

This paper does not include any information regarding the formation, functioning and statistics related to Haldia Dock Complex. Parts of such information were already presented in the previous workshop, and Mr. Chakraborty has answers to the rest. This paper is an exploration of the Haldia space, built up around logistical networks.

If you have known me for any length of time, you would also know that I am fairly fearless. Of course I squeal and run every time a lizard enters a room, have an obsessive fixation with the destructive power of fires, but otherwise, in unknown spaces and with people, I usually boldly go where wiser people are well advised to think couple of times before going. It might be due to the fact that I think I am strong and can hold my own in most situations.

However, on my second visit to the Shramik Bhavan at Ranichak, Haldia, I was scared. I had entered it for the first time in my life the day before, having looked at it and heard about it for several years. My memory of it was also corroborated by the people I spoke to in the course of this research, “Lakshman Seth used to rule Haldia from this building”, a journalist reminisced. ‘Rule’ of course in this context does not stay confined within the first meaning available with the OED, that of governing, but instead, one that smacks of authority extending beyond and above what is mandated within a democratic set up. A 2007 profile of Lakshman Seth in *The Telegraph* calls him the ‘*badshah*’ of Haldia, while the current TMC strong-man, Ajijul Rahaman, gets referred to as Haldia ‘*Samrat*’ at college functions. Keeping the significations of these monarchic addresses aside for the time being, let me return to the reason the second trip to Shramik Bhavan was scarier than the first. The day before, on my first visit, I was flanked by two colleagues, reluctant to let me enter a place perpetually dark and deserted. As we walked in, that first time, tentatively, we were taken aback by the sight of destruction that hits you as soon as you come close. Window panes had been shattered, paint was peeling off, on the first floor the glass window panes had completely disappeared, rusting metal grills were backed by plastic sheets. There was a dim bulb burning at the entrance, a septic tank on the right, in the middle of missing paved stones that made up a path skirting the building grass had cropped up.

We felt our way in, through a rusting front gate and then an also rusting collapsible gate, into a long corridor that was once green. At the end of the corridor we found some light, it opened up into a large hall, with a few posters of the recently concluded trade union strike (Haldia did not see any strike activity, in the face of active opposition by the state government, a CITU leader bemoaned) and really dim lights. We also met three people who then pointed us towards more people who were eager to talk about the horrible mess that TMC has created in the state, but that is beside the point. Let me now come back to the reason I was scared the next time that I visited Sharmik Bhavan. It was the very next day, I was meeting with a leader of the CITU organisation based in the Indian Oil Corporation factory, and I did not have the courage to walk inside the building unaccompanied, instead waited at the threshold, taking photos of Lenin sitting on his chair, among cows and goatherds. And some dung cakes.

My interview with this CITU leader went off famously, after a while he forgot that I am person who teaches, choosing to instead remember the discipline I come from, and went on to educate

me about labour laws in the country and the role Trade Unions have played in challenging them. He also spoke about CITU's role in the recent negotiation with the management of Renuka Suagr Mill, thereby giving me an entry into the first of the synecdochic figures that would, in the course of this paper, stand in for the logistical space that is Haldia. The second is even more material, if that were possible, embodied in the figure of Sk. Mujaffar who I was going to meet, a self proclaimed advertisement of how the port has affected the erstwhile Doro Pargana.

But I get ahead of myself, yet again. I was worried not because I was sitting in intensifying gloom with someone I had never met before, in a building that frankly, gave me the creeps, but because of what I ended up doing next. Gopal is the caretaker of the building who, came to Shramik Bhavan in 2012, after the Trinamool Congress broke down his home once they came into power in the state. He takes care of the building, not that there is much to take care of, stays with his 'family' and does something he refused to tell me, at night, somewhere. Gopal showed me the way, through a room full of clothes and utensils, then couple of dark corridors that opened up into a small unkempt garden and a whole new wing of the building that I did not know existed. Not visible from the road, this L shaped wing was double the size of where I had just come from, and through couple of more dark corridors, rooms with open doors but no one inside them I climbed up to find a section with fresh paint on the walls, marble on the floor, a brand new collapsible gate, tiles and bright lights. The surprise at finding such a space inside such a decrepit house only helped in mounting my fear, because incongruity, does not merely give rise to laughter, in the correct dose, can also be scary.

It was in this sort of sanctum sanctorum (primarily because if asked to, I would never be able to retrace my steps, but also because the sheer incongruity of this space, comprising four rooms, couple of halls, one kitchen and a bathtub- juxtaposed with the human-engineered and systematic destruction that I had seen, made it sinister) that I met Sk. Mujaffar, owner of Five Star Logistics (an umbrella term I am going to use for Five Star Trading Agency, Five Star Logistics Pvt. Ltd., Five Star Shipping Agency Pvt. Ltd., Five Star Vanijya Pvt. Ltd., Haldia Star Builders, Haldi Chemicals Pvt. Ltd, M. K. Shipping and Chartering Company etc.). Clad in bright white Kurta pajama, this tall man made me eat five and a half sweets, while he proceeded to rattle off phone numbers from memory. Armed with a smart phone that he never picked up, and a note book and pen where he scribbled illegibly, he proceeded to give me an outline of who's who in Haldia, as well as a remembered history of the port and its people.

Sitting in a room flanked by helpers that he ordered around, Mujaffar extended the same feudal hospitality towards me, arranging for a car that would drop me home and then a treat of Biryani for my roommates and I. However, at seven thirty on a Wednesday evening, somewhere at the back of Shramik Bhavan, appreciation of feudal hospitality was the last thing on my mind, I was acutely conscious of the fact that I hadn't met or heard a woman in over three hours, and while I was given to understand certain Trinamool families who earlier lived in shanties now lodged there, as did Gopal, the awareness was acute, and disconcerting.

Everyone I have spoken to so far, in the course of this project, barring Tamalika Panda Seth, have been men. I have met with them at various locations, ranging from the recently

refurbished *Apanjon* office to a HDA flat to Five Star godowns¹ to, as mentioned above, Shramik Bhavan. They have invariably occupied spaces uninterrupted by women. This, in itself, is not a surprise, as traditionally ports have been male spaces. Nelli Kambouri explains: “It may seem that dock work is stereotypically normalised as masculine only because in the past it required strong hands, but most of all it is the ability to work without having family or domestic care responsibilities that determine the gendered division of labour in the Port”. For people whose lives are centered, whether directly or indirectly, upon the port, it therefore is no surprise that spaces would also be coded strictly by gender. In my analysis, I view the space of Haldia city (now, definitely one, a contender in the Smart City project) as a space made and characterised by male labour, big machinery, impossible landscapes, but also, a space that constantly obfuscates the labour of women, that go into the making of this logistical space.

The port city, in existing literature, has so far been studied as a city marked by global flows, trying to hold on to its cultural heritage in the face of neo-liberal policies and containerization that threaten to disrupt the very fabric of dock-side existence and as cities straddling the liminal space between negative environmental impact, business growth and economic development. Managerial perspectives are of the opinion that a variety of stake holders are crucial to the dynamic and complex innovation networks that characterise port cities/ areas (De Martino 435). Alice Mah is of the view, in her analysis of the three great ports of the past, Liverpool, New Orleans and Marseille: that in the time of dwindling traffic and business, the global heritages of these ports are invoked by local authorities to shore up tourist activity and by fictional and cultural representation, encompassing the contradictory yet complementing schema of the blue and the black to represent these cities as both exciting and progressive places, but also as places of exoticisation and crime.

The Haldia Dock Complex, reclaimed from erstwhile Doro Parganas, where people seem to have lived in idyllic bliss, fishing and farming, especially bitter gourd, was at the beginning just an oil jetty, commissioned alongside the Haldia Urban Industrial Complex in 1959, the Haldia Dock was built in 1968 and picked up its activities with the commissioning of the Haldia Dock Complex in 1977. The barebones of this chronology do not do much by way of either documenting or describing what happened before, during and after the Dock was built. Ethnography pointed at two different directions, one where people benefitting from the building of the Dock go on to own crores of rupees, and the other, in which they are displaced with pittance in the name of rehabilitation package, no land to settle on and no job. ‘Haldia Udbastu Kalyan Samiti’ has been holding sit in demonstrations in front of the office of the Dock Complex, Jawahar Towers, every day, for the past one year. Of course, this dichotomy of development and its unfulfilled promises also cannot claim to capture fully the complexities of this space, or even for that matter, its originary narratives. If teleology is suspect, so are origins, both aligning our analysis ideologically.

But in a moment of completely unexpected poeticism Tamalika Panda Seth, the erstwhile MLA of Mahishadal and Chairperson of Haldia Municipality (the administrative structure of Haldia

¹ Did you know that the English word godown is used only in South Asia, especially India? Maybe it is not an English word after all, that being warehouse?

will be dealt with shortly, delineating the differences between the HDA and the Municipality and their shared vision of growth) recounts the time when if the Port Trust wanted to acquire land, it did so. Was this a nostalgic harking back to the times when the other form of land acquisition, and her and her husband's summary dismissal from power, could not be thought of? Yes, and no. While ascribing motives to an ethnographic account is the established anthropological practice, the need to read ethnographic accounts as narratives, analysable, is also well established now. TPS spoke eloquently of a man called Subal Das, a technical hand at the port who was reputed to take great pleasure in pulling the roof off houses with his crane, while the people living there ran out for cover, struggling to collect their belongings. She never met the man herself, but for children like her, living at the exact same space where the Dock Complex now stands, Subal Das was a feared creature, someone mothers told stories about when the children refused to sleep, or when they did not want to eat. It is crucial to keep in mind that this achievement of mythical proportions was aided by his mastery of new technology, the crane. The crane, with its gigantic proportions and ability to destroy, must have been an active component in the children's imaginary. As I will show later, along with containers, cranes and various heavy machinery belonging to the same family, dominate the logistical and visual landscape of Haldia. Their size, coupled with the understanding that they yield great power and can therefore be moved and made to comply only with great mastery and technique, a male domain. Crane-workers comprise a sizable constituency among the Class III technicians in the Dock, the others being electricians, mechanics, welders, etc. The crane and parts of its family, the Carl Mar (that one weigh bridge operator cheekily informed me is after all named after Karl Marx), the fork lift, the loader, the pock land and the ominously named Hydra, are integral to the logistical worlds we try to map here, lifting, shifting, dumping, loading and unloading, levelling, laying and as has been mentioned already- dismantling.

Another figure haunted these dismantled homes, her sighs and howls audible from the distance; haunting abandoned houses that would soon be underneath the Dock in this Doro Pargana. *Doro*, from *dariyā*, indicates that the silted, fertile land that the Dock was laying claim to, was once under water. In these abandoned empty homes, one could hear distant cries in the evenings, attributed to '*grhalakshmi*', who's been crying for obvious reasons. From the aggressive male who displaced *grhalakshmi*, to the future that would come to be dominated by the self same masculine figures, the logistical space of Haldia is marked by, albeit not overdetermined by the Dock complex.

Sentimental narratives do not start to encompass the ease with which land was acquired by the Port Trust in the 60s and the 70s. There are accusations of malpractice, of dealing with the urban space in a feudal manner. Haldia Dock Complex and the industrial belt (proudly harbouring around 400 industrial units- source, HDA website, having attracted 36% of total investment in Bengal) are inextricably linked with each other in a logistical web, but a web that stretches back to the inception of the port. The Calcutta Pot Trust has acquired and continues to hold large tracts of land, later selling parts of it to the various industries including the biggest two, the Indian Oil Corporation and Hindusthan Fertilizer Corporation (now closed). Often it has been accused of not subsidising the license fee, at other times there have been lawsuits. The Port Trust is also engaged in continuous tussle with the local bodies, both

the Haldia Development Authority and the Municipality. The interests of both groups are meant to be represented within the structure of the HDA itself, with the Deputy General Manager of the Haldia Dock Complex and directors from the IOC and HPL being members of the HDA board. There are also accusations of not purifying water for the longest time, and, in a stroke of negligence, getting tankers full of water from elsewhere for the inhabitants of the township, and leaving the rest of the city to fend for itself.

Of course, as mentioned earlier, for some, the Port made them who they are, and in his reminiscences, Mujaffar's past is no less eloquent. He claims to have been working as a *mati kata* labourer when the Dock was being built, having lost all their land and home to the Dock, five brothers of the family were employed by the Dock itself. Since 1977 he became close to Lakshman Seth, initially being part of the INTUC which lost steam 1978 onwards when everyone and their uncles shifted to CITU. He had also become an employee of CPT in 1978, an employment that came to an end when he became a councillor of Haldia Municipality in 2002. Five Star group of companies that Mujaffar runs is one of the biggest shipping and logistics service providers at Haldia, undertaking loading, unloading work as well as supplying labour, containers, trucks, cranes and godown space. Once he warms up, Mujaffar proceeds to make jokes on the contrast between his past and present: claiming to have carried loads of soil on his head when the Dock was being built, and not being allowed to touch or clean others' cars, he now rides cars himself, connects with ships and has a son who has qualified as a commercial pilot from the Australia? Anyway, I do not wish to sing the paeans to Mujaffar. Instead I wish to follow Neilson and Rossiter in their pamphlet, *Logistical Worlds: Infrastructure, Software, Labour*, as they persuasively argue that

logistics is something more than a system of for searching out and connecting diverse firms and labour forces on the basis of cost and other parameters. Logistics also actively produces environments and subjectivities, including those of workers and labour forces, through techniques of measure, coordination and optimisation. That is to say, it is not simply a socio-technical system that adapts to existing economic and material conditions (5).

Anupam, an employee at Five Star was entrusted with the job of explaining to me what logistics mean. According to him, it means handling the cargo once it comes off the ship, or from somewhere else, and preparing and loading it for its next destination. While human agency determines when how and how many, the most precarious element of this logistical network remains labour. As mentioned earlier, with relation to masculinity of the dock worker, the logistical worker is also almost always unfailingly male: driving trucks, supervising, manually unloading cargo from containers or trucks, shovelling them into sacks, loading the sacks onto the trucks again, guarding the godowns or running the weigh bridge. In this logistical world, women are at best marginal entrants, being employed to clean the warehouses or as itinerant contractual labour, employed to fix some small things, mix cement or lay brick. In the logistical enterprise, apart from a handful few, of supervisory rank or with expert technical knowledge are forever contractually employed, their work determined by the amount and nature of cargo to be handled. Like the Dock, employment at a logistical outfit is also largely based on the ability to be flexible, a male attribute.

People who work at such places are local people, some whose lands have been acquired to build the giant godowns, others who live nearby. In the meantime, with the backing of the existing political power, the agitation of the people displaced by the Dock gathers momentum. In a 2005 interview the then Deputy Chairman of the Haldia Dock Complex, M. L. Meena claimed “we have given jobs to one person per family who had lost their homes and land due to the dock complex. Displaced families were rehabilitated further inland”. Ten years down the line, the forty odd people gathered near the gate of Jawahar Towers, living under a makeshift hut and eating off a communal kitchen, present round the clock, and claiming to represent 800 families are unequivocal in their condemnation of the party that was previously in power, although rehabilitating those few who have been after all given space was done through protracted negotiation between the HDA and the Port authorities, in which it was decided that both the Port and the HDA would give equal amount of land to set up various colonies. Rehabilitation into a colony such as Kshudiram colony or Gandhinagar does not make up for the agrarian land that the families have lost. Colonies, now part of the spiralling urban, can only accommodate homesteads. While the resettlement of those displaced by the Port continues to be disputed, the number of shanties across NH 41 continues to increase. People come, build shanties, build small enclosures where they then grow a few vegetables and livestock, build a mosque and a temple, try to cultivate the fallow land around. Their children then start going to the government aided school nearby, the men find jobs repairing vehicles, in stealing or unloading cargo when wagons stop at the signals. The population at other established colonies, SaotalChak etc are also increasing every day. It seems they are not ‘real’ displaced people, coming in to Haldia in search of livelihood, from 24 Parganas and Nandigram.

During the course of field visits, I rented a car, whose driver, Sashanka Jana is from South 24 parganas. He used to come and visit his maternal uncles till he decided to move to Haldia for good. After five years of living and working here, he has now built a house (of what kind I did not enquire), in the land that the party has given him. Which party, I ask. Trinamool party he says, after all in this political clime, who else can give him and many others like him the permission to build a house on land that is the HDA’s property?

There are two things I wish to explore from this, and then end. First, during the heydays of CPM, ICARE, the company run by Lakshman Seth (one that runs Haldia Institute of Technology, Haldia Institute of Nursing Science, Dr. B C Roy Memorial Hospital, Research and Development Centre, Vidyasagar Primary teachers’ Training Institute, Haldia School of Languages, Haldia Institute of Management, Haldia Insitutte of Health Science, Institute of Education, Haldia Law College, Global Institute of Science and Technology, Haldia Institute of Dental Science and Research, Haldia Institute of Maritime Studies and Research etc.), bought 37 acres from HDA for 37 rupees. Haldia Govt. College’s land houses one such flourishing colony, but as the ICARE example illustrates, there is a fine line between encroachment and legal occupation. Migration into Haldia is at least two fold, one, people who come from all over India and in the case of Mitsubishi, from the rest of the world, and are housed in townships or other upscale residential neighbourhoods. They, of course are not considered displaced, albeit a significant suspicion continues to remain for the outsiders. However, they are not the targets of AIDS awareness campaigns such as the one in which a rhyme explores the better livelihood option that might bring a male member of the family into a town like Haldia, who might then

get involved in unsafe sexual liaisons, thereby endangering the wife who's waiting for him at the village. Like the grhalakshmi mentioned above, womanhood is closely tied with notions of home, while the independent and individuated male member goes forth to earn a living. The migrant male, then is not merely someone who displaced existing land equations, as an active sexual subject he also threatens the sexual order. Women are passive, and therefore out of this picture.

The second trope I wish to develop from here is that of land. Haldia Development Authority proudly declares its landbank on its website. After Shubhendu Adhikary became the MP for Tamluk Lok Sabha constituency and hence the chairperson of HDA, the Haldia landscape has been dotted with plaques that he has inaugurated, signalling the beginning or the end of projects such as laying of roads, digging tubewells or refurbishing roads. Haldia Municipality, formed in 1997, from the erstwhile Haldia Notified Area Authority, has as its stated purpose a linear progression from agrarian economy to industrial economy, from clay-ey roads to tarred and then concrete roads, from a small village to a 'smart city'.

Who does not aspire for concrete roads? However, while the HDA and the municipality spread out their concrete arms into the villages, newer pockets of rural crop up within the city itself. On both sides of the rail tracks women can be seen in the mornings and late afternoons foraging for greens and mussels, taking their cows and goats around and plastering factory walls with their dung cakes. They climb up on to wagons carrying coal, throw them to their friends, carry them home, break them and then mix it with water to form coal pellets on which their food can then be cooked. They collect firewood, dry leaves and various weeds that they then dry for the same purpose. Often in these everyday humble pursuits they are joined by old men and young children. This happens in the backdrop of the Haldia Industrial belt which everyone I spoke to, claims is slowly crumbling down, as is the Dock, despite promises of transloading, Inland Waterway and bio-diesel.

Renuka Sugars is a case in point in the logistical space determined by the Dock that Haldia is. Renuka Sugar Mill has been a constant feature of my life in Haldia. It is right across the road from us, and we have regularly been assaulted by the noxious smells emanating from its chimneys, of course, it took me a while to distinguish the specific sugar mill smell from the other various smells wafting about in the smoglike substance that passes off as air at Haldia, from the fumes generated by the various petrochemical refineries, mixed with the general pollution, other fumes and the suspended particles thanks to the constantly being moved around iron and coal ores.

Interesting however, is the fact that for me Renuka Sugar Mill was as permanent a fixture on the Haldia landscape as the goats trying to get into my classroom or the half clothed children chasing them. Of course, there were some changes, the highway got new lights, the two large dingy by lane became a four lane high road, along with two service roads to boot, the mud got reduced and girls started wearing jeans to college. Also, the Sugar Mill built two pyramidal structures, and we got our first mall, City Centre, Haldia.

So, consider my amazement when one muggy morning in April I woke up to the news that Shree Renuka Sugar Mills was pulling down its shutters. SRS is part of 'India's largest sugar

company², a company that ‘clocked a revenue of 6.522 crore in 2013- 14’. This particular mill, albeit not a production unit, merely a refining one, apparently has the capacity to produce 2000 tonnes of sugar per day³, but had not been producing anything for the seventeen months prior to its operations being mothballed, and was instead trying to clear its stock. Two reports, one extensive and the other not, provided several reasons behind this event, but all of these reasons can be broadly divided into two kinds: one, national policies and politics, and two, more regional, but in effect, global chain of events culminating at Haldia Port. Lakshman Seth had cut a deal with the Murkumbi family, owners of many sugar plants across the world, who built their plant in such a place which did not see any sugar cultivation, incidentally, on the same space where Amalsh Tripathy’s grandparents’ house stood. The understanding was that raw sugar would be brought in by ship from Brazil where the company owns large holdings, refined in Haldia and then sold off. The various reasons behind the mothballing of the company include rise of production costs due to higher labour charges incurred at the dock, increased expenditure as shipment could be brought only in small ships, due to the reduced draft at Haldia, fall of sugar prices in the country and increase in import duty for raw sugar. They also mention the state government’s failure to impose VAT on the product has undermined the possibility of the incentive that the plant would subsequently get. However, none of the reports mention the fact that this exceptionally profit making venture has more than made up for the investment that was put into it. With the mothballing of productions, people who had given up their land now have neither a land nor a job. After protracted negotiations with the management, the union claims to have garnered the assurance that when the plant starts operation again, the job losers will be reinstated en masse.

Five Star Logistics, mentioned towards the beginning of this paper, was also the logistical support provider for Renuka Sugar Mills. The logistical network with the port, given the constraints that the HDC is facing , and the constantly skewed nature of developmental projects, point at a not so far future where this logistical universe is bound to collapse. Not that one would mourn the collapse, the environmental damage that Haldia Dock and the industries dependent on it have done, have never been assessed, let alone circumvented. But in the shadow of this universe we see other, local, woman centric logistic networks flourishing. Based on cultivation and more out of need, that desire, these networks operate at the interstices of factories, rail lines and go- downs, making spaces slightly more habitable, producing food and sustenance.

² ‘jagged Spoon in Bengal Sugar Bowl’.

³ “haldia Bandho hoye Gyalo Chini Karkhana”