

Tentative title: - 'From refugees to immigrants: the career of a population at the borders between necessity and potentiality'

The lack of an overarching framework defining and protecting the rights of refugee populations to 'care' and 'return' has been felt by scholars and activists alike in the context of the Indian sub-continent. This lack, however, has been the ground for the development of a complex field of rehabilitation policy discourse and practices of care. The first part of this paper will focus on the post-partition refugee influx in West Bengal and the evolution of certain tendencies in the dialogue between state authorities and political organizations of the refugees. In this section we will discuss the conceptual and material apparatus that was shaped through a dialogue between the state authorities and political organizations of refugees at the end of the first decade of post-partition migration. The complex mechanism that is shaped by the convergence of constantly evolving policy bearings, practices of care within state institutions and refugee organizations along with spaces of rehabilitation has been fittingly called a space of 'ambiguous hospitality'¹. The aim of this paper will be to describe a specific moment in the conceptual process that came to define the contours of this 'hospitality' through a geometry of 'necessity' and 'potential' as articulated in a dialogue between the state authorities and the refugee organizations in the year 1958. In this dialogue the refugee organization articulated a demand for rehabilitation by creating a specific figure of the 'potential' of the refugee population which the state authorities circumscribed under an argument of 'economic necessity'. Scholars like Samir Kumar Das, Anusua Basu Raychaudhury and Gyanesh Kudaisya have already marked the importance of the late 1950s as a watershed moment in the development of the rehabilitation policy discourse. This study attempts to further probe that moment and try to capture the strands of various arguments whose convergence is indexed in a selection of important documents from the period. The paper will try to bring together a framework within which we can begin to narrate the process of linking together of concepts like 'necessity', 'potentiality', 'Labour' and 'belonging' which came to mark the ways in which the policy discourse came to address its object, namely the 'refugees'. The impetus behind the construction of such a narrative is to understand the process of arranging and cementing the structures of governance addressing the refugee population at an early and fraught moment of refugee influx in West Bengal.

Scholarly studies of the status of refugees and the state of refugee rehabilitation in West Bengal has argued that the rehabilitation policy discourse and the growth of semi-formal networks of spaces and institutions that came to take shape in the state provided for a constantly evolving 'emplacement'² of the refugee population within the nation-state. In recent scholarship there has been an attempt towards arriving at an understanding of the places of this 'emplacement'. Various enclaves of refugee rehabilitation, such as relief camps, work-site camps, government sponsored colonies and squatter's colonies that came to take shape in West Bengal are now being studied in order to explain their permanence and the relative differences of their residents from the mainstream citizenry³. The second section of the paper shares the concerns of the above mentioned set of academic studies. Following the first part of the paper the study progresses in the second section by bringing together a selection of oral narratives from certain villages in the Barasat Sub-division of North 24 Parganas district of West Bengal to map the effects of the shifts in policy discourse in the narratives of families that were the targeted by the rehabilitation apparatus in the late 1950s⁴. The paper will attempt a retelling of the experiences of multiple splitting and displacements that these families went through in their passage through the rehabilitation apparatus. The aim of this paper is to connect the early moment of structuring of the rehabilitation apparatus with a population that was produced through its interventions and came to inhabit a precarious socio-political and legal space in contemporary West Bengal.

¹ Ranabir Samaddar, 'Introduction', Ranabir Samaddar (ed.), *Refugees And The State: Practices Of Asylum And Care In India, 1947-2000*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2003, pp 21-68

² Samir Kumar Das, 'State Response To The Refugee Crisis: Relief And Rehabilitation In The East', in Ranabir Samaddar (ed.), *Refugees And The State: Practices Of Asylum And Care In India, 1947-2000*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2003, p 147

³ See Anusua Basu Roy Chaudhury and Ishita Dey, *Citizens, Non-Citizens and in the Camps Lives*, Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group, Kolkata, 2009, and Anusua Basu Raychaudhury, 'Nostalgia of 'Desh', Memories of Partition', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 39, No. 52, Dec. 25-31, 2004, pp. 5653-5660.

⁴ In this section the study takes as its starting point an already existing set of sophisticated scholarly studies of this region in terms of its importance in the history of partition and later population movements. See for instance Ranabir Samaddar, *The Marginal Nation: Transborder Migration from Bangladesh to West Bengal*, Sage, New Delhi, 1999 and Willem Van Schendel, *The Bengal Borderland: Beyond State and Nation in South Asia*, Anthem Press, 2005