

On the Margins of Citizenship: Principles of Care and Rights of the Residents of the Ranaghat Women's Home, Nadia District

By

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Introduction

The nationalist discourse has always tried to locate women's participation as a journey from private to public locating women as "symbolic bearers of the nation" but "denied any direct relation to national agency or citizenship" (Roy 2005: 41). The denial of national agency can be traced back to the "Indian" nationalist movement; specifically the nineteenth century where "the movement for women's education" is often read as "the rising middle class's attempt to adept its women to a Western milieu" (Kumar 1993: 14). The traditions of the *andarmahal*¹ were condemned; particularly women's participation in popular cultural forms such as songs and recitals (*kirtans, panchalis and kathakathas*²). These cultural forms were seen as low and obscene by the rising middle class (Banerjee in Kumar *ibid*: 15). In an attempt to ape the "colonial" lifestyle there was an attempt to redefine the public-private relationship. The "home" /"private" associated with women had to be reformed so that it could complement the "outside"/"public". Indian nationalist historiography is rich with evidences of women participating in the violent and non-violent struggles of freedom movement.

The Indian sub continent was partitioned into two nascent nation states - India and Pakistan in 1947 based on the two-nation theory. Partitioning of the Indian subcontinent was followed by communal frenzy and tension in various centres of the country as people were forced to flee their homes for newer homelands. "Physical violence on women's bodies and forceful impregnation" on both side of the border followed by formal agreement between Governments of India and Pakistan that "any (abducted) girl (of any community) should be forcibly recovered and returned to her relatives and, until such time as her relatives remain untraced, to the Government of her country (Qidwai 1990: 151³ in Roy 2005: 45) mirrors the

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gender blindness of Indian nationalism and reinstates that the process of Indian citizenship was an exclusive project of the patriarchal nation state.

It is against this historical backdrop we need to read the partition historiography and try to understand the process of “becoming a citizen” for post partition refugees as a project of Indian statecraft. The Indian statecraft adopted various policies and programmes to cope with the mass movement of people. Despite varied accounts of partition both on the eastern and western front there are certain humanitarian questions that we need to ponder upon. How are to locate this mass movement of people from one corner to the other? Is the movement similar to mass exodus of Jews during the days of the Third Reich? Is this “another example of “coerced migration” – to use the category of Charles Tilly (1990) which “entails obligatory departure, forced severing of most or all ties at the origin”? (Bagchi and Dasgupta 2007:1). All “coerced migrations” have their own region -specific reasons and these reasons create unique “refugee experiences”. These unique refugee experiences create various expectations of rights/ care. In this context it is important to understand that partition was not an “event” but a continuing process, a process that has produced and reproduced “citizens”, non – citizens as the state continues to dole out refugee care even after sixty two years of independence to residents of Permanent liability Camps and Women’s Homes in West Bengal. In this essay we will explore the present dilemmas faced by Bimala and Kanaka Das⁴ as inmates of Ranaghat Women’s Home of Nadia District, West Bengal. These narratives reveal parallel unending struggle between statecraft, citizenship rights steeped in the prejudices produced by the development discourse of the Indian nation state. Through these two narratives an attempt will be made to unravel the dichotomy of “rights”/“care” that occupies their imagination. Following this, we will try and unravel how the shifting notions of “citizenship rights” based on “territoriality” and a given moment can create a new category of “us/them” within the marginalized. The two narratives bear witness to the changing face of the government’s shifting position as the nation- state makes way for the market state and is constantly negotiating with them to acquire land for public purpose.

Partition, Statecraft and “Citizen”

Partitioning of the Indian subcontinent was responsible for one of the massive migration of people in modern history. In this section, we will try and see how the nascent Indian state conceptualized “citizenship” vis a vis the “refugee/ displaced”. The statecraft adopted legislative measures like Displaced Persons (Legal Proceedings Act) 1949, and the Administration of Evacuee Property Act, 1950. In this context, it is important to note that the citizenship of partition refugees was a major concern as evident in the Constituent Assembly Debates of 12 August 1949 on Article 5 and Article 6. The definition of “citizenship” as propounded by Article 6 of the constitution stated that if a person has migrated to India before 19 July 1948

would be considered a citizen of the state and added that if a person migrated to India after 19 July 1948 would be required to reside in India for six months and then register with a government official prior to attaining Indian citizenship. There was strong opposition from two representatives in the Constituent Assembly Debates who were against this kind of securitization of borders.⁵ The identification documents such as we will see create systems of regimentation which produce a linear notion of citizenship that is disciplined through securitization and militarization of “borders” and movement of people across borders. Indian state since its inception has created ways to securitise and militarise its borders to prevent population movement post partition. One of the basic ways to discipline and monitor the refugee movement is issue of identification documents. In the case of eastern side of Bengal, refugees were issued border slips, migration certificates. Apart from these identification documents; the government announced that “refugees”, residents of East Bengal who have managed to come to West Bengal between 1 June 1947 and 25 June 1948 on account of civil disturbances or fear of such disturbances or the partition of India was entitled to relief and rehabilitation. A second order published in December 1948 declared that refugees would not be registered after 15 January 1949 and on 22 November 1948; the State Government clearly declared that the state would not support any family with able-bodied male immigrant beyond a week of their arrival at camps (Chatterji in Kaul (Ed): 77-78). The refugee influx from East Bengal was a constant feature and it continued till the formation of Bangladesh. The refugee influx from East Pakistan from the very beginning was seen as a temporal problem thus solutions laid in curtailing their rights; post partition refugees were still better off compared to those who came in later as the camps had stopped functioning and even the state initiated steps to stop refugee influx in 1970s. This is evident in the Lok Sabha debate (19 August 1970) where Shri Surendra Pal Singh, Deputy Minister in the Ministry of External affairs pointed out:-

“... In reply to one of our verbal protests against the increased exodus of minorities from East Pakistan, Pakistan had inter alia alleged that we are not exercising sufficient vigilance on the border. The charge of laxity on our part was denied but at the same time it was emphasized by us that the primary responsibility for stopping the migration lay with Pakistan; we could not be expected to take an inhuman attitude towards human beings in distress”.

“Government had already taken up this issue strongly with Pakistan and has reminded them of their solemn obligation under the Nehru – Liaquat Pact of 1950 and the Tashkent declaration of 1966 and has urged them to provide security of life, property and honour to their minorities and thus stop the exodus.”

It was one of the ways in which the nascent Indian state distanced and incorporated this moving population in its territorial ambit. “State” according to Donald Carter (1994) is a continuing project envisioned through official documents. From the cartographer’s maps to presentation of columns and graphs in daily reports, the state must create and re-create a vision, or visions of its own existence. Soguk(1999) extends this argument

slightly further by arguing that the “institution of the identity certificates, “documenting” refugees “ as distinct from , say , citizens, must be seen as a practice of statecraft , one among the an array of practices that craft the identity of the state.

The state refugee discourse classified the refugees into two categories. People who migrated before April 1958 were known as old migrants and the new migrants were those who migrated between January 1964 and March 1971. During the intervening period of five years and nine months about 52000 people crossed over to West Bengal. This figure is however, based on Police records of only those who crossed border through the check-posts. There is no official record of those who crossed the 1200-mile border at countless unmanned points. Persons in authority who are in the know of things have estimated that not less than 2.5lakhs of persons migrated to West Bengal during these years; particularly after the widespread minority killings in Rajshahi and Pabna districts of East Bengal in 1962. Whatever, be the actual number of the migrants, the fact remains that quite a large number of refugees migrated during this period have been deprived of relief and rehabilitation benefits, to which are entitled those who preceded and followed them. The State Government was of the opinion that there should be no discrimination between one refugee and another on the ground of the date of migration⁶.

The ideals of the nation state India upheld towards displaced people during violence that erupted post partition in East Pakistan which forced thousands to migrate for a better and secure future even exists at the level of rehabilitation schemes and measures laid down by the West Bengal Government. The Refugee, Relief and Rehabilitation Department, Government of West Bengal’s missionary zeal is reflected in the forward to the latest Administrative report⁷ of the Department where the Minister of State-in-Charge Binay Krishna Biswas writes,

“We in this department and directorate have always stood by the displaced persons in their struggle and will continue to play our role as far as is practicable to ameliorate the sufferings of displaced persons coming to our state from the erstwhile East Pakistan on or before the 25.03.1971 and our motto is we will continue in this nature”

The state discourse on refugee issues remained confined to managing “population flows”. One of the classic features Foucault argues of “techniques of power” is the emergence of population as an economic and political problem. Population is seen as the wealth, manpower or labour capacity. Foucault calls this technology “bio-politics”, where there was increasing state intervention in the lives of the individual. The state refugee discourse was also centred on how to negotiate with the rising population with each day after 1950 riots in Barishaal and other districts in East Pakistan. The population movement was seen as a temporary phase both by the people themselves and by the nascent Indian state.

Map 1: India before Partition: Education Sources - Indian Independence 1947



(Source: <http://www.bl.uk/reshelp/findhelpregion/asia/india/map1/> accessed on 11 May 2009)

One of the ways to cope with refugee influx was to provide shelter, food and other basic amenities. Government started to open certain camps in Nadia district, which were used as military base during world war, and also because of availability of vacant land as the state probably had no idea how they are going to cope with huge numbers. So, were the refugees were seen as a daily increase in “numbers”, an aberrance to the building of the modern nation state? Not necessarily so, as the Government laid down various initiatives for the displaced. One of the prime initiatives was building up separate places for the refugees- campsites. To cope with the mass refugee influx from East Pakistan, the Government response was threefold: “relief, rehabilitation and general measures” (Das, Samir in Samaddar 2000: 123). One of the relief measures was to enumerate and classify the refugees in terms of their social and economic background. The Government set up three types of camps: a) Women’s Camps b) Worksite Camps and c) Permanent Liability Camps. (Basu Ray Chaudhury 2009:8). Most of these camps were strategically set up in and around the border districts of West Bengal (See Map 2). The Government’s rehabilitation policies were targeted to the rural and urban population. Rural policies were three fold: type scheme, Union Board scheme, Barujibi scheme and Horticulturists scheme. Each of these schemes addressed special needs and provisions of the people in the form of special grants/ loans and land allotment (Das, Samir in Samaddar 2000: 126). One of the remarkable points of intervention and legal measures that the state adopted was the West Bengal Land Development Act

1948, which upheld ‘the settlements of migrants to the state on account of circumstances beyond their control’ as one of its main provisions. Similarly the West Bengal Act XVI of 1951, a provision was created to mitigate the ongoing conflict between landowners and the migrants. According to this provision, if a person continuously remained in unauthorized occupation of land or premises for three months, no criminal proceedings could be drawn against him (ibid: 144-145).

These provisions and measures created a new era of “state” discourse of rights and care; of the Indian state in particular. The democratic Indian state with its new nationalist vigour and rigour adopted the policy of cooption and adoption of “displaced” as it did not use the term “refugee”. The Government of India defined “displaced” person as “...one who had entered India (who left or who was compelled to leave his home in East Pakistan on or after October 15, 1947) for disturbances or fear of such disturbances or on account of setting up of the two dominions of India and Pakistan”.⁸ According to Anasua Basu Ray Chaudhury (2009), this definition failed to accommodate and ensure rights of the Hindus who had left East Pakistan before 1947 before the outbreak of communal frenzy. Secondly, “passport” system was yet to be launched and it was regarded as a special case since the refugees had citizenship rights in both the states. Thirdly though India became independent on 15 August 1947, the extended period of two months was given to the people for settling themselves in the country of their choice (ibid: 5).

The constitutional provisions of the Republic of India clearly outline the distinction between the *Indian citizen* and the *non-citizen* (alien)⁹. “While a citizen enjoys certain rights and performs duties that distinguish him/ her from an alien, the latter has certain rights of “personhood” that she/he possesses irrespective of the fact that she/he is not a citizen”. (Roy 2005: 196). The categories of persons who became citizens of India at the commencement of the constitution on 26 January 1950 were:

- a) those domiciled and born in India
- b) those domiciled, not born in India but either of whose parents was born in India
- c) those domiciled, not born in India, but ordinarily resident in India for more than five years
- d) those resident in India, who migrated to Pakistan after 1 March 1947 and returned later on resettlement permits
- e) those resident in Pakistan, who migrated to India before 19 July 1948 or those who came afterwards and stayed on for more than six months and got registered
- f) those whose parents and grandparents were born in India but were residing outside India. (ibid)

Thus the notion of “citizenship” as upheld by the Indian constitution was based on the idea of sameness derived from the Indian “nation”. “Nation” became the inspiration for the “liberating individual” whose rights were to be protected through ensuring “civil, political and

social” rights. “Citizenship” for T. H Marshall comprises of three elements. They are civil, political and social. The civil element for Marshall “is composed of the rights necessary for the individual freedom ... political meaning, the right to participate in the exercise of political power...social element implies economic welfare and security and right to lead a secured life (Marshall in Shafir (eds) 1998: 94). Thus the community feeling for the nascent “nation- state” evolved from a struggle for equality where the ‘past’ formed the basis and source of self- determination and also informed the commonality of the political purpose and destiny (Roy 2005: 180-81).

The “past” as we have seen informed the constitutional framework of the process of “becoming a citizen”, as the “citizen” was constructed as a liberating individual and enjoyed equal rights as guaranteed by the state. Roy (2005) argues that while “liberal citizenship” ensures legal rights of the citizen there is a certain set of presumption regarding “equality” and it fails to take into account the “principles of inequality deriving from gender, ethnic, class/ caste” relevance to the status of the citizenship (Roche 1987 in Chari 2009: 48). There was a consensus among the political leaders to “care” for the refugees from both the eastern and western side of the border. The cut off year of 1948 for a “refugee” to “become a citizen” shows the way the state managed to reproduce hierarchies between “citizens” as it failed to envision how the existing “inequalities” on the lines of caste, gender of a refugee will reproduce inequalities even in the egalitarian state’s refugee care policies. It is against this backdrop, we need to situate the refugee flows on the eastern side of the border to have a better understanding of the functioning of the camps. Most of the camps in West Bengal as we will see in the following section started functioning in 1950s which shows that state aided humanitarian assistance towards refugees was ad hoc in nature and implementation.

Partition and Population Flows in Perspective

The migration of Hindus from East Bengal began with the communal violence that broke in Noakhali and Tipperah in October 1946. According to the West Bengal Government Relief and Rehabilitation Directorate Report 1957, “refugee flow” was seen as a constant feature on the eastern side of the border.

“ Unlike in the Western Sector, i.e., in the Punjab-West Pakistan region, where the migration of population was practically complete in the course of a few months, the movement of displaced persons in the eastern sector has not ceased, although more than ten years have elapsed since it began.¹⁰”

The average influx of refugees into West Bengal reportedly was 20,000 persons per month.

Table 1: Refugee Flows to West Bengal (1952-1957)

<i>Year</i>	Population
Number of refugees up to the end of 1952	2517504
Fresh Arrivals in	
1953	60647
1954	103850
1955	211573
1956	246840
1957 (upto 30 September 1957)	7993
Total	3148407

(Source: Relief and Rehabilitation of Displaced persons in West Bengal Report 1957)

These figures do not take into account the 40000 persons who found their way into West Bengal on forced migration certificates, or the very considerable movement into other neighbouring states. In 1950-51 members of the minority community numbering 7 lakhs had left West Bengal but only 5 lakhs have returned. Initially when the influx started there was an impression that the movement from East Pakistan was a passing phase; and the migrants would return as soon as normal conditions prevail; initial focus was on “relief”. It was only in the earlier part of 1949 that it was agreed upon that migration was going to be a permanent feature and that migrants were not returning to East Pakistan. In 1956, Migration Certificate was introduced.

Nadia is one of the bordering districts that witnessed huge refugee influx post partition. In 1956, there were 8 camps in Nadia district with a population of 52, 068 people. If we compare and contrast the population of camps in Nadia with other camps in West Bengal we will see average population per camp was 7,500 (approx.) compared to other camps, which ranged from 1000 to 1500 (approx).

Table 2: District Wise Distribution of Camps and the Population

District	No. Of Camps	Population
Nadia	7	62797
24- Parganas	53	49,417
Burdwan	31	46646
Hooghly	18	23,323
Howrah	8	9636
Bankura	7	12,653
Birbhum	17	21,984
Murshidabad	11	14844
Midnapore	13	18,386

West Dinajpore	1	1,056
Cooch Behar	1	1,425
Calcutta	7	6144
Total	174	2,68040

(Source: *Relief and Rehabilitation of Displaced persons in West Bengal Report 1957*)

The influx of refugees from East Pakistan was constant during the following years, mostly marked by communal disturbances. The significant years are: 1947, 1948, 1950, 1960, 1962, 1964, 1970 whereas in the Western Region, influx of refugees was over by 1949¹¹. According to the official estimates of the Government of West Bengal in 1953, 25 lakhs have been forcibly displaced. In 1953-61 there was no major influx but the figure swelled to 31-32 lakhs up to April 1958 and later in 1962 around 55000 persons migrated after the killing of minorities in Pabna and Rajshahi. Approximately 6 lakh people crossed border between 1964-March 1971 and following the disturbances after creation of Bangladesh there was a massive exodus of about 75 lakhs (R.R. Committee's Report Government of West Bengal, 1981). It was reported by the Minister of Supply and Rehabilitation, Shri Ramniwas Mirdha in a Lok Sabha debate in 1976 that 52.31 lakh persons migrated from East Bengal to India from 1948-1971.¹²

The West Bengal government Relief and Rehabilitation Directorate initiated a study on the relief and rehabilitation of displaced persons in West Bengal and the report was published in 1957. According to this report, the findings suggested that there were certain camps like coopers, which have a large number of refugees, and "an attempt is being made to convert them into townships". Various rehabilitation alternatives and schemes were laid down. The Government decided to shut down the transit camps by 1951. After the disbursal to rehabilitation centers in 1949, there was a sudden wave of migration in 1950-51 which swelled the number to 360769. At this time there was a decision to close down all the camps by March 1951 as a result of which camp families were dispersed to rehabilitation sites and the camp population came down to 80000 by the end of 1951. After 1954 when passports were introduced, there was huge influx of refugee population.

According to official estimates by Ministry of Labour and Rehabilitation, by December 1962 there were 20 homes and infirmaries in West Bengal with a population of 29000 inmates as against 54000 inmates in 27 homes and infirmaries in 1957. With the decision to wind up the Ministry of Rehabilitation by 1962, the work of homes and Infirmaries was finally transferred to the Ministry of Education in 1962¹³. Department of Social Welfare looked after the work of Permanent Liability Homes. With the decision to wind up the transit camps and parallel rehabilitation initiatives the Report (ibid) by the Ministry of labour states that there were five permanent liability homes (See Table 2) and four women's home.

One of the major concerns was rehabilitation and winding up of existing camps. After the rehabilitation of rehabilitable and border-line rehabilitable families the committee reported that there would be about 5000 families consisting of 10000 heads left in the homes and infirmaries of the state.

Table 3: District Wise Distribution of Homes/Infirmaries in West Bengal as on June 1972

Sl. No	Name of the institution/ District	No of Inmates	Date of Functioning
<u>A.</u>	P.L. Homes		
1.	Coopers PL Home (Nadia)	3404	Originally these institutions were
2	Dhubulia PL Home	6223	Transit Camps but they were
3	Chandmari PL Home I and II	2215	Converted to PL Homes/
4	Rupashreepalli PL Home	667	Infirmaries in 1960
5	Dudkundi PL Home(Midnapore)	797	
<u>B</u>	Women's Home		
1	Rupashreepalli Women's Home No I	748	1951
2	Rupashreepalli Women's Home No II	375	1951
3	Champta Women's Home	764	1955
4.	Ranaghat Women's Home	691	1950

(Source: *ibid*)

Thus two kinds of official “refugee” categories were created. First and foremost those families with able bodied men who had to be cared for a week and the state took on the role of the “able bodied men” in case of the second category – “permanent liability” as the state “saw itself as standing in for the male bread winner in relation to these unfortunates and therefore entitled to assert all the moral authority over them that a male bread winner enjoys over his dependants” (Chatterji in Kaul (eds) 2001: 89).

Principle of Rights/ Care and State - Ranaghat Women's Home

Studies have pondered on the prevalent sense among the people that despite these “contending notions of right and charity, there is a fundamental agreement between all sections of the actors in that contentious scenario, namely, we/they are part of the nation, the nation must accept us/them”(Samaddar 2000: 27). To understand how the “refugee” is posited at the margins of citizenship, we need to understand the conflicts between

the two founding principles of modern society, the belief in the universal human rights and the sovereignty of the nation states (Bose 2000). According to Pradip Bose (2000), the international and national legal regimes address this inherent conflict. Thus, what is evident is that the legal conception of the refugee is closely associated with the state, state sovereignty and membership. This in a way also reinstates that the way “statecraft” defines and maintains the “the modern rituals of inclusion and exclusion” through their policies towards “refugee issues” produce, project, and privilege the hierarchy of the citizen/nation/state. How are these hierarchies created and produced? Are these hierarchies about us/ them? How are these hierarchies translated at the level of policy making?

According to the Relief and Rehabilitation of Displaced persons in West Bengal (Report 1957), permanent liability camps are defined as *“...Amongst the refugee families that are admitted to camps, there are those whose members are either infirm or aged or otherwise incapacitated or consist of women who have no able bodied men to look after them. These constitute what is known as “Permanent Liability” of Government. Total number of persons in this category in September 1957 was 54066”*.

After sixty years of independence, the permanent liability camps have been functioning on the state assistance, the central government has ceased to support after the mass rehabilitation/ resettlement of East Pakistan refugees in Dandakaranya, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh. The report also suggested that the following categories of refugees would be eligible for admission into P.L. Homes and Infirmaries:

Old: men above 60 years and women above 50 years with no able bodied member

Infirm: those who have been suffering from a permanent disability

Unattached women: those who have no adult able-bodied son

Orphans: unattached boys up to age of 16 years and girls till they are married or gainfully employed.

Dependents of above first three categories

Dependents of TB patients

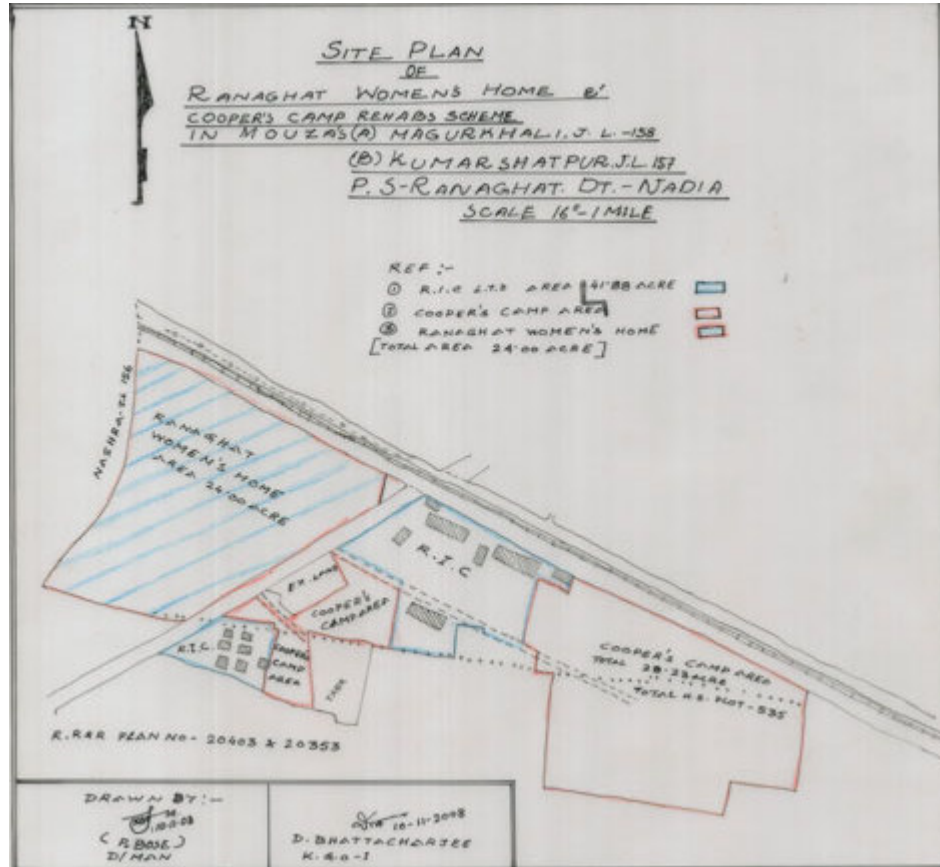
This very categorization reveals a paternalistic top- down approach towards groups with certain vulnerabilities. This was a replica of the colonial master-slave relationship where “the state’s relation to this dross of humankind was that of surrogate *pater familias* or benevolent despot. Because the refugees had placed themselves in its care, government could decide – indeed it had a duty to decide- what was best for them... In this same role, the state also accepted (albeit without much enthusiasm) responsibility for single unattached women, the elderly, the infirm, and their dependents. These categories of refugees were, it acknowledged, ‘more or less a permanent burden on the government because they had no able bodied men to support them. In the case of infirm, women and children, the state accepted ‘permanent liability’ (Chatterji in Kaul (eds) 2001: 89). The state at this juncture played the role of a “patriarch” and fountainhead of charity almost simultaneously and it continues to do so as the residents of the

permanent liability homes continue to negotiate with the state regarding the delay in doles, increase in cash “dole”. The location of the “women’s home” of Ranaghat is interesting and as one of the Government officials of the Cooper’s Camp Permanent Liability Home puts it “When I first visited Women’s Camp, I could not believe such a place existed in India”¹⁴. As Mr. Monimohan Mondal¹⁵ shared his experience of working in the PL office pointed out that “Anatha”¹⁶ camp; as it is popularly known in the area carries the stigma of victimhood.

The official of the Cooper’s Camp Permanent Liability Home introduced me to my informant and guide. Bimala Das¹⁷ (name changed here) has been a spokesperson for the women here and has led innumerable protest movements when the camp residents received “doles” with prolonged gap. As the government official recounted his first encounter with the residents of the “Women’s Camp” I was taken by surprise. When he was transferred to Permanent Liability home of Cooper’s Camp in 1993, a higher official on supervision was *gheraod* by the residents of the women’s camp because it had been months that they did not receive their monthly cash dole of Rs. 41.60. Manimohan Mondal, assured them oblivious of the consequences that they will receive their cash dole in two days. Following day he collected money from his colleagues and distributed it among the people; Government money followed in later. As he recollected this incident, Bimala Das said that after this incident we realized we have found somebody from the “state” who did not treat the distribution of dole within the ambit of “refugee care”. “He went beyond that. He treated us like any other “citizens”.

What is entailed in the term “refugee care”? Is it the sense of being uprooted and being at the mercy of the host state that creates the notion of “care” which otherwise should be seen as state responsibility? Even after such a long time why did Bimala feel the need to distinguish between “refugee” and “citizen”. Is it because of her locale? The camp as a site of enclosed space has given her social security. As she recalled her childhood days, she remembered how she with her camp inmates ran to the gate on the western side of the camp as soon as she heard the siren at 6 O’clock. The guard opened the gates of the camp. Bimala recounted that the guard before letting them off took a head count and similarly on their way back around 10 O’clock similar process followed. She said as a child she hated to be under such strict surveillance. Still things were better then. She showed me the eight pillars that stood still at four corners unguarded but acting as the borderline. One of the critiques of refugee studies has been the demographic count and shifting patterns of growth. In this context, the importance of the role of the “subject” in the refugee care discourse needs to be addressed because it is “the subject who moves, who makes the movement” (Samaddar in Bose (ed) 2000: 201).

Map 3: Site Plan of Ranaghat Women’s Home and Cooper’s Camp Rehabilitation Scheme



(Source: Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation Department, Government of West Bengal)

In this context, I want to draw attention to how “subject” has been addressed in the state discourse of “care” with respect to the existing permanent liability camps. Does the “subject” figure in the official records? The subject is reduced to a systematic categorization in the official records since the days of census. The system of classification is an integral component of colonial project which has its traces even today as the dusty, yellow pages of the official records of the Permanent Liability Camps show. These records have a tale to tell through the defined categories of “Ration Card Number”, “Date of Admission”, “Name”, “Family details” and “dry dole” and “cash dole”. The commodification of the “citizen” subject in the case of the recipients of the dole from the state government is a step beyond Risley’s census. The “state” through the quantification of right to care

creates “subjects” who unlike the Government official in this case fail to address the special needs of women.

When Bimala Das introduced me to Kanaka Das, another resident of the women’s camp she was getting ready to cook her lunch. She took a cup of rice infected with insects and stated that this is the condition. Her journey from Titagarh camp to Women’s Camp with her mother has been similar like Bimala. She tells me “*aamra dustbiner phela jinish*”. In other words our situation is like garbage, people want to do away with. We are the garbage of the state that had once lent a patient ear to our problems. To which Bimala adds, how she and other camp dwellers protested against the quality and length of the saree that they had received few years back. She showed me the white cotton cloth with green border of 4.5m and lamented whether I will ever wear such a saree to go to the town or not. Women in the permanent liability camps are entitled to receive cloth/ saree on three occasions; 15 August, 23 January and Kali Puja.

The claim making processes of the Women’s Home residents through petitions to substitute the coarse material with a better reflect the way the women are trying to articulate their “rights” which are usually seen as “care” rather “charity” by the state. These women are constantly challenging the paternalistic attitude of the statist discourse as they manage to cross every hurdle to draw special attention to the special needs of women. Both Bimala and Kanaka gives me a vivid account of their visits to the relief office in Ranaghat, followed by their brief meeting with the official at the Relief and Resettlement office in Kolkata which resulted in distribution of new sarees with an increase in breadth. These protest movements show that within their limitations, women have tried to find avenues of claim making processes, asserting that the “state” responsibility towards their “Rights” of “care”.

Chari (2009) argues that one of the central elements of “gendered citizenship” is the “strategy of negotiation and contestation”. Drawing from Kymlicka and Wayne (1994) who defined “citizenship” as “...not just certain status, defined by a set of rights and responsibilities, but also as an identity. It is thus an expression of one’s membership in a political community”. For Kymlicka and Wayne (1994) rights of citizenship cannot ensure a feeling of “commonality” among many groups such as blacks, women, and aboriginal people. In the case of Ranaghat Women’s Camp residents this feeling of commonality is not only driven by a shared history of “past, present and future” of partition but also by their caste, class and social position. These factors inform their strategies of negotiation and contestation with the state as they negotiate for their “gendered” spaces as they stand at the crossroad of development and statecraft.

In July 1968 at the instance of the Dept of Social Welfare, Government of India the terms of reference of the Committee of Review were extended to examine the functioning of homes and infirmaries in West Bengal with particular reference to the following:

1. Introduction of economically oriented schemes for speedy rehab of the rehabilitable home families
2. Existing pattern of expenditure on homes/ infirmaries
3. Measures for the education part beyond the middle standard
4. Arrangement for satisfactory accommodation of inmates of homes and infirmaries including repairs to existing structures

The report was finally published in 1974 and it was titled “15th Report on Educational and Medical Facilities for the inmates of PL Homes and Infirmaries in West Bengal”. In 1974, there were 644 inmates in Ranaghat Women’s Home. There was one outpatient department; one medical officer daily for two to three hours, one pharmacist and one general duty attendant. The report suggested that finally seven homes could be retained and maintained by the state. The Committee suggested three significant recommendations:-

- a) Existing practice of allotment of funds for educational and medical facilities for Home inmates on per capita basis and lumping it together with the overall per capita allotment should be abandoned.
- b) The per capita provision of Rs 3 per month (raised to Rs 4.50 per month with effect from 1.6.1973 for meeting the expenditure on minor repairs, water supply, electricity ,lighting, medicine and education has been grossly inadequate.
- c) There should be separate provision for meeting the expenditure on educational and medical facilities and in no circumstances it should be lumped with the overall per capita grant.

Currently twenty three members receive dole from the State Government. All the expenses are borne by the state. All these members are entitled to receive “dry dole” which constitutes of: 3 kg of rice for 14 days, 4kg of wheat for 14 days and 800gms of dal for 14 days. Monthly “cash dole” of Rs 400, clothing for three occasions 15 August, 23 January and Kalipuja/ Diwali and blanket in every alternate year are allocated to the recipients. One of the safeguards by the Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation Department in late 90s was the transfer of administrative control of Dhubulia Homes& Infirmary and Cooper’s P.L. Home to the District Magistrate, Nadia and Sub Divisional Officer Ranaghat. [Administrative Report (1998-99), of RR & R Department, Government of West Bengal].

The housing and sanitation condition of the women’s camp is far from satisfactory which opens up the question of social security and citizenship. The dichotomy of “right/ care” gets further complicated when it comes to the housing and sanitation condition of the camp residents; especially women. The camp structure of a thatched roof and walls to make it an enclosed space has rusted with time. Though there is a separate space for kitchen, there exists no public lavatory, a matter of extreme concern. All the tube wells from the Panchayat are functional. Almost half of the camp residents have no access to electricity. The housing conditions of the camp residents deserve special attention; specially the need for better sanitation and hygiene conditions. As Bimala reiterates, “we had everything. It’s true

that we grew amidst risk but it is equally true that the government did try to recreate a “home” in the camp structure” as she shows me the space where as children they got together to perform during festivals. This leaves us with another question what went wrong and also points to the fact that the “refugee” care is about monitoring, classifying populations rather than about rights.

Post independence, the nation-building project initiated various programmes and measures to ensure equal rights of men and women. The Indian state in its remarkable attempt declared that the widows of 1947 became responsibility of the state and measures were taken so to set up homes across the country and train them to make them economically self-sufficient. It is against this backdrop of nation building and democratic state formation that we need to understand the growing years of Bimala and Kanaka.

Bimala and Kanaka went to school and occasionally for singing classes in the camp. The Indian Government created various provisions for recruitment in developmental projects so that through employment, people could rehabilitate themselves. Another way of rehabilitation was to create separate colonies and one of the worst case and process of rehabilitation was the Dandakaranya settlement in Orissa and Madhya Pradesh. A person who opts for rehabilitation today is allotted land and a one-time security allowance of Rs 10,000 for single member. For the two-member family or more, a person who opts for rehabilitation receives allotment of land and an allowance of Rs 14000.

Many Perceptions of “Citizenship” Rights and “us/ them”

On our way back to the railway station, Bimala promised me to show me the gate she used while going to school. She was brimming with excitement as she narrated to me about her school days. When we reached the gate she asked me to be careful with my belongings warning that in the recent years there has been infiltration of Bangladeshis and with local aid they have forcibly occupied certain areas. Dare they venture into our camps!!! She muttered to herself.

Bimala’s father died when she was one year old. He used to work in Kolkata. Following his death, Bimala’s mother decided to return to her “desh”/home in Barishal District of the then East Pakistan. In 1950, when the riots broke, her mother like many others migrated to West Bengal. They initially settled in Titagarh and then came to Women’s Camp around early ‘50s. She clearly announces that she is not a Bangladeshi.

To Bimala, “Bangladeshi” occupies the same popular perception that we heard in the public discourse; when there was a huge refugee influx. Though there are differences between the categories of “infiltration” and “migration” and one is fully aware of these, what is entailed in this kind of vehement protest is a notion of “nationality” based on “territoriality” and an “imagined nation” of Indian subcontinent of East Bengal and West Bengal.

This is why she cannot identify herself with the “Bangladeshi” and she cannot relate why “they” should attempt to share voting rights and other citizenship rights that “victims of a violent history” earned after a long struggle.

Hoffman (2004) argues, “Nationalism and state are barriers to citizenship”. The concept of a nation develops hand in hand with a notion of territory. What gives this territorial identity its overarching and “quasi-ontological significance” is the link between state and nation. In the case of the Indian subcontinent, the redrawing of borders in 1947 and again in 1971 based on two ideologies of “nationalism” produced states and citizens whose identification with the political community and negotiation with the state was shaped by two distinct historical events. The migration flows due to communal violence and fear of being uprooted after “desh-bhag”¹⁸ was responsible for most of the migration; the feeling of “Bengaliness” of a shared common past based on language and religion run parallel to the opposition of popular voices against the refugee influx. In the case of the violence that followed prior to creation of Bangladesh people decided to migrate but were seen as members of a new nation-state.

The history of refugee movements in West Bengal recounted in various studies and memoirs (Chakraborty 1990, Singha 1999, Sinha 1995) are evidences of the various struggles of “becoming a citizen”. Bimala’s assertion shows how cartographic exercises create and produces hierarchies between people of the same geographical entity. The political past shaped by violence is responsible for creating different “community membership” which shows that processes of statecraft through these fissures continues to reproduce the figure of citizen and non-citizen.

Nation-State to Market State and the “Citizen”

Post independence, the nation-building project initiated various programmes and measures to ensure equal rights of men and women. The Indian state in its remarkable attempt declared that the widows of 1947 became responsibility of the state and measures were taken so to set up homes across the country and train them to make them economically self-sufficient. It is against this backdrop of nation building and democratic state formation that we need to understand the growing years of Bimala and Kanaka.

Bimala and Kanaka went to school and occasionally for singing classes in the camp. The Indian Government created various provisions for recruitment in developmental projects so that through employment, people could rehabilitate themselves. Another way of rehabilitation was to create separate colonies and one of the worst case and process of rehabilitation was the Dandakaranya settlement in Orissa and Madhya Pradesh. It is against this backdrop that we need to understand the ongoing task of rehabilitation. A person who opts for rehabilitation today is allotted land and a one-time security allowance of Rs 10,000 for single member. For two-member family

or more, a person who opts for rehabilitation receives allotment of land and an allowance of Rs 14000.

Both Bimala and Kanaka told that they have heard and are aware that one day they might be forced to give up the land of the camp site for developmental purposes. They are very clear that they will give up land and make way for development when their basic demands are fulfilled which includes increases in cash and dry doles. There has been constant pressure from top officials to acquire land but Bimala tells firmly that they need to know how the land will be utilized, and their share in the project. Recently the local administration with the aid of the central government has proposed to set up a school in the vacant area of Women's Camp. The residents have agreed under the clause that the abled will be provided a job. Bimala pointed out they are scared how long they would be able to hold on to their "home" and land. She is determined to fight for her rights. In any case she argues, if the school project comes through she would demand that the local residents of the camps are part of the day to day decision making process. She repeatedly tells me that she is not afraid of state administration.

This instance further reiterates what Hoffman (2004) has argued that citizenship is a momentum concept. Momentum concepts are those that are infinitely progressive and egalitarian. Even those who seek only limited steps forward and are oblivious of a more wide-ranging agenda can develop struggle for citizenship. Citizenship involves a process that is evolutionary and revolutionary. It is an ongoing struggle with no stopping point as the narratives of Bimala and Kanaka tells us many experiences of citizens from the margins. While on one hand Bimala and Kanaka's narratives show that citizenship is not reaffirmation of political, social and civil rights by the "state" but also a feeling of "identity" of a "collective past" and challenges the exiting discourses does it fail somewhere to challenge the relational status with the "state". This reinstates Hoffman's thesis that the constant process of negotiation and contestation with the state reflects that the states are dissolving "statism". Thus citizenship can be seen as a governmental and not a statist concept.

There is a constant emphasis to wind up the Coopers and Rupashreepally camp. The Screening Committee Report 1989 on the problems of the refugee camps and homes in West Bengal insisted that the rehabilitable families in both these PL Camps should be rehabilitated in situ or at Ranaghat G.S. Scheme; while the PL inmates could be shifted to Chandmari PL Home. The report mentioned that the local MLA is not in favour of winding up of the camp as the camp inmates resisted any proposition of rehabilitation elsewhere though the condition of hutments here was worst of the lot.

According to Hoffman (2004) citizenship requires security not only in terms of protection but the state should also provide what Tickner (1995: 192) calls a people-centred notion of security in terms of securitization of livelihood. The transition of the nation state to the market state has been marked with securitization of GDP rather than addressing livelihood

questions. Drawing from Tickner, Hoffman argues that “security” as a concept should transcend state boundaries so that people feel at home in their locality, their nation and in the world at large (Hoffman 2004: 72).

Securitisation of livelihood in areas such as Cooper’s camp is essential where most of the female workforce is engaged with rolling bidi (local tobacco rolls). The women get paid Rs 30-35 for rolling 1000 tobacco sheets. This is a comparatively painful task when one gets old as Kanaka Das points out because you need good eyesight to see the thread... (“*bidi bandhte gele choker daker hoy... suto dekha jayna...*). Local residents of the Coopers Camp reported that women could hardly manage to make 500 bidis after doing their household chores; earning Rs 17 per day.

This shows that the nation state has been clearly divisive in its transition to market state and has invested in areas whose economic gains cannot be shared by everybody. The divisive politics that the state plays out creates factions of unrest and legitimizes the basis on which state could use force/ coercion to curb them. According to the Administrative Report 2004-2007, “There are 8 camps and homes run by the RR & R department. It was decided vide an order no3747-H&M/5H-17790, dated 5.10.1990 that all Rehabilitable group families living in the Camps will be given rehabilitation and those Permanent Liability group families will be shifted to three camps to be given permanent camp status”. It has been further decided that six camps, namely P.L. camps at Dhubulia and Cooper’s (Ranaghat) and Women’s homes at Champta, Ranaghat, Titagarh and Bhadrakali will be closed down and three camps namely, Habra Composite Home, Bansberia Women’s Home and Chandmari P.L. Camp will be retained. According to the Administrative Report 2004-2007, there are currently two schemes for rehabilitation of camp inmates: -

- a. Rehabilitation without land with financial assistance of Rs 10,000/- in lump.
- b. Rehabilitation with land either elsewhere or in-situ at Home area with the following rehabilitation assistance:
 - i. House-building grant @ Rs 9000/- per family
 - ii. Small trade loan @Rs 5000/- multi-unit family and @Rs 1000/- per single unit family
 - iii. Maintenance grant of Rs 135/- per head

These measures demonstrate the changing attitude of the Indian state towards the refugees. The constant emphasis to wind up homes and camps across the state speak about the fact that “refugee problem” is a thing of the past whereas the rehabilitation schemes merely encouraged a shelter and self-employment. The statecraft refuses to acknowledge that “partition” and its effects on population movements. The reconfiguration of the “citizen” as residents in Women’s Home of Ranaghat becomes a way of revisiting how “statecraft” through the margins of citizenship reproduces “citizen” and “refugee”.

Notes

¹ Andarmahal: private space

² Kirtans, panchalis, kathakathas are various forms of songs and recitals performed as part of rituals and religious ceremonies.

³ Here Anupama Roy draws from Anees Qidwai as cited in Gyanendra Pandey 1994: 189

⁴ The names of the respondents have been changed here to maintain their anonymity.

⁵ Sardar Bhopinder Singh, (representative of the East Punjab: Sikh) argues that the definition of ‘citizenship’ is skewed “as a weak sort of secularism has crept in and an unfair partiality has been shown to those who least deserve it”. He further adds, “... I do not understand why the 19 July 1948 has been prescribed for the purpose of the citizenship. These unfortunate refugees would not have foreseen the date...it will be cruel to shut our borders to those who are victimized after the 19 July 1948 ... our demand is that any person who because of communal riots in Pakistan has come over to India and stays here at the commencement of this Constitution, should automatically be considered as a citizen of India and should be on no account be made to go to a registering authority and plead before him and establish a question of six months domicile to claim rights of citizenship.

Shri Rohini Kumar Choudhuri in the same session argues for the people who migrated to Assam because they found it impossible to live there. According to Mr Choudhuri, “... it may be argued in a limited way that every one who has come from East Bengal was not really actuated by fear or disturbance or actually living in a place where disturbance had taken place... condition of fear, of disturbance should not at all be insisted in the case of a person coming from Pakistan over to West Bengal or Assam or any other place in India” (Constituent Assembly Debates, Vol IX, 1949 30 July -18 Sept 1949.

⁶ For details please refer, A Master Plan for Economic Rehabilitation of Displaced Persons in West Bengal, Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation Dept. July 1973.

⁷ Administrative Report 2004-2007; Govt. of West Bengal, Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation Department

⁸Annual Report of the Department of Rehabilitation, 1965-66, (New Delhi: Department of Rehabilitation, Government of India), 1967,p 107

⁹ (Italics) Emphasis added

¹⁰ See Relief and Rehabilitation of Displaced persons in West Bengal (Report 1957), West Bengal Government Relief and Rehabilitation Directorate for further details

¹¹ For details please refer to 11th Report on Maintenance of inmates of Homes and Infirmaries for displaced persons from East Pakistan In West Bengal, Committee of Review of Rehabilitation Work In West Bengal, Ministry of Labour and Rehabilitation New Delhi -11, 1973

¹² Shri Ramniwas Mirdha in reponse to Shri Somnath Chatterji in a session in Lok Sabha dated 29 March 1964 stated that 52.31 persons or 10.46 lakh families have migrated between 1948-1971.

¹³ For details please refer 11th Report on Maintenance of inmates of Homes and Infirmaries for Displaced persons from East Pakistan in West Bengal, Committee of Review of Rehabilitation Work In West Bengal , Ministry of Labour and Rehabilitation New Delhi, 1973

¹⁴ See Map 3 for the location of Women’s Camp

¹⁵ Interview with the author on 28 February 2008 and 3 April 2008.

¹⁶ Anath means orphan.

¹⁷ Interview with the author on 28 February 2008.

¹⁸ Desh-bhag is the Bengali word for partition. It literally means “division of homeland” in 1947.

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Interviews

Interview with Monimohol Mondal on 28 February 2008 and 3 April 2008.

Interviews with Bimala Das and Kanaka Das (names have been changed to maintain their anonymity) on 28 February 2008.