

## City of Transit

### Calcutta Migrant City III

#### Concept note

As a noun, transit indicates the action of passing through or across a place. As a verb it is to pass through an area. What happens to the place and the area, that people and objects, transit through? We propose looking at Calcutta, a city of/ in transit—through three specific sites. Between 1834 and 1920<sup>[1]</sup> millions of Indians were transported to various plantation economies via the Calcutta port. Being sourced from the port's vast hinterland, they were temporarily housed in Calcutta—before being sent off in ships. These ships would often be manned by the lascars—sailors of the subcontinent who would eventually reach different parts of the empire<sup>[2]</sup>—the Calcutta port will almost inevitably be where they signed up from—and repeatedly came back to. This riverine port also altered the landscape on either side of the river Ganges—building warehouses to house objects, goods, commodities, roads for their transport and creating a focal point for consolidation of migrant workers. In the post-colonial city, both at the moment of the nation's inception, and for years afterwards, refugees arrived at Sealdah station—settling on platforms, temporarily and in waves of migration.

What do we learn of the city of Calcutta, if we tease out her memories from these three sites? What role have transient workers, perishable goods and temporary people played in marking and making this city of transit?

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<sup>[1]</sup> <https://rangandatta.wordpress.com/2017/03/15/indentured-indian-labourers-memorial-and-kolkata-port-trust-clock-tower/>

<sup>[2]</sup> <https://www.ourmigrationstory.org.uk/oms/the-lascars-britains-colonial-era-sailors>