution. They arrived by train or by steamer. Calcutta worked as a transit point in their journey. The refugees were given provisional accommodation and food, and helped in their onward journey often to farther east to different parts of Assam. The official strategy and private initiatives for dealing with this population in many ways set the pattern for such endeavours in future.

An Evacuee Reception Committee was instituted by the government with representatives from all religious communities to facilitate the transit of 'evacuees' coming to Calcutta (KPM No SB/01569/05, File no PM/ 757/A/42, Year 1942). This government strategy of including representatives from 'all religious communities' was a marked feature of the time of many different government committees and boards set up for famine relief, riot relief or evacuee relief. This was devised as a way of solving acrimonious relations between the Hindus and Muslims in office at the provincial and municipal elected bodies. The government committee and its services were however grossly inadequate. The main work of reception were done by different private organisations affiliated to political parties. The private organisations catered to the Hindus and the Muslims separately. Thus, the machinery of the Bengal Congress together with the Marwari Relief Society, and other Hindu volunteer organisations like the Bajrang Parishad, the Nababidhan Samaj was geared to provide for the incoming Hindu 'evacuees' from Burma. Separate organisations like the Anjuman Mofidul Islam provided for the Muslims. Mr Humayun Kabir,<sup>xiv</sup> a member of the Bengal Legislative Council issued a press statement to the effect:

a serious problem has been created by the influx into Calcutta of refugees from Burma... the refugees require help at the ghats and the station... the Marwari Relief Society has done a splendid work in this respect.... (but) it is not possible for the Marwari Relief Society to arrange different kinds of food for different communities, nor in these abnormal circumstances give Muslim women the degree of seclusion to which they are ordinarily accustomed. For this reason, the Muslim Relief Committee constituted by members representing different political opinion and under the patronage of the Muslim Chamber of Commerce... have made arrangements for Muslim refugees at Salagi Mussafirkhana and their food at Gahar building in Lower Chitpore road... (Ibid).

Separate arrangements were put in place for receiving Muslim and Hindu refugees respectively in *mussafir khanas* and *dharmashalas*, (both the terms literally mean shelter for guests). They were received from the rail station or the *ghats* (river banks) by the volunteers of these organisations, brought to the specific shelters created for each community (the *mussafir khanas* served only for the Muslims and the *dharmashalas* for the Hindus and all the other religious communities like Buddhists etc). They were provided food and helped in their onward journey. It is interesting to note that certain services and 'public utilities' were made available to the 'evacuees'. They could take a free ride of Calcutta's tramways to reach the rail stations and were given free rail tickets to proceed in their journey (Ibid). These victims of extraordinary circumstances could access the city's public utilities and public spaces which were otherwise under military dominance. Two broad future trends were set amidst wartime dislocations and rising communal hostility in Calcutta. Relief from this time onwards became increasingly communal.<sup>xv</sup> The other important marker was a partial and selective opening up of the city's public space and 'public utilities' which were otherwise heavily surveilled, to displaced groups. These were more readily made available to groups displaced by *climactic* circumstances and much less so to people displaced by more long term *demic* factors.

The next major round of displacement came with the Calcutta riots of August 1946.<sup>xvi</sup> By this time communal situation in the province had greatly deteriorated. The Calcutta riots of 1946 marked a distinct turning point in the urban history of the city, and in a chain reaction of communal violence, ultimately culminated in the carnage around 1947. My concern here not the different aspects of the riots.<sup>xvii</sup> I am primarily concerned with the nature of displacement associated with the riot and some aspects of riot relief in relation to the emerging regime of relief and shelter.

A specific feature of the Calcutta riots was that neighbourhoods or *paras* and *mohallas* in the city became an important locus of protection or violation (Mukherjee 2011, Nakazato 2015). Attempts were directed at purging neighbourhoods of the minority community. Apart from the middle-class *paras* the other prime scene of violence and destruction were the lower class *bustees* or slums. Many *bustees* all over Calcutta were burnt down and their inhabitants killed or displaced (Das 1993, 172). Roughly about 10% of the city's population were dislocated by the riots. The ensuing displacement and relocation transformed and redefined the social geography of Calcutta. Minority communities were moved from 'areas under threat' by government authorities and voluntary organisations to rescue camps set up all over the city. Often vacant famine camps were made use of as relief camp (Mukherjee 2015, 220). As in the case of the Burma evacuees, more than government relief it were the private organisations that came in a big to cater to people affected by violence. Relief societies were formed at the level of *paras*, *mohallas* and *bustees* all over the city. In a sharp disjuncture with earlier practices, a part and parcel of the new relief societies were 'defence committees' to protect against possible attacks. The proceedings of a meeting of the members of two *bustees* near the Ultadanga area points to arrangements typical all over the city in the aftermath of the riots:

at a meeting... on 9.9.46... a relief committee was formed named Settbagan Relief Committee to give relief to Muslims destitutes in the said *bustee*, arrange for shelter of those Muslims who were evacuated as refugees from other parts of the city during the recent disturbances and to arrange to feed the families of those Muslims who cannot go to work in Hindu areas.... It was further decided that a defence committee would organize volunteers for protecting the locality from attack by Hindus... They would also arrange to maintain a night watch in the locality and preventing the public from raising any slogans without their direction and from going out during the curfew hours (KPM No SB/01817/05, File No PM/938/46/I, Year 1946)

While the riot was officially declared to have ended on 22<sup>nd</sup> August, sporadic violence continued throughout the period. The Calcutta riots were followed by communal violence in Noakhli (mainly against the Hindus) in October 1946, and riots in Bihar (against Muslims) in October-November 1946, both of which sent new sets of 'evacuees' to Calcutta. Similar arrangements were put in place for the displaced groups. Marwari relief society among other organisations played a prominent role in providing assistance to the Hindu migrants from Noakhali, and when Muslim refugees started coming in the wake of the Bihar riots, it was the AnjumanMofidul Islam that came forward to help. Relief arrangements by this time had become overtly communal and mutually hostile. Thus, the creation of a Hindu relief centre by the name of 'Subhash Refuge' had to kept under 'special surveillance' as the area was close to a Muslim locality and the presence of a large number of refugees from Noakhali could create possibilities of communal riots. (KPM No SB/01814/05, File no PM 937/46, Year 1946). Amidst such mutual hostility the balance was gradually turning against the Muslims. While Muslim riot victims from Bihar did come to Calcutta for shelter, the period saw considerable outmigration of Bihari Muslims from Calcutta.<sup>xviii</sup> Space for Muslims in Calcutta had already begun to shrink.

Flow of 'evacuees', now mostly Hindu East Bengalis would reach a climax of sorts with the partition of 1947. But amidst such displacement, our not so spectacular 'destitutes', groups displaced from the rural areas through long term forces of hunger and poverty continued to come to Calcutta and its suburbs. A news report in the daily Swadhinata noted

New destitutes are coming to Calcutta again. Groups of distressed peasants from many adjoining villages are on the lookout for 'work'. All they want is 'help' or meal for one half of the day. Dhiren Das, a peasant of the village Laugachi under the Bhangar police station, was seen at the Hedua crossing with a group of 12-14 men and women seeking 'assistance and work' from passers-by. On enquiry by our reporter he revealed that hundreds of destitute peasants from his village and the adjoining villages are coming to Calcutta to find 'work'. (KPM No SB/01655/05, File No PM 845/46, Year 1946)

But by this time the rural migrants have been rendered invisible once again and public attention was shifrtng to another group, the East Bengali Hindu 'evacuees'.

From the foregoing deliberation on different waves of migration to Calcutta I wish to draw attention some aspects of relief and refuge. Shelter was not officially promised to any of the migrants discussed so far, be them 'evacuees' or 'sick destitutes'. But the first were treated with more hospitality, offered limited and often differential assistance (difference being increasingly made along communal lines). The second group were sought to be pushed out (through containment outside the city) or simply erased from policy circles. Both the groups fought containment and erasure to their best of their ability. The next section explores facets of resistance, whereby Calcutta's footloose migrant populations swelled the ranks of protesters at the slightest provocation.

### 1.3 Claiming Calcutta back: resistance and appropriation

From around 1945, grievances over military excesses all over Bengal started being voiced by political parties, organisations and the people more broadly. The entire period saw increasing strikes among the industrial labourers, many of them staged under the influence of the communists. There were strikes in Calcutta's jute mills, among the tramway workers, workers in the Calcutta Corporation, in the docks among others.<sup>xix</sup> The atmosphere of all pervasive discontent and possibilities of outbursts has been well captured by the phrases by which mid-1940s Calcutta came to be known, on 'the edge of a volcano' or on a 'heap of dynamite'.<sup>xx</sup> While there were manifold expressions of low key and highly charged up resistance, I will briefly trace some patterns in some of the violent mass protests in immediate post war Calcutta, including the two anti-Indian National Army (INA) trial agitations of 1945-46, a strike organised by the communists in support of the naval mutiny in February 1946 and finally the communal riots of 1946 where popular anger was channelized along anti-imperial or alternately on communal lines. These were protests initially called on by political parties, that later developed their own momentum.

The two agitations against the trial of the INA prisoners in Calcutta took place in November 1945 and February 1946.<sup>xxi</sup> The protests against the trial of INA prisoners were led mostly by students, and industrial labourers.<sup>xxii</sup> The two 'disturbances' had some specific features. They took the form of *hartal*, meetings and parades led by the student wings of the political parties (including Congress, Muslim League and the left parties). Agitators belonged to different religious communities like the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs and had the support of different shades of political opinion. Symbols of colonial authority became targets of attack. Clashes with the police broke out when the processionists forcefully entered prohibited areas like the administrative heart of Calcutta. Another special feature of the agitations was a concerted attack on all forms of public transport which included burning vehicles, road blocks and even squatting on railway tracks. What attracted attention was the militancy of the two 'disturbances'. Sir Francis Tucker, then General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Eastern Command observed of the November agitation: "In November there had been riots, the worst that Calcutta had as yet experienced; they had been mainly anti British in complexion but their violence, though short-lived, had shocked all decent people" (quoted from Majumdar 2015, 245). The Calcutta police confirmed that the ultimate objective of the protesters was to cause *civil disorder*. (Ibid 262, emphasis mine). The violence got worse in the February agitation. But they followed more or less a similar pattern with student and worker leadership of

sorts. Around the same time in February, another such strike was organised by the CPI in support of the naval mutiny at the Royal Indian Navy (RIN) in Bombay and Karachi. Again, the students and sections of the working classes of the city took on the lead role. In view of such widespread anti-colonial militancy, the government initiated an Emergency Action Scheme to deal with future disturbances against the state. The Emergency Action Scheme aimed to protect government and corporate interests and the 'public utilities' from attack in case of future disturbances in Calcutta.

Anti-colonial labour mobilisation along class lines and growing militancy during the 1940s were results of unprecedented dislocations both in the city and countryside all through the decade. While the students and the workers played a leading role, these protests opened up spaces for venting of grievances of Calcutta's most deprived population, its migrants. Calcutta was to experience its next round of violence during the riots of August 1946. While class solidarity broke down along communal lines and popular anger was now directed against the rival community, Calcutta's 'civic life' fell victim just the same as before. From the 17<sup>th</sup> August, the second day of the rioting, violence had already gone beyond the control of organised politics. It was in this uncontrolled manifestation of violence that some continuity with previous militancy could be traced. Despite the religio-communal nature of the riots, there were in fact attacks on European, governmental and quasi governmental targets, such as ration shops, civil supplies warehouses, and the property of large industrial firms. The violence could not spread because the Emergency Action scheme was now in place, and there were armed police to protect these 'public concerns' (Mukherjee 2011). In the transport sector, violence among the labourers were contained, under the positive influence of communist dominated unions. The public transport in the city nonetheless, had come to halt during the riots. During the next few months after the riots, when the atmosphere was still communally charged, the trams and bus services in city often came under sporadic assaults. Often trams on the roads of Calcutta had to ply under armed police protection (KPM No SB/01817/05, File No PM/938/46/I, Year 1946).

These violent outbursts of the mid 1940s came in response to scarcity of food, shelter and basic necessities of life and were radical in nature. For the purpose of the present study, my aim has been to focus on the sporadic and the excesses of these protests, which opened up spaces for the most deprived of Calcutta's population, its migrants to express anger and momentarily reverse exclusion. Public spaces of the city like the streets, official buildings and other monuments of public concerns were symbolic of the exclusive 'public' of imperial Calcutta. Special protection of a small number of 'priority classes' and surveillance of the 'public utilities' had come to cause grievance all through the war years. The huge mass of Calcutta's informal labour, different migrant populations with dubious claims of residence to the city, more generally the poorer disenfranchised groups were excluded from much needed protection and 'public' benefits. As already noted, there were no general scheme of public welfare in place. There was hardly any official provision of shelter for Calcutta's diverse migrant groups. And added to this, the new vagrancy law made certain behaviour in public a punishable offence and relentlessly tried to purge the city streets of 'destitutes'. The wartime violent protests and their excesses have to be understood in this context. It were migrant groups that swelled the ranks of protesters at the slightest provocation. An invasion of privileged spaces through huge rallies and a concerted attack on the 'public utilities' during the agitations of mid-1940s were

symbolic ways of claiming back exclusive spaces and provisions. Burning of tramcars assumed a symbolic significance of protest movements from this time onwards. Calcutta was the first city in South and South East Asia to have acquired electric run tramcars. Trams were a matter of civic pride for Calcuttans. That tramcars were specially selected out for burning during the disturbances indicates the nature of anger at prevalent policing and exclusion. The public spaces and public utilities were appropriated in manifold ways with changing strategies of resistance.

#### **1.4 Partition, new 'evacuees' and a 'new proletariat'?**

Continued migration from across the border as well from its own countryside marked the coming of independence and partitioning in the city. Food and shelter remained at the forefront of the demands of the disadvantaged and disenfranchised groups who had swelled the ranks of the city for the past decade or so. Death and disease raged at periodic intervals. The overall health condition in Calcutta was dismal. This excerpt from the Corporation Annual Health report draws attention to the connection between the decade long migrations, scarcity of shelter and ill health and death, which have continued to rage in Calcutta from the days of the Bengal famine:

The health condition of the city during this year were unsatisfactory. Next to the year, 43-44 when the death numbered 59,739 this is the year of highest number of deaths... this is possibly mainly due to the influx of displaced persons from East Pakistan and to the displacements of persons from within and without the city and their housing in compact blocks (for reasons of security) mainly in *bustee* areas of unhealthy conditions. Mostly unacclimatized to the city environment these people contributed their quota to the huge death rate. (Annual Report 1950-51, Health Department, 1)

If we turn to the new waves of migrations around partitions, some of the trends from the previous years were accentuated. Migration of East Bengali Hindus, which had started since the Noakhali riots assumed alarming proportions. The term 'evacuee' continued to be used for the incoming population during the first few years of uncertainty. In some time, the authorities would bracket the East Bengali Hindu migrants under a new category 'displaced persons' with a reluctant recognition that these groups were here to stay. The initial days of migration were uncertain times, and there were suspicions regarding the role of the new 'evacuees' in Calcutta. Thus, one Radhanath Chandra, an erstwhile trainer of the Civic Guards, was apparently spreading the news that

an attack on West Bengal is impending and that there is no knowing whether East Bengal refugees will join the Pakistan forces or the West Bengal government forces... Radhanath Chandra is reported to be organizing a band of armed men apparently for this purpose.<sup>xxiii</sup>

The east Bengali 'evacuees' would succeed in changing this uncertain status decisively in their favour within a few years. The Hindu East Bengalis would variously take up the task of actively and ardently proving their allegiance to the Hindu nation. Due to sheer number, the resourcefulness of certain sections of middle class east Bengali migrants, and active support from the left political parties in the state, the more resourceful sections of the east Bengali migrants would claim their 'right to shelter'



from a reluctant state. The 'climactic' bias in the regime of shelter will come in their favour. The Hindu East Bengali migrants however, were an internally variegated group. They were of different class and caste backgrounds and their resourcefulness greatly varied. Their access to shelter also differed accordingly.

We may look a bit more closely into how the East Bengali refugees were clashing with other groups. These refugees found housing in 'vacant' Muslim quarters. Different parts of Calcutta saw such displacement of one religious community followed by their re-occupation by members of the other community. As noted earlier, this process had already started from the time of the Calcutta riots of 1946, and continued for decades to come. Successive rounds of Hindu-Muslim communal riots in Calcutta saw a repetition of the same process. The census of 1951 notes: "Sukea street, Colootola, Fenwick Bazar, Manicktola, Belliaghata, Belgachia, and Cossipur wards used to contain mixed populations of Hindus and Muslims before the riots of January-February 1950. During the riots, most of the *bustees* were deserted and many empty hutments were later gutted by fire by hooligans. Between 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 in from various parts of the city and Howrah in others. They finally sorted out no more in mixed but clear cut blocks of communities" (Calcutta census 1951, xiv).

Finally, a large number of refugees gravitated towards Calcutta's slums and competed for space with the different migrants living there. Slums in Calcutta have traditionally housed its labour migrants and increasingly the footloose famine stricken rural 'destitutes'. The census of 1951 notes that "in the 3,615 *bustees* of Calcutta, having 21,556 huts and 155,624 living rooms, containing 617,374 souls (almost a quarter of Calcutta's population) no less than 112,515 are Displaced refugees (which comes to about 18.2 per cent of the *bustee* population)" (Calcutta census 1951, viii). Not only did the refugees share space with local slum dwellers, they variously *replaced* them. There were instances when east Bengali refugees occupied slums whose residents had left under government 'quit notice' (KPM No SB/01794/05, File No PM 918/46-48). Sometimes the refugees forcefully squatted on housing meant for slum dwellers. Thus, a rehousing project of the Calcutta Improvement Trust in central Calcutta, was originally meant for slum populations who had been displaced by two road extension schemes of the Trust (CIT Annual Report 1950, 16, 37). These buildings under construction were forcibly occupied by the refugees in 1948-49 and despite repeated attempts, they could not be evicted.<sup>xxiv</sup> These resourceful groups successfully tilted the bias for 'partition refugees' (an archetype of climactic refugees) to their favour. An often-quoted figure from the census of 1951 may be repeated here. The census of 1951 recorded that only 33.2 % or less than a third of the total population of Calcutta were born in the city. The rest came from outside, 12.3% from other districts of West Bengal, 26.6% from other Indian states and 26.9 % from what became East Pakistan in 1947 (Calcutta census 1951, ix). Citing these figures, it is often declared in academic circles and outside (Chaudhury 1983; Chatterjee 1990) that 'in the post-independence era the city of *migrants* became a city of *refugees*' (emphasis added). Implicit in such declaration is an appreciation of the resourcefulness of the Hindu East Bengali migrants and their ways of claiming the city. I have tried to highlight in this chapter that such declaration shifts attention away from problems associated with the process of 'refugee-isation' often at the detriment of the 'other' less privileged migrants and the city's underclasses. If Calcutta was a 'city of refugees' that did not make it an egalitarian space, and

the refugees often co-existed in tensed relations with the other disadvantaged social groups and displaced or replaced them materially from dwelling space and discursively from policy documentation. In post-colonial Calcutta, the east Bengali refugees (specially the middle classes) overshadowed every other socially disadvantaged group if not in numerical presence, certainly in terms of access to public space and public sphere. In many ways, a homogenized and unified figure of the *bastuhara* was projected to claim for them the status of a new proletariat in Calcutta.

By this time, poverty stricken rural migrants have receded from the front page of the newspapers, which gave prominence to the new *bastuharas* from East Pakistan. They occasionally made small entries in the last pages of the left newspapers like *Swadhitan* and *Janajuddha*. These groups found place in small pockets of informal squats, and increasingly by the city's canal side and railway line shanties and pavements *erased* from public view, but present nonetheless in great numbers.

### 1.6 In conclusion: a permissive city

My purpose in this paper has been to highlight how amidst the fluidity and multifarious movements of the decade of the 1940s, a differential regime of shelter was being put in place by the authorities. One persistent feature of government policy towards the displaced groups throughout the period remained denial of any meaningful shelter. But within this overall stance of denial, groups displaced from *climactic* factors were offered controlled hospitality more readily than those displaced due to more *endemic* long term violence of poverty. The latter groups, poverty stricken migrants from the rural areas were treated with confinement and faced discursive erasure from policy circles and public sphere of the city. My chapter also indicates that the migrants negotiate this regime to the best of their ability, claiming their 'right to shelter' to different degrees either by living and dying on the pavements as 'destitutes', or by successfully creating illegal refugee settlements, with many stages in between. The other important theme of this paper has been to reflect on migrants' relation to the public spaces of the city and resistance to government control mechanisms. Consistent presence of migrants in Calcutta's public spaces, sporadic resistance and death left an indelible mark on the urban fabric of Calcutta. Momentary overturning of the hegemonic public sphere through symbolic acts like the violation of section 144 and despoiling 'public utilities' will continue to recur in the protests of footloose groups in the city streets. The combined force of migrant militancy had a loosening effect on the planning regime of the wider urban area and the public spaces of the city opened up in significant ways. Calcutta thanks to its migrants had become a permissive city.

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<sup>i</sup>For a detailed discussion of the powers and functions of the ARP, the civic guard and the Home guard, see (Mukherjee 2015, 30-39).

<sup>ii</sup> During the war about 1,22,000 feet of slit trenches were dug in the city's parks and open areas (CMC Annual Administrative Report, 45-46, 1).

<sup>iii</sup>Records of the Special Branch (henceforth SB), Calcutta Police note many other such instances of such rumour of such impending evacuation. (KPM No SB/01569/05, File No PM/757/A/42, Year 1942)

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<sup>iv</sup>For a detailed discussion on how government publicity campaigns from 1940 were launched with a view to create support for British war efforts, by advertising rosy promises of post war reconstruction and development, see (Bhattacharya 1999).

<sup>v</sup>Dasgupta has shown that around the 1980s two thirds share of urban population and four fifths of share of industrial output and employment was concentrated in the Calcutta metropolitan area (B. Dasgupta 1987, 285).

<sup>vi</sup>An important feature of Calcutta's urban profile in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century was what has been called the 'inverted pyramid' (Datta 2012, 128) whereby the upper class/castes were numerically larger than the lower classes. This feature was to change gradually by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when labour migration picked up due to industrial expansion in the suburbs of Calcutta

<sup>vii</sup>Entry to Calcutta's labour market came to be controlled by intricate ethnic and village networks in operation. Recent researches have shown that the Bengali migrants found it increasingly difficult to enter the industrial labour market of Calcutta, and had to settle for less privileged jobs ((Dasgupta van Schendel and Faraizi 1984, 53; Haan 1994, ).

<sup>viii</sup>The British denial scheme had two sides. One was the 'scorched earth policy' whose aim was to confiscate all 'surplus' stocks of rice in the vulnerable coastal districts of Bengal, in order to 'deny' an advancing Japanese army resources it could utilise in the event of an invasion. The other aspect of the policy was to destroy the local riverine transport system of Bengal delta in order to prevent a potential Japanese force from using it. For a detailed discussion of the denial policy see, (Mukherjee 2011, 77-119).

<sup>ix</sup>War induced dislocations affected all the groups of migrants in the city and often generated new streams of migration. The 'upcountry' labour, the most significant from the point of view of the colonial administration and a lively point of interest for the academics were now deemed 'essential' to the smooth running of the war. Essential 'war industries' included cotton and jute mills, armament factories, engineering firms, paper mills, printing facilities, tobacco factories gin presses, food service workers, stone masons, as well as employees of municipal, provincial and central governments. All these workers were deemed 'essential' to war efforts (Bhattacharya 1999, 82-83). They came under new regimentation which combined protection/restriction, and suffered from war violence, especially during the Japan air raids on Calcutta (Sailer 2015; Mukherjee 2015). While my focus is not on the changes in patterns of wartime labour migration, I will simply like to point out that industrial labour remained unsettled and recalcitrant all through the 1940s often under communist leadership and added to the militancy of the times.

<sup>x</sup>The period also saw large number of death from emergency situation like Japanese bombing of Calcutta, or during the Calcutta riots, when processing the huge number of dead bodies posed a civic problem for the city authorities. Two private organisations, the Hindu Satkar Samity and the AnjumaMafidul Islam rendered important service to the Corporation. For the treatment meted out to the dead during these two occasions, see (Mukherjee 2011).

<sup>xi</sup>Figures compiled from CMC Annual Reports for the mentioned years.

<sup>xii</sup>The pavement dwellers would be enumerated from the 1970s through government surveys. The squatters are still not a recognized official category and outside enumeration, as recording them would be tantamount to an official recognition of sorts.

<sup>xiii</sup>Around 600,000 Indian refugees fled Burma, with at least 400,000 forced to travel the 600 miles of perilous tracks across high mountain passes and jungle. There were few provisions along the way and as many as 80,000 died on the trail (Mukherjee 2011, 70).

<sup>xiv</sup>Humayan Kabir was an elected member of the Bengal legislature from 1937 to 1947 as a KPP candidate. He was a strong advocate of peasant and workers' rights, and as such played much less into communal politics than many of his elected contemporaries of the time on either the Hindu or the Muslim side.

<sup>xv</sup>An important exception to this was the relief efforts organized by the communists often through their labour unions.

<sup>xvi</sup>Bengal's Muslim League ministry is squarely blamed with the responsibility of orchestrating the riots to achieve its political goal of the separate Islamic nation. Recent scholarship has shown, however, that the communal mobilisation all through the 1940s was not a one sided Muslim affair and the Hindus had an equal share in the process. Moreover, official control of the riots remained only till the initial stages, and number of Muslim deaths in the riots exceeded that of Hindus. Even by conservative official estimates, about 4000 people

were killed, 10,000 injured and 30,000 displaced (Nakazato 2015, 268). Due to this huge number of casualty and unprecedented intensity of violence it stood out from preceding communal violence and riots in significant ways. This is also termed as the 'partition riots' as it in sense set in the process of chain reaction of communal riots in other parts of the subcontinent which eventually led to the partition of 1946 (Das 1993).

<sup>xvii</sup> For a detailed discussion of different aspects of the Calcutta riots, see (Das 1993; Mukherjee 2011).

<sup>xviii</sup> It was noted in a Calcutta police entry for early November 1946, that about 10,000 Bihari Muslims residing in different parts of Calcutta have left for their respective home in Bihar at places which are still relatively unaffected by riots, by the end of October on the receipt of news of alleged preparation of Hindus for a massacrings of Muslims on the Bakr id day. (KPM No SB/01814/05, File No PM 937/46, 1946)

<sup>xix</sup> Specially the movement of Calcutta's tram workers under the leadership of the communists stand out in Calcutta's labour history of the period. Throughout the first half of the 1940s, the tramway workers launched strikes with various demands and succeeded in extracting concessions from the Calcutta Tramway Company. They took active part in organizing the anti-INA trial agitations in February 1946. They played constructive role in providing relief during the riots of august 1946. For more details see (Guha Ray 2015).

<sup>xx</sup> The first expression was used by the civil servant Penderal Moon, and the second was used by GD Birla at the end of 1945 (Majumdar 2015, 251).

<sup>xxi</sup> The first anti INA prisoner trial agitation took place between 21<sup>st</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> November 1945. This was part of a widespread discontent against the trial of the INA officials Shah Nawaz Khan, Prem Kumar Sehgal and Gurbaksh Singh Dhillon by the colonial authorities to be held in Delhi. In Calcutta students led the anti trial agitation between 21<sup>st</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> November, 1945. Anti-trial propoganda became closely mixed with election campaign and received support from all the political parties. The army had to be called in to suppress the 'disturbances'. Over 30 people were killed and several hundred injured. This was followed by a similar protest in February 1946, this time against the trial of the INA Captain Abdul Rashid Ali who had declared his loyalty to the Muslim League. While the propoganda for the release of Captain Rashid often had anti Congress and communal overtone, the agitation that resulted in the streets of Calcutta united the Hindus and Muslims. It continued from 11<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> February 1946. The army had to be called in to quell the protests and more than 3000 people died in the fight (Majumdar 2015, 239-251).

<sup>xxii</sup> These two agitations have received scholarly attention for being anti colonial, non-communal and 'spontaneous'. It is argued that political parties tried to gain political capital out of their support of anti-INA trial agitations, but their support was only partial. As the protests grew more militant they withdrew their support and condemned the violence. It was the communists who supported the movement all through and instigated the workers to join the strike. (Sohini Mazumdar)

<sup>xxiii</sup> This is an excerpt from a letter by an East Bengali refugee addressed to the Home Minister of West Bengal (KPM No SB/01794/05, File No PM 918/46-48, Year 1946-48)

<sup>xxiv</sup> The refugees forcefully took possession of six incomplete housing blocks in the south side of the Christopher road rehousing scheme area, and despite serious intention on part of the Trust and legal attempts through the early 1950s, they could not be evicted. After some time it was decided to continue with the scheme in the north block of the project site, where eventually housing blocks were built and leased out. But by the Trust's own admission, very few of the originally displaced population could afford to rent the apartments and these were mostly let out to outsiders. (CIT Annual report 1960, 28)

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