

**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. 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, 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, 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.