In the shadow of displaceability: refugee and migrants in suburban Calcutta
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Chapter One

Migration, governance and evolving regime of protection in late colonial Bengal and Calcutta

In this chapter I explore different streams of migration centred around Calcutta during the period of decolonisation from 1939 till 1947. Decolonisation in Bengal entailed massive dislocations. Calcutta, the second city of the British colonial empire and the industrial centre of a large impoverished hinterland, was at the very heart of wartime dislocations and relocations. I trace mechanisms of migration governance during this transitional period by drawing on the files of the Special Branch of the Calcutta police, contemporary surveys and municipal reports. I look at how colonial archival knowledge was mobilised to codify fluid migratory subjects and how this simplified and abstract information aimed to fashion a differential regime of protection for refugees and migrants. I suggest that colonial knowledge categories actually *produced* the realities it recorded through archival displacements, creating a grid of legibility suitable for migration governance. Its administrative machinery including the police and the army was disposed to ensure that this reality prevailed. I specifically focus on three streams of migration to wartime Calcutta: people displaced from the Far East (Burma, Malaya), the rural poor migrating from the famine stricken countryside of Bengal and eventually those fleeing communal violence between the Hindus and the Muslims. I look at how through particular labels like 'evacuees' and 'sick destitutes', the migrants' access to space and resources was sought to be controlled. The attempt was to create a *graded* regime of protection for the displaced, acknowledging limited rights for a few and dispersing others. The chapter also briefly locates strategies of resistance to colonial governance by looking at migrant dissident subjectivities oscillating between tactically owning the officially imposed labels or overturning them through acts of protest and symbolically claiming their right to the city.

While there are a host of scholarly works on migration around Bengal's partition in 1947, they usually take a cursory look at the preceding decade as a background. A few recent researches centrally address this fluid period, focusing on important themes like communal politics in this transitional time (Chatterji 1994; Chatterjee 1986; Bose 1986; Mukherjee 2011; Nakazato 2015; Das 1993) the Bengal famine (Mukherjee 2011), industrial labour unrest during the war (Sailer 2015) and wartime repression and militant resistance (Majumdar 2015). But the patterns of migration during this time have remained relatively unexplored. This is all the more remarkable, since this was a period of an unsettled sort, marked by multifarious movements, which in turn set off new dynamics in migration governance. I bring in focus the different streams of migration in the transitional decade

of the 1940s, and look at migration governance through the creation of population categories by way of selective enumeration of migrants and associated archival dislocations which aimed to fashion a differential regime of refugee protection.

The chapter begins with a brief recapitulation of the evolution of the city and traces urban governance in Calcutta from the onset of the Second World War and through the years of decolonisation. I outline how specific groups of population were rendered 'essential' for the war and were guaranteed wartime provisions and how specific war related infrastructure were 'prioritised'. The two subsequent sections look at a few streams of migration to the city and migration governance in relation to the mechanisms of war. Section two is concerned with the inflow of impoverished rural migrants to Calcutta from the famished Bengal countryside. Here I trace archival processes which construed them as pathologised subjects, leading to their dispersal by para military forces. In the third section, I turn to the experiences of the migration of two groups, war refugees from the Far East and those dislocated due to Hindu-Muslim communal violence. I look at the way these groups displaced due to diverse factors were rendered legible under a simplified official category of 'evacuee' with limited entitlements. Through both the sections I try to show that dislocated people were disciplined into specific population categories in keeping to their positioning vis-à-vis the imperial war. 'Relief' (or lack thereof) was channelled through this graded categorial regime. The final section traces challenges to this regime of refugee protection posed by the migrants through acts of protest which momentarily reversed exclusion. I conclude with an assessment of the centrality of archival displacements and the erasure they entail in migration governance.

1.1 Prioritising war: policies of wartime governance

Calcutta grew from its early association with British trade and commerce from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. From the late seventeenth century, a constellation of British and Indian trading marts started growing on the right bank of the river Ganga[1] in Bengal's lower delta region. Trade grew specifically around the hamlets of Sutanuti, Kalikata and Govindapur, which were cotton growing areas. The British town establishment started developing around this small nucleus of commercial centres. For a long period of time almost till the end of the nineteenth century, the expansion of Calcutta was in the nature of responses to the push and pull of economic forces, rather than a result of top-down planning. The city was loosely patterned in a native 'black town' in the north, a European 'white town' in the south, and an intermediate cosmopolitan bazar town in the

middle, with permeable boundaries (Sinha 1978). Within this loose morphological pattern, the growth of the town remained largely unplanned, and included a variety of mixed land use.

Figure 1 Map of nineteenth-century Calcutta
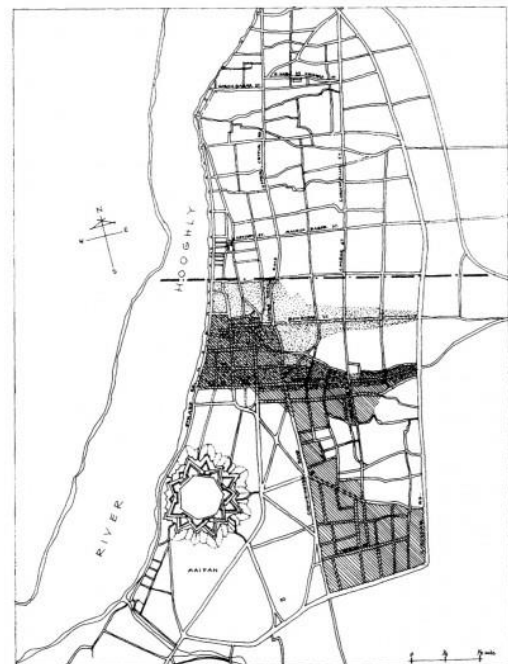
Boundaries as indicated by William Baillie, 1792.

Boundaries as indicated by Leopold von Orlich and Edward Thornton

Boundaries as indicated by Lieutenant R. G. Wallace

Map 1.3: Map of nineteenth century Calcutta (top left) (Source: Chattopadhyay 2000);

Map 1.4: Map of Calcutta showing boundaries of the White Town (bottom right) (Source: Chattopadhyay 2000)

By the mid-nineteenth century, the idea of a representative municipal government started gaining ground. Representation as understood in the nineteenth century was confined to a small number of urban property owners, who paid taxes and were known as 'rate payers'. After the end of the First World War, the Calcutta Municipal Corporation Act of 1923 brought in a new phase in city governance. Hereby more powers were concentrated in the elected members of the Calcutta Municipal Corporation (CMC). This phase was marked by the politicisation of the municipality and the growing anti-colonial nationalist spirit of the times. The CMC became a hotbed of nationalist politics. The difference between native elected members and the nominated members representing the colonial state and British trading interests became sharper. Another dimension of the Corporation's internal conflict was growing communal tensions between the Hindus and the Muslims. The dynamics of communal tension in urban governance starting from this period will have a direct bearing on 'relief' measures meted out to varied displaced population during the war years.

The first phase of large scale institutionalised planning in Calcutta started with the creation of the Calcutta Improvement Trust (CIT) in 1911. The Trusts were autonomous bodies with independent funding which could bypass elected municipalities. The planning vision espoused by them reflected ideals of modern western town planning. The nature of the Trust's improvement in Calcutta, as elsewhere in the subcontinent, was Haussmannian (Chattopadhyay 2009; Datta 2012). The larger goals of this sort of planning had an economic rationale favouring private business. The 'improvement' thus carried out was to result in the creation of a market for land which in turn could stimulate building projects and raise land value.

Indigenous responses to the state sponsored vision of the city varied. The propertied Indian elite were broadly in agreement with the goal of the colonial agendas of development, sanitation and their sense of modern urban aesthetics. They were variously represented in the Corporation and the Bengal Legislative Assembly from the early twentieth century, welcomed 'improvement' and benefitted from it. The group that was most adversely affected by such development projects, were easily the city's poor, settled in various types of informal housing quarters located both in central areas as also in the peripheries. These informal settlements would eventually become known as *bustee*s.[2] Over time *bustees* housed casual labour and from the second half of the nineteenth century, Calcutta's industrial labour force who came to work in the growing suburban mills and

factories. It was the city's poor, who primarily bore the brunt of state 'improvement' projects. Areas improved by the CMC or the CIT often meant displacement of these labour migrants. Later the improved areas were repopulated by well to do groups under better living conditions.

New power dynamics were initiated in Calcutta's urban sphere with the coming of an elected provincial ministry in Bengal in 1937 since the introduction of provincial autonomy and then with the initiation of the Second World War in 1939. Provincial autonomy was introduced by the Government of India Act of 1935. It brought elected ministries in the British Indian provinces for the first time in 1937. This was closely followed by the onset of the Second World War. Governance during the period was concerned more and more with the war. Administration came to be marked by tensions that pulled the imperial authority, the newly elected provincial government in Bengal and municipal bodies like the CMC in opposing directions. Often there were clashes regarding policies and jurisdiction. In Bengal, Fazlul Haq, the leader of the Krishak Praja Party (KPP), formed a coalition ministry with the Bengal Provincial Muslim League. But this was an uneasy alliance. The KPP had gained support of a large majority of Muslim and a section of the Hindu cultivators in rural Bengal through espousing a variety of peasants' rights. Its alliance with the Muslim League with their narrow urban elite communal concerns did not sit well. Eventually the ministry was purged through manoeuvrings of the Bengal Governor. It was formed anew under the Muslim League in April 1943, superseding the previous KPP led coalition government. The Bengal Congress became the principal and only opposition in the provincial legislature. There was a gradual purging of the Bengal Congress of its left supporters over the next few years, culminating with the expulsion of Sarat Bose[3] and many of his followers. At the same time the Congress party forged close links with the Hindu Mahasabha, with political agendas toeing the communal line (Chatterji 1994; Das 1993). In 1942, the majority of the Congress leaders were jailed after their declared opposition to the imperial war efforts and eventually the launching of the Quit India movement all over India in August 1942. The Hindu Mahasabha, under the leadership of Shyama Prasad Mukherjee emerged as the main opposition to Bengal's provincial ministry. By this time, government and opposition in the province became clearly divided along communal lines. The period was also fraught with tension between the elected provincial ministry and the British Governor of Bengal. Wartime policies often led to bypassing the elected provincial ministry and authoritarian rule by the Governor. 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 changes in imperial and provincial politics had significant bearing on the urban governance of Calcutta. 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 Fazlul Haq government to put an end to Hindu supremacy in this traditional bastion of *bhadralok* power.[4] More generally, the powers of the CMC were severely attenuated under war time regulations. 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 of the ARP was policing Calcutta and its 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 CMC over the jurisdiction of the ARP. The Corporation condemned the scheme as 'unscientific and puerile' (Mukherjee 2011, 39). Initially recruitment to these bodies proved difficult due to social stigma attached to collaboration with the British at the height of the anti-colonial Quit India movement. But recruitment picked up with the introduction of a scheme of allowance. 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.[5] 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, 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 were 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'.

Following the 'civic guards' came the military. Huge internationally constituted army contingents consisting of the British, Americans, Chinese, West Africans were brought to Calcutta in large numbers. Military equipment of mechanised warfare arrived in their thousands. Endless convoys of huge lorries and giant tanks rolled through the streets of Calcutta night and day.[6] This 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 saw many long and dark nights, dark perhaps in more than one sense with criminals having 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' ("Administrative Report for the Year 1945-46," *Corporation of Calcutta,* 1946, 103).

The presence of these forces of war resulted in myriad forms of displacement. Presence of troops necessitated the creation of army encampments, and 'requisition' of civilian properties. A large number of properties were requisitioned under the Defence of India rule all over the city and countryside. Requisition, needless to say, were forceful and were conducted with the prospect of heavy penalty under the Defence of India rule. This implied largescale population displacement. The Famine Inquiry Commission which published its report in 1945, noted that more than 30,000 persons had to evacuate their homes and lands due to military requisition. Many of these families became famine victims in 1943 ("Famine Inquiry Commission: Report on Bengal," *Government of India*, 1945, 27). These were conservative estimates and the actual dislocations were much larger. Apart from actual displacements, Calcutta and surrounding areas were rife with rumours of possible threats of displacements. For example, a rumour was doing the rounds in a south Calcutta neighbourhood called Ballygunge, that a wholesale evacuation was in the offing for the entire ward number 27 of the CMC. The government had to issue frequent declarations and press notes denying such rumours of largescale impending civil evacuation.[7]

A central concern of wartime governance became the smooth functioning of the 'essential services' of war and the protection of the 'public utilities'. The second important concern was providing for 'priority citizens'. A number of policies were devised to secure these objectives. Special measures were taken to police and protect the 'public utilities' essential for the war. It included the transport network and other essential public infrastructure. By mid-1942 'improvements' orchestrated by the CIT and the CMC came to a halt. The machinery of the Corporation and the Trust were geared to create and sustain a 'war infrastructure.' 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.[8] 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 ("Administrative Report for the Year 1942-43," *Corporation of Calcutta,* 1943, 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. In this new function, it was the ARP and the civic guard who had greater authority than either the CMC or the CIT.

The war industries were dubbed as 'essential public service' from February 1941 onwards. The essential war industries included cotton and jute mills, armament factories, engineering firms, paper mills, and printing facilities, tobacco factories and gin press. People working as stone masons, food service workers, and employees of the municipal, provincial or central governments and labourers in the suburban industries became essential service providers. Labourers in these industries were put under restrictions. An Essential Services Maintenance Ordinance was promulgated in 1941. It sought to control the freedom of labour employed in the aforementioned war industries. The Ordinance made it a criminal offence for any worker engaged in 'essential' war related industries from abandoning their station of employment without 'reasonable excuse', under a penalty of imprisonment of up to one year. The possibility of 'physical danger' to their persons was not deemed to be a 'reasonable excuse' (Bhattacharya and Zachariah 1999, 82-83). The Act intended to keep the population required for the running of the war industry *stay put* in Calcutta. But despite provisions of special benefits and threat of penalty under the new Ordinance, labour outflow from Calcutta could not be prevented.

A very small number of the total population of the city including the colonial bureaucracy, the labour force working in the aforementioned vital war industries, the army, corporation workers, sections of the transport workers while being put under various restrictions, were also categorised as 'priority citizens.' They ran the 'essential war services' and were concentrated in Calcutta and surrounding region. A variety of procurement policies were undertaken by the government to guarantee a continued supply of resources for conducting the war. Food security became a central concern and it aimed to provide subsidised food for the 'priority citizens'. Provisioning for the 'priority citizens' was achieved at the cost of starving the countryside and the non-priority groups in the city. An integral part of wartime food security was a policy of 'denial'. The war between the Allied powers (including Great Britain, France, the Soviet Union and the United States) and Japan broke out in December 1941. British debacle in the Far East, first with the fall of Singapore in February 1942, followed by the fall of Burma in March 1942, made the threat of war in the Indian subcontinent imminent. In this context, a two-pronged policy of denial was undertaken. It included food denial and boat denial. Food denial meant procuring rice from the fertile coastal districts of Bengal like Khulna, Barishal, Midnapur among other areas and bringing rice to the interior. This was aimed at depriving the

enemy of resources and food in the case of a Japanese naval invasion through the coastline of Bengal. But eventually the scope of the policy of food denial was expanded from the coastal areas to the interior and a considerable part of the denial rice was moved to Calcutta. The other part of the same policy was boat denial. In the riverine areas of lower and coastal Bengal, boats were often the sole means of transport and travel. Country boats were extensively used for various trading activities and by a large community of fishermen in Bengal. Boat denial aimed at removing boats from the coastal areas, so as to deprive the enemy of means of transport in the case a possible advance through these areas ("Famine Inquiry Commission: Report on Bengal," 1945, 29). Both the policies had devastating effect on the rural economy. It led to starvation in large parts of the countryside and contributed to famine like conditions.

This was however only the beginning of policies of procurement of resources for Calcutta and the war machinery woven around it. Procurement of rice had begun from December 1941. In January 1943, another round of procurement was undertaken. It involved officially purchasing 'surplus' rice and other food grain from the districts of Bengal aimed at supplying Calcutta. A few months later, in June 1943 another province wide Food Drive was launched, this time on the pretext of preventing rural hoarding by cultivators and various rural middle level traders and re-distribute such hoards ("Famine Inquiry Commission: Report on Bengal" 1945, 37-55). All the procurement policies were ultimately directed at supplying the Calcutta industrial region and its 'priority citizens'. These policies were adopted by the Governor, often bypassing the elected ministry in the province.

No comprehensive plan for securing the welfare of the larger public was in place. The government of India had no separate food department till that time. A food department was established at the centre in December 1942. From the early 1940s, control shops were opened in the city to provide the 'priority classes' essential commodities at controlled prices. Control shops procured their stocks partly from the government and partly from purchasers in the open market. A large number of the control shops were private, often run by Hindus and set up within the premises of industrial units. They exclusively catered to their employees. With the advance of a province wide famine, increasing restrictions were placed in access to controlled shops, often based on claims of rightful residence to the city. Rationing was introduced in Calcutta by 1944 and extended to Greater Calcutta by May 1944 ("Famine Inquiry Commission: Report on Bengal" 1945, 45, 65, 94). The countryside still remained unrationed. The eligibility for inclusion in the rationing schemes in Calcutta was based on claims of being rightful residents of the city. The rationing system effectively excluded a large number of people from its scope. And it was the 'civil defence' forces like the ARP who ultimately

had the tasks of controlling rationing of food and providing 'relief' in different capacities. Even as these measures were being put in place there were relentless strikes, petitions and protest rallies staged by different labour unions and a variety of non-partisan groups demanding the provision of subsidised food for a large majority of the socially disadvantaged groups.

A few important points may be recapitulated here. Wartime governance meant policing the city and protecting 'public utilities' and the 'essential services', in short, the infrastructure required for running the war. The population were classified in keeping with their function vis-a-vis the war. People essential to the war were grouped as 'priority classes' with access to provisions. The only welfare schemes instituted in wartime Calcutta were the 'priority schemes' which included special provisions for the supply of food and other daily necessities meant for these groups. Multiple rounds of procurements and denial aimed at providing for Calcutta and starved the countryside. The forces of the war including these policies led to dislocations in the countryside and would result in large scale migration. The situation of the different non-priority 'migrants' with tenuous claims to entitlements have to be understood in relation to the 'priority classes' and the resources made available to them.

1.2 'Sick destitutes' and 'vagrants': classifying diseased migrants

The advance of the war and the gradual unfolding of the Bengal famine in 1943 meant massive dislocations. The direction of the ensuing population flows were manifold. A part of this migratory flow was directed towards Calcutta and came to be schematised under two interchanging official labels, 'sick destitutes' and 'vagrants'. This classificatory schema was mobilised to foster a pathologised perception of the migrants. The official vision sought to erase the structural connection between the imperial war, policies of procurement and denial, famine like conditions in the countryside and massive rural dislocations.

From its very inception, migration to Calcutta has been integrally connected to an unequal relation between the city and its hinterland.[9] Under the influence of colonialism, rural surplus was extracted from a very large area surrounding the city and siphoned off to facilitate foreign trade. The metropolitan area came to acquire a disproportionate share of industrial output and factory employment and other economic activities. From early colonial days, the city experienced migration of business entrepreneurs, service groups and industrial labour in connection with trade and commerce. With the setting up of the jute and cotton industries in the suburbs of Calcutta, labour

migration mainly consisting of non-Bengali migrants from Bihar, Orissa and the United Province (known as 'upcountry' labour) gained momentum from the latter half of the nineteenth century (R. Dasgupta 1976; Haan 1994).[10] As already noted, this section of the migrants faced various restrictions to their mobility under the wartime labour laws.[11]

Somewhat separated from these were another stream of migration labelled as 'distress' migration. They made occasional appearance in policy literature of the region in times of famine. This type of migration is often construed as '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 was 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 industrial labour force was invoked to highlight that the peasantry in Bengal did not need to supplement their rural income by seeking wage employment at the factories in the urban areas. 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).[12] These studies point out that the proportion of rural population dependent on wage labour, which is an important indicator of rural poverty remained high and this was specifically true for middle and western districts of Bengal (van Schendel and Faraizi 1984; Bose 1986, 30-31). There existed a floating population between the villages and cities of Bengal often on the verge of destitution. Sections of the poorer groups of course met their financial hardships partly by seasonal rural to rural migration at the time of harvest (Rogaly 1994). But it would not be incorrect to assume that a steady trickle kept coming to the urban fringes as well, specially to the unorganised and informal sectors, and remained largely outside enumeration. The following table provides some idea of the migration to and from the city of Calcutta in the first half of the twentieth century.

Table 1.1. Migration to and from Calcutta, 1891-1951 (Source: Census of Calcutta, 1951, xviii).

Year	1951	1941	1931	1921	1911	1901	1891
Actual	2,548,67	2,108,80	1,140,86	1,031,69	998,012	920,93	741,88

population	7	1	2	7		3	0
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 separate figures for increasing number of poverty stricken villagers who came to the city all through the 1940s are not available. What can still be highlighted from Table 1.1 is that there was a drastic rise in migration to Calcutta during the twenty years from 1931 to 1951. This 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 cultivators were reeling under pressure from unpaid credit balances. The rural credit system was on the verge of collapse. From the time of the slump of 1930s, especially in the western and central part of Bengal, the combined effects of diminishing size of holdings (a fact emphasised by most studies of this period), lack of productivity and indebtedness had started pushing people out (with or without land alienation) to different directions including the urban centres around Calcutta. With the onset of the Second World War, repeated government drives of procurements, together with 'denial' worked to further cripple the countryside. Calcutta became the most important war supply fronts, accounting for as much as 80% of the armament, textile and heavy machinery production used in the Asian theatre (Mukherjee 2015). 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 seen as essential for survival. Large migration ensued.

With the beginning of the war in 1939 and with the unfolding of the famine in the countryside, thousands of impoverished peasants left home from rural areas. They wandered across the countryside in the direction of towns where they hoped to obtain food. The greatest flow was towards Calcutta. Such migration reached a certain visibility in Calcutta from early 1943.[13] In response to the situation in 1943-1944, two sample surveys were conducted with government

assistance to assess the impact of the famine. The first survey focused on Calcutta and Howrah. The second survey drew its samples from the villages in Bengal spread across different districts.[14] Their findings were presented to a Famine Inquiry Commission, appointed in 1944 to assess the ravages of the famine in Bengal. The Commission published its report in 1945. The two surveys and the Commission's report impacted policies of 'relief' for the displaced people to a great extent.

The sample survey of famine 'destitutes' in Calcutta and Howrah's streets was conducted by Professor Tarakchandra Das and his colleagues of the Department of Anthropology, University of Calcutta in August-September 1943.[15] It was a survey of 820 units or a total of 2537 persons randomly selected from among the 'destitutes' on the city streets. The surveyors consciously used the term 'unit' rather than 'family' or 'house'. The people taking shelter on city streets lacked a home and according to the surveyors these groups did not resemble a family either. They found that the 'destitutes' started appearing in Calcutta from July 1943. It was the landless agricultural labourer in the countryside of Bengal who suffered the most. The landholding classes escaped with least damage. Majority of the 'destitutes' in Calcutta were lower caste and class Hindus, or Muslims, coming from Midnapur and 24 Pargana district ("Bengal Famine: As Revealed in a Survey of the Destitutes in Calcutta," 1949, 31, 51-52). Many travelled by train without tickets. Stations on railway lines south of Calcutta were thronged by starving crowds waiting for transport. They reached the city in different states of poverty and took shelter in the air raid shelters, by the baffle walls, under the trees or simply on the streets and pavements of the city. Some 'destitutes' living in villages near Calcutta came daily by train to the city to obtain food at the relief kitchens and returned home by night. It was reckoned that in the middle of October 1943, the number of 'destitutes' in Calcutta had reached 100000 ("Famine Inquiry Commission: Report on Bengal," 1945, 68, 70).

The two aforementioned surveys, the CMC reports of the time, and the report of the Famine Inquiry Commission started using the term 'destitute' to identify the incoming famished rural population. The official documents for most part took the meaning of 'destitute' to be self-evident. The notions associated with destitution can be gauged from the following explanation provided in a footnote of the report of Famine Inquiry Commission

> The word "destitute" was generally used in Bengal as a noun to describe famine victims. However objectionable as English, the word is convenient and its use has not been avoided in this report. ("Famine Inquiry Commission: Report on Bengal," 1945, 2)

Destitution came to be equated with a type of abjection. The same report noted

Families were broken up and all moral sense lost. In their distress they often sank to sub-human levels… ("Famine Inquiry Commission: Report on Bengal," 1945, 2)

In a similar vein, the Survey of 'Destitutes' in Calcutta, 1943 observed

The destitutes lived a life which was in many respects less than human. So far as personal cleanliness was concerned, they presented a scene of utter carelessness…. The dirt and dust of the streets of Calcutta went on accumulating on them. The approach of a destitute could be easily detected by the terrible odour which he emitted constantly. Even this noxious smell came to be associated with the places where they lived for sometime such as the railway sheds, air raid shelters, projecting verandahs etc… ("Bengal Famine: As Revealed in a Survey of the Destitutes in Calcutta," 1949, 5)

According to the Survey of the Destitutes in Calcutta, about 73.29 percent of the people surveyed were connected to rural land in some way. They were either owner cultivators, farm labourers or those who combined farm labour with other forms of day labour. The remaining 26.7 percent had been involved in petty trade and other activities in the villages ("Bengal Famine: As Revealed in a Survey of the Destitutes in Calcutta," 1949, 68-69). Rather than using other identifier such as their profession, place of origin, state of deprivation etc., the blanket term of 'destitute' was preferred. In this portrayal there was an attempt to mark these groups as hapless victims who had resigned to their fate, degenerated to sub human levels and were bereft of any agency to fight the conditions of poverty. The reports started prefixing 'sick' to it and it became crystallised into a new category of 'sick destitute'.

…the mass migration of starving and *sick destitute* people was one of the most distressing features of the famine. Thousands flocked into towns and cities… The wandering famine victims readily fell a prey to disease and spread disease in their wanderings. ("Famine Inquiry Commission: Report on Bengal," 1945, 2, emphasis added)

A certain pathologisation of poverty was underway. Even as the famished peasants were being labelled as 'sick destitutes', a new official stance towards vagrancy was being fashioned during the height of the famine in Bengal. Much was made of 'nuisance in public thoroughfares' as people started living on the pavements. The Annual Report of the Health Department of 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 Vagrant Home outside Calcutta ("Administrative Report for the Year 1942-43, Annual Report, Health Department," *Corporation of Calcutta*, 1943)

The report did not directly equate famine victims with beggars, but there was no possible way of telling the two groups apart. Its policies implicated the very same population. The public presence of deformed bodies, and the conscious use of such deformities in the city's public spaces to claim visibility, attract sympathies and alms from the passers-by was not to be tolerated. The Bengal Vagrancy Ordinance was promulgated in 1942. It became codified into the Bengal Vagrancy Act, 1943 and came into force from October 1943 in parts of Calcutta, Howrah, Tollygunge, Behala and 24 Parganas. For the first time in Calcutta's urban history, beggary was conceived as a punishable 'offence' requiring municipal intervention. The problem of vagrancy was included in the Medical Report section of the CMC Annual Administrative Report indicating its pathologisation. Through the formation of categories like 'sick destitutes' and 'vagrants' whose presence on the streets worked as 'reservoir of infections', the poor came to be seen as pestilential. As a contemporary news report declared, the presence of 'sick destitutes' was degenerating the 'health of Calcutta' ("Kolkatar Sastha Hani," *Jugantar*, August 1943, 1). The 'sick destitute' and 'vagrants' were turned into diseased bodies. Colonial knowledge practices actually *produced* a group of pathologised subjects by narrowing its vision upon disease and by erasing the violence of war, scarcity and hunger. This justified their governance primarily through confinement and dispersal.

By the mid-1943, the famished rural poor had started drawing attention through press reports. In the height of the famine, *The Statesman* published pictures and news of the famine bringing international attention to it. This created official discomfort. Certain relief measures pertaining to food and shelter for the incoming population were gradually being instituted. The 'destitutes' were distributed food known as *ghyat* or *mondo* (gruel) at various government run and private *langarkhanas* and *annasatras* (food kitchen/rice kitchen). Private charitable organisations were encouraged by the government to set up food kitchens, centres of milk supply for children etc. with certain regulations. By mid 1943, about 220 free kitchens were being run in the city by private organisations, supported by the government (Bengal Famine: As Revealed in a Survey of the Destitutes, 1949, 31). Organisations like the Marwari Relief Society, Mahila Atmaraksha Samity, Bengal Relief Committee of the Hindu Mahasabha among others played an important role in 'relief'. A government press release was issued in July 1943 stating that *langarkhanas* and *annasatras*, were not meant for the 'priority classes' who were being served by the 'control shops'. Separate

entitlements for different wartime population categories were to be maintained. Only people who were not entitled to receive subsidised ration from control shops were eligible to receive food in the free kitchens ("Kolkatar Pothe Ghyat Bitoroner Siddhanta," *Jugantar* July, 1943, 1). Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, the minister of Civil Supply in Bengal stressed the need to eat a 'measured meal' amidst scarcity. There were attempts to stop the same 'destitutes' from getting food from two to three kitchens on the same day ("Mondo Bitorone Somosya," *Jugantar,* May 1943, 4). Meals were given at the same time of the day in all kitchens to prevent 'destitutes' from getting more than one meal. In effect they were being supplied starvation ration. Within two to three months of opening the *langarkhanas*, a new policy was adopted. It aimed at relocating the kitchens from the city to the suburbs, in order to prevent the arrival of famished poor to the city in search of food. The government incentivised institutions that agreed to open food kitchens in the suburbs through the supply of subsidised food grains ("Sraddhananda Parke Sosta Bhojanalay," *Jugantar* May 1943, 3; "Kolkatar Sastha Hani," *Jugantar*, August 1943, 1). While there were no declared communal separation in the relief measures, private organisations like the Hindu Mahasabha and organisations like the Muslim Byabosayi Samity in effect catered to the Hindus and the Muslims separately ("Muslim Byabosayi Samitir Seba," *Jugantar,* March 1943). This trend will be accentuated within the next few years with deteriorating communal relations.

A policy on shelter was also improvised. Different 'homes' were set up for the 'sick destitutes'. The prospective inhabitants were collected through forceful 'round ups'. Throughout the peak months of the famine, 'sick destitutes' were collected from the streets in ambulances operated by the ARP and the police and discharged in hospitals. Apart from this, from August 1943, the beggars were routinely rounded up, placed in front of a Special Magistrate and after being declared 'vagrants' by the magistrate, sent to collection homes ("Aro Noy Jon Bhabaghure Greftar," *Jugantar,* August 1943, 3). A large number of children were also rounded up from the streets and taken to 'shelters'. Finally, a large number of the dead were regularly picked up from the streets for last rights and disposal. And it were the government's civilian police forces, that is, the ARP and the civic guard who performed the main task of round ups.

The process of 'rounding up' 'sick destitutes' and 'vagrants' was a rather forceful one. The 'destitutes' tended to gather in the neighbourhood of food kitchens, sitting or lying on the pavements throughout most of the day and night. They were often picked up from the food kitchen centres. The report of the Famine Inquiry Commission noted that the 'destitutes' had acquired a wandering habit and resented confinement in camps. Many absconded if the opportunity occurred.

The arrival of a police lorry in a street crowded with 'destitutes' would be a signal for their rapid and noisy dispersal. They evaded the ARP or the police vehicles to the best of their ability. It was estimated that by the end of 1943, over 55000 people were received in destitute homes and camps ("Famine Inquiry Commission: Report on Bengal," 1945, 71-72). A very considerable section of the 'destitutes' did not leave the city via the government dispersal processes. They eluded the authorities and simply remained. Throughout the next couple of years, a steady trickle of impoverished people continued to come to Calcutta from the countryside.

While a considerable section of the living were sent off to confined spaces created for them outside the city, a large number of the dead on the streets of Calcutta also posed a problem. Two organisations, the Hindu Satkar Samity and the Anjuman Mofidul Islam took care of the dead bodies of the Hindus and the Muslims respectively ("Kolkatar Pothe Mritodeho," *Jugantar,* July 1943, 2). Corporation officials lamented the difficulty of ascertaining the exact reason of such death, or keeping count 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 CMC annual reports to account for these unfortunate lot whose dead bodies lay unclaimed on Calcutta's streets. Their enumeration started from mid-1943. The entry of 'paupers' on Calcutta's streets and sidewalks and in the CMC annual reports proved to be a rather long-term affair. After the initial years, street deaths that started under the famine had become somewhat regular and *normalised*. Table 1.2 provides an estimate of the number of deaths of 'paupers' for the next decade or so.

Table 1.2. Percentage of death of 'paupers' in relation to total annual death in Calcutta from 1944 to 1960 (Figures compiled from CMC Annual Administrative Reports from 1944-1960).

Year	Total Number of Deaths in Calcutta	Death of 'Paupers'	Percentage of Death of Paupers in Relation to Total Death
1944-45	51,992	8826 (average 167 per week)	One sixth
1945-46	37,656	5649 (average 109 per week)	One seventh
1946-47	36,859	4872 (average 94 per week)	Less than one seventh
1947-48	45,310	5863 (average 113 per	One-eighth

		week)	
1948-49	44,307	4708 (average 91 per week)	Less than one ninth
1949-50	43,804	4756 (average 91 per week)	One ninth
1950-51	55,422	6587 (average 127 per week)	One eighth
1951-52	40,927	3971 (average 76 per week)	One tenth
1952-53	38,501	4365 (average of 84 per week)	One ninth
1953-54	36,578	4467 (average of 86 per week)	One eighth
1954-55	32,197	4282 (average of 82 per week)	One eighth
1955-56	32,223	4993 (an average of 96 per week)	One sixth
1957-58	32,197	5315 (an average of 82 per week)	One eighth
1958-59	33,269	4833 (an average of 94 per week)	One seventh
1959-60	34,383	5102 (an average of 98 per week)	One seventh

In short, the famine migrants were seen in terms of disease, codified as 'sick destitutes' and 'vagrants' and their governance was effected through confinement and dispersal. 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 contexts. The official closure of the Bengal famine was marked with the Famine Enquiry Commission's report published on May 1945. But a huge and consistent number of unclaimed dead bodies continued to be picked up from the streets of Calcutta for long after. Starvation, destitution and death raged throughout the next decade. The living perhaps eluded official enumeration and confinement, or were rounded up to different 'homes'. The dead registered a consolidated presence.

1.3 Schematising the inflow of 'evacuees'

Around the same time that famine migrants were coming to Calcutta, the city was receiving other fleeing people, whose displacement was more directly related to the war and associated violence. An ambiguous category was devised for these groups as found in contemporary police files, 'evacuees'. It implied a population that *evacuated* in the face of *direct* or *climactic* threat of violence. The term of course precluded any straightforward acknowledgement that these groups could have claims to 'refuge'. The category of 'refugee' whose meanings were being defined in Europe and worldwide in the context of the Second World War and included certain rights and entitlements was avoided in India all through the colonial period and later. 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.[16] 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. They were given provisional accommodation and food, and helped in their onward journey to farther east to different parts of Assam. Certain entitlements of sorts were devised for the 'evacuees' through official as well as private relief measures. The official attitude towards these first groups of 'evacuees' from Burma is important as it reveals a pattern of governance of 'relief' towards refugee for years to come.

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, Kolkata Police Museum Archive, 1942). This official strategy of including representatives from 'all religious communities' was a marked feature of the many different government committees and boards set up at the time for famine relief, riot relief or evacuee relief. This was devised as a way of solving acrimonious relations between the Hindus and the Muslims in office at the provincial and municipal elected bodies. The government committee and its services were however grossly inadequate. As noted in case of famine 'relief', the main work of reception was done by different private organisations affiliated to political parties. The private organisations catered to the Hindus and the Muslims separately. Thus, while the machinery of the Bengal Congress together with the Marwari Relief Society, and other smaller Hindu volunteer organisations like the Bajrang Parishad, the Nababidhan Samaj was geared to provide for the

incoming 'evacuees' from Burma, it was deemed inadequate for communitarian needs. Mr Humayun Kabir,[17] 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 evacuees at Salagi Mussafirkhana and their food at Gahar building in Lower Chitpore road…" (Ibid).

Separate arrangements were put in place for receiving incoming Muslims and Hindus respectively in *mussafirkhanas* and *dharmashalas,* (both the terms literally meaning shelter for guests) organised differently by the representatives of the respective communities. 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 *mussafirkhanas* served only the Muslims. The *dharmashala*s were meant 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). Their movements were closely monitored. These displaced by 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 became increasingly communal.[18] And there was a partial and selective opening up of the city's public space and 'public utilities' under close surveillance. These were more readily made available to groups displaced by *climactic* circumstances and perhaps much less so to people displaced by more long term and insidious structural violence of poverty.

By this time another group of people had also started trickling in, albeit fewer in number, those dislocated due communal violence between the Hindus and the Muslims. A brief review of riot 'relief' in Calcutta shows continuities in governing 'relief'. The blanket category of 'evacuee' continued to be used. Communal relations between the Hindus and the Muslims had been deteriorating due to acrimonious communal politics in Bengal from the 1930s. Displacement due to

communal violence started roughly with the Hindu Muslim communal riots in Dhaka and adjoining areas in 1941.[19] It assumed significant proportion from the time of the Calcutta riots in August 1946. The Calcutta riots of 1946 marked a distinct turning point, and in a chain reaction of communal violence, ultimately led to the carnage around 1947.[20] We may note some features of relief for riot 'evacuees' here, which were similar in nature to the provisions made available to the 'evacuees' from the Far East.

The Calcutta riots of 1946 officially continued from 16 August to 20 August, though in effect communal violence continued for much longer. The riot manifested in several ways, including taking out processions through notable public spaces of Calcutta, looting of property of the rival community, arson and widespread killings out of sheer communal hatred. A specific feature of the Calcutta riots was that neighbourhoods or *paras* and *mohollas* in the city became an important locus of protection or violation (Nakazato 2015). Attempts were directed at purging neighbourhoods of the minority community. Neighbourhoods around this time saw considerable militarisation by local communities. 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 ten percent of the city's population were dislocated due to 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 in the *Maidan*[21] and many other places all over the city. Often vacant famine camps were used as relief camps (Mukherjee 2015, 220). As in the case of the Burma 'evacuees', more than government relief it were the private organisations that came in to cater to the people affected by the violence. Relief societies were formed at the level of *paras*, *mohallas* and *bustees* all over the city either through the initiative of political parties, or through non-political leadership from the localities themselves. In a sharp disjuncture with earlier practices, a part and parcel of the new relief societies were 'defence committees' set up to provide protection against possible attacks. The proceedings of a meeting of the members of two *bustees* near Ultadanga in north Calcutta points to the arrangements typical all over the city in the aftermath of the riots

> at a meeting… on 09.09.46… 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 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 prevent 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, Kolkata Police Museum Archive, 1946)

While the riot was officially declared to have ended on 22 August 1946, sporadic communal violence
continued throughout the period. The Calcutta riots were followed by communal violence in the
Noakhali district in East Bengal mainly against the Hindus in October 1946. Riots in Bihar followed in
October-November, 1946 where Muslims were targeted. These communal disturbances sent new
groups of 'evacuees' to Calcutta. Similar arrangements were put in place for the displaced people.
Several Evacuee Relief Centres were opened by the Marwari Relief Society for Noakhali riot victims
in Calcutta. When Muslim 'evacuees' started coming in the wake of the Bihar riots, it was the
Anjuman Mofidul Islam that came forward to help. Relief arrangements by this time had become
overtly communal and mutually hostile (KPM No SB/01814/05, File no PM 937/46, Kolkata Police
Museum Archive, 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 out-migration of Bihari Muslims from Calcutta.[22] Space for Muslims in Calcutta had
already begun to shrink. While the usage of the term 'evacuees' was more frequent, the term
refugee and displaced persons were also occasionally used (in the police files) in attempts to label a
large and diverse array of people. The process of codification of the different groups of migrants was
far from complete and remained opaque.

Continued migration from across the border as well from its own countryside to Calcutta marked the
coming of national independence and partitioning of the province of Bengal in 1947. The foreign
troops left and their place were taken by native troops. Policing of the city remained but changed in
character. In the immediate aftermath of the partition, the rival religious community often became a
special target of policing.[23] Derequisitioning of property taken over by the military during the war
proved to be rather long drawn. Sometimes such property was simply not returned, and taken over
for government use ("Jami Pherot Paoyar Proshno," *Anandabazar Patrika,* April 1951). 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. This excerpt from the CMC's Annual Health Report in 1951 draws attention to the
connection between the decade long migration, scarcity of shelter, 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 ("Administrative Report for the Year 1950-51, Annual Report, Health Department" *Corporation of Calcutta*, 1951, 1).

Migration of victims of communal riots, specially of the East Bengali Hindus, which had started since the Noakhali riots assumed alarming proportions after 1947. In the daily notes of the Special Branch of the Calcutta police for the years 1947 and 1948, the label of 'evacuee' continued to be used to classify the incoming population, together with 'refugee' and 'displaced persons'. These were uncertain times, and there were suspicions regarding the role of the new 'evacuees' from East Bengal 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.[24]

In the face of the massive scale of migration of Hindus from East Bengal, the responsibility of providing relief to the new 'evacuees' had to be assigned to the jurisdiction of a separate government department in the newly carved out state of West Bengal in independent India. Relief measures extended by this new department, the Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation Department, Government of West Bengal were in tune with the pattern set in the preceding decades. The stress was primarily on relief. There was no immediate acknowledgement of the need for rehabilitation of the displaced groups. Every attempt was made to persuade immigrant Hindu East Bengalis to return to their places of origin. The relief efforts again were communal in nature. In some time, the authorities would bracket the East Bengali Hindu 'evacuees' under a new category of 'displaced persons' with the reluctant recognition that these groups had been *displaced* due to violence of a climactic nature. The category of 'refugee', with a more direct acknowledgment of 'right to refuge' was not to be officially acknowledged in West Bengal and India.[25]

The East Bengali 'evacuees' would succeed in changing their 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 nation. While the state labelled them as 'displaced persons'

which continued to be used in government reports, the Bengali term *udbastu*, which translates into refugee, came to be widely used in West Bengal's press and non-government circles. Due to sheer number, the resourcefulness of middle-class East Bengalis, and active support by left political parties in the state, the more resourceful sections of the East Bengali refugees would claim their 'right to shelter' from a reluctant state. The Hindu East Bengalis however, were an internally variegated group. They were of different class and caste backgrounds and belonged to different occupation groups. Their resourcefulness greatly varied. Their access to shelter and other entitlements also differed accordingly.

A large number of many different types of refugee settlements cropped up in the Calcutta metropolitan area and in the entire state of West Bengal after 1947. Among all kinds of refugee dwellings, it was the middle-class squatters' colonies which dominated the landscape and eventually became a symbol of refugee resourcefulness. There was a heavy concentration of squatters' colonies within the Calcutta Metropolitan Area, especially in the low-lying suburbs along Calcutta's north, south and east. In these areas the refugees capitalised on the existence of low-lying marsh and waste lands to build their temporary huts. These settlements had a predominantly a middle-class East Bengali Hindu population. Through what is now eulogised as the *jabardakhal* (squatting) movement (Chakrabarti 1999; Chatterji 2007; Sen 2014; Sanyal; Chaudhuri 1983), a homogenised and unified figure of the *udbastu* (uprooted) was projected to claim for them the status of a new proletariat in West Bengal. They at the same time claimed to be its rightful citizens who have contributed to the formation of the new nation and the rightful recipients of rehabilitation.

An overwhelming majority of the lower class and caste East Bengali Hindus started migrating in large numbers a little later than their middle-class counterparts, from the 1950s. They found shelter in government camps. Political and social separation remained between the middle and lower class and caste refugee colonies and camps. The camps were segregated from the social fabric of the larger neighbourhoods within which they were situated. This segregation was actively maintained by the camp officials. There were very few government camps inside Calcutta. Government camps were set up in rural areas or at the urban peripheries in different parts of the state. From the late 1950s, there was a change in government rehabilitation policy for East Bengali 'displaced persons'. All new government rehabilitation schemes were set up outside West Bengal. Their resettlement followed a very different path than their middle-class counterparts. More is discussed about lower class and caste dalit East Bengali refugees in chapter two.

All through the years of the partition and afterwards, impoverished rural migrants continued to trickle in to the Calcutta metropolitan area in search of food, work and livelihood. But they were rendered invisible in the official records. By the end of the 1940s, poverty stricken rural 'destitutes' have receded from the front page of the newspapers as well. They occasionally made small entries in the last pages of Bengali left newspapers like *Swadhinata* and *Janajuddha*. 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 one meal a 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, Kolkata Police Museum Archive, 1946).

By this time, the famine was declared to have officially ended and the famished migrants receded from official vision. Public attention was shifting to the East Bengali Hindu 'displaced persons'. The front pages of contemporary newspapers were often full of news of waves of migration from East Bengal. The famished rural migrants continued to trickle in. They found place in small pockets of informal squats and increasingly by the city's canal banks, railway lines and pavements. The experiences of the impoverished rural migrants in Calcutta are explored in greater detail in chapter three, who were known as 'sick destitutes' in the 1940s, but would later come under a more incriminating label as 'encroachers'.

As emphasised in the discussion so far, this period was crucial for fashioning a regime of protection for refugees and migrants. A graded structure of entitlement was being created in which a newly consolidated 'priority classes' were granted some rights as people servicing the war. This was done in opposition to its migrant 'others'. The colonial state adopted a synoptic vision towards largely opaque migratory flows and brought about a discriminatory regime of migration governance. In this schematisation, the famished peasants were construed as pestilential, to be pushed outside the city limits by the ARP and the police forces. A wide array of other migratory flows, including people displaced from Burma by the Japanese army, religious minorities displaced due to communal riots and finally refugees coming from across the international border in East Bengal were initially all classified as 'evacuees'. Such categorisation retained considerable ambivalence and other terms of identification like refugee and displaced persons also appear in contemporary records. In the construal of the category of 'evacuee', there was a tacit acknowledgment of displacement through

climactic violence, even though 'relief' still meant provisional assistance. Groups displaced from *climactic* factors were offered controlled hospitality. People displaced due to more *endemic* long-term violence of poverty were rendered invisible, pathologised and dispersed. Migrants fought such discriminatory policies to the best of their ability. The following section briefly looks into facets of resistance, whereby Calcutta's footloose migrant populations swelled the ranks of protesters at the slightest provocation.

1.4. Protests and dissident identities

The decade of the 1940s was one of all pervasive discontent. The period saw low key unrests as well as violent outbursts. The protests of the mid 1940s came in response to scarcity of food, shelter and basic necessities of life. The sporadic and the excesses of these protests, opened up spaces for the most deprived of Calcutta's population, its migrants to express anger, momentarily reverse exclusion and shed derogatory categories of identification. While there were manifold expressions of low key and highly charged up discontent, I will briefly draw attention to two related aspects of such dissonance, shifting everyday forms of resistance and a few of the organised protests of the times. The streets of Calcutta were a key site where everyday contestations played out. The roads of the city came under the sway of the military establishment. But the city's lanes and alleys were also the places where its migrants dwelled, roamed and staked a stubborn presence despite attempts at 'round ups' and dispersal. The following extract from an intercepted personal letter by Mr Ranbir Juneja, a resident of Gariahat road, in south Calcutta brings out the nature of everyday entanglements

> Now I will tell you something I saw with my own eyes. A boy of about 8 was walking across Chowringhee on the 24th when a military lorry *went out of its way to run him over*. There were about 15 military policemen present when the boy was killed, but they did nothing at all, not even ring up for an ambulance to come and remove the body (KPM No /SB/01646/05, File No PM 841/45, Kolkata Police Museum Archive, 1945, emphasis added).

Sikh drivers plying their taxis in Calcutta became a specific target of attack by soldiers. Daily notes of the Calcutta police record a host of incidents, where Sikh drivers, who were the most important taxi driving community in colonial Calcutta, were cheated of money or physically abused by soldiers who rode their taxis as passengers, sometimes in a state of drunkenness. Such military excesses were met with everyday forms of counter-conduct. The latter part of the same intercepted letter quoted above narrates an incident that is revealing

> The following incident took place on Russa road. An army lorry was running at full speed when suddenly a man wearing a Gandhi cap stepped into the middle of the street and raising his hands stood fearlessly. The driver tried to swerve past him when suddenly a second man tried to step out. He was killed immediately. All American cars now bear three or four flags each in order to distinguish them from the British so that they would not be attacked - a direct kick to the British (KPM No /SB/01646/05, File No PM 841/45, Kolkata Police Museum Archive, 1945).

From the mid-1940s, military vehicles running over people, animals or private vehicles were increasingly chased, and eventually the vehicles set on fire. A crowd would assemble at the site of an accident, often pursue the vehicle, and set it on fire. Sometimes the vehicle causing the accident escaped. On such occasions, the military vehicles coming immediately afterwards would become the target of attack (KPM No SB/01647/05, File No PM 841/46/1, Kolkata Police Museum Archive, 1946; KPM No SB/01648/05, File No PM 841/46 II, Kolkata Police Museum Archive, 1947). Sometimes, military men (or people perceived as being related to the military) could come under attack for no apparent reason at all. Thus, a special branch file of the year 1946 notes an incident, when an Italian prisoner of war was waiting at a tram station in south Calcutta. A few men suddenly appeared, surrounded him and started shouting slogans of 'Jai Hind'. Stones were thrown at him. One of the assailants took away the belongings from his pockets. The report stopps short of identifying the assailants or their motivations for the attack (KPM No SB/01648/05, File No PM 841/46 II, Kolkata Police Museum Archive, 1947).

It can be conjectured that the anonymous men wearing the Gandhi cap, or those shouting 'Jai Hind' who appeared out of nowhere around soldiers or their vehicles at opportune moments to throw stones, or to set fire to their vehicles were metaphorically and really the men and women of Calcutta's streets, that is, the figure of the migrant. These quasi citizens with dubious claims of residence to the city labelled as 'sick-destitutes', 'vagrants' and 'evacuees' drew from the mainstream nationalist repertoire of protest of the day to position themselves against the omnipresent colonial police and military establishment. They momentarily enacted nationalist subjectivities to channelise their protests and dissipated back into the multitude. They exacted their small revenges at the slightest of opportunities.

Apart from such everyday resistance, the period also witnessed some violent mass protests. The entire period saw increasing strikes among the industrial labour migrants, in Calcutta's jute mills, among the tramway workers and workers in the Calcutta Corporation, and among the dock labourers. Some of the militant protests of the time included two anti-Indian National Army (INA)

trial agitations of 1945-46 and a strike organised by the communists in Calcutta in support of a naval mutiny by the Royal Indian Navy (RIN) in Bombay and Karachi in February 1946. These protests have engaged scholarly attention for their militancy and anti-colonial nature.[26] Here I wish to draw attention to some common features of these protests in and through which Calcutta's migrants momentarily shed their official categories of human misery. These protests were initially called on by political parties, often led by students and industrial labourers and later developed their own momentum. They took the form of *hartal* (strike)*,* meetings and parades led by the student wings of the political parties including the Indian National Congress, the Muslim League and the left parties. The agitators belonged to different religious communities including the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs and had the support of different shades of political opinion. These protests often spiralled out of control of the leaders and turned violent. The sporadic and the excesses of these protests were claimed by the dwellers of the streets and the migrants. Symbols of colonial authority and privileges of the 'priority classes' like civil supply ware houses and control shops became targets of attack. Clashes with the police broke out when protesters formed into processions and forcefully entered prohibited areas like the administrative heart of Calcutta placed under section 144. Another special feature of the agitations was a concerted attack on all forms of public transport which included burning of vehicles, road blocks and squatting on railway tracks. Sir Francis Tucker, then General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Eastern Command observed about the November 1945 anti-INA trial protest: "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."[27] The Calcutta police confirmed that the ultimate objective of the protesters was to cause *civil disorder*.[28] 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 the government and corporate interests and the 'public utilities' from attacks in case of future disturbances in Calcutta.

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 policing of the 'public utilities' (like the transport system) had come to cause grievances all through the war years. The huge mass of Calcutta's informal labour, different migrant populations who were the shadowy 'other' of the 'priority citizens' with dubious claims of residence to the city were left with few protections. The wartime violent protests and their excesses have to be understood in this context. It were the migrants who swelled the ranks of protesters at the slightest provocation. An invasion of privileged public 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. The public spaces and public utilities were appropriated through everyday counter conduct and violent protests with shifting strategies of migrant resistance. These protests were also moments when the migrants symbolically overturned their dominant categories of identification officially associated with sickness and destitution.

1.5 Conclusion

This chapter brings out the integral connection between archival displacements and migration governance. Categorising moving people in specific ways and generating knowledge and public perception about them through official propaganda is central to administering refugee relief. In this process many realities are erased and a synoptic grid most suitable for the agendas of governance is created. In the 1940s in Calcutta three official categories were devised for simplifying mobile population flows, 'sick destitutes,' 'vagrants' and 'evacuees' which aimed to create a differential regime of refugee protection. The famished rural peasants came to be seen through illness and destitution, which justified their governance through forceful dispersal. A less value laden and more ambiguous category of 'evacuee' was created to classify a wide array of immigrants. It reflected the ambivalence of the time. The 'evacuees' were not granted the status of refugees, but they were provided controlled relief. In the coming years, the category of 'evacuees' will be more streamlined, and be re-deployed as 'displaced persons' to classify people coming from across the international border in East Pakistan. The famished rural migrants would recede from official vision, fight erasure and their right to the city for a long time. The chapter also shows that official classifications are never absolute, and state imposed categories of identification are contested by the migrants through violent outbursts and more everyday forms of counter conduct.

Notes

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[1] The lower stretch of the river Ganga marks the western boundary of present day Calcutta and flows south, finally out-falling into the Bay of Bengal. This stretch of the river is locally known as river Hooghly.

[2] The term *bustee* originated from the Bengali word *basati* which simply means habitation. Under colonial usage it increasingly implied congested housing quarters for the poor that required planning intervention. The term *bustee* eventually became synonymous with slums.

[3] Sarat Bose was a Congress leader of great political significance in Bengal. After India's independence, he left the Congress party and assumed leadership of the Forward Bloc, a left wing political party formed by his brother and Bengal's revolutionary leader, Subhash Chandra Bose.

[4] A new seat sharing arrangement was introduced in the CMC that ensured a significant Muslim presence among other constituencies. Off the total 98 seats of the Corporation, 47 were to be reserved for the Hindus, of which 4 seats were to go to the Scheduled Castes, giving the Hindus 3 seats less than an absolute majority. The remaining 51 seats were to be divided between elected aldermen (5), Mohammedans (22), Special Constituencies, including the Bengal Chamber of Commerce, Port Commissioners etc. (Chatterji 1994, 107). The powers of the Hindu leaders were reduced.

[5] For a detailed discussion of the powers and functions of the ARP, the Civic Guard and the Home guard, see (Mukherjee 2015, 30-39).

[6] It is interesting to note that bringing foreign troops from outside caused grievances in different quarters, and appeals were made to the government for training and using Indian troops for the protection of their own territories. Thus, at a conference of the Bharat Sebasram Sangha (a volunteer organisation attached to the Hindu Mahasabha) organised in South Calcutta, its president NC Chatterji voiced apprehension that so long as the safety of the Britishers were at stake, Indians could expect no help from them or their civic guards in the case of a Japanese attack. He urged the people not to depend on the British, and arrange for their own defence. The Bharat Sebasram Sangha, following a general trend of the time, was actively organising defence bodies like the Milan Mandir, or the Rakshi Dal (KPM No SB/02658/05, File No PM 510/42, Kolkata Police Museum Archive, 1942). Such volunteer organisations attached to political parties had existed all over Bengal since the early 1920s. But wartime dislocations and anxiety led to a rapid proliferation in their numbers in Bengal and Calcutta. They took upon themselves the responsibility of parallel and usually communal 'defence'. From the time of the Second World War, society in Calcutta also saw a proliferation of arms. Arms could be purchased for small amounts from the British and the American soldiers. Later the ex-Indian National Army (INA) soldiers also brought in arms with them. Amidst a general atmosphere of uncertainty, arms were being piled up by the 'volunteer' organisations, as well as by people outside such organisations and came into frequent use in flashpoints of tension from 1945 in the labour and communal unrests.

[7] Records of the Special Branch (SB), Calcutta Police note many other instances of rumours of impending evacuation (KPM No SB/01569/05, File No PM/757/A/42, Kolkata Police Museum Archive, 1942).

[8] During the war about 1,22,000 feet of slit trenches were dug in Calcutta's parks and open areas ("Administrative Report for the Year 1945-46," *Corporation of Calcutta*, 1946, 1).

[9] It may be noted here that Bengal has also seen rural to rural migration, not directed towards Calcutta. This increased with the introduction of agrarian reforms initiated by the Left Front government from 1977. Agrarian reforms have led to increase in productivity and generated greater demand of rural labour.

Current research shows that seasonal rural to rural migrants to the rice producing areas of West Bengal work under gruelling conditions (Rogaly et al. 2003).

[10] A part of this labour migration was circular. Migrants worked at the industrial areas in cities and went back to their rural villages at periodic interval. Even when the migrants settled in the cities with their families, they maintained their rural ties. This trend of maintaining ties to their villages of origin by migrants was prevalent in large parts of Asia, China and Africa (Lucassen 2013).

[11] 'Upcountry' labour, were now deemed 'essential' to the smooth running of the war. They came under new regimentation which combined protection and restriction. The migrant labourers suffered from war violence, especially during the air raids by Japan on Calcutta (Sailer 2015). Industrial labour remained unsettled and recalcitrant all through the 1940s often under communist leadership and added to the militancy of the times.

[12] The permanent settlement (introduced in 1793) between the landlord and the colonial state with high revenue demands, multiple layers of landed intermediaries and fragmentation of rural landholding worked to keep the rural peasantry impoverished. The earliest survey of the conditions of poverty in rural Bengal is presented in the Dufferin Report of 1888. The report indicates that throughout Bengal, about 26% of the households solely depended on wage labour for sustenance. The percentage of wage labour was considerably higher in the western districts like Bankura, Murshidabad and Midnapur. But the findings of this report were kept confidential for a long time by the colonial administration (van Schendel and Faraizi 1984, 37-38).

[13] In October 1942, a massive cyclone hit Midnapore. The Midnapore Cyclone produced severe distress to the affected areas. Some 14,500 people and 190,000 cattle were killed and dwellings, food stores and crops destroyed over a wide area ("Famine Inquiry Commission: Report on Bengal" 1945, 66). These areas were also the hardest hit by scarcity and famine and generated large number of 'destitutes' who migrated to Calcutta.

[14] A sample survey of the effects of the famine was carried out in late 1944 by the Indian Statistical Institute (ISI) commissioned by the department of Relief of the Bengal government under the direction of Professor Prasanta Chandra Mahalanobis. They surveyed a total of 15,769 households in 386 villages spread around Bengal's different districts and looked at the causes and extent of destitution. By destitution the ISI researchers meant the condition of becoming entirely dependent upon others' charity for subsistence. In their sample, of the famine 'destitutes', about 199000 were agricultural labourer, 90000 were agriculturists, 56000 were craft workers, and nearly 50000 were small cultivators who also worked as agricultural labourer. It were the agricultural labourer who suffered the most (Greenough 1980, 216-217).

[15] Professor Tarakchandra Das was himself involved in organising a free food kitchen for the 'destitutes' at Ballygunge Place ("Bengal Famine: As Revealed in a Survey of the Destitutes in Calcutta," 1949, 12). They initiated the survey with their colleagues from the department of Anthropology, University of

Calcutta. Their aim was to help the government with future schemes of rehabilitation. A part of the survey was presented to the Famine Inquiry Commission as a memorandum in 1944. Afterwards, a survey of the countryside during the famine was directly commissioned by the government.

[16] 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 jungles. There were few provisions along the way and as many as 80,000 died on the trail (Mukherjee 2011, 70).

[17] Humayan Kabir was an elected member of the Bengal legislature from 1937 to 1947 as a Krishak Praja Party candidate. He was a strong advocate of peasant and workers' rights, and as such played much less into communal politics than many of his contemporaries either on the Hindu or the Muslim side.

[18] An important exception to this was the relief efforts organised by the communists often through their labour unions.

[19] In the Dhaka riots March of 1941, about 100 people lost their lives in Dhaka and surrounding areas and there was widespread looting and arson (Das 1993, 143).

[20] Bengal's Muslim League ministry is squarely blamed for orchestrating the riots to achieve its political goal of a separate Islamic nation. Recent scholarship has shown, however, that 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 the number of Muslim deaths in the riots exceeded that of the 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 riots in significant ways (S. Das 1993).

[21] Maidan literally means play ground. In Calcutta, an open green space in the administrative centre of the city is known as the Maidan.

[22] 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 homes in Bihar at places which are still relatively unaffected by the riots, by the end of October on the receipt of news of alleged preparation by the Hindus for a massacring of the Muslims on the Bakr Eid day (KPM No SB/01814/05, File No PM 937/46, Kolkata Police Museum Archive, 1946).

[23] Thus, Indian military sepoys in plain clothes could be seen on an ordinary September evening in Calcutta in 1948 creating a scene at a local pan shop belonging to Farook Mia on the Diamond Harbour road. Farook Mia was unceremoniously ordered to remove the portrait of Muhammad Ali Jinnah which hung from the wall of his shop. Farook Mia refused. After a while the sepoys were chased away by the local police. They reappeared at his pan shop the next evening. Only, this time in greater numbers. They managed to inflict some damaged before being chased away by the police again (KPM No SB/01648/05, File No PM 841/46II, Kolkata Police Museum Archive, 1946-48).

[24] This is an excerpt from a letter by an East Bengali refugee addressed to the Home Minister of West Bengal, Calcutta Police, Special Branch (KPM No SB/01794/05, File No PM 918/46-48, Kolkata Police Museum Archive, 1946- 1948).

[25] India is not a signatory to the United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, 1951. Its policy pertaining to 'refugees' have been ad hoc and on a case-to-case basis.

[26] The first anti INA prisoner trial agitation took place between 21 to 24 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 Dhillion by the colonial authorities to be held in Delhi. In Calcutta students led the anti-trial agitation between 21st and 24th November, 1945. 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 propaganda 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 the Muslims. It continued from 11th to 19th February 1946. The army was called in to quell the protests and more than 3000 people died in the fight (Majumdar, 2015, 239-251).

[27] Ibid, 245.

[28] Ibid, 262.