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ΤΜΗΜΑ ΚΟΙΝΩΝΙΚΗΣ ΑΝΘΡΩΠΟΛΟΓΙΑΣ

**“Residing outside South City’s wall”: Kolkata’s changing urban landscape in
the post-liberalization era**

ΔΙΔΑΚΤΟΡΙΚΗ ΔΙΑΤΡΙΒΗ

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Abstract

The thesis explores the ongoing socio-spatial transformation of two Kolkata neighbourhoods (Poddar Nagar and Katju Nagar) located next to the gated community of ‘South City’ and in the context of India’s urban restructuring. These neighbourhoods emerged as refugee colonies (inhabited by Hindus from ‘East Pakistan’ after the Partition of 1947), and turned into legal and middle-class residential areas in the 1980s when they were absorbed into emerging real estate markets. To this aim, I employed a wide range of methods, including semi-structured interviews and informal conversations with residents, collecting life histories, conducting participant observation in the area, and drawing on newspaper articles, a book in Bengali on the history of Katju Nagar, and the collection of maps from Kolkata’s Municipal Corporation.

Since the early 2000s, South Kolkata’s built environment has changed radically, partly because of redevelopment initiatives initiated by the residents themselves to transform their older, self-made structures and, partly, because of the way the ‘promoting’¹ method resulting in the construction of three or four-storied structures where older houses had once stood. Promoting in Katju Nagar and Poddar Nagar received a further impetus through the construction of ‘South City’ residential complex and shopping mall, which triggered real estate speculations across the area.

I show how promoting operated under Kolkata’s ‘Left-Front’ government, a coalition of left-wing parties formed in 1977, with the Communist Party of India (Marxist), (henceforth CPM), as the dominant political force. I argue that promoting should be seen first and foremost as a state process. First, promoting involved a systematic production of illegalities. The construction of new multi-storied buildings flouted the construction rules of Kolkata’s Municipal Corporation (KMC). This practice was encouraged by the CPM and had the tacit approval of the state, especially KMC, allowing for the promoters and landowners to maximize profits. Second, it involved CPM’s patronage politics. Promoting was masterminded by the party, which patronized promoters and facilitated their work, with the backing of the formal state given CPM’s control of the public administration. Third, I argue that the production of illegalities created a dynamic of constant negotiation and negotiability, and should be understood as part of CPM’s renewing and consolidating its political bonds with the former refugee colonies’ residents. Promoting, thus,

¹ Promoting is precisely what is known in the Greek context as *antiparohi*

represented a successful hegemonic strategy simultaneously implemented from the bottom up by the nexus of the informal party machinery, the promoters and a substantial number of landowners. However, as I show, not all residents benefited equally. Under the Left Front's successor, that is, the Trinamool government which has ruled West Bengal since 2011, I demonstrate that promoting has become "normalized" and show how the reproduction of the system depends on a complex nexus comprising the local councilors, the promoters, the local Trinamool party leaders and goons, sections of the police, as well as KMC officers, engineers and mediators. Lastly, I explore the implications of urban redevelopment initiatives as well as of promoting for evolving kin and neighbourhood relationships.

Key words: urban restructuring in India, neoliberal transformations of urban space in Global South cities, South Kolkata refugee colonies, the role of small scale promoting in Kolkata's urban development, urban property in India

Περίληψη

Η διδακτορική διατριβή εξετάζει τον εξελισσόμενο κοινωνικό-χωρικό μετασχηματισμό δύο γειτονιών στο νότιο τμήμα της πόλης της Κολκάτα, πρωτεύουσα της Δυτικής Βεγγάλης, (τις Poddar Nagar και Katju Nagar) που βρίσκονται δίπλα στο περικλειστο οικιστικό συγκρότημα και εμπορικό κέντρο της ‘South City’, μέσα στο ευρύτερο πλαίσιο της αναδιάρθρωσης του αστικού χώρου στην Ινδία. Οι γειτονιές αυτές είχαν συγκροτηθεί ως προσφυγικοί οικισμοί (που κατοικήθηκαν από Ινδουιστές από το ‘Ανατολικό Πακιστάν’ μετά τη διαίρεση της Ινδίας το 1947), και, αφού νομιμοποιήθηκαν κατά τη δεκαετία του 1980, μετατράπηκαν σε κατοικημένες περιοχές για την μεσαία τάξη και εντάχθηκαν στην αναδύομενη κτηματαγορά ακινήτων. Για τους σκοπούς της έρευνας, χρησιμοποιήθηκε μια ποικιλία μεθόδων, μεταξύ των οποίων ημι-δομημένες συνεντεύξεις, άτυπες συζητήσεις με κατοίκους των γειτονιών, συμμετοχική παρατήρηση στην περιοχή, συλλογή αρθρογραφίας από τοπικά έντυπα, βιβλίο στα βεγγαλέζικα της μικρο-ιστορίας του Katju Nagar και αναζήτηση χαρτών στο κατάλληλο τμήμα του Δήμου.

Από τις αρχές της δεκαετίας του 2000, το δομημένο περιβάλλον της νότιας Κολκάτα μεταμορφώθηκε με την κατασκευή τριώροφων ή τετραώροφων κτιρίων τόσο μέσω της ανακατασκευής ή επέκτασης των παλαιότερων αυτοδημιούργητων σπιτιών με πρωτοβουλία των ιδίων των κατοίκων, όσο και μέσω της λειτουργίας του συστήματος της αντιπαροχής με τη συμβολή εργολάβου. Η δημιουργία της ‘South City’ έδωσε περαιτέρω ώθηση στην αστική ανάπτυξη των γειτονιών Katju Nagar και στο Poddar Nagar κυρίως με τη μέθοδο της αντιπαροχής και πυροδότησε κερδοσκοπικές πρακτικές στην κτηματαγορά ακινήτων σε όλη την περιοχή.

Καταδεικνύεται ο τρόπος που λειτούργησε το σύστημα των αντιπαροχών κατά τη διακυβέρνηση του «Αριστερού Μετώπου», ενός συνασπισμού αριστερών κομμάτων που σχηματίστηκε το 1977, με κορμό το Κομμουνιστικό Κόμμα Ινδίας (Μαρξιστικό), [στο εξής ΚΚΙ(Μ)]. Υποστηρίζεται ότι οι παραπάνω ενέργειες θα πρέπει πρωτίστως να κατανοηθούν ως μια κρατική διαδικασία. Αρχικά, επισημαίνεται ότι η κατασκευή νέων κτιρίων με τη μέθοδο της αντιπαροχής ήταν συνυφασμένη με πλήθος παρανομιών αφού παραβιάστηκαν πολλοί από τους σχετικούς πολεοδομικούς κανόνες της Δημοτικής Αρχής της Κολκάτα. Αυτή η πρακτική ενθαρρύνθηκε από το ΚΚΙ(Μ), και είχε τη σιωπηρή έγκριση της Δημοτικής Αρχής, επιτρέποντας στους εργολάβους και τους ιδιοκτήτες των ακινήτων να μεγιστοποιήσουν τα κέρδη τους. Συνεπαγόταν, ως εκ τούτου, την πολιτική πατρωνία του ΚΚΙ(Μ) σε όλους τους εμπλεκόμενους.

Τέλος, υπογραμμίζεται ότι η ύπαρξη των αυθαιρεσιών συνετέλεσε στη δημιουργία μιας δυναμικής συνεχούς διαπραγμάτευσης μεταξύ του ΚΚΙ(Μ) και των κατοίκων των εν λόγω γειτονιών, επαναπροσδιορίζοντας και εδραιώνοντας την πολιτική τους σχέση. Το σύστημα της αντιπαροχής, λοιπόν, αντιπροσώπευε μια επιτυχημένη ηγεμονική στρατηγική που, ωστόσο, εφαρμόστηκε ταυτόχρονα και από τα κάτω, από ένα πλέγμα των ανθρώπων του κομματικού μηχανισμού, των εργολάβων και ενός σημαντικού αριθμού ιδιοκτητών. Εντούτοις, δεν επωφελήθηκαν όλοι οι κάτοικοι εξίσου.

Από το 2011, με τη διακυβέρνηση Trinamool που διαδέχτηκε το Αριστερό Μέτωπο στη Δυτική Βεγγάλη, ο τρόπος λειτουργίας του συστήματος των αντιπαροχών έχει «κανονικοποιηθεί». Η αναπαραγωγή του συστήματος στηρίζεται, πλέον, σε ένα περίπλοκο δίκτυο που περιλαμβάνει τους τοπικούς δημοτικούς συμβούλους, τους εργολάβους, τοπικά στελέχη του κόμματος Trinamool, μέρος της αστυνομίας, καθώς και υπαλλήλους, μηχανικούς και μεσάζοντες της Δημοτικής Αρχής. Τέλος, διερευνώνται οι επιπτώσεις των παραπάνω αλλαγών στις ανθρώπινες σχέσεις σε επίπεδο οικογένειας και γειτονιάς.

Λέξεις-κλειδιά: αναδιάρθρωση του αστικού χώρου στην Ινδία, προσφυγικοί οικισμοί της νότιας Κολκάτα, ο ρόλος του συστήματος της αντιπαροχής στην αστική ανάπτυξη της Κολκάτα, ακίνητη ιδιοκτησία στην αστική Ινδία

Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to explore the ongoing socio-spatial transformation of two lower- middle class/middle class neighbourhoods, namely Poddar Nagar and Katju Nagar, located in South Kolkata (formerly Calcutta), in the context of India's and West Bengal's economic liberalization since the early 1990s. This area is known as the "southern fringes", covering the Jadavpur and Tollygunge constituencies of the state government. This part of the city had been largely established as refugee "colonies" founded by Bengali Hindus coming from East Pakistan (or 'East Bengal'), after the Partition of India. Katju Nagar and Poddar Nagar, as well as other refugee squatting colonies were part of a predominantly industrial landscape centered on the 'Jay Engineering' (or USHA) factory which used to produce sewing machines and fans. It was only in 1989, after almost forty years since their establishment, that all the refugee settlements of the area were granted title deeds to the land, with the condition that any sale of the allotted plot could take place only from 1999 onwards.

Since the late 1990s, South Kolkata's built environment has changed radically partly because of redevelopment initiatives initiated by the residents themselves that transformed a part of the self-made old structures and, partly, because of the way the 'promoting' method operated, resulting in the construction of three-storied or four-storied structures where the old houses had once stood. Promoting² constitutes a peculiar form of city-building depending on the unison of small private capital. It involves, on the one hand, the landlord who either owns a vacant plot of land and/or already has a house on it which is bound to be demolished and, on the other hand a promoter (or developer/contractor) with whom he signs an agreement. According to the contracted agreement, the promoter is responsible for constructing a new multistoried building and, henceforth, owns 50% of the plot and usually 50% of the newly created flats. The rest of the plot and the flats belong to the landlord. As a result, since the early 2000s South Kolkata neighbourhoods have turned into legitimate middle-class residential areas and have been adsorbed into emerging real estate markets.

Although 'promoting' has profoundly reshaped South Kolkata as well as other parts of the city, it has received little attention from scholars. To date, academic interest in South Kolkata's former refugee colonies has a historical focus largely covering the pre-1989 period (e.g., Sen 2013;

² Promoting is precisely what is known in the Greek context as *antiparohi*

Chatterji 2007). In his autobiography 'Growing Up Refugee' (2002) while referring to his birthplace, Netaji Nagar, one of South Kolkata's largest neighbourhoods, Manas Ray mentions the influx of the 'real estate sharks' in his locality, after the acquisition of land rights by the former refugee residents. However, he does not expand on the issue (Ray 2002:175). This thesis by examining the post-2000 real estate transformation of Katju Nagar and Poddar Nagar, and of South Kolkata neighbourhoods more broadly, fills a gap in the literature. The thesis makes a substantive contribution to our understanding of urban development and real estate dynamics in neoliberal India through the lens of two lower-middle to middle-class neighbourhoods in Kolkata. While existing literature to date has primarily focused on high-end urban redevelopment of upper-middle class neighbourhoods, the material presented here expands this perspective by exploring how urban development unfolded in an ex-refugee neighbourhood and how the political-economy of real estate not only transformed once impoverished urban areas into middle-class neighbourhoods but was also key to the upward mobility of a Hindu refugee community. Moreover, the thesis examines the ways in which the dynamics of urban infrastructural development intersects with state politics, class mobility, urban kinship transformations, and the development of urban community relations.

To understand the transformation of urban space through promoting I will place my analysis in the broader framework of the 'production of space', drawing on Setha Low's reworking of Lefebvre (1991) to make his theory more compatible to ethnographic work. My main focus will be on the material dimension, thereby, I will follow the 'social production' perspective, as outlined by Low, which puts emphasis on the materiality of the built-environment:

The social production perspective emphasizes the history and political economy of the built environment and landscape, providing insights into how and why they came into existence, who (governments or people) or what (earthquakes or earthmovers) were involved in their emergence and when this took place. It provides a materialist rendering of how space and place are conceived, built and created. Social production approaches do not necessarily exclude social constructivist understandings since the material environment is given meaning through representational and symbolic processes. But it posits that materiality is of primary importance and shapes social construction processes through specific power dynamics, hegemonic practices, economic strategies and political and military control (Low 2017: 10)

I see promoting as a pattern of urban growth. The patterns of urban growth should be understood first, as a political and legal framework and a concomitant set of practices that develop and evolve through negotiations between the state and various interests and groups, and, second, as a form of hegemonic popular culture condensing ideas about urbanism, politics, history and identity as well as knowledge about the ways lots are legalized, houses are built, plans are negotiated and rules are bent.

Hence, in chapter four, I show how all the above applied to the way promoting operated under Kolkata's 'Left-Front' government [a coalition of left-wing parties formed in 1977 with the Communist Party of India (Marxist), henceforth CPM, being the dominant political force, and remaining in power until 2011]. I argue that promoting should be seen as first and foremost as a state process. First, promoting involved a systematic production of illegalities; the construction of the new multi-storied buildings flouted the construction rules set forth by Kolkata's Municipal Corporation (KMC). This practice was encouraged by the CPM and had the tacit approval of the state, especially KMC, allowing for the promoters and landowners to maximize profits. Second, it involved CPM's patronage politics. Promoting was masterminded by the party, as it was the one to patronize promoters and facilitate their work, having the backing of the formal state given CPM's control of the public administration. Third, building on Roy (2003: 140), I argue that the production of illegalities created a dynamic of constant negotiation and negotiability, and should be understood as a form of CPM's renewing and consolidating the political bonds with the residents of the former refugee colonies. Promoting, thus, represented a successful hegemonic strategy simultaneously implemented from the bottom up by the nexus of the informal party machinery, the promoters and a substantial number of landowners. However, as I will show, not all residents benefited equally. Under the Left Front's successor, that is, the Trinamool government which ruled West Bengal since 2011, I demonstrate that promoting has become "normalized" and I show how the consolidation and reproduction of the system depends on a complex nexus comprising the local councilors, the promoters, the local Trinamool party leaders and their goons, sections of the police, as well as KMC officers, engineers and mediators. In the last section of chapter four, I examine promoting's impact on neighbourhood relationships.

The last chapter focuses on the way family rivalries (especially between siblings) are played out through discussions and disputes over property in both self-redeveloped buildings and promoted buildings. It examines how class and gender positions become embroiled in these family

disputes. Furthermore, it demonstrates that a complex set of factors play a role in how claims to property are made and how, ultimately such disputes are resolved (or not). In this way, the chapter contributes to the emerging anthropological literature on urban property in India (De Neve and Donner 2015; Searle 2013).

Promoting in Katju Nagar and Poddar Nagar received an impetus through the construction of South City residential complex and shopping mall that triggered real estate speculations on land and housing in the area. South City project, which acquired emblematic status and is still seen by locals as the epitome of an elite real estate project, was constructed on the land where the Jay Engineering factory used to be located. Katju Nagar and Poddar Nagar are located just next to South City's eastern wall, hence the title of the thesis. In 2003, the Jay Engineering land was sold off to a conglomeration of real estate developers, named South City Limited. As part of its wider effort to attract real estate investment (Bose, 2015), the then ruling 'Left-Front' government actively supported and facilitated the work of the real estate developers. The demolition of the Jay Engineering factory in 2003 was followed by the demolition of the workers' quarters, the local club, their children's playground and school. The story of the epic struggle of one of the workers, Sambhu Singh, to resist the evictions and to halt South City's construction is narrated in the film *Quarter No. 4/11* directed by Ranu Ghosh. A detailed account of the conversion of the Jay Engineering factory land into the upscale South City mall and gated community, and of the politics around it, is provided by Ghosh (2012), which constitutes perhaps the most comprehensive academic writing so far on South City.

Although the development and the politics surrounding it have drawn numerous comments, other writings on South City have so far overlooked its impact on the adjacent neighbourhoods and focused instead on the 'global' character of the discourses surrounding the new community and the aspirational character of its design (Bose 2015; Jackson 2010). Through a detailed ethnographic study of how an urban regeneration project changed the surrounding neighbourhoods, property markets and livelihoods, my research sheds novel light on how such redevelopment projects have wider material and social impacts, transforming both everyday sociality as well as wider community and class relations. Indeed, the opening of South City Mall in January 2008 triggered a boom in property values, which in turn had an immediate impact on rent prices and the cost of purchasing flats in its wider surroundings. The third chapter of this thesis

will show the ways in which Poddar Nagar and Katju Nagar have been affected by South City, and how its far-reaching impact has been felt by the residents of the aforementioned neighbourhoods.

The changeover from a manufacturing regime to a real estate driven transformation of core urban space, as the South City case exemplifies, constitutes one among many broader processes characterizing India's urban restructuring, which I describe extensively in chapter two. In terms of housing, scholars of urban restructuring have paid much attention to the way urban restructuring mostly led by the upper middle class, has produced gated communities and high rises (Searle 2013; Srivastava 2014,2015; Waldrop 2004), and has brought about the suburbanization of the middle class (Roy 2010; Fernandes 2004). However, little is known about the role the lower middle-classes and middle-classes play in the urban restructuring of Indian cities. This thesis foregrounds the ethnographic study of lower middle-class/ middle-class residential areas situated 'in between the high-rise buildings and the slums'. More particularly, the case of South Kolkata neighbourhoods shows that the lower-middle and middle-classes not only invest in properties but also benefit from in some –albeit in limited– ways from the new opportunities of neoliberal urban transformations.

Methodology

The thesis is firmly situated in the broader landscape of the 'spatial turn' in the social sciences. (Low, 2014: 17-19). Thus, the project draws on urban anthropology and the way concepts like community and experience have been explored as well as on large-scale theories provided by scholars like Lefebvre (1991) and Soja (1980). It uses an ethnographic approach to add more situated and fine-grained insights into processes of urban transformation through empirical in-depth and embodied understandings of everyday urban life (Low, 2014:17).

I conducted ethnographic research in the city of Kolkata for four months from January 2016 until May 2016 and for another seven months from September 2019 until April 2020, the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. The ethnographic component was centred on the neighborhoods of Poddar Nagar and Katju Nagar. I conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews with residents and collected life histories. Initially, through my acquaintances and friends in the city I approached residents of the localities (including also Bikramgarh) and then through the snowballing method I was introduced to other individuals and became acquainted with a wider circle of residents and

informants. I strategically selected interlocutors who were above 40 years old, for they had experienced the socio-spatial and cultural changes in their neighbourhoods after the titles of the land rights were granted in 1999. I also conducted interviews with members of both Poddar Nagar and Katju Nagar's colony committee as well as members of Katju Nagar social club. Apart from residents I conducted interviews with the secretary of the local CPI (M) office, local brokers, and the Jay Engineering CPI (M) controlled labor union representatives (the office of which is located opposite to South City mall).

Apart from interviews I engaged in informal conversations with interlocutors, what is colloquially known as *adda* ['the practice of friends getting together for long, informal, and unrigorous conversations' (Chakrabarty 2000: 181)].

I conducted participant observation in public spaces such as the local bazaar, spent time in local tea stalls, attended socio-religious festivals, most importantly Durga Puja, religious worshipping, namely Kali Puja and Saraswati Puja, and other festivals such as Basanta Utsav ('celebration of spring'). I attended a political speech delivered by a politician of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and the 52nd anniversary celebration of Poddar Nagar's club establishment.

The research was not confined to Katju Nagar and Poddar Nagar area; I conducted interviews and informal conversations with individuals residing in South Kolkata as well as in other areas of the city, including with real estate developers, engineers, CPI (M) politicians, journalists, activists, academics. All the interviews in Bengali language were conducted with the help of a research assistant, whose contribution was invaluable given that he also acted as a 'cultural translator'.

Moreover, the research drew on newspaper articles and Gautam Roy Chowdhury's (local resident and author) book named *KatjuNagar: Itihaser Khonje* (*Katju Nagar: In search of History*). Archival research requiring the collection and analysis of quantitative data including population counts and maps was accessed through the Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) Town Planning Department and the Borough office X (a KMC's governing body). The KMC's Building Rules, 2009 were accessed online.

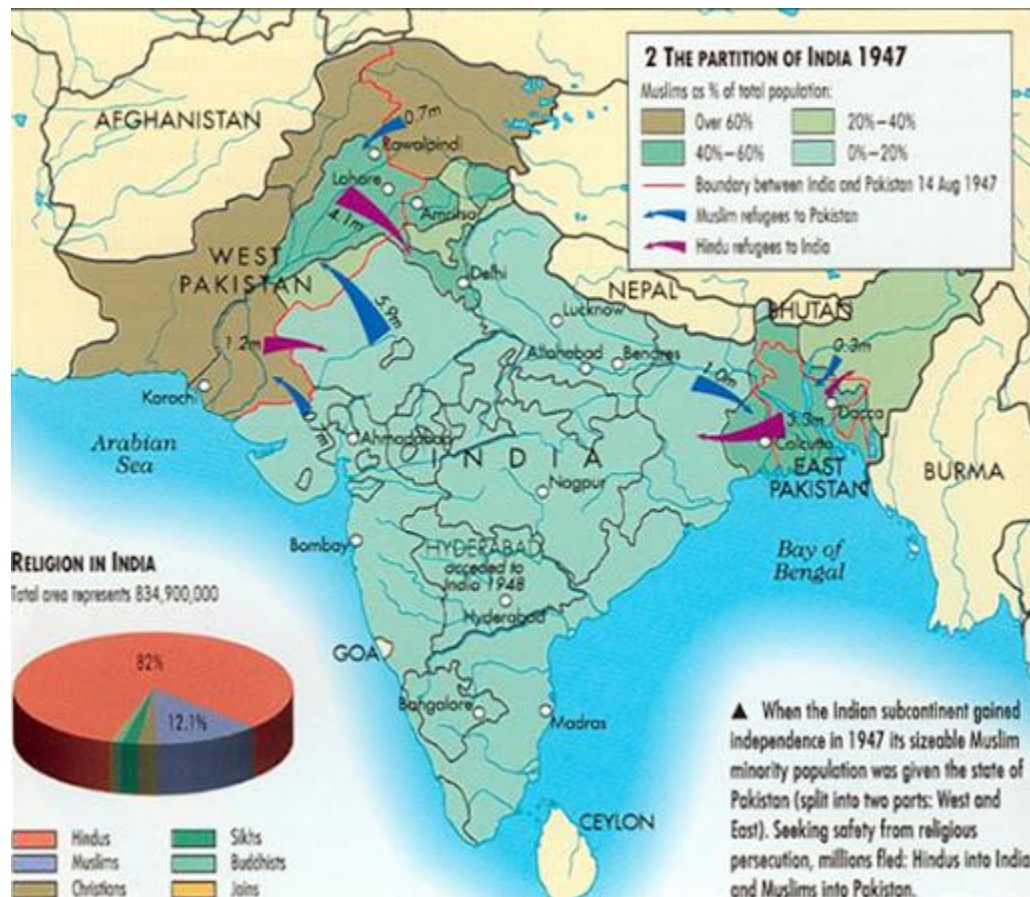
I adhere to the highest ethical standards of field research as promoted by the ASA and AAA, and all interviews and observations were conducted with the full informed consent of my research participants. I maintained anonymity and confidentiality at all times, and I have used pseudonyms for all my interlocutors and informants.

Chapter one

The influx of post-Partition refugees and the emergence of the ‘refugee colonies’ in Kolkata: Formation of Katju Nagar and Poddar Nagar in 1950

Introduction

The partition of British India on 15 August, 1947 instigated horrific violence and caused an unprecedented displacement of people. On 17 August, 1947 the Radcliffe line was published. It defined the new borders between the Hindu majority, but officially secular, India and the Muslim Pakistan, thus dividing the provinces of Punjab and Bengal (Chatterji 2007: 999). This led to a massive displacement of more than 15 million people, which is regarded as one of the largest population displacements in modern history, if not the largest one (Sanyal 2013: 40). The two nascent nation-states emerged out of communal bloodshed, causing the death of more than one million of people, most of which occurred in Punjab and in other parts of North India. The violence in Punjab assumed genocidal proportions. Between August and December 1947, some fifteen million people crossed the western borders between India and Pakistan, with Hindus and Sikhs fleeing to India and Muslims escaping to Pakistan. On the eastern border, in Bengal, however, the scale of violence was much lower than that in Punjab. By the middle of 1948, over a million refugees had entered West Bengal. By the end of 1950, a year marked by widespread communal violence in East Pakistan, the number had risen threefold to almost three million (Chatterji 2007: 1001; Ray 2002: 148). Moreover, the refugees from eastern Pakistan did not flee into India in one tidal wave, as was the case in Punjab. They rather arrived in either small or large flows over the course of the following decades. It is estimated that, by 1973, six million Hindus from the east had come as refugees into West Bengal (Chatterji 2007: 997-1001).



Map i: The Partition of India

(Source: <http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00maplinks/modern/maps1947/populationtransfer.jpg>)

The first wave of refugees who crossed over West Bengal by 1948 was characterized by a common social background. They were drawn from the educated middle-class and most of them were upper caste Hindus (Ray 2002: 151). About 350,000 of them were urban *bhadralok* (literally meaning ‘decent’ people). The term was originally used to describe the landed and educated Hindu middle class of Bengal. However, with the radical decline of the *bhadralok* in the first half of the twentieth century, the term increasingly came to represent a claim to social respectability, bolstered by superior educational qualifications, lineage, and cultural pursuits, which may or may not have been reflected in economic status (Chatterji 2007 :115; Sen 2013: 64).



Map ii: West Bengal and Bangladesh

(Source: <https://www.anandarooproy.com/projects/kantha-74/>)

This chapter focuses precisely on this first wave of refugees who were predominantly upper caste. It seeks to answer how and why they set up refugee settlements in Kolkata by forcibly occupying land. The establishment of Katju Nagar and Poddar Nagar in 1950 is understood in the broader context of the formation of such settlements in South Kolkata. Drawing on Katju Nagar residents' reminiscences and on Gautam Roy Chowdhury's (local resident and author) book named *KatjuNagar: Itihaser Khonje (Katju Nagar: In search of History)*, the chapter highlights the role of the actors who were at the forefront of Katju Nagar and Poddar Nagar's formation, while it also

sheds light on the neighbourhoods' Muslim past. It then shows how south Kolkata localities were forged as meaningful communities, though characterized by opposing tendencies and social divisions within them. The second part uncovers the variety of tactics refugees devised for the recognition of their settlements. It also discusses their relation with the communist Left and the impact the nearby factories' labour unions had on their political radicalization and struggle. Thus, the chapter offers a contribution to the pertinent literature on the microhistory of South Kolkata refugee colonies.

The emergence of the 'refugee colonies' in Kolkata

The fact that violence in Bengal had not reached the levels of Punjab was one of the reasons why the Central Government of that time, and in particular Prime Minister Nehru, did not pay immediate attention to the Hindu East Bengali refugees who were seeking asylum in West Bengal. Nehru felt that the East Bengali Hindus, although being a minority, ought to stay in East Pakistan despite the sporadic rounds of communal violence, and that it was the task of the government in Dacca to "deploy well-conceived 'psychological measures' to restore confidence among the Hindu minorities". Furthermore, he feared that a massive influx of Hindus in West Bengal could trigger communal sentiments and would undermine his attempt to create a secular state. Hence the State Government was advised to provide only relief work rather than rehabilitation, and to halt the influx of Hindu refugees or even to push them back to East Pakistan (Chatterji 2007: 1000; Sanyal 2009: 69; Sanyal 2013: 41).

Despite the scarcity of resources and infrastructure, Kolkata's urban environment was deemed as the most preferable location for the refugees to set up a new life and have increased chances to find employment (Chatterji 2007: 133). Although impoverished, the refugees thought that their *bhadralok* status, alongside their previous exposure to urban life, was enough to secure them an equal right to the city among their West Bengali counterparts. Furthermore, given that many of them had contributed to India's independence movement and that they had disproportionally paid the price of partition by being uprooted from their homeland, they felt that not only did they rightfully deserve a place in the new nation, but they also ought to be subjected to processes of positive discrimination. It followed naturally for them that it was the responsibility and obligation of the nascent government to resettle them.

Realizing the absence of a concrete rehabilitation plan, the East Bengali Hindu refugees soon decided to take the situation in their own hands. They wanted to have a say on where and when they would be rehabilitated and refused to live in refugee camps. The refugees settled in and around the city on their own, occupying vacant land in less desirable areas to set up the so-called refugee or ‘squatter’ colonies. The land refugees occupied was either owned by big landlords or it was government land. In a few cases the land belonged to Muslims (Sanyal 2009: 79; Sanyal 2013: 40; Ray 2002: 155).

The area where these refugee colonies were mostly concentrated was around the industrial zone of Calcutta³ (Chatterji 2007: 141). The first of these colonies were successfully established to the north of Calcutta, near the banks of river Hoogly in areas like Panihati, Sodepur, Naihati and Kanchapara (Bradbury 2019: 65-66; Sanyal 2009: 70). A large number of colonies was also established in Dum Dum area, where the city’s airport is currently located. The third set of colonies, with which we are concerned here was established in the southern fringes of the city and it took the form of a mass movement (Sanyal 2009 70;72). By the end of 1950, about 150 such squatter colonies had sprung up, mainly in and around Calcutta, spread over several thousand acres (Chatterji 2007: 141-142).

³ Industries in Calcutta region, among them the jute mills, had been established in the mid-19th century by the colonial state and were mostly located in the city’s suburbs. After Independence and “until the mid-1950s West Bengal was the leading industrial state in the country with established economic infrastructure and manufacturing industry (automobiles, chemicals, consumer non-durables etc)” . On a national level, the Nehruvian policies of import substitution promoted industrial growth and in this context industries in West Bengal were likewise supported. However, from late 1950 onwards and due to various reasons, there has been a steady decline in West Bengal’s industrial development. One reason according to Chakravorty was that after Independence significant part of Calcutta’s hinterland (mainly the jute growing region) had become part of another hostile country. Another reason that preceded this was that after the shift of the capital of the British Empire in 1912 from Calcutta to Delhi the former gradually lost its prominence as economic and administrative center (Chakravorty 2000: 60-61).



Map iii: The city of Kolkata

(Source : <https://www.mapsofindia.com/maps/westbengal/kolkata-city-map.htm>)

The squatting colonies of South Kolkata

The refugee colonies of South Kolkata came into existence in the area of Jadavpur and Shantoshpur, in the southern part of Jadavpur-Tollygunge industrial zone.⁴ In the late 1940s, South Kolkata was semi-rural, quite remoted from the city and was sparsely populated. According to most of my interlocutors' narrations, the area was a mixture of fallow land and woods. Likewise, Manas Ray describes this location as having been a "waste land of mostly marshy patches, shrubs, and wild growths, crisscrossed with ditches" (Ray 2002: 155). Throughout my research I heard stories about jackals and snakes inhabiting the area just before the establishment and consolidation of the colonies, and such stories also feature in Manas Ray's (2002) autobiography. Such recurrent

⁴ The other five industrial zones of the city are described in Nagarik Mancha (2005).

narrative representations of the area, which corresponds to a large extent to the harsh realities the refugees had to face, are often part of the foundational myths of many of these colonies.

Refugees had to struggle immensely to defend themselves from the police and the landlords' attacks, all the while confronting the debilitating effects of their impoverishment and the hardship induced by the lack of basic amenities and proper shelter. On top of that, they had to adapt to the environment of this part of South Calcutta, which was quite 'unfriendly' for human habitation.

Their struggle for 'self-rehabilitation' was premised on and strengthened by remarkable forms of self-organization, including patterns of self-administration, building houses and rudimentary infrastructure on their own, 'self- help' and so forth which, in most cases, proved to be successful. These efforts were spearheaded by the colony committees, namely groups of refugee leaders who had led the squatting movement. They were often men of some recognition, being mostly teachers and lawyers by profession. After the formation of the colony, they "were elected by the vote of one member (almost always a male) of every household" (Ray 2002: 155-156; Sanyal 2009: 73; Sengupta 2019:2).



Photo 1.1 , by the author: A statue of a refugee family carrying their meagre belongings in Netaji Nagar. The statue has a board in front of it with the following words: 'Bastur tagide srishtir karigar, tomaderi srishti ajker e nagar', meaning, "compelled by homelessness, you became the creators, the city stands today on those efforts" (Sengupta 2019)

To establish a refugee colony, it was common to follow these steps: First was occupation. A group of refugees would identify a vacant piece of land and would clear it overnight, cutting down bamboo thickets and rooting out snakes' nests (Bradbury 2019: 66). Next step involved the division and distribution of the cleared land. The occupied land was divided into small plots under the initiative of the colony committee. The news of the occupation immediately spread through refugee networks; and newcomers would be allotted a plot provided that they paid a nominal amount to the colony committee (Sanyal 2009: 73). Each family would build a basic shelter (*kancha bari*) in their allotted plot of land. The house "was usually one room which all the family members occupied, with the cooking and bathroom activities occurring outside" (Sanyal 2009: 75).

Bradbury and Sanyal provide some additional details on how these early houses were erected: they "were often built by using woven bamboo (*bansher bera*). Here the bamboo is torn into strips and woven into large mats and tied with ropes made of coconut fibre to columns made of bamboo". As for the roofs, those "were made with *hogla bera* (waterproof, wind-resistant panelling woven out of sedge) ... or a thatch of leaves were often bound together to make roofs". (Bradbury 2019: 66; Sanyal 2009: 75). Residents of Netaji Nagar remember the hardship in the early years of settling, which was exacerbated in the monsoon periods, when "floodwaters often brought snakes and other dangerous creatures into the houses" (Sanyal 2009: 74). The houses were slightly improved once the squatter colonies were consolidated. Rooms were added and sturdier materials were used. The bamboo sheets were usually replaced with tin ones; and tiles for the roof were used instead of leaves (Sanyal 2009: 76). This is also corroborated by Manas Ray (2002: 156) who referring to his birthplace, Netaji Nagar, mentions that until the late 1960s most of the houses "were constructed of bamboo, with tiled, tin or asbestos top" (Ray 2002: 156).

Planning of the colony would come last, as it would follow the occupation, the distribution of land and the making of the houses, and it was essentially the responsibility of the colony committee. Planning comprised, first, the division of the colony into wards which, in turn, had elected committees responsible for making tubewells, pathways and doing relief work in their area (Chatterji 2007:143). Second, it involved the planning of the roads, which, with the guidance of the committee, were marked and dug by groups of residents themselves (Sanyal 2009: 74). Moreover, under the initiative of the committee, ponds were dug and then cleaned. Ponds in South

Kolkata, as elsewhere in the city, were vital for daily life activities, given that they were used for bathing and washing as well as for religious purposes⁵ (Bradbury 2019:66).

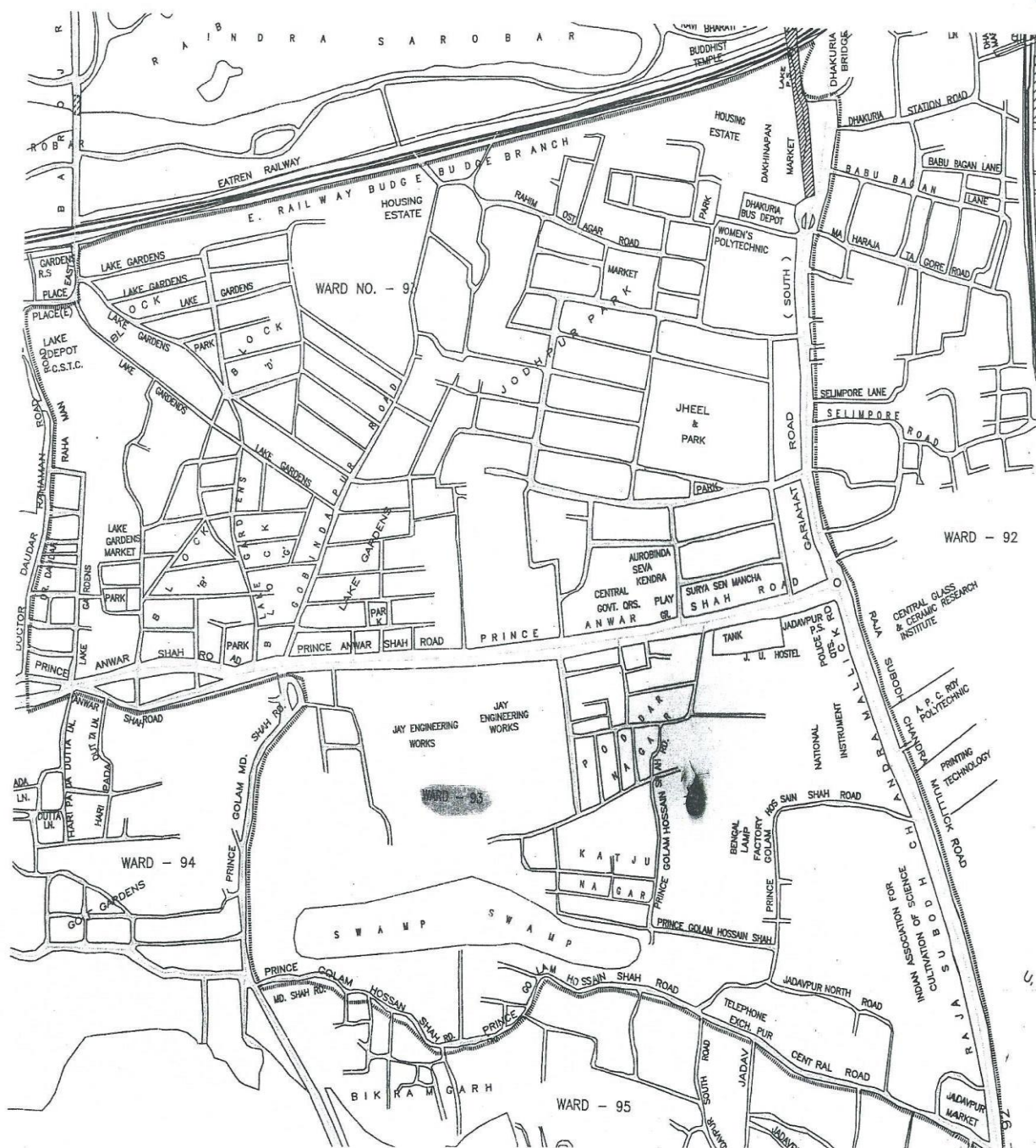
Formation of Katju Nagar and Poddar Nagar

The area where Poddar Nagar and Katju Nagar were established was located in south Kolkata's industrial zone, more specifically in the land stretching between the two factories, namely, USHA and Bengal Lamp. The USHA factory of Jay Engineering Works, which was established in 1935, was the largest factory of the area. Since it was the first of its kind to manufacture sewing machines in India, it came to be known as the Usha Sewing Machine. Works Bengal lamp was established in 1913 and shut down in the 1990s. Its primary products were fluorescent lights, tube lights and filament bulbs (Ghosh 2012: 8-9; Nagarik Mancha 2005). The neighbourhoods of Katju Nagar and Poddar Nagar were among the first ones to be established in South Kolkata.

The aforementioned area, which the refugees occupied to form Poddar Nagar and Katju Nagar, was owned by Anandilal Poddar. The latter was a Marwari landlord, businessman and Congress politician, described by several interlocutors as being a very famous, rich and influential person. Poddar Nagar was named after him. A resident of Katju Nagar in his mid-70s eloquently points to aspects of the landlord's lifestyle:

Beside the pond there is still an abandoned house with a tin shed. That house belonged to (Anandilal) Poddar. These were rich people. Every evening, these people used to watch the dance of the *Baijis* (professional dancers who were also courtesans) in an underground room which was located there. These lands belonged to them.

⁵ To date, the few remaining ponds across the city continue to be indispensable for the poorer sections of the population and for religious purposes, especially used for the immersion of the idols, made out of clay, during religious celebrations.



Map iv: A 1992 map of South Kolkata Wards acquired from Calcutta Municipal Corporation (Planning and Development Department). Katju Nagar and Poddar Nagar are located between Jay Engineering Works and Bengal Lamp factory.

The formation of Katju Nagar and Poddar Nagar is in itself a fascinating story, well documented in Gautam Roy Chowdhury's book named *KatjuNagar: Itihaser Khonje (Katju Nagar: In search of History)*. What I describe below is based on the book. To begin with, two committees were formed at the very initial stage of the colony formation process. Their members included refugee workers from both Usha and Bengal Lamp factories along with inhabitants from Jadavpur Camp. As elsewhere, some of the members were former freedom fighters. Secret discussions were held in Jadavpur Camp, (the first squat in the area which became the refugee colony of Bijoygarh later) and Lalkuthi, the portion of land between Usha factory and Bengal Lamp was identified and all the details of the forthcoming occupation were meticulously planned.

Fundamental in the course of the struggle, apart from efforts made by the two colony committees, was the support and solidarity they received from the East Bengali workers of Bengal Lamp factory as well as from the Jadavpur Camp residents. In a memorial article –in the context of celebration of the 50th anniversary of the foundation of the colonies– by Saroj Chowdhury, which is quoted in the book in a chapter called, “Kolony Protishtha” (Colony Establishment, p.p.20-21), it is written that eighty-ninety inhabitants of the Bengal Lamp mess, along with residents from Jadavpur Camp, actively assisted in the establishment of the two colonies. The aforementioned 70-year-old Katju Nagar resident elaborates thus on the role played by Bengal Lamp workers:

This colony was established in the year 1950. In order to establish this colony, Bengal Lamp (*Ben: Bangla Bati*) – Bangla Bati was there; do you know? Just beside– here [meaning Bengal Lamp's] the maximum employees were from East Bengal; the owner is also from East Bengal...So he [the owner of Bengal Lamp] mostly employed people from East Bengal. Those who were educated became clerks; those who weren't educated became labourers. A few of their people had helped in capturing this area. They had formed a militia armed with sticks (*Ben: Lethel bahini*) to fight with the police, the owner's agent/ middleman, (and) the owner's goons. Usha company was also there. But in Usha company there were more employees from outside than from here. So, automatically, they used to leave after work. (But) these who were there in our area [referring to the workers of Bengal Lamp] – our neighborhood [Katju Nagar] and the one beside, Poddar Nagar– these two colonies (were established) through the help of some of these people. Maximum help was provided by Bengal Lamp.

In early 1950 the struggle started. Both committees occupied land in the aforementioned area and brought bamboos and *hogola* (a tough reed-like grass that grows near water bodies) to make houses with. The first committee, with Shombhu Chowdhury as its secretary, occupied the northern part of the area establishing Poddar Nagar; while the second, with Santiranjan Deb as secretary, controlled the southern portion forming Katju Nagar. Both committees distributed the plots to the refugees who came through kin and caste networks and started collecting donations. This is illustrated by the life history of a 90-year-old Katju Nagar resident, presented below:

My father sent me to Calcutta to pursue my education and I was living with my elder sister. In 1948 I actually came to Calcutta, but my entire family remained at Bhola. At that time, I used to study in Class VII or VIII. This happened around 1944. So, the area was always quite communally charged. Hence, my father thought that it won't be possible to stay in the country (East Pakistan. Uses the word '*desh*' here which isn't always synonymous to '*country*'), so at least the eldest son should be sent away so that he remains safe. So, I was studying and living in Calcutta with my elder sister. My brother-in-law (elder sister's husband, *Ben: Jamai babu*) was in the Indian Navy. At that time, he was posted in Calcutta. We used to stay in Maniktala (North Calcutta). I used to study in Maniktala school, in 1948. Riots never happened in Barishal (a place in Bangladesh). It happened in Noakhali; in Dhaka riot was a perennial thing. However, riots never took place in Barishal because the Muslims were so dominant there that they thought what was the use of killing those few (Hindu) people, they could be killed any time. Then in January 1950, communal riots broke out in Barishal as well and my entire family had to leave, leaving everything there (in Bangladesh) except for what they were wearing and a few essentials. After coming here, they had to spend five days at Sealdah Station. I still remember, my mother and father along with my brothers arrived at Sealdah Station and lived at platform No. 5 of the main station. We had an arrangement to stay in Calcutta, my elder sister was already here. There were other (acquaintances as well). At that time, Calcutta being the capital city (of undivided Bengal), many people of East Bengal were living in Calcutta. So, there were connections. The business that we had, our selling center was in Burrabazaar. I still remember, that in No. 5, Nawab Lane— just in front of the former Mint (a ref. to the Old Silver Mint), there is a small street called Nawab Lane— there we had our Calcutta sales agency. When I came (to Calcutta) with my father for the first time, the Howrah Bridge had already started to function. It was around 1945. It was an object of wonder. I was a village person. I was astounded to see Calcutta's tramway. It was amazing for me. Then my entire family stayed at Sealdah station for 5 days. Then, my relatives (who stayed in Calcutta) found a small room in Narasingha Lane (Central Calcutta)— opposite St. Paul's College, you have the Marwari Hospital. Walking towards Maniktala, just after crossing the Marwari Hospital, there is a small lane on the left. That is Narasingha Lane— there we lived in the sixth house. One of my elder cousin sisters (*Ben: Jettoto*

didi) used to live there before. There was an empty room there, just a room with one door and no windows. We lodged there. Then, we came to know that these lands (plots in Katjunagar and Poddarnagar area) were being captured (by squatters). One of my relatives had a plot here. He informed us that there were still one or two plots available here. Then my father contacted the committee here, my relative also acted as a mediator. My father took this plot and made a house here. I passed my matriculation exam (Class X/ secondary exam) in 1950, and then got admitted in Surendranath College (for intermediate/ higher secondary/ 10+2). On 11 December, 1950 we came here to stay. Since then, I'm living here... It was ready for occupation by July- August, but actually we moved here on 11 Dec, 1950.

However, things went wrong, not because of any exterior threat but because of internal frictions. Saroj Chowdhury attributes this to the existing antagonism between the two committees, catalyzed by their respective founding members' desire to maintain their strong individual identities and continue to struggle for power. Ultimately, under the mediation of Binoy Roy, Ranjit Roy and others, it was decided the area to the north of the east-west road, running from Usha quarter to the boundary wall of Bengal Lamp, would be under the control of Sambhu Chowdhury's committee and would be named Poddar Nagar. The area to the south of the same east-west road remained under the control of Santiranjan Deb's committee and continued to be called Katju Nagar.

South Kolkata's Muslim Past

Yet, as Sanyal (2013) has argued, some of the refugees' and scholarly literature's insistence on the point that squatting in South Kolkata happened on 'empty land', obscures the fact that the area at that time was home to a substantial number of Muslims. Particularly the area around Tollygunge⁶, as well as the southern fringes of Kolkata more broadly, had been marked by the presence of the royal family of Tipu Sultan, the ruler of Mysore. Tipu's descendants were dispatched by the British there (in Tollygunge) after the Vellore Mutiny in 1806. The presence of the influential royal family along with their retainers and staff, as well as the traders, scholars and divines they patronized (Chatterji 2007: 1020; Chatterji 2005: 222; Sanyal 2013: 39), shaped the whole area to a large extent. The religious and cultural monuments built by them –many of which exist to this day– testify to the impact the royal family had in the area. Under the initiative of the most renowned of Tipu Sultan's sons, Ghulam Mohammed Shah, among other important structures, a mosque named after Tipu Sultan was constructed in the area, presently lying at the western edge of Anwar Shah Road. Moreover, a large estate, which subsequently ended up in British hands, and now includes the present-day Tollygunge Club and the Royal Calcutta Golf Club was built under the initiative of the same Prince. Today, part of Tollygunge, especially the area to the south and east of Tipu's Mosque, remains Muslim dominated, also comprising a huge Muslim slum and a burial ground. Notably, a central artery of present-day Tollygunge to the south of Anwar Shah Road is named after Prince Ghulam Mohammed Shah. As I was told, some of the few remaining descendants of the royal family, who have long before been impoverished, work as rikshaw-wallas outside of the South City gate, in Poddar Nagar neighbourhood.

⁶ Tollygunge was a 'jungle' area in the 18th century dotted with few garden houses belonging to Europeans, mainly British. The area was later transformed under the initiative of Colonel William Tolly who made the tributary of Ganges, Adi Ganga navigable. The former marshy land was turned into a busy waterway connecting South Kolkata with the salt lakes lying at the eastern side of the city and further to the east with Dhaka and the eastern districts of undivided Bengal. Tolly also had a market (*ganj*) built in the area. Hence the area came to be known as Tollygunge (formerly Tollygunj) (Mukherjee 2012: 6).



Photo 1.2, by author: Caption of Royal Calcutta Golf Club from South City

In the early 1940s, before Partition, although sparsely populated, the southern edge of the city was home to a substantial number of Muslims, mainly farmers and landlords, some of them associated with the vanquished Muslim aristocracy. The Muslim presence at that time has been corroborated in multiple accounts by several aged inhabitants of the former refugee colonies. For example, Sanyal's interviewees from Azadgarh, Bijoygarh and Netaji Nagar, admit that there had been a Muslim presence in these areas, both farmers and landlords (Sanyal 2013 : 42- 43), and regarding Azadgarh this is also attested by Chatterji (2007: 1020). Moreover, a promoter (small scale real estate developer) currently staying in South Park, a bit further to the south of Jadavpur University, acknowledges that Chittaranjan area was Muslim-dominated prior to the arrival of the Hindu refugees⁷.

⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w5CnRwKd3p8> Ek Porijayii Shohorer Itikatha (Tale of a Migrant City)

Although it appears that violence against them was only sporadic, local Muslims were intimidated by the Bengali Hindu refugees and were forced to flee their homes. For example, Sajal Sengupta, a resident of Shahidnagar Colony indicates that “Muslims had some properties in this area. They started leaving as refugees started to settle down”. Or as an octogenarian resident of Asutosh Colony commented, “Though there were no killings or violence, the Muslims were intimidated by the local refugees” (Sengupta 2019: 10). In some cases, and as corroborated by Sanyal’s interlocutors, several Muslim families were chased out and their houses were looted (Sanyal 2013: 42-43). It is also common knowledge that their properties were often taken over by the Hindu refugees. For instance, in the neighborhood just to the south of present-day South City, “in the adjacent colony of Bikramgarh that was originally referred to as Mollahati ... considerable numbers of Muslim properties and families were displaced by refugees” (Sanyal 2013: 47).

The residents who did not immediately leave, were gradually confined in small Muslim pockets circumscribed by Bengali Hindu neighbourhoods. Due to the Hindu refugees’ presence and attitude, the Muslim residents’ right of access to their sacred places such as graveyards was severely objected to and ultimately constrained. Chatterji (2005: 222-224) tells the story of Selimpur’s graveyard. Once refugee colonies sprang up around it, the Hindu refugees gradually encroached upon it and “began to challenge the right of the few remaining Muslim families to use the graveyard to bury and honour their dead”. Even worse, there have been claims that Hindu refugee boys used parts of the burial ground as a playfield. In 1956, local Hindu refugees tried to block the Shab-e-barat ceremony during which Muslims gather at the graves in remembrance of their dead loved ones (Chatterji 2005 :222-224).

Today, as a result, only a handful of Muslim families live in each one of the former refugee colonies of South Kolkata, Selimpur, Jadavpur and Qazipara, being a few of such examples. As an informant of mine eloquently described it: “There are only tiny Muslim islets within a Hindu Ocean”. The dilapidated mosques in Tollygunge (Sanyal 2009: 71-72) and in Qazipara⁸ as well as Selimpur’s abandoned graveyard (Chatterji 2005) remain as dim echoes of South Kolkata’s Muslim past.

Recalling the narrations of elders who had lived through the late 1940s, which in themselves were not very unlike other South Kolkata inhabitants’ reminiscences, many residents from both Katju Nagar and Poddar Nagar emphasize that the area where the two colonies were

⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w5CnRwKd3p8> Ek Porijayii Shohorer Itikatha (Tale of a Migrant City)

founded was originally a mixture of woods and fallow land. However, some of them acknowledged that the wider area was inhabited by Muslims. For instance, the same septuagenarian resident, referring to Tollygunge area, said that:

A few lands belonged to the Mohameddians [meaning the Muslims]. Tipu Sultan's...This road (Anwar Shah Road) was very small then, and at the end of this road the Muslim population used to live. Muslim population is still there.

It is also known, that very close to Bengal Lamp mess there used to be a huge Muslim settlement. The quote below is from an interview featuring in the chapter titled, "Kolony Protishtha", p. 23, in Gautam Roy Chowdhury's book:

Sudhir Das: At that time about a 100 of us used to stay in the (Bengal Lamp) mess. Just behind there was a huge Muslim settlement/locality, in Peyara Bagan. They often roared with cries of "Allah-hu-Akbar". After the factory [meaning, Bengal Lamp] closed (for the day) the place used to become very desolate/secluded (Bengali: *nirjon*). We used to feel very scared. The Muslims were many in number. Then it was decided that we will forcibly occupy (Bengali: *Jobor-dokhol*) the vacant/empty space and stay there.

However, it is unknown whether this particular land, where Katju Nagar and Poddar Nagar lie at present, was home to Muslim families or not, as it appears to have been the case in adjacent Bikramgarh. What is certain, though is that a part of the land where Katju Nagar presently lies belongs to Muslims. According to the same septuagenarian resident there are nine plots occupied by Hindu Bengali refugees that used to belong to Muslims who did not receive any compensation by the government.

The making of the localities: Forging the community, Unifying and dividing tendencies

Arguably, at one level, South Kolkata refugees' collective identity was defined negatively, counterposed to the local state, the Muslim community as well as the host society. To refer to the latter, given that the two first have already been discussed, East Bengali refugees' collective

identity was constructed negatively as opposed to the inhabitants⁹ of West Bengal's assumed cultural identity. Their spoken language was the version of Bangla spoken in East Bengal, known as *Bangali*. Hence, they were attributed the term *Bangals* (or 'o *desher lok*'), which, although denoting a linguistic category, soon came to designate all the East Bengali refugees. However, the term *Bangal* was often used in a pejorative way, carrying the connotation of one being an uncultured Bengali, also manifested in jokes at the expense of the *Bangals*. There have been long-standing and deep-seated cultural prejudices that marked the latter as rustic, clannish, unsophisticated or quarrelsome. However, despite the competition between locals and immigrants there was never any political conflict between them (Chatterjee 2006: 182).

The rivalry between *Bangals* and *Ghotis* was nowhere more explicitly manifested, or rather channeled, than in football (soccer)! Refugees have been largely supporting SC East Bengal, while the 'native' inhabitants of West Bengal traditionally supported and continue to support Mohun Bagan AC. However, it must be stressed that the rivalry between the two clubs preceded the *Ghoti-Bangal* controversy, and reflected the competition between the different social classes within Kolkata. The earlier authorities of Mohun Bagan club, founded in 1889, basically belonged to old aristocratic, or old bourgeois families of Bengalis, while East Bengal was founded by in 1920, by a group of people who hailed from East Bengal and was associated with the new bourgeoisie, that is, the 'new' Bengali middle-class.

Quite naturally, the refugees were identified with East Bengal club which gave them a sense of identity. This was corroborated by my octogenarian interlocutor, who vividly narrated how passionately he used to attend the club's football matches:

Due to the name 'East Bengal' the people from erstwhile East Bengal found a sense of identity in it. I never missed any East Bengal (football) match. From 1950 to 1952, even if I hadn't eaten anything, I would not miss any game of East Bengal (Club). It was my identity, I found my country there, in East Bengal Club... East Bengal Club gave us an identity, we were alien (here).

Moreover, as Chatterjee (2006: 182) has argued, refugees' massive support of East Bengal club not only signified an assertion of identity but also an assertion of their claim to the city:

⁹ The native Bengalis of West Bengal were known as *Ghotis*, (or 'ey *deshis*'). The term *Ghoti* does not refer to a linguistic identity, but it rather pertains to a broad geographical designation of the inhabitants of West Bengal.

On the football ground, the rise of East Bengal Club as the chief public institution asserting the identity of the refugees from East Pakistan was the most important event in the post-colonial period. With the British teams no longer in the picture, East Bengal emerged as the principal competitor to Mohan Bagan and Mohammedan Sporting. The club had an overwhelming mass following in the refugee settlements of the city. Hundreds of overflowing buses would carry thousands of supporters, waving their red-and-yellow flags, from the dingy squatter camps to the football grounds located in the very heart of urban power and privilege. When East Bengal won, the stands would light up with rows of flaming torches set against the falling dusk. The torch was the club's icon. When hundreds of them lit up the Eden Gardens Stadium, it was a sign that the refugees had come to stay and were determined to assert their claims to the city.



Photo 1.3, by author: East Bengal Club flag in Bikramgarh neighbourhood

At another level, refugees' collective identity was positively defined on the basis of common aspects, namely place of origin (East Bengal), language, religion (Hinduism) and upper caste identity (Donner 2011:31). An essential marker of their shared hegemonic upper caste culture and identity was the annual worship of Goddess Durga, that is, the *Durga Puja*. The worship of Goddess Kali used to be and continues to be equally important. To this day, it continues to take place in permanent temples dedicated to Goddess Kali, which can still be found in most South Kolkata localities. Furthermore, platforms for religious congregations, particularly for the *Vaishnavites*, known as *harisabha* used to be widespread, constituting an important feature of Hindu East Bengalis' socio-religious life of earlier times (Sengupta 2019).

All the above apply to both Katju Nagar and Poddar Nagar. Regarding the celebration of Durga Puja in earlier decades, many first-generation interlocutors described it as being more religious and intimate in nature, besides being locally orientated. This contrasts to the way it is celebrated in the recent decades.¹⁰ Both Katju Nagar and Poddar Nagar have at least one Kali temple (Ben: *Kali Bari*). As I will mention further below, the annual worship of Bishwakarma (*Bishwakarma Puja*) was also important, especially for the working class. Moreover, in both neighbourhoods kirtan events (devotional songs based on the life of Krishna) used to happen in the *harishabhas*, particularly for Vaishnava Hindus. Poddar Nagar's Kali temple's Brahmin priest recalled his memories of such congregations, held in the early 1980s:

Very big kirtan events used to be held in our neighbourhood. I have seen, in our neighbourhood, there used to be 15 days long all-day performances [Ben: *Ashta Prahar* (8 Prahars= 24 hours); 1 Prahar= approx. 3 hours] of kirtan. We used to get extremely tired... I remember the kirtan of our neighbourhood because I was greatly influenced by it. I have heard '(Vaishnava) Padabali kirtan', 'Ramayan gaan', 'Kavigan' (a form of Bengali folk performance where a folk poet (Ben: *Kaviyal*) sings and performs). These were organized here. Very famous 'Kabiwalas' (sang) their songs here. Bijoy Sarkar (folk singer), I have seen Bijoy Sarkar come here (to perform) in our neighbourhood. Bijoy Sarkar (1903–1985) is an important man in the history of 'Kavigan'. I myself have seen Bijoy Sarkar come here to sing; he had sung 'Nakshi Kathar gaan' (song's name is '*Nakshi Kathar Math*').

He also added that as soon as the kirtans were over, '*bhog*' (food served to devotees at the end of Hindu religious ceremonies) would be distributed and subsequently a *Krishna jatra* would be held.

¹⁰ For more details on Durga Puja, see Ray (2017) and Bradbury (2019), especially Chapter 4

The ceremony used to close with a *Jatra* (a form of popular folk-theatre in Bengal) which was performed by groups that came from outside the neighbourhood. Yet, at present, he explained that these kinds of ceremonies have become obsolete in the neighbourhood. All the above is indicative of how the Hindu Bengali identity was experienced in Poddar Nagar and Katju Nagar, just as it was in other South Kolkata localities, at the time of their establishment.

Forging the community

Apart from the Hindu temples and congregations, a sense of community was fostered and strengthened in the local social clubs, the schools (since their teachers were drawn from local refugees, thus reinforcing the ties within the community) the markets, and the social clubs all having been constructed under the initiative of the local colony committees (Sen 2013: 64-65). The social clubs were responsible for the organization of functions, sporting events, drama performances as well as religious festivals and celebrations, including the public celebration of *sarbojanin* (everyone's) puja (that is Durga Puja) (Donner 2011: 33). The instrumental role of the clubs in homogenizing the 'society' is highlighted by the previously mentioned 90-year-old Katju Nagar resident who used to be the secretary of the local club (*Jagriti Shongho*) for ten years:

We came from East Bengal, and there every district has its own culture. We came from different cultural backgrounds; we had different food habits. For example: the people of 'Chatga' (Chittagong) and Noakhali eat 'Shutki mach' (a spicy delicacy made of dried fish, it has a strong pungent odour). We don't have 'shutki mach'. Then, the local dialect changed from one district to another. Our spoken language (means dialect) was different. Written language was same, but spoken language was different (...) I still can't understand the dialect (*Ben: Bhasha*) of the people from 'Chatga'. I don't know the dialect of the people from Sylhet (a region in northeastern Bangladesh. The people of Noakhali talk in a different dialect. But the written language was the same (...) We came here as uprooted humanity; we lost our past. Everything was new to us here (...) We come from an established society where ten generations of my forefathers had lived in our ancestral village house (at Palong). All were strangers, we knew nobody. At that time, the clubs here played a very important role (...) The clubs made a homogenous society, which was heterogenous (originally). In all refugee settlements you will find one club. Through these sporting events at the playground and the plays, we came to know each other and our new society was formed. We stopped being complete strangers and we created a local society (*Ben: samaj*).

Despite the above unifying tendencies within the community there existed others that created separations not only within South Kolkata localities but also within the refugee community as a whole. For, as Sen (2013) has argued, caste and class hierarchies of rural East Bengal were re-created among the first generation of the displaced Hindu population in West Bengal” (Sen 2013: 72). These caste and class positions were implicated with a stress on education, notions of respectability and *bhadralok* identities. After all, the ‘respectability’ of the *bhadralok* squatters of South Kolkata who were predominantly upper caste rested on their demarcation from the lower status refugees who were transferred in government camps across West Bengal, as well as from Kolkata’s urban poor in general. Moreover, the emphasis on education set them apart from the urban poor of Kolkata (Sen 2013: 65;72). Such class/caste hierarchies were manifested in the discourse of an upper caste interlocutor from Poddar Nagar who pointed to the different social categories among the East Bengali refugees. He employed the word *chotolok*, a derogatory term which means someone with no moral values, someone who is ‘uncultured’, the ‘inferior other’ of the *bhadralok*, to refer to the lower class/caste refugees:

Various categories of people had come. The educated classes were there, the poor were there, the peasants were there— the usual (mix of various classes of people) that happens in our country. Meaning, the poor were there, the lower classes/castes (*Ben: Chotolok*,) were there, the hooligans (*Ben: Bodhmaish*) were there, the ‘*bhadralok*’ were there, all were there, educated people were also there.

There is some evidence that lower caste/class refugees who sought to occupy a plot in South Kolkata squats were displaced. For instance, as soon as Jadavpur Association announced that only *bhadraloks* would be allotted plots in the colony, groups of them actively sought to exclude refugees “deemed to be ‘*chotolok*’ or of low status to make room only for the suitably cultured and substantially better-off *bhadraloks* of East Bengal” (Sen 2013 : 70). Yet, there were many cases of refugee colonies in which lower caste/class refugees resided and in which certain levels of social segregation existed. For example, in Gandhi colony there were rumors of an ‘exclusive’ enclave of larger plots reserved for its founders. The second example comes from Manas Ray’s autobiographical account of growing up in Netaji Nagar colony (2002):

The vast majority of those who came were middle-class people with some urban exposure. Those who did not fall in this bracket—fishermen, carpenters, hut-builders, masons, barbers—tended to concentrate in two adjacent wards lying at one end of the locality... In retrospect, it seems

amazing how little I knew of that world, how subtle and comprehensive was the process of normalization of divisions.

These spatial divisions, point to certain levels of social segregation based on caste. For, the professions of fishermen, carpenters, hut-builders, mason, barbers are also indicative of lower caste identities (Sen 2013: 71). Third, in Azadgarh, it is known that, most residents belonged to the higher castes (including *Brahmins*, *Baidyas*, *Rishis* and *Kayasthas*), but some, mainly *Namasudras*, were drawn from the lower down of Hindu hierarchy (Chatterji 2007: 1017-1018). It is also known that the “poorest families made huts out of thick brown paper soaked in tar to shelter themselves against the elements”, while the better-off had “solid structures, with corrugated iron or tiled roofs and brick walls; others had roofs and walls of ‘hogla’ thatching” (Chatterji 2007: 1021).

To conclude, I highlighted the simultaneous yet distinct processes of community formation. One the one hand processes of forging a community and a sense of belonging that bridged differences of food habits, language, regional origin could be identified, while, at the same time, reproducing inequalities and forms of exclusion along the lines of caste and class (and religion, with the exclusion of Muslims), were existent.

Second part: The variety of tactics the refugees employed for the establishment and recognition of their settlements

2.1 Confrontation with the police and/or the landlords’ thugs

Apart from those owned by the government, the lands refugees occupied were often private property owned by big landlords. In most occasions the landlords deployed thugs as well as appealed to the government to send the police to evict them, but in many cases the refugees vigorously resisted such eviction efforts. The government sought to enforce the law and order and aimed at protecting the right to private property which was enshrined in the Indian constitution (Sanyal 2013: 41; Chatterji 2001: 100).

Perhaps the most characteristic example is the armed battle of Bijoygarh, the earliest and along with Netaji Nagar the largest among South Kolkata refugee colonies. Bijoygarh colony began as an unauthorized squat of an abandoned Second World War military camp at Jadavpur area by a group of refugees. As the military barracks filled to capacity, latecomers started building

thatched shelters on neighboring fallow land (Sen 2013: 40-41;47-48). As it was the case with most refugee settlements, the squat was on privately owned land. It belonged to a rich landlord named Layalka who, in mid-1949, deployed thugs to forcefully recapture the land in which the refugee settlement had grown. However, the refugees resisted and after a pitched armed battle they won a decisive victory over the aforementioned landlord's hired goons. Vital for the refugees' victory was the support of the students of the nearby Jadavpur Engineering College, who had rushed in and rescued the colony. The name Bijoygarh (meaning 'victory-fort') precisely denotes that glorious victory. Yet, as Sen argues, the commemoration of the victorious battle often overlooks the role played by 'outsiders' (Sen 2013: 56).

The formation of Poddar Nagar was of outmost importance. For it happened after an initial failure to establish the first refugee colony in South Kolkata, given that the squat in New Alipore was attacked by the police and thus evacuated (Chakrabarty 1999: 65). The survival of both Poddar Nagar and Katju Nagar colonies, soon after their formation, continued to rest upon the support of 'outsiders'. This was well appreciated by the left leaning interlocutor from Katju Nagar. He highlighted the fact that apart from the aid provided by the Bengal Lamp workers, the newly founded colonies were also supported by Jadavpur students, something which is reminiscent of the role they played in Bijoygarh against Layalka' goons:

On that side, there was Bengal Lamp. When our settlement formed here, we often got news that the goons of the zamindar, Anandilal Poddar would come to remove us. That time, the workers of Bengal lamp and the Jadavpur university students guarded and supported us. So, we also had very close relation with them.

However, unlike the case of Bijoygarh, an armed fight against Anandilal Poddar's goons or the police did not ever happen. According to Bhabatosh Topadar' narration quoted in the aforementioned book by Roy Chowdhury, it was only in 1953 that Anandilal Poddar hired some goons –a group of non-Bengali wrestlers (*obangali pailwaans*) adept in the art of fighting with thick sticks– to attack Poddar Nagar and Katju Nagar. However, the inhabitants of both neighbourhoods were alert and quickly mounted a joint resistance, at the face of which the goons retreated. While fleeing the area, the latter mistakenly hit a passer-by who finally succumbed to his injuries and died. The refugees considered this person named, Manmatha Sarkar, to be the first martyr (*sahid*) of their nascent twin colonies. To honor him, it was proposed by Ambika

Chakrabarty (a CPI leader and politician) to rename Poddar Nagar into Manmatha Nagar. However, this did not finally happen.

2.2 Political struggle, contestation and mobilization: the relation with the Left

The driving force behind the formation of these early colonies was a refugee council named Nikhil Vanga Bastuhara Karma Parishad (All Bengal Refugee Council of Action). Formed in 1948 and having incorporated members who belonged both to the Congress and the Left, it demanded the permanent rehabilitation of the East Bengali Refugees in West Bengal. During Nehru's visit on 14 January, 1949 the council had organized a massive protest drawing in 15,000 refugees which led to many arrests and assaults by the police (Sanyal 2009: 77).

As soon as the settlements were established, the refugees sought to assure their recognition by the authorities, as there was always the risk of their demolition. This purpose was served by the "United Central Refugee Council" (UCRC) which was established by 1950. When in 1951, the state government introduced the 'Eviction of Persons in Unauthorized Occupation of Land Bill' (more commonly known as Eviction Bill) which directly threatened the colonies with eviction, the refugees fought back, organizing massive protests, and finally won. The government soon withdrew the Bill and redrafted it as 'The Rehabilitation of Displaced Persons and Eviction of Persons in Unauthorized Occupation of Land Act', thus promising monetary compensation and suitable rehabilitation in case of eviction (Sengupta 2019; Sanyal 2009: 77; Sanyal 2013: 41).

However, both within the refugee councils and within the settlements, different political parties, mainly the Congress, the Hindu Mahasabha (a party of the Hindu right), and leftist parties (mainly the CPI) competed for political hegemony in the refugee struggle. Although the refugees were initially wary of the CPI, eventually the latter gradually came to dominate both within the United Central Refugee Council and within the local committees of the settlements.

The first victory had come with the withdrawal of the 'Eviction Bill' and refugees, including Poddar Nagar and Katju Nagar residents, were already in a less vulnerable opposition, as they were not directly threatened with eviction. What was at stake, though, was a possible resettlement which would be organized by the central Ministry of Rehabilitation, which would also have the responsibility to provide housing infrastructure. I describe below a significant protest that happened in 1954, which proved to be a turning point in Poddar Nagar and Katju Nagar

residents' struggle against eviction from the land they had earlier occupied, as well as its consequences for the colonies' future. It was narrated by the aforementioned former secretary of the local club for ten years and of the local school for twenty-eight years, who had participated in the said protest. At that time, he himself was ideologically and actively inclined towards the Left:

We had our refugee struggle. Our life wasn't as easy as it is now. We had to struggle. There was an organization then called UCRC (United Central Refugee Council). I'll tell you one thing, that politically these areas were always left leaning. I was always involved in student politics. That time there was AISF (All India Students Federation). I volunteered during the election of Hiren(dranath) Mukherjee (CPI politician) in 1952. We used to take part in students' politics and left politics was very predominant here at one time.

As the same interlocutor explained, the then Union Minister of Rehabilitation, Ajit Prasad Jain (who served from 1950 until 1954) in coordination with Anandilal Poddar (the landlord), proposed a possible resettlement of the refugees from both Katju Nagar and Poddar Nagar. Anandilal Poddar had some additional land to the north of Poddar Nagar (what is now Poddar Park, opposite South City) and it was decided that government-sponsored apartments would be built there. According to the proposed plan, the refugee families would then be relocated to those new apartments, and Anandilal Poddar would repossess the occupied lands. However, the refugees did not accept this proposal because they felt, that the residential space available to them in the apartments would be much less than that which they had already occupied. As he characteristically commented, "But we had 3 kathas of land here, how could our six or seven membered families be moved to 10 feet by 10 feet apartment there? It was impossible for us".

Therefore, they took action to get this proposal withdrawn and succeeded in doing so. In 1954 residents of both Poddar Nagar and Katju Nagar *gherao-ed*¹¹ en mass the Branch office of the Rehabilitation Department in Calcutta, which was at Theatre Road, and were subsequently subjected to lathi charge (meaning, to be attacked by the police with sticks). Yet, this powerful protest, along with further negotiations and partly by virtue of the pressure exercised by the Left, brought about another victory for the refugees. Mehr Chand Khanna, who succeeded Ajit Prasad

¹¹ *Gherao* literally means a forceful encirclement of governmental buildings or offices until a particular demand is accepted.

Jain as the Union Rehabilitation Minister in 1954 and held the office till 1962, was in charge of the Calcutta department. Being a refugee himself (from West Punjab), Khanna finally accepted the East Bengali refugees' demand, for not being forced to relocate again:

But Mehr Chand being refugee himself (from West Punjab) Khanna understood our problem. Mehr Chand (Khanna) had mainly come (to Kolkata) to hold a meeting with the MPs of West Bengal regarding the problems faced by the refugees. Then we sent a deputation there. Then, Hiren Mukherjee traced us and then Mehr Chand Khanna declared to Delhi that the refugees would not be moved and would be allowed to form a settlement there (that is, on the land the squatters had already occupied). Then, we felt a bit assured.

Not only this, but it was also the first time that the refugees secured a sort of official recognition:

Then, government gave us a document called, Apran Patra (Letter of Authorisation to Occupy a Plot in Squatter's Colony). It was a promise that one was being given settlement here, subject to some conditions like a certain amount had to be paid. But we got a legal status; although we were trespassers, the government took the responsibility for that. I still have that document with me.

The relation with the Left

How does one explain why a community characterized by Hindu and *bhadralok* identity turned to the communist Left? First, there was a tradition of upper-caste East Bengali Hindus joining radical Left parties in the context of the anti-colonial struggle, and therefore joining the CPI was not seen as a contradiction for them. Moreover, quite predictably, the refugees felt wronged by the Congress government and hence could not support the Congress party at the local level. The Hindu Mahasabha, on the other hand, had by this time lost much of its influence after its members had been implicated in the assassination of Gandhi in 1948 (Chatterji 2007: 262).

Therefore, the CPI with its rhetoric about the rights of refugees, its organizational prowess as well as its struggle on the street won the sympathy of the refugees and in turn, the refugees provided active political support to the left cause, not only electorally but also through their participation in radical mass movements spearheaded by the Left. Amidst mounting dissatisfaction from various sections of the population, including the East Bengali refugees, the Left parties took action and sought to organize an urban opposition to the Congress government. Besides the refugee movement, the Left, and primarily the CPI, spearheaded other radical movements, including the

movement against the hike in tram fare (1953), the teachers' movement (1954) and the food movement (1959)¹², all of which turned out to be successful in achieving their desired objectives. The large participation of the refugees in these movement, which had a transformative effect on the political character of Kolkata, contributed to the fall of the Congress government in 1967 and the subsequent election of the "Left Front" [a coalition of left-wing parties formed in 1977 with CPI(Marxist) being the dominant political force, remaining in power until 2011] (Chakrabarti 1999; Chatterjee 1998: 187; Sengupta 2019 :3).

It became clear, though, that the influence of the CPI and more broadly of the Left in the refugee colonies had its limits. It operated within the deeply entrenched cultural framework defined by *bhadralok* values and practices (for example the emphasis on upper-caste Hindu identity, *bhadralok* respectability, education, and claims for upward mobility). The influence by the Left largely restrained outbursts of violence against the few remaining Muslims of the settlements of southern Kolkata, but did not prevent their eventual displacement from the area (Bradbury 2019: 75).

The impact of labour unions

Arguably, apart from the broadly favorable political culture of the time (Chatterjee 1997:183-192), as well as the systematic CPI cadres' grassroots work in the refugee colonies (Bradbury 2020), the influence of the unions of the factories in the area largely controlled by CPI trade unions, also accounted for the political radicalizations of the refugees, something that has been little explored in the relevant English-language literature. Proximity to these industries not only played a decisive role in the successful formation of the colonies, but also had an impact on their sociopolitical life in the subsequent decades. I primarily focus on the impact Jay Engineering labor union had on Poddar Nagar and Katju Nagar residents and their socio-cultural life. What follows is based on two interlocutors' reminiscences. The first is a Poddar Nagar's resident in his mid-70s who used to work in Usha factory until his retirement. The second is a left leaning Katju Nagar resident in his 60s. I also draw on Ghosh's (2012) interviewees' narratives.

The refugee settlements of south Kolkata were established in the southern part of the Jadavpur-Tollygunge industrial belt, in Jadavpur and Shantoshpur districts, near the factories of that area. I will refer below to the case of USHA (Jay Engineering) factory, showing the effect that

¹² For a comprehensive analysis of the aforementioned movements: Sengupta (2019) and Samaddar (2018)

labour unions as well as the factory workers more broadly had in radicalizing the residents of the surrounding refugee neighborhoods, including Katju Nagar and Poddar Nagar. I will do this through a spatially oriented approach that focuses on spatial relations, namely between workers and residents.

First of all, the Jay Engineering labour union was at the forefront of political struggles of the Left through the 1960s, including supporting the refugees' struggle for rehabilitation, and was particularly known for its militancy, especially in organizing strikes. The factory had initially recruited immigrants from other parts of India (Bihar, eastern Uttar Pradesh and Orissa), while subsequently refugees from East Bengal were also recruited. Within the factory premises there were quarters for approximately 175 worker families as well as a school for their children (Ghosh 2012:9). Just to the east of the factory were the neighborhoods of Poddar Nagar and Katju Nagar while the main road separating the two neighborhoods led to the main gate of the factory.

It can be inferred from the reminiscences of my interlocutors that, especially during the 1960s, at the height of the political struggle against the Congress government, a sense of community had developed between the workers and the residents of the neighbourhoods. Apart from the common membership in the ranks of the Left or simple support of the Left, a broadly shared consciousness of their common social and class background could be identified. The residents of the refugee neighborhoods were, as I have mentioned, impoverished *bhadraloks*. On the other hand, the workers were, relatively highly paid and enjoyed social prestige. There were, of course, rivalries that reflected the antagonisms within the Communist Left and that led to the split of the CPI in 1964 and the formation of the CPI(M) in 1964 and the CPI(M-L) in 1969 (Ghosh 2012:9; 12).

Apart from within the context of the work environment and political action, the forging, reproduction and strengthening of their relationships also took place in their common social and religious life. For example, as Ghosh's interlocutors tell us, the main street of the area, Anwar Shah Road, was a meeting place for workers and residents of the refugee neighborhoods on a daily basis, and bazaars were organized there twice a month characterized by a festive atmosphere. The refugees participated in the workers' festivals, which were particularly popular, could last a month, and were accompanied by artistic events, music, dance, theatrical performances, and magic shows (Ghosh 2012: 10). They also participated in the religious festivals organized by the workers. For

instance, in the annual worship of the god Vishwakarma¹³ of the Hindu pantheon, who was and remains popular among the working class, especially manual laborers and drivers of three-wheelers(*rickshaws*) and other vehicles, and the worship of it includes the worship of tools and machines. In addition, the workers organized sports activities in which the refugees participated, especially football matches held every August 15th. Accordingly, the workers also participated in cultural and religious events organized by the refugees. Lastly, the ties of the two sides were strengthened by marriages between them.

As a culmination of these relations, a large section of the residents of refugee neighborhoods such as Katju Nagar and Poddar Nagar demonstrated their support and solidarity with the workers during an epic strike that took place in 1963 and lasted for six months. Striking workers were facing police repression, violence and torture, and neighborhood residents not only hid them in their homes (in some cases workers pretended to be family members) to escape, but also some of them surrendered themselves to the police to protect the workers from arrest, this being an act of self-sacrifice.

2.3 Harnessing political connections and cultural capital

Apart from the above-described tactics, the refugee leaders of South Kolkata resorted to other less confrontational tactics to achieve their settlements' recognition. In some cases, they succeeded in acquiring government aid and in very few cases they gained the legalization of their colonies. The case of Bijoygarh is again the most telling.

Bijoygarh's recognition rested on both political affiliations and connections and the cultivation of relations with the local state and bureaucracy. Refugee leadership in Bijoygarh deliberately invited influential Calcutta personalities having ties with Congress leadership, to become president in their association. Apart from that, Bijoygarh refugee leaders incorporated in their ranks former freedom fighters and Congress affiliates (especially members of the Jayprakash faction of the Congress Socialist Party). All the above enabled them to gain the tacit support of the West Bengal Chief Minister and prominent Congress politician, Dr Bidhan Chandra Roy (Sen 2013: 48; 50-51; 62).

¹³ According to Hindu mythology Vishwakarma was the creator of the universe ('Bishwa) and he produced weapons for the gods

Moreover, Bijoygarh' leaders sought the help of government officials, and lawyers hailing from East Bengal –thus mobilizing East Bengali solidarity– or sympathizers of the refugee cause. Among the former were individuals who held key positions in the West Bengal administration and the refugee rehabilitation department. Many of them were the so-called 'optees' (the Hindu government employees who had staffed East Bengal administration but they 'opted' for India at the time of partition). Sen gives telling examples of the district magistrate of the area where Bijoygarh lies, and the local office-in chief of the Tollygunge police station –both of them 'optees'– as well as the lawyer who hailed from East Bengal and represented the refugees at court in the aftermath of the fight against the Layalka goons and finally forced him to drop charges. As Sen comments (2013: 61), "Thus, the battle with Layalka, which has been mythologized as a militant conflict won by sheer muscle and grit of desperate refugees, was actually won in court". Likewise, the fact that the commander-in-chief of the Eastern Command had East Bengali origins, was instrumental in handing over the extant military barracks, which was the army's property, to the refugees in order to establish a new school (Sen 2013: 58-61). Notably, some Bijoygarh squatters were themselves employed in West Bengal government positions and a significant number of them had worked as clerks. This interior knowledge allowed them in coordination with their leaders to "exploit the loopholes in administrative procedure in order to derive some official recognition for Bijoygarh" as well as acquire government aid (Sen 2013:62-63).

Lastly, refugees' leadership in Bijoygarh, Netaji Nagar and elsewhere, sought to display their cultural capital in order to gain recognition from the state authorities as well as the host society. Sen (2013: 65; Ray 2002: 163). As Manas Ray narrates in his autobiography, in Netaji Nagar, the refugees believed that *shiksha* (education) would enable them to gain recognition as *bhadraloks* from the host society:

The press for education (*shiksha*) was enormous and to counter its constant discursive presence, we boys took up different comportments. Education of course brought the ability to attain economic security and, accompanying it, the ability to cope with moral vices (...) The locality in the late evenings would take the proportions of a factory, the *shiksha* factory, with loud readings – rendered in a variety of styles – emanating from different houses. Shiksha would help us win recognition from Calcutta of our *bhadralok* status, something we thought we rightfully deserved but were deprived of

(Ray 2002: 163)

Moreover, the leadership of refugees in *Deshbandhu* colony by displaying their similar Bengali bhadralok cultural heritage, successfully elicited the legalization of their settlement from West Bengal's Governor, Dr Kailash Nath Katju. Dr Katju was a prominent lawyer –he had defended the accused at the Indian National Army trials (between 1945 and 1946)– and Congress politician, having served as the Governor of West Bengal from 1948 to 1951. The incident described below by Sen is telling:

Sailen Chowdhury's (local refugee leader) play on the cultured identity of the squatters was far more spectacular. Once the chairman of Sherpur Municipality of Mymensingh in East Bengal, he had joined the ranks of squatters in West Bengal and had helped to found *Deshbandhu* colony. He succeeded in eliciting an impromptu meeting with the governor of West Bengal, Dr Katju, through a calculated display of cultural affinity. Young refugee girls dressed in saris, blowing conch shells, and scattering flowers upon the governor's car as he travelled along the main road bordering the colony proved to be far more effective than a roadblock. The governor was ushered into a squatter's shack and draped with garlands, accompanied by songs and recitations by refugee children. Sailen Chowdhury wrapped up the session with an appeal for help. This display had the desired effect upon Dr Katju. According to Hiranmoy Bandyopadhyay, who was his companion on this tour, the governor was extremely impressed by the refugees' commitment towards preserving their cultural heritage, despite their poverty. He showed his appreciation by arranging for the resettlement of *Deshbandhu* colony on legally requisitioned land nearby. Naktala No. 1 colony, an island of legal settlement within the expanding mosaic of squatters' colonies in south Calcutta, emerged as a result of Dr Katju's determination to rescue these cultured families from a life of illegality (Sen 2014: 65-66)

Likewise, the leaders of Katju Nagar, apart from their militant struggle against and confrontation with both the central and the state governments, and their own efforts for rehabilitation, tried to garner some degree of indirect support from the state government, thus partly emulating the Bijoygarh model. This point was underpinned by the reminiscences a 90-year-old Katju Nagar resident, who was not only a part of the group that founded the colony, but also the first gazetted officer in the locality. It remains unknown though what particular connections Katju Nagar's leaders had with either Congress, or CPI politicians and/or state officials.

According to the aforementioned resident, it was primarily the then Chief Minister (Dr. B. C. Roy) who was an indirect supporter of the refugee's cause, and this assertion is in line with

Sen's (2014) argument regarding Bijoygarh. This indirect support virtually signified tolerance, in the form of not prompting eviction and offering some recognition to the settlements once formed:

The school, the educational institution, the club— everything we have made. The government did not have to make these things for us. Here, there are three high schools. Government did not have to make these high schools. We have built them. We have constructed the buildings. Government just gave recognition to them, nothing else. In some places the government had to give everything. But in these areas as ours they did not have to give anything. Where there is government colony, the government had to build school there. But we have built our school in here. We made our own club, cultural organization— everything we have made on our own. We did not need any kind of assistance from the government in this. They only supported our efforts and later gave us the land.

According to the same 90-year-old resident, the government's inner logic was:

After Bijoygarh, refugee settlements began from this place. Government thought that if they themselves had to do it, then they would have to buy lands and make houses, it would have required a lot of expenditure. Bidhan Chandra Roy and Katju understood this. They understood that if the refugees settled on their own initiative, then their (work will get easier). People who were brought from other places like Cooper's camp, the government had to build houses for them. But it did not have to give us houses. We got self-rehabilitated (....) There was a person called T. R. Gupta. He always wanted our development... we formed our club with his support.

Furthermore, the same interlocutor made the point that, more broadly, a great deal of support came from Dr Katju:

He (Dr. Katju) gave stress on the rehabilitation of the refugees... After becoming Governor, he told very clearly that the refugees are capturing lands from those who already have enough lands, so the government need not verify the matter too much. If compensation needs to be given, we, the government, will give it. (...) The Relief and Rehabilitation Department was taken from the Writer's Building to the Raj Bhawan. (For the) first time. And he wanted daily reports about the condition of the refugees. How much development they (the refugees) had done? And we had squatted here. We settled here illegally. He (Dr. Katju) said that since the land was lying fallow, the squatters should not be removed from there. We knew this.

Importantly, he claimed that he was among the people, along with Shombhu Chowdhury, to have proposed that this place be named Katjunagar, in recognition of Dr Katju's support. With reference

to the South Kolkata refugee colonies, he stated that apart from the Governor there were other MPs and MLAs of that time, who supported more proactively the establishment of these residential areas of the refugees, and in some cases, these efforts included the acquisition of land for the refugees. “Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy, with the help of Ambika Chakrabarty (a CPI leader and politician), used to acquire unused lands for the resettlement of the refugees”. In fact, in a very few cases, this resulted in the immediate legalization of the settlements, as it was the case for Deshbandhu colony, although this move seemed to contravene the central government’s orders.

Conclusion

It was only in 1989, after almost forty years since their establishment, that all the refugee settlements were entirely legalized. Indeed, the Left Front government gave the residents title deeds to the land, with the condition that any sale of their plot could only take place from 1999 onwards.

From the 2000s onwards, the former refugee neighborhoods have been transformed. The old houses were torn down and new three-storied or four-storied ones were built in their place by the method of promoting. Promoting¹⁴ constitutes a peculiar form of city-building depending on petty private capital. It involves on the one side the landlord who either owns a vacant plot of land and/or already has a house on it which is bound to be demolished, and on the other side a promoter (or developer/contractor) with whom he signs an agreement. According to it, the promoter is responsible for constructing a new multistoried building and, henceforth, owns 50% of the plot and usually 50% of the newly created flats. The rest of the plot and the flats belong to the landlord. In addition to the spatial, social and economic changes, there were also demographic changes, as residents other than East Bengalis settled in the neighborhoods, excluding, however, Muslims.

Politically, the political party currently dominating in south Kolkata is the local Bengali centrist Trinamool Congress which was formed by a split of the Bengali Congress. Led by Mamata Banerjee, it overthrew the Left Front in 2011 and has been ruling the state of West Bengal ever since. In the last state assembly elections in both the Congress and the CPI(M) were left out of the local parliament for the first time in the history of independent India, and as a result the main opposition to the Trinamul has been the Bharatiya Janata Party. The latter is the Hindu right-wing

¹⁴ Promoting is precisely what is known in the Greek context as *antiparohi*

party that has been in the central government of the country since 2014 with Narendra Modi as prime minister.

A critical question remains whether the people of south Kolkata will support or not the Bharatiya Janata politically and electorally. As it has been confirmed by many of my interlocutors, the hostility of the Hindu refugees towards the Muslim community has always remained ‘under the carpet’. It is precisely this underlying hostility that the Bharatiya Janata is trying to foment in order to make inroads into the former refugee neighbourhoods, while reminding the younger generations of the history of their ancestors being uprooted from East Bengal due to Muslim violence, and stirring up the old but deep-rooted trauma of the partition of India. Quite surprisingly, the first generation of the refugees did not turn to the Hindu right, at that time represented by Bharatiya Janata's political predecessor, the Hindu Mahasabha. Thus, due to the initial increased influence of the Left and the Congress on the refugees, hostility towards Muslims remained subdued. In a different historical and political context and given the predominance of the forces of Hindu nationalism at the pan-India level so far, the political stance of the younger generations of refugees in south Kolkata is at stake.

Chapter 2

Urban restructuring in India

Introduction

Since the early 1990s, Indian cities have been undergoing a great transformation. Mostly directed at middle-class consumers, the new cityscapes, produced by public-private partnerships and real estate firms, depend on legal change, land grabs and the often-illegal appropriation of former industrial estates, inner-city slums and deregulated peri-urban agricultural lands. In the course of these processes, a huge number of communities have been displaced and whole neighborhoods have been marginalized. By 2030, it is predicted that in a still predominantly rural country, “41% of the country’s people will live in cities and towns” (Bhattacharya & Sanyal 2011: 41). India’s urban population “is projected to grow faster than that of any other country, more than doubling between 2010 and 2040 to reach 734 million” (Shatkin 2014: 2). Therefore, the study of urban restructuring, as well as that of urban India more broadly, is of outmost importance. In recent times, scholars, from various disciplines, including historians, geographers, anthropologists, urban planners, and sociologists have begun to contribute to the study of urban restructuring from diverse but often converging perspectives. This chapter will prioritize an approach which places more emphasis on the urban political economy, paying also attention to the dynamics of urban class relations, and will be concerned with the implications that urban restructuring has for the urban poor. In the first section it will show why in the pre-liberalization period Indian cities were relatively inclusive and why the ‘right to the city’ of the urban poor was respected. The second section will highlight the urban transformations underway since the post-liberalization era, which is one of the main focuses of the thesis. It will discuss the role of the ‘new’ middle class, the role of different levers of the state as well as the impact of urban reforms on urban restructuring. The last section constitutes a case study of urban restructuring from the city of Kolkata, also pointing to its environmental consequences.

The Indian city during the Nehruvian period (1947-1984)

The economy of post-Independence India during the Nehruvian era, was state-led and largely dependent on Nehru's Five-Year Plans. Its tenets were import substituting industrialization which encouraged the investments in production in heavy industries and state involvement in the ownership of key industrial infrastructure sectors like power generation, iron and steel, etc. These heavy industries were established only in small urban areas (Chakravarty 2000:61 Whitehead 2018: 127; Fernandes 2006: 36-37).

After Independence, India's core cities' urban space, apart from the effect of immigration (the influx of Hindu Bengalis in Kolkata and more than 500.000 Hindus and Sikhs from West Pakistan settled in the peripheries of Delhi having fled from West Pakistan) and Indian particularities such as caste and religion, was shaped by the combination of the rise of the industrial sector, the service economy and the informal sector, especially domestic service. In all core cities small industries were concentrated mainly across the suburban industrial belts (Chakravorty 2000: 58- 62). This, of course produced working-class neighbourhoods, for instance huge slum areas in the industrial areas of Kolkata (Chatterjee 2004: 132) or central Mumbai¹⁵'s *chawls* (working-class collective housing peculiar to Mumbai).

Despite divisions based on caste or ethnicity, most urban neighborhoods were usually mixed in terms of class. Arguably, during the 1950s and 1960s, as Chatterjee (2004:132) argues, urban neighbourhoods in Kolkata were shaped by 'patron-client relationships' between the wealthy and the middle-class on the one side and the working- class on the other:

The wealthy were at the forefront of a general middle-class involvement in providing social, cultural, and moral leadership to the urban neighborhood. There was usually a quite dense network of neighbourhood institutions such as schools, sport clubs, markets, tea shops, libraries, parks, religious gatherings, charitable organizations, and so on, organized and supported by the wealthy and the middle classes, through which an active and participatory sense of urban community was created and nurtured. It was then normal rather than exceptional for middle-class children to go to the neighbourhood school and play in the neighbourhood park; for young men to assemble for adda

¹⁵ Central Mumbai emerged as an industrial centre with pharmaceuticals, chemical production, and engineering industries located alongside the textile industry (Whitehead 2018)

in the neighbourhood club or tea shop; for housewives to take out books from the neighbourhood library or buy clothes at the neighbourhood market; for the elderly to converge on a neighbourhood institution to listen to religious discourses and devotional music. Most neighbourhoods were mixed in terms of class. A street front lined by large mansions or elegant middle-class houses would invariably hide crowded slums at the back where the service population would live. (Chatterjee 2004: 132)

Moreover, there were two additional factors that explicate why in Indian metropolitan cities' socio-spatial segregation was never absolute. First, because of the structural effect domestic service had on urban space and urban class relations. Although separation between the wealthy, the middle-class and the working-class neighborhoods had certainly been existent, these spatial distinctions were not strict. Given the need of the wealthy and the middle-class for household work (washermen, sweepers, cooks) as well as other services (e.g., tailors, shoe repairmen, hawkers) their neighbourhoods witnessed the presence of the working class, squatters and pavement dwellers (Fernandes 2004: 2420). Second, the disengagement of the middle class from urban politics, something that, as it will be shown in the next section, changed only since the 1990s (Chatterjee 2004: 142). For all the above reasons, Indian cities were not characterized by sharp class-based spatial distinctions at least until the late 1980s.

Regardless of the underlying purposes of populist rhetoric and policies, until the mid-80s the 'right to the city' of the urban poor was not only considerably well respected, and this was reflected in the political culture of that time (Fernandes 2006: 36-39), but it was also adequately recognized that the state was solely responsible for providing them proper housing.

Given that urban development was state-led and was based on the protectionist policies of the Nehruvian state, importantly around land and housing (Searle 2016: 26), the state through its policies, ranging from planning to legislation, whether effectively implemented or not (Ghertner 2011: 511), aimed at curbing urban land speculation and ensuring housing for the poor (Ghertner 2014: 1561). At any rate, planning was premised on the concept of 'livable Indian cities' (Banerjee Guha 2013: 80), and Indian cities were characterized by a democratic ethos (Chatterjee 2004: 135). I give below two examples of such policies regarding the acquisition and disposal of land to the urban poor.

Fundamental in Nehru's protectionist and redistribution urban policies was the implementation of Delhi's Master Plan which was subsequently followed by other major cities. Its first pillar was that 25% of all residential land was reserved for the two lowest income categories. Its second pillar was that a system of public land management was put in place, under which the Delhi Development Authority (DDA), established in 1957, was given monopoly power over the acquisition and disposal of all urban land.

The second example is the Urban Land (Ceiling and Regulation) Act (ULCRA) implemented in 1976 by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. This act introduced a limit to the amount of vacant land that a single landowner could hold in urban areas up to 7.5 katha (one-eighth of an acre or 500m²). Land in surplus of the ceiling was to be appropriated by state governments with the purpose of being distributed to the economically weaker sections of the population (Searle 2016: 28; Banerjee-Guha 2013: 81; 2011: 260; Shatkin 2014: 48; Sissener 2019: 230).

Regarding housing, it also followed from Delhi's Master Plan and subsequently from ULCRA that the urban municipal authorities were responsible for large-scale building activities including the provision of formal low-income housing. If the latter was not achieved due to a possible lack of resources, "India's developmental state extended the right to occupy public land to the working poor as a type of social welfare" (Ghertner 2011: 512). It was the municipal authorities who could be blamed in case of lack of proper housing for the urban poor or slums' unsanitary conditions. Moreover, the same held in the event of an eviction, since it was taken for granted that resettlement and rehabilitation would be provided by the local state (Ghertner 2011: 286; Chatterjee 2004: 136).

The responsibility of the state in providing proper housing to the poor was also recognized by the courts, for as Chatterjee argues, it was reflected in the "general willingness of the judiciary to come to the aid of the urban poor" (Chatterjee 2004: 135), including also the pavement dwellers. For example, as Bhan (2009) has shown in a landmark 1985 case about the eviction of pavement dwellers in Mumbai, the "Supreme Court not only ordered the city government to resettle those who would be displaced, but also attributed the problem of pavement dwelling to the city government's failure to provide adequate low-income housing" (Shatkin 2014: 58).

Urban transformations in the neoliberal city

The role of the ‘new’ middle-class in urban restructuring

The rise of the ‘new’ middle class in contemporary India has been linked to the policies of economic liberalization initiated since the 1990s. The year 1991 was a watershed moment for the Indian economy. The Government of India initiated economic reforms largely imposed by the IMF as part of structural adjustment policies. Essentially, the so-called reforms were neoliberal policies which aimed at opening up the Indian economy into world markets, while repealing the former protectionist policies of the Nehruvian state. Economic liberalization signaled the influx of foreign goods, unavailable during earlier decades of state-controlled markets (Fernandes 2004: 2415).

The emergence of the new middle class has been mostly associated with the consumption of commodities, such as cell-phones, color televisions, washing machines and cars which seem to serve as the symbols of liberalizing Indian nation. This new political culture centered on a middle-class-based culture of consumption has clearly entailed a divergence from earlier ideologies, premised on (Mahatma) Gandhian-Nehruvian political discourses of austerity and state socialism (Fernandes 2006: 36-39).

While middle class as a social category has been existent in India at least since the colonial period, including West Bengal’s *bhadralok*, “its ‘newness’ refers to a process of production of a distinctive social and political identity that represents, and lays claim to the benefits of liberalization” (Fernandes 2006: xviii). Hence, apart from its materiality, the ‘new’ middle class is constructed discursively, in conjunction with representational images in the media, advertising and the public sphere. Moreover, its newness lies in the fact that it is literally associated with the young (‘new’) generation (Fernandes 2006: 86).

Discourses about the growth of the ‘new’ middle class are inextricably linked with the political project that underpins economic liberalization. For this social group is portrayed as the one which is the immediate beneficiary of the reforms. It is also seen as the group which manages the western and more broadly globalizing forces in the country and at the same time it seeks to represent the whole nation abroad. For all the above reasons the ‘new’ middle class have increasingly been self-identified as a distinctive group with its own political and economic interests, shaping the national politics and exerting political and cultural hegemony at the Indian society as a whole (Fernandes 2006).

Precisely because of its deeply political nature, estimations of its size vary considerably. The designation of the actual size of the middle-class has provoked endless debates among analysts and scholars. As in other parts of the world where liberal discourses celebrate the expansion of the urban middle-class, likewise in India in the period before the 2004 national elections the current ruling party (BJP) based its political campaign (though it eventually lost the elections) on the celebration of “India Shining” with 200-million middle-class consumers (Fernandes 2006; Kalb 2014). At the same time, neoliberal institutions such as the World Bank calculated the size of the middle class as 264 million in a 2005 report. Apart for the political underlying intentions an overestimation of the middle class as prospective consumers also certainly serves to attract foreign firms to invest in the Indian market. However, these estimations should be skeptically evaluated because their political aims define the tools of its measurement (e.g., income, occupation, monthly wage, daily consumption consumer practices). Meanwhile, there have been contradictory estimations; for instance, a Credit Suisse report (2015) based on a wealth-definition which calculated the middle class as only approximately 24 million.

Another key question that should be raised is to what extent the middle-class constitute a homogenous category. Importantly, Fernandes (2006: xxxiii) argues that “the creation of this group is shaped by internal differences that are in turn created through unequal distributions of capital and structured, identity-based inequalities”. In the survey presented by the same author (2006: 82) substantial disparities are observed in terms of income between the lower and the upper middle class. Likewise, Chakravarty (2018) estimates that the lower middle class might constitute the four fifths of the whole category of the middle class. The upper sections of the new middle class have been recruited to the ‘new’ economy jobs, including the private sector especially in multinational corporations or foreign banks (Fernandes 2006: 88-89). Prevalent within the expanding service sector of the ‘new’ economy is the Information Technology (IT) Industry that comprises the sector of software and services and business process outsourcing (BPO). Yet, it must be stressed that the “older middle class of bureaucrats, lawyers, bank officials, teachers” remain important (Fuller & Narasimhan 2007: 122). Yet, even though the material boundaries to access remain far more rigid, the discursive boundaries of the ‘new’ middle class are fluid and anyone from lower social segment can aspire to potentially enter (Fernandes 2006 xviii; De Neve & Donner 2011: 13; Fuller & Narasimhan 2006; Nisbett 2013).

This section, though is particularly concerned with how, since the 1990s, the ‘new’ middle-class, have been associated with urban restructuring. At one level, urban restructuring should be understood as a political project. This project aims at portraying that the benefits of globalization in the Indian context are embodied in the material visibility of the ‘new’ middle-class and its spatial representations. At another level, urban restructuring represents a cultural project through which middle-class identities are materially produced by the state. For instance, in Indian metros, such as Mumbai, processes of suburbanization of the middle class which are underway along with the expansion of middle-class spaces for leisure and entertainment such as restaurants, malls, amusement parks, theatres and elite clubs, materially produce middle-class cultural identities and lifestyles (Fernandes 2004).

Furthermore, at the heart of urban restructuring lies the middle-class vision of a beautified city, ‘free’ of slums and without any sign of poverty, a middle-class desire for class-based socio-spatial segregation also linked with a new urban aesthetic of class purity (Fernandes 2004: 2420). All the above overlap with aspects of the same political project which intends to not only create new material and symbolic boundaries between the middle-class on the one hand, and the urban poor who are believed to be among those who did not benefit from economic liberalization on the other, but also to render the latter invisible. Hence, fundamental in this political project has been the creation of a city “in which signs of poverty can be forgotten in both spatial and political terms” (Fernandes 2004: 2428). This has been enabled by spatial practices and a class-based management of urban space, primarily public space, by the local state in collaboration with middle class resident associations and civic organizations. For instance, in Mumbai middle-class associations through filing legal petitions sought to prohibit the presence of street vendors, the so-called *hawkers*, in public spaces as well as in residential areas (Fernandes 2004: 2422). Ultimately, middle class assertive claims over urban space and property through their activism around urban aesthetics reflect their control over the terrain of politics both at municipal and national level.

The role of the state

By implementing ‘spatial purification’ and beautification projects, the local state seems to not only adhere to middle-class civic culture, but also to produce it. As Fernandes (2004) argues, it is precisely the middle classes’ capturing of the local state which has enabled them to make the state operate to their advantage and serve their interests. In Mumbai, for instance, the ‘cleaning up’ of public land including beaches, promenades and maidans has been orchestrated by the local state. A noteworthy example of such efforts was the beautification of *Chowpatty*, a well-known beach of the city. It involved the demolition of the slums which existed at the beach and the displacement of the individuals who used to live there. The plans for the beautification drive included the construction of a watch-tower and the presence of two policemen who would ensure that the poor would not be able to re-enter the beach. As part of a wider effort to restructure parks to cater to the interests and lifestyles of the wealthy and the middle-class, there have been plans to transform Shivaji Park –formerly with open access– by constructing seven gates which will control access, ‘VIP’ parking and jogging tracks (Fernandes 2004 :2424).

Moreover, another important work on the changing role of the state in urban development, as well as the changing state-society relationships comes from Ghertner (2011). In his article, ‘Gentrifying the State, Gentrifying Participation: Elite Governance Programs in Delhi’, Ghertner (2011) shows how visions and strategies to remake Delhi as a ‘world city’ and ‘free of slums’ depend on the ‘gentrification’ or ‘respatialization’ of the local state. More particularly, he gives the example of the *Bhagidari* scheme, a forum dedicated to urban development agenda initiated by the Chief Minister of Delhi. On the one hand, this forum was regularly attended by low-level bureaucrats and politicians, and on the other, by mobilized propertied associations of citizens, Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs), and representatives of the government, among other ‘stakeholders’. Clearly, in this forum the interests of the unpropertied urban poor were not represented. Thus, low-level bureaucrats, the ones who historically negotiate with the unpropertied urban poor, in the context of Chatterjee’s ‘political society’, were henceforth held directly accountable to the higher-level bureaucrats and RWAs for implementing their visions of urban change. It is in this sense that state space has been reconfigured.

It must be highlighted, therefore, that the privatization of urban development has not led to a retreat of the state (Searle 2014: 66). Rather, it has brought about the restructuring of the state power and its being captured by the middle classes and their interests. It is the different levers of

the state (including municipal and metropolitan authorities) which have undertaken the task to lead urban development along with the forces of the market (Roy 2011: 261).

Moreover, state entities either prepare the ground for commercial/real estate projects, or for beautification purposes, or merely for the sake of slum removal (which does not necessarily lead to transformation into commodified spaces), and they have orchestrated large scale evictions and displacements of the urban poor (Ghertner 2014: 1560). In all Indian metros, instances of the state acting as a coercive agent, in many cases resorting to the unleashing of violence, have been well documented. In Delhi, for instance, where urban restructuring has been associated with the symbolic and legal role of a capital:

Government and developers were quite successful in utilizing the Commonwealth Games, held in 2010, as a pretext for large-scale evictions and relocations and for the realization of major infrastructure and real estate projects. According to Bhan (2009) 45,000 homes were demolished from 2004 to 2007 in the run-up to the Games (Shatkin 2014: 2)

In Mumbai, slum evictions of an unprecedented scale, implemented by the municipal authority, have occurred mostly at the central and southern parts of the city, to make way for real estate projects: “the municipal corporation demolished approximately 90,000 slum dwellings, displacing as many as 450,000 people and clearing three hundred acres of land between November 2004 and March 2005 alone” (Searle 2016 :6; Whitehead 2014: 157).

Considering the state’s coercive role in acquiring land for corporate purposes, sociologist Michael Levien (2011) has aptly updated geographer’s David Harvey’s (2008) term “accumulation by dispossession” adding that in the context of India it constitutes an “extra-economic process that requires forcible coercion by the state”. Arguably, what Levien perceives as ‘accumulation by dispossession’ lies at the heart of urban restructuring in India.

The impact of the “reforms” on urban space

As in other parts of the Global South, the neoliberal strategies and policies which promoted privatization were to guide urban development and urban governance, resulting in the gradual collapse of the previous model of state-dominated urban development (Shatkin 2013: 2, Searle 2016: 26;29; Donner 2012 :138; Banerjee-Guha 2013: 77).

One of the first significant urban “reforms” passed in 1992, partly dictated by the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank (Roy 2011 262-263), was the 74th Constitutional Amendment. It aimed at the de-centralization of urban governance, introducing instead the ‘urban local bodies’ which ever since have had more power and responsibilities (Shatkin 2014: 10). Moreover, the Amendment “created the institutional space for newly empowered and politically engaged middle-class groups to shape local governance and development agendas” (Weinstein & Sami & Shatkin 2014: 52).

Another regulatory reform, which had tremendous impact on urban space, was the repeal of Urban Land (Ceiling and Regulation) Act, passed by the lower house of the Indian Parliament in 1999. The repeal of the Act signified that henceforth unlimited private ownership of urban land by a single landholder was allowed. However, it rests with the respective state governments to decide whether to repeal the Act or not, given that the policies around land is primarily a state affair. The majority of state governments have already repealed the Act with the exception of West Bengal (Weinstein & Sami & Shatkin 2014: 54).

During the 2000s a series of novel policies enabled the relaxing of former legal restrictions to Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) and encouraged the creation of Special Economic Zones (SEZs). As Shatkin writes, “Foreign direct investment in townships was legalized in 2002; Venture capital fund investment in real estate was allowed in 2004; and new incentives were provided for the development of SEZ in 2005” (Shatkin 2013: 6). Altogether, the latter reforms, along with the repeal of the ULCRA, enabled the “liberalisation of city-building processes” (Shatkin 2013 :2). These regulatory reforms, led to an unprecedented pouring in of money in the form of FDI. This trend is rightly indicated by Shatkin (2014:8), as he writes:

FDI in real estate and construction rose from an amount so negligible that until 2005/6 it was not even recorded as a discrete sector (and government figures report a mere \$38 million in investment for that initial year) to \$2.84 billion in 2009/10, when it was the second largest source of investment.

As a corollary, this surge of money has had a transformative impact on both spatial and political change (Shatkin 2014: 8). Quite strikingly though, with the exception of the work done by Searle (2016), the ‘world’ of the real estate development industry, which has profoundly transformed Indian cities, remains unexamined.

Arguably, the most far-reaching reform was the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission, popularly known as National Urban Renewal Mission (NURM), ‘for planned development of Indian cities’. It was launched by the Government of India in December 2005, as part of a ‘world-city’ investment strategy that channeled more than US \$ 11 billion, for a period of seven years beginning in April 2005. The Mission aimed at developing 63 Indian cities into ‘world class’ sustainable cities (Banerjee-Guha 2013: 79-80; Goldman 2011: 236). The priority of the Mission was the injection of money for infrastructure: “The major thrust was put on infrastructure, such as wide roads, flyovers, tunnels, skyways, airports, mega commercial complexes, real estates, and open spaces for recreation, all aspiring to achieve an international standard” (Banerjee-Guha 2013: 79-80).

Apart from the emphasis on infrastructure, the Mission sought to consolidate processes that were underway. The first was the encouragement of public-private partnerships. After all, the Mission was based on the experience brought about by such experiments in Bangalore (Shatkin 2014: 10-11). Such partnerships would signify the commercialization of basic services because of the introduction of user fees (Banerjee- Guha 2013: 81). Second and equally important, the Mission increased pressure for the repeal of the Urban Land Ceiling Act. Though, the repeal of the Act remained in the hands of the State Governments, yet the new effort rested on the fact that the release of NURM funds for State Governments would be contingent on the repeal of the Act. (Weinstein & Sami & Shatkin 2014: 54; Banerjee- Guha 2013: 81). Furthermore, the Mission ensured 100% FDI in housing and real estate, and made land conversion norms easier. Significantly, it sought to implement the 74th Amendment, the tenets of which were the co-opting of the middle-class in urban development agendas and the decentralization of the state in urban development. Other key-items of NURM have been analyzed in more details by Banerjee- Guha (2013: 81) among others.

More broadly, in terms of urban planning, the reforms point to two directions. The first is the re-zoning of industrial and residential land for commercial purposes. The most characteristic example is the gentrification of central and south Mumbai. The former mill areas (*Girangaon*) have been transformed into real estate housing and commercial spaces for the upper and the middle-classes (Whitehead 2014). Secondly, they encourage government appropriation of privately owned agricultural lands for broadly construed economic development activities by the private sector. Apart from SEZs, this includes mini townships, as well as housing subdivisions. It is precisely in the peri-urban fringes that India's 'urban revolution' has been unfolding (Ghertner 2014: 1560). The following section will present a relevant case from Kolkata's eastern fringes.

Urban restructuring in Kolkata's eastern fringes

Kolkata (formerly Calcutta) constitutes the main metropolis of Eastern India. In this part of India, economic reforms came to fruition in the mid-1990s with the then ruling 'Left Front' seeking to attract investment through regeneration and development of a 'global city' (Bose, 2015). As Roy has argued, urban growth has been driven by property capital:

Calcutta's insertion into the global economy of the late twentieth century took place not through industrial, financial, or technological capital, but through property capital, and a distinctively transnational type of property capital that – what Bose (2008) calls “diasporic capital”. Despite the emergence of an information technology sector in Calcutta, the growth of the metropolis is driven by real-estate developments and speculations (Roy 2011: 101)

Since then, local regeneration projects have included private and public-private partnerships (housing, hospitals, hotels and housing complexes for the emergent middle class, malls and transport links) with the state allotting stretches of urban land to large companies as well as small scale developers (Donner 2012: 145; Bose 2015).

In the intervening decades, these processes have had far-reaching consequences for the urban poor. Efforts to make Kolkata a 'world-class' city and to capitalize on its urban land market also led to the 'cleansing' of public space more generally, for example the infamous 'Operation Sunshine' in 1996, which attempted to get rid of hawkers, and included evictions of illegal pavement dwellers, all of which triggered mass protests and debates (Donner 2012: 146; Bose 2015). Between 2003 and 2005, as Bose has documented, during the campaign for the

beautification of Calcutta: “a total of 350,000 people were displaced, often with no notification and no provision for rehabilitation or resettlement” (Bose 2012: 131).

Undoubtedly, urban restructuring in Kolkata is best evident along its eastern fringes. The most recent urban developments have emerged along and around Eastern Metropolitan Bypass, which clearly represent ‘the new frontier’ of Kolkata’s real estate driven transformation. Eastern Metropolitan Bypass (henceforth EM Bypass) is the highway that skirts the eastern edges of the city (Bose 2015: 97). It was inaugurated in the 1980s “as a reliever of the vehicular congestion in the heart of the city and a quick transit from the southern parts of the city to the airport” (Banerjee 2012: 94 ;110-111). Since the 1990s, apart from being the city’s major artery, it has been increasingly developed as a real estate hub, having attracted foreign and Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) investments, seeking to materialize the vision of making Kolkata a ‘World-class’ city. Ever since, “within the city, several connectors and flyovers have been constructed to ease traffic congestion in the urban core but significantly and explicitly also to facilitate easy access to the Bypass” (Bose 2015: 104).

Housing construction, mainly “massive new apartment complexes of the type seen in Delhi’s infamous Gurgaon”, along and around the EM Bypass has seen a tremendous boom (Bose 2015: 104). The new housing complexes are surrounded by luxury hotels (including international hotel chains), new shopping malls, gleaming office buildings, convention centres, theme parks, entertainment parks, playgrounds, gated green spaces, schools, multiplex theatres, golf courses, expensive restaurants, and private roads (Bose 2012: 132,136; Bose 2015: 104). Interestingly, EM Bypass also constitutes a medical hub. Along its stretch, many private hospitals, such as Ruby and Peerless hospital, are lying constructed in modern glittering structures, either privately built or as public-private partnerships. Close to the Bypass, small hostels catering to hospital tourism have also been recently created. All the above developments have made the area around the Bypass desirable for upwardly mobile middle-class citizens, who seek better opportunities for housing, health and education, as well as for doctors who wish to rent an apartment near their work.



Photo 2.1, by author, 2016: New constructions along Eastern Metropolitan Bypass



Photo 2.2 by author, 2016: ITC Sonar Hotel under construction

As it was underlined by developers who work in the city, in the case of EM Bypass area, land within two kilometers from the highway was purchased by medium developers, making way to

huge housing complexes, such as Eden residency and Eden Sky Terraces. Yet, some of these land deals have often been facilitated by the political parties' informal practices, something which will be discussed in following chapters (Roy 2003;2010).

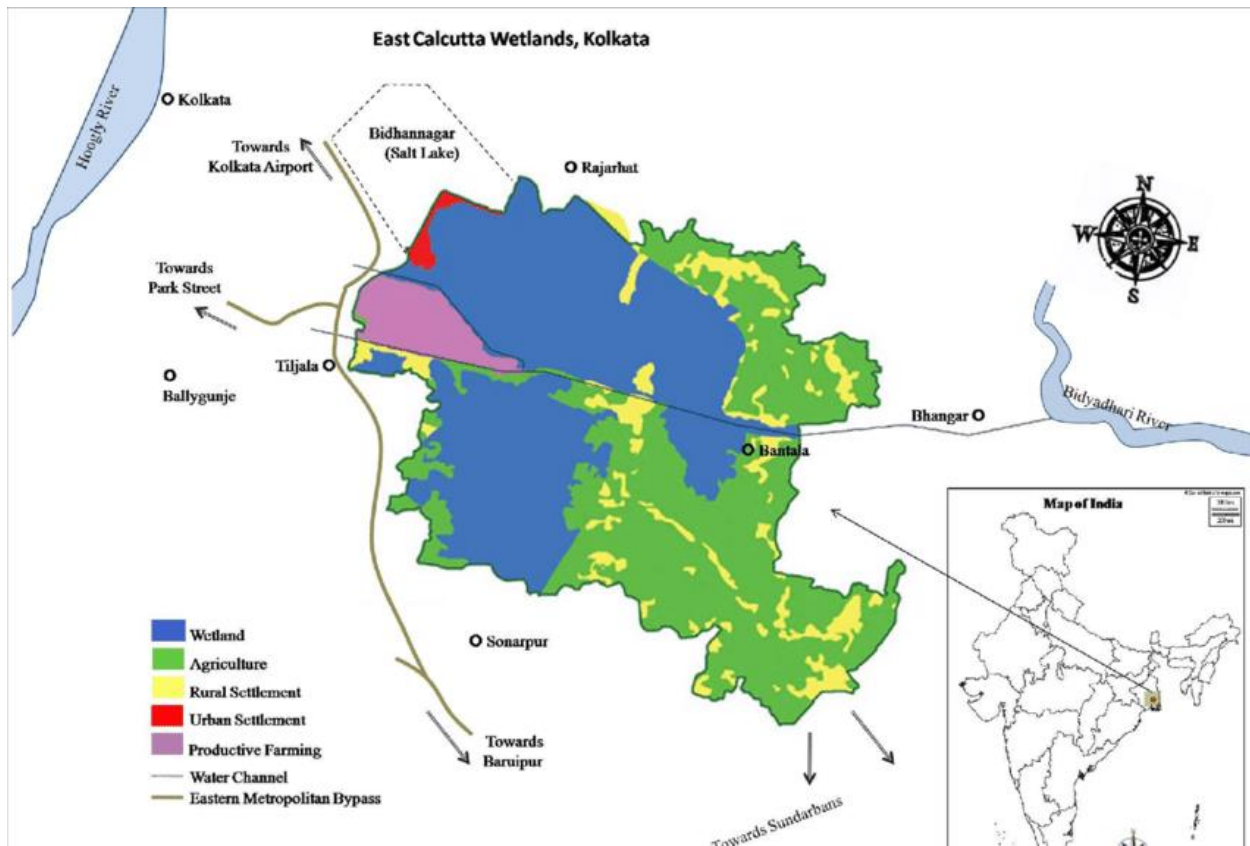
Apart from the elite urban landscapes of EM Bypass area, urban restructuring in Kolkata's eastern fringes has been more broadly associated with the suburbanization of the middle-class. This was enabled by the active role of the state. As part of its broader political project put in motion since the 1990s to form alliances with the urban middle class, the Left-Front government actively sought to facilitate middle-class housing in two ways (Roy 2004) First, in many cases it subsidized middle-class housing while at same time it did nothing to improve slum residencies. Second, it appropriated land by evicting refugees from Bangladesh who used to live there, to make way for new constructions for middle-class housing in the eastern suburbs. This happened in areas near the EM Bypass, for instance Mukundapur, a former refugee colony, which has subsequently emerged as a middle-class suburb and medical hub (Roy 2010: 99).

Efforts made for the expansion of the city towards the east are not recent and these constituted planned suburbs and townships by state entities. In the 1960s, the township of Bidhannagar (or Salt Lake City) was built in an effort to decongest the city center and to provide housing for the middle-class (Bose 2012: 135; Banerjee 2012: 107). Notably, Sector V of Salt Lake City, was developed to attract high-profile investors and to provide appropriate and respectable jobs for high-earning middle-class workforces (Donner 2012: 146-147). Following efforts based on the Salt Lake model, during the 1980s were the establishment of Baishnabghata-Patuli Township which aimed at providing subsidized housing to mainly middle-class families, and East Kolkata Township (Bose 2015: 96; Roy 2011 :101). Yet, the most massive development was the creation of the satellite township of Rajarhat or 'New Town' (three times the size of Salk Lake City) throughout the 1990s. The land used mainly for agriculture and fishing was acquired by the Housing and Infrastructure Development Corporation (HIDCO), under the Left Front government, and leased out to corporate organizations and realtors to make way for Rajarhat New Town Project. It has been alleged that in many occasions, the owners of the land, mostly farmers and fishermen, were coerced to sell the land to HIDCO. Either involving coercion to sell the land or not, the construction of Rajarhat township led to the displacement of 131,000 people who were the former inhabitants of the area (Dey, Sammadar & Sen 2013; Bhattacharya & Sanyal 2011: 46; Searle 2016: 6).

Apart from displacements and evictions of former inhabitants, urban restructuring in Kolkata's eastern fringes has brought about ecological devastation. For huge part of the once-vast *Bidyadhari* wetlands that used to surround the north-east, east and south-east parts of the city has been reclaimed for urban expansion (Bose 2015: 91; Roy 2011: 96; Banerjee 2012: 94-95). The remaining wetlands, constitute a unique ecosystem, also part of the Sundarbans mangrove forest, crucial not only to West Bengal's, but to the "entire sub-continental watershed environmental sustainability" (Banerjee 2012: 93). Despite efforts made for the protection and the maintenance of the wetlands, for example, the 1992 Calcutta High Court's ban on changing the character of the land (wetlands), most of the conversions from agricultural to non-agricultural land have been illegal (Banerjee 2012: 114).

Particularly, the development of the area to the east of EM Bypass has been threatening the viability of a large fraction of the wetlands, the so-called East Kolkata Wetlands. These are low-lying areas stretching across 12,500 hectares (125 square kilometers) to the east, a body of brackish water consisting of tidal pools, creeks, and a series of large, interconnected vast but shallow ponds dedicated to fish-farming (*bheris*) (Bose (2015: 91-92; Banerjee 2012: 98). This part of the wetlands has gained supplementary legal protection due to its Ramsar status, having thus gained more public attention. The main reason this part of the wetlands is distinctive and has been therefore declared as a protected area in 2002 under the Ramsar treaty (on the convention of Wetlands), is that it constitutes the waste- recycling zone of the wetlands (Banerjee 2012: 97). Remarkably, it constitutes the world's largest organic sewage management system.

It was by the 1930s that the local fishermen discovered that the domestic wastewater was recycled through the mediation of a certain kind of phytoplankton found in their *bheris*. It also provided protein that fed the fish and rendered the sweet-water fish cultivation sustainable. Equally important, it also signified that the city was gifted by nature with a unique natural sewage management system, often eloquently characterized in media representations as 'Kolkata's kidney' (Bose 2015: 92; Banerjee 2012: 98). Ever since, the city's entire waste water is channeled and treated through the Wetlands, and it is subsequently used for pisciculture and agriculture. The environmental benefit that the remaining East Kolkata Wetlands (EKW) give is huge since it also acts as a natural barrier against floods (Bose 2015 :97).



Map v : East Calcutta Wetlands

(Source: https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Map-of-East-Calcutta-Wetlands-ECW-Kolkata-Inset-showing-the-location-of-ECW-as-a_fig1_274069064)

Apart from their environmental importance, EKW constitutes a site of social and economic significance (Bose 2015: 91-92). It is a fact that its many wastewater-fed fisheries and farms provide foodstuffs for the markets especially of the urban poor. Moreover, a population of around 100,000 inhabitants, the majority of them being scheduled caste, including farmers, fishers, migrant laborers, garbage workers depend on the EKW for their livelihoods, and also provide cheap labour to the urban economy. The majority of them are the garbage workers who work in Dhapa garbage landfill, where 95% of the city's waste is disposed (Bose 2015: 92; Bose 2012: 135).



Photo 2.3, by author, 2016: farmlands, in the eastern side of EMB

All in all, the above real-estate development has enabled the reordering of Kolkata's rural fringe in the interests of global and transnational capital and the middle class, with the facilitation of the local state, at the expense not only of the livelihoods of the former inhabitants of the area, but also of West Bengal's ecological sustainability. Lastly, given that the land around the Wetlands was largely not commodified prior to urban restructuring, this case does not represent an example of 'gentrification'. It should be rather construed in analytical terms as a case of a 'capture of the commons', 'enclosure' or 'accumulation by dispossession' (Ghertner 2014).

Conclusion

This chapter has described some of the most significant trends of India's urban restructuring, that is, the suburbanization of the middle-class, the creation of elite enclaves, SEZs and new townships, accompanied by processes of gentrification and 'accumulation by dispossession' leading to slum evictions displacements of the urban poor. Urban restructuring involves the active role of the middle class and the state in the making of the 'World City' and necessarily signifies the reordering of urban class relations. The literature on urban restructuring has paid less attention to lower-middle class housing, having focused on upper middle class and middle-class housing instead. The

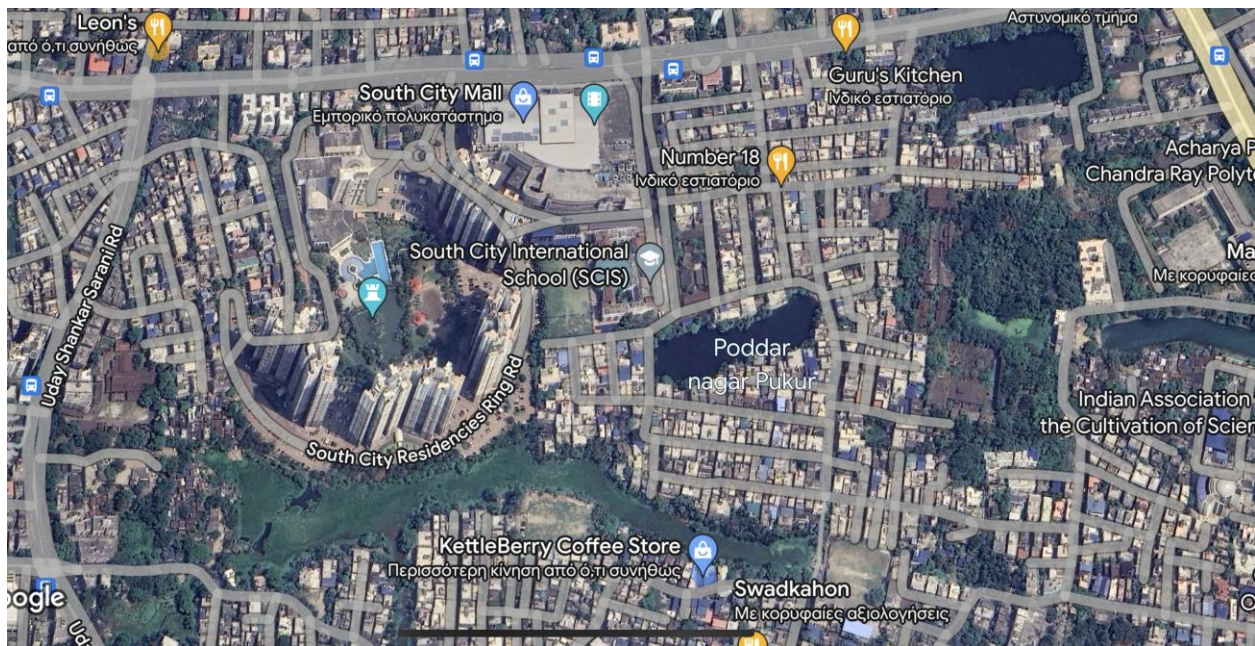
two following chapters, discussing the real estate transformation of the former refugee colonies of South Kolkata through promoting, represent a case study of lower middle class and middle-class housing in the context of India's urban restructuring in the post-liberalization era.

Chapter 3

Introduction to the field of research: Katju Nagar and Poddar Nagar at present

In this chapter I will now give an ethnographic description of the more recent transformations these neighbourhoods have undergone as well as the contemporary social and spatial life within them, based on my fieldwork among residents in these areas. These changes are understood in the context of the neoliberal transformations of urban space from the 1990s as described in chapter two. I will look at some of the main changes in terms of the built environment and class composition of residents, perceptions of social and moral relations, and finally the changing role of local institutions. I argue that while these neighbourhoods have been massively transformed in terms of their built environment and social/moral relations, there are also continuities, especially in the significance of local clubs and colony committees.

Residing outside South City's wall



Map vi: South City mall and gated community

In a typical evening, the area in and around South City mall is teeming with huge crowds. Visitors of the mall, of all ages, line-up to get into the shopping mall after passing security control. Upon entering, a sense of excitement and consumeristic desire is felt in the atmosphere. Groups of youngsters click selfies, families wander around lured by the commodities such as electronics, and fashion brands ranging from international (such as Adidas, Levis, Lacoste and the like) to domestic (e.g., Fab India) labels. Yet, it is well known that the majority of mall visitors, not only in Kolkata but also in India more broadly, will never purchase any item from inside the mall, for they lack the financial capacity to do so. Visiting a mall is more likely to be a form of leisure activity, a way to hang out with friends, and this also seems to be the case with South City mall. However, some of the visitors of South City mall, mainly middle-class Kolkatans, frequent the food court on the top floor, to either meet up for a cup of tea/coffee or to try the food served in the various Indian and international fast-food outlets. Others, like many of my interlocutors and friends, go for grocery shopping at Spencer's, which constitutes perhaps the most successful store of the mall and is located in the basement. Others occasionally go to watch a movie in the mall's multiplex.



Photo 3.1, by author: South City Mall and Anwar Shah Road



Photo 3.2 by author: The interior of South City Mall

Outside the mall, street vendors (the so-called *hawkers*) take over the better part of the footpath with their makeshift stalls selling snacks and beverages. Anwar Shah Road, the thoroughfare adjacent to the mall, is always congested with all sorts of vehicles. Cars, buses, yellow ambassador taxis typical of Kolkata, auto-rickshaws, and other modes of transport cater to the transportation requirements of the mall's visitors as well as of its employees. There are two gates for cars for both the mall and the residential complex, both adding to Anwar Shah's traffic. The exit lies just next to the west end of the mall. The entrance leads to the mall's parking, the South City residency and the International School. Security guards desperately try to control the traffic and manage the crowd with cordons, thereby, preventing anyone from being hit by the cars while trying to cross from one side of the entrance to the other. Insistent sounds of klaxon and exhaust-gas fill the atmosphere!

Beside the car entrance to the east of the mall lies South City's eastern wall. Just outside the wall, there is a street just wide enough for a single car to pass through at a time. Its crossing with Anwar Shah Road is crowded throughout the day. As one turns from Anwar Shah Road into this narrow street, one cannot help but notice that it has been rendered narrower still by the many

stalls flanking the mouth of the lane. On the right side, along the wall, stand a few stalls serving hot beverages like tea and coffee, and selling a number of Bengali, Hindi and English dailies. Fieldwork often used to begin from this point after having a cup of tea and buying the ‘Telegraph’. The left side of the road is replete with eateries, serving a range of fast-food delicacies such as noodles, momos and samosas (*shingara* in Bangla). Apart from mall visitors, these eateries are also frequented by mall employees, from Spencers’ and other stores as well, who have their lunch there or a cup of tea or a cigarette whenever they have their breaks. At the crossing, this mix of people includes, apart from mall visitors and employees, youths who come for a cigarette and other working people who work in the area, such as call center employees and brokers whom I also often encountered there.



Photo 3.3 by author: GK Bansal and Anwar Shah Road crossing

On the side opposite to the wall, that is the eastern side, lies Poddar Nagar. There some small stores dealing in electronics, and others that sell sweets can be found; and further to the south, Poddar Nagar’s Kali temple stands next to a banana tree. Further to the south, along the eastern side of the South City wall, from which trees have sprouted with roots threatening to dismantle the wall, one can find rickshaws lined up and waiting to take passengers to Jadavpur 8B, the bus stop opposite Jadavpur University. The southern edge of the road leads to Katju Nagar and Katju Nagar/Poddar Nagar pond. Here, near the pond the face of the area changes. A big rubbish vat, public urinals and stalls with people dozing in them meet one’s eyes. At night, the area is dark

owing to the lack of proper lighting. There are also no houses in this part of the street. In daytime, the plying of rickshaws and cars creates clouds of dust.

Just before reaching the pond, at the eastern side of the road, lies G. K. Bansal, the dilapidated building of a once big factory that produced colored stoned chips used for mosaic floors. It is precisely because of the existence of this factory that the narrow road, which leads from Anwar Shah Road to Katju Nagar pond, is known to local people as G.K. Bansal *goli* (meaning street/alley/lane in Bengali). G.K. Bansal along with Bengal Lamp further to the east, constitutes the sole remnant of the area's industrial past. Katju Nagar and Poddar Nagar are among the smallest former refugee colonies, comprising around 200 plots and around 4000 inhabitants each. Both belong to Ward 93, adjacent to the well-off neighbourhoods of Lake Garden and Jodhpur Park to the north of Anwar Shah Road.



Photo 3.4 by author: GK Bansal road



Photo 3.5 by author: Poddar Nagar/ Katju Nagar pond

Before I began my fieldwork there, Katju Nagar was represented as «a claustrophobic place» by a friend who stays in Jadavpur area. At that time, unfortunately, I did not ask him to amplify this. However, retrospectively, I assume that it was a comment about both Katju Nagar's built environment and its residents' mentality. Or in a sense, it was implied that the built environment of Katju Nagar partly shaped its residents' mentality. I will not discuss Katju Nagar's residents' mentality now, but I must say though that from the beginning of fieldwork this «claustrophobic» feeling was indeed induced. This was largely created by the neighbourhood's built environment. Its apartment buildings (either three or four-stories) both the ones that are adjacent and the ones that are on the opposite sides of the alley, stand too close to one another, thus blocking the sunlight and the circulation of air. Apart from the very narrow lanes in between the buildings, an element which has been retained from the colony structure, there are other reasons accounting for that which I will refer to in the following chapter on promoting.



Photo 3.6 by author:

A Katju Nagar's by-lane: A 35-storied residential tower of South City residency complex can be discerned in the background

In both Katju Nagar and Poddar Nagar, apart from the multi-storied buildings (among which only few contain a garage for keeping the private vehicles), new small shops, offices and call centers have cropped up. However, these shops are much less in number compared with those in other former colony neighbourhoods like Netaji Nagar and Bijoygarh. The small shops include restaurants, sweet shops, cafes, electronic stores, while one can also find plenty of tailor shops, and many makeshift tea stalls. Moreover, there are nursing homes and tuition centers as well.

These are all markers of Katju Nagar and Poddar Nagar's ongoing and far-from- complete transformation which began in the early 2000s. As it has been testified by many of my interlocutors, a rapid and radical change happened in these areas at that time. The majority of houses were demolished to pave way for promoting. This was enabled because from 1999 onwards the plot holders of all former refugee colonies acquired the right to sell their properties. At the same time, it was prompted by the construction of South City residency and shopping mall. It is precisely Katju Nagar's and Poddar Nagar's socio-spatial transformation that is the key focus of this thesis.



Photo 3.7, by author: A typical three-storied promoted building in Poddar Nagar

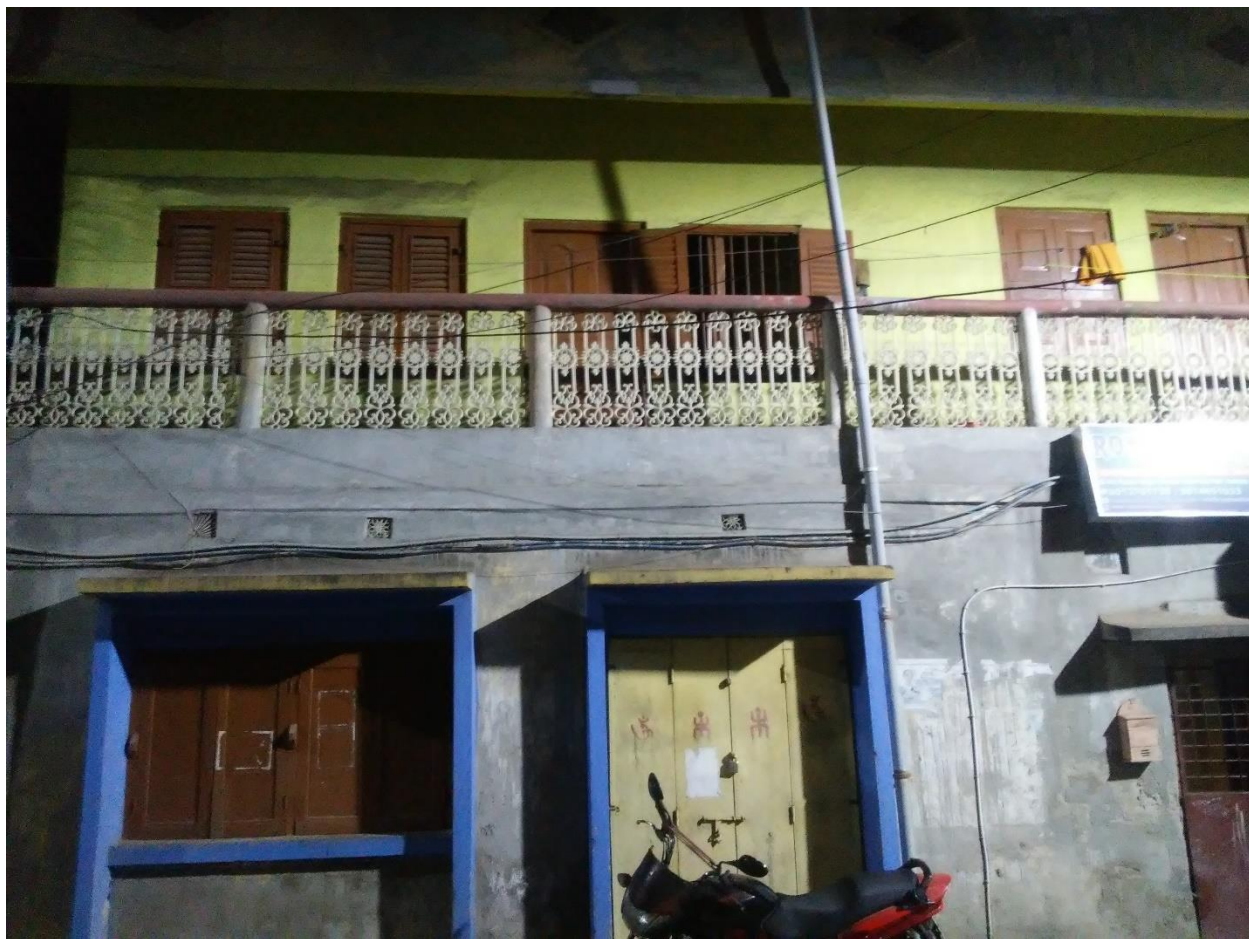


Photo 3.8, by author: One of the few remaining old houses in Poddar Nagar

Despite class disparities and caste hierarchies, the majority of the population among the Bangals in both Katju Nagar and Poddar Nagar can be designated as lower middle class and middle class. On the one hand, I encountered people working as charter accountants or holding government jobs, and on the other hand, I met people working as drivers. Apart from their professions and ownership of property, a marker of their middle classness was the dependence among many of them on the labours of not only maidservants, but also masons and carpenters. As Poddar Nagar's Kali temple's Brahmin priest eloquently articulated:

The rickshaw-walas of this area and the maidservants who come here, mostly come by the three (railway) lines that have diverged from Jadavpur–Canning, Lakhikantapur and Diamond Harbour. Mostly who come from these places are the unorganized labours like the carpenters, masons (...) Since the economic condition of our area was changing, houses were being built, these people came here to work. The maidservants come to work here. Right from dawn.

He jokingly added that:

Now this has become the heart... every morning I wake up to the sounds of discussions between my wife, my mother and my paternal aunt about whether she (the maidservant) has come or not. This has become a big question for us now

Almost all the families I encountered in both Katju Nagar and Poddar Nagar send their children to English-medium schools, not very differently from what urban middle-classes do in the rest of Kolkata and in other Indian metros more broadly. I had the chance to meet a boy from a poorer background and I heard about another one who also attended a private school in South Kolkata. This shows that there is a trend also among lower middle class and working-class families to send their children in an English-medium school. Among them, the most popular ones in South Kolkata are: Delhi Public School, South Point owned by Birla group, Pathabhawan, and Nava Nalanda. Some Katju Nagar and Poddar Nagar residents send their kids to these schools.

Katju Nagar still has a government school (until class 12) called Swarnamoyee school (for both male and female students). It lies opposite to Katju Nagar club. I did not have the chance to discuss with any of the school's students, but I was informed that there are only a few students who attend the school and the majority of them come from a poor background.

Poddar Nagar used to have three schools (one primary school, one high school for girls, and one high school for boys). The high school for boys has been taken over by the government and converted into a government-run school for orphans. The high school for girls has been made English medium government-run and the primary school's building has been demolished to be constructed in a new manner. However, it appears that government schools are increasingly closing down not only in South Kolkata but elsewhere in the city too. This has also been observed by Sengupta (2019):

When we visited some colonies of south Calcutta, we were told that being 'Bengali medium', the colony schools no longer attracted students from the locality. Upper-middle-class or middle-class families send their children to the English-medium schools.

However, both Poddar Nagar and Katju Nagar, like other Kolkata localities, experienced not only the consequences of the Indian banknote demonetization in 2016 (which, as I will explain in the following chapter, impeded the real estate driven development of these areas), but also the impact

of the economic crisis which was also deeply felt everywhere in Kolkata. This resulted in the migration of the youth to other states of India or abroad. The devastating effects of unemployment, economic crisis and the migration of the youth were recurrent issues that were cause for concern for many of the interlocutors. For instance, a Katju Nagar resident in her early 60s commented thus:

The lack of young generation, people from young generation, is something that is becoming acute. This is because of a lack of jobs in the state (of West Bengal). So many of the educated children have to leave (to go) either outside the state or a small number of people also have to go outside the country. Now, this has created this problem that the elderly, (like those) above 50, are more in number in this place. And they are not being looked after properly in some places. The children are outside; some of the people don't have children.

Another example of youth migration I came to know about was the case of the 30-year-old son of a gentleman from Poddar Nagar, who had been working abroad as a chef in a cruise boat. Yet, there have been some other young people who opted to stay in the neighbourhood. One stayed with his parents and as an engineer, he has been helping in the construction of their self-made multi-storied apartment building. The other entered into a partnership with friends and opened a Chinese restaurant in Bikramgarh. In any case, the neighbourhoods, especially Katju Nagar, are dominated by people in their 50s or 60s, the second generation of refugee Bangals.

Due to promoting, various people, not necessarily with an East Bengali origin, have come to live in both Poddar Nagar and Katju Nagar, by either buying or renting an apartment. Among the renters, there is a sizeable number of students and mall employees. I came to know four of these outsiders. The relations among the 'original inhabitants' and the 'newcomers' will be the focus of the last section of chapter four.



Photo 3.9, by author: A former two-storied house being demolished to pave the way for multiplex apartments



Photo 3.10, by author: An already demolished house

An ambivalent place

As has been corroborated by some references, the demolition of Usha quarters in 2005, the eviction and displacement of Usha workers and the concomitant construction of South City Mall and Residency complex did not provoke considerable protests or any serious organized resistance from the adjacent former colonies, including Katju Nagar and Poddar Nagar.

In retrospect, many Katju Nagar residents harbor an ambiguous feeling about ‘residing outside South City’s wall’. On the one hand, they know that it is a matter of status to reside next to one of Kolkata’s most desired residential complexes and Eastern India’s largest mall. At the same time, they have also benefited financially as the value of their property has substantially increased.

On the other hand, due to their property’s increased valuation, they are now obliged to pay a higher tax. Moreover, the presence of South City and its residents has brought about an increase in the price of groceries at the local bazaar. Katju Nagar residents explain that some South City residents purchase their vegetables, fish and meat from the Katju Nagar/Poddar Nagar bazaar on a weekly basis, not only because the produce is fresh, but also because it is cheaper there compared with the shops inside the mall. However, given their higher purchasing power, the South City residents just buy the goods without bargaining with the sellers, and, as a result, the prices are kept as high as possible. This signifies that the residents of Katju Nagar have lost their power to bargain and reduce the cost of things in the local market. Consequently, their daily cost of living has increased. Moreover, a few Katju Nagar residents accuse South City residents of throwing their garbage at Katju Nagar’s garbage vat and, more broadly, of causing pollution with the huge number of ACs installed in the apartments.

Moreover, residents of Katju Nagar complained about the eateries situated along G.K. Bansal Road which, they allege, are also polluting the place with their waste. Another common problem that the neighborhoods face is the lack of parking places. This is because of the mall visitors’ cars that occupy most of the available parking spots nearby.

Another palpable change after the creation of South City has, in fact, been the increase of traffic, with all sorts of vehicles crossing both Katju Nagar and Poddar Nagar. A Poddar Nagar resident eloquently described how this has brought about an accumulation of dust in his apartment:

After the making of South City Mall, specifically in our neighbourhood, the traffic of two-wheeler (and) four-wheeler (vehicles have increased) a lot. And rickshaws (have also increased) a lot. We

had never expected this before, that from 6 in the morning till 12 at night so many vehicles are coming and going (through this neighbourhood). And the dust! You can't imagine that in my house— I live on the 2nd floor. There is a window (but it) remains shut. However, since my verandah faces the road, I have to keep its door open. After 2-3 days we can understand that the handle type of thing that's attached to our bed, the TV, the things which are black (in colour) – on (all of) them we can see a layer (*prolep*) of (accumulated) dust.

The congestion of vehicles and crowds of people, who either pass through the area, visit the mall, or work or reside in the area, has become a matter of concern for many residents depending on their respective perspectives.

The first perspective was from a Katju Nagar resident who compared the experience of passing through G K Bansal Road at present with that of the past. In the past, she said that this road wasn't used by women and girls while coming to this area because they were afraid of it. After the daily closing time of Usha factory, the part of the road near G K Bansal was empty, deserted and dark since there were no houses around. Hence, people used to be afraid not only of thieves but also of ghosts, which were believed to be residing in the few trees next to the road. Although this particular stretch of road close to G K Bansal factory remains relatively dark at night, after the creation of South City, it has been more illuminated. Therefore, the fear of ghosts and thieves has disappeared.¹⁶ According to the same interlocutor, although the past fear has become obsolete, a different type of fear related to that road, especially for women, is there. The current fear has been induced by the overall congestion created by the huge number of strangers, the shops and the cars which flock to G K Bansal Road.

The strangers crossing the neighbourhoods, most of them visiting South City Mall, apart from the congestion they are believed to cause, they were critiqued by a group of Poddar Nagar residents in their mid-60s on moral grounds. This criticism stemmed from the judging of the strangers', especially women's behaviour and dressing style. As the first interlocutor stated:

(..)They are travelling by rickshaws wearing vulgar dresses. To be frank, you all must also have seen it. This isn't something new. In future something more will happen than this that is (already) happening now. We have to be prepared accordingly because, in the matter of dresses, everyone

¹⁶ It must be stressed that stories and experiences of ghosts are still common in West Bengal. Therefore, the story narrated above should not be considered as something striking.

wears whatever (s)he prefers to. If I like the dress you are wearing, certainly you will also feel good (about it). (But), if I don't like your dress, you don't care (about what I think of it). This kind of thinking has developed. Especially amongst the women, the girls, who for the sake of fashion, wear western dresses. Slowly (there is a tendency among women) to wear as skimpy clothes as possible while going out. But when I'm walking in the street with my elder sister or my paternal uncle's wife (*kakima*) or my maternal aunt (*mashi*), if such (a woman dressed in such short clothes) comes in front (of us), we feel a kind of uneasiness. These things, you know. These matters are happening everywhere. This is not for just you and me. In order to stay in society, one has to set oneself accordingly. One has to adjust with the (changing) times.

Drawing comparison between what he perceived as the overarching culture and morality of the people who used to cross the neighbourhood in the past to go to their working place and the respective of the ones who cross it at present, he commented thus:

Before, (people) used to go to a workplace (*kormosthol*). Now, (people) are going to a (mall only) to have fun ('*phurti korte jacche*') ¹⁷(...) At that time, the rush (was that of) decent/civilized (*bhodro*) people. Now, it is that of indecent/uncivilized (*obhodro*) ones.

The same concern was raised by another Poddar Nagar resident who, being ambivalent about his neighbourhood, added that it was disconcerting to see young women not only wearing western dresses but also smoking in public:

Then, changes have occurred in the dressing style (colloquial expression '*poshak-ashak*'). Western (style) has arrived. Our brothers and sisters, especially our sisters– the kind (of dresses they used to wear) like sarees, frocks– frocks of those times I mean– (isn't worn) by today's children. Various types of western dresses have come. Let me tell you specifically of our neighbourhood. This big market in front of my house– South City Mall is just nearby– we even feel awkward taking our elder sisters by the road adjacent to South City Mall. My parents are no more. But those who are older than us, (we feel awkward escorting them by that street). The young girls smoke and wear odd dresses. These things are there. This isn't just happening here, but all-over India. This is the general trend.

¹⁷ The word '*phurti*' which means 'to have fun, to enjoy' is often used with a slightly negative connotation. Furthermore, the implied negative undertone of this word is reflected in the intonation of the word while it is delivered.

While they both acknowledged that novel cultural practices brought about neoliberal globalization, such as western dressing and smoking represent a general trend in Kolkata and in urban India more broadly, the fact that they encounter such behaviours on a daily basis in their neighbourhood, made them increasingly feeling more ambivalent about it. Moreover, they sought to dissociate themselves from the carriers of such practices, that is other middle-class individuals whom they perceive as being influenced by “modern” lifestyles which they deem unethical. In the course of other conversations that followed they juxtaposed to these practices, other practices such as volunteering “social work” for the neighbourhood as well as the value of sociality and the joint family ideal. These are indicative of the moral values of a section of both Poddar Nagar and Katju Nagar residents above their 50s.

Likewise, in another part of India, in Gujarat’s Baroda, Van Wessel (2004) has shown how members of the city’s middle class morally evaluate consumption culture as part of a broader criticism of ‘modern life’ experience. For instance, practices such as eating out, buying expensive clothes, eating more than ordinary portion, going to movies are heavily criticized, deemed as unnecessary practices and are regarded as debased materialism. She shows, though, that their stance towards consumption is more ambivalent since they do not deny the necessity of having material goods and in fact, they participate in a status competition among their neighbors (not family members as in other contexts). At the same time, these practices are disapproved and efforts for self-realization through consumption are heavily criticized. Instead, they counterpose the values of spiritual and social orientations drawing on collective aspects such as the sociality and empathy of village life, the solidarity of the caring joint family, and simplicity. In this sense, Barodian middle-class subjectivities dissociate themselves individually from what they consider an increasingly immoral society (Van Wessel 2004).

However, the changing moralities in Poddar Nagar and especially Katju Nagar is not only related with the influence of South City mall and its visitors. It is also a consequence of promoting Before promoting began, a close-knit supervising/guiding structure, a form of social policing used to characterize the colonies just as other Kolkata’s neighbourhoods (or *paras* in Bengali). This allowed for the elders of the colony to have more respect and the power to guide the younger generations. The younger generations were afraid to do many things out of respect for the elders; for instance, they would not smoke or drink alcohol inside the colony, and they used to be afraid

that if someone saw them smoking then their parents would be informed. As a Katju Nagar left leaning interlocutor mentioned:

Before, it was unthinkable that anyone would drink inside the neighbourhood. If anyone wanted to smoke, he used to go outside the neighbourhood to smoke. They used to be afraid on seeing the elders. They feared what their parents at home would say (if they came to know about their smoking habit). (...) Nobody used to date inside the neighbourhood.

The coming up of renters from other areas because of the construction of the new flats, since the early 2000s brought about the change of the character of the colony and along with it the dissolvment of the social policing. As a result, according to the same interlocutor it is not only the visitors of the mall who openly smoke or drink alcohol in the neighbourhood's public spaces, but also the renters, especially the youth:

Now, even girls smoke when they come to the tea shops. The young people who have come to stay in the rented flats here, they are doing jobs; they smoke at the tea shops. The girls who come here because of the mall also buy cigarettes and smoke. They are doing this publicly. They are drinking beside the pond here. They are stealthily openly drinking. (...) Now, there is no control of any sort. This is a big change

The local institutions: the social club and the colony committee

However, although the old type of social control is not exercised anymore, at the same time, especially in Katju Nagar there is some level of social policing inside the bounds of the locality which mostly aims at restricting activities, which are considered unethical, such as excessive alcohol drinking. As a Poddar Narag resident revealed:

(...) in Poddar Nagar you will find a lot of rowdy, anti-social elements (uses the words '*gunda*' meaning 'hooligans, gangsters, henchmen'; and '*bodmaish*' meaning 'disobedient, not law abiding, evil/bad'). You can't find these in Katju Nagar. In these aspects, Katju Nagar is very organized. At evening, you won't see anyone sitting and drinking alcohol in 3-4 different places in Katju Nagar. Such things happen outside their neighbourhood, beside the playground.

This has been enabled because of the presence of two local institutions, namely the social club and the colony committee that seek to exert some level of social and territorialized control. While the social club is a defining feature of most urban neighbourhoods, the colony committee office constitutes an informal institution peculiar to the former refugee colonies.

The activities of social clubs in Kolkata and in West Bengal more broadly are diverse. First of all, the building they are housed in is used for leisure. Neighbourhood residents gather to play cards or to chat, there is often gym in the building and other sport facilities available. Second, the club is responsible for the organization of religious festivals and other sociocultural and sport events. Third, the clubs are also responsible for «social work». For instance, they organize blood donation drives, health camps or clothes distribution. What is less apparent is, as Correa has aptly argued, that clubs also play a role as important local institutional governance actors, “clubs were found to perform a variety of governance functions ranging from mediating domestic disputes, to resolving disagreements between *para* (neighbourhood) members and ‘outsiders’, to settling inheritance disputes” (Cornea 2019; 2016: 63). Lastly, although clubs are considered as ‘non-political’ institutions, in fact they have political leverage. Recently, there has been considerable effort from the ruling party to encroach on the local clubs and, through them, to control the respective locality politically and socially. For this purpose, the Chief Minister of West Bengal has financially supported more than 20000 clubs. However, both BJP and CPI(M) are also competing for the control of some of these clubs (Dutta 2018).

Katju Nagar’s club, Jagriti Sangha consists of nine designated posts (among them are the president, vice-president, secretary, assistant secretary, sports/games secretary, cultural secretary who also organizes drama competition). According to the club policy, the nine people who constitute the executive body have to be from Katju Nagar. The club has around 150 members, 50 among them are youth. The club houses a gym in the first floor and also has a well-organized library. However, neither of them is frequented by the members. What is more common is that in the club, aged people congregate mostly in the evening and play cards or carrom. The club used to organize sports events, blood donation camps, cultural programs, and theatrical performances. However, there has been observed a lack of participation among the members, especially the youth. It appears that both Trinamool and CPM, which still has some leverage in the area, are competing for its control. It must be point out, though, that the party affiliation of the club committee members

is never overtly manifested and inside or outside the clubs, symbols or flags of political parties are not to be found.



Photo 3.11, by author: Jagriti Sangha (Katju Nagar's club)



Photo 3.12, by author: Prabhati Sangha (Poddar Nagar's club)

Poddar Nagar's club, Prabhati Sangha, has a different policy since its committee members, as well as its members, can be not only from Poddar Nagar (including the 'newcomers') but also from other neighbourhoods. Remarkably, many times its president and secretary have been from Katju Nagar. Prabhati Sangha has more than 500 members, but it appears that women are not eligible to become club members. Unlike Katju Nagar's club, it rents out the club house for marriage and other ceremonies. Not very differently than Jagriti Sangha, it is frequented by people who play cards and carrom. The club does not have any sports equipment. Like Katju Nagar's club, it used to organize sports events. In Prabhati Sangha residents of Poddar Nagar can address property disputes. It must be stressed though that there is a peculiarity in both the neighbourhoods' organization of Durga Puja, the most important Bengali festival. While in most Kolkata neighbourhoods it is organized by the local club, in Poddar Nagar and Katju Nagar it is organized by the respective colony committees which form a different committee called, *Durgotsav Committee*. It is noteworthy that the latter committee is selected, not elected.

Colony committees, as it has been shown in Chapter one, used to have a vital role not only in shaping the colonies' built environment but also in leading their socio-political life. Their authority was so pervasive that they even used to interfere in inner family matters. According to the Poddar Nagar Kali temple's priest: «There was a time, when the colony committee used to interfere also in domestic quarrels between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law». Moreover, according to the same interlocutor, colony committees used to be responsible for handling domestic issues related to the division of plots. Such issues were not uncommon in the area:

Problems between brothers used to happen. This was natural. After the father's death when the land had to be divided, there were problems between brothers. Then the colony committee had to come to solve the problem of who would stay on the east side and who on the south side. They did the demarcations and according to that they (the 3 brothers) stayed. This has happened in all the plots.

As soon as promoting began, the nature of the colony committees changed profoundly. For, given that they were largely controlled by CPM they served to the latter's urban developmental agenda. They were co-opted by the new constellations of power in the localities, that is the party-promoters nexus, thus reinforcing promoting. But this will be the subject of the next chapter.

In the aftermath of promoting, that is once promoting was largely complete, colony committees slowly and steadily lost their prominence. First, because of the radical change in the character of the neighbourhoods which are not deemed as colonies anymore. Second, given their orientation towards the CPM, it appears that their rival party, Trinamool, being in power since 2011, has sought to undermine them or instead capture them if possible. If the accounts of some of Katju Nagar's committee members affiliated with CPM are to be deemed reliable, the growing decline of CPM's influence in the area has led to the dismantling of several other distinct local committees, most probably with the purpose of transferring more responsibilities to the police and the municipal authorities largely controlled by the party in power. More particularly, the Katju Nagar/ Poddar Nagar pukur (pond) committee, responsible for the cleansing of the pond, and a committee named *Thana Sommonnoy Committee*, responsible for the supervision of the pujas, including the immersion of the idols, were rendered obsolete a few years back. Katju Nagar's committee is and has always been CPM dominated while at present it is not clear if Poddar Nagar's committee members are affiliated to any political parties.

At present, both Poddar Nagar and Katju Nagar's colony committees are housed in old brick-made buildings, apparently not very well-maintained, both of them lying near the respective clubs at the very heart of the respective neighbourhoods. Katju Nagar and Poddar Nagar's colony committees are both elected bodies, comprising nine posts. However, elections do not always happen at fixed intervals. Notably, as I will discuss at length in the last section of chapter four, the newcomers of both neighbourhoods are not entitled to be voted for in the committees. Only the 'old' inhabitants hold that right exclusively. Despite being undermined, apart from organizing religious festivals such as Durga Puja and other sociocultural events, they remain important for a number of reasons, which are related to urban development through promoting that will be discussed below.



Photo 3.13, by author: The building where Poddar Nagar's colony committee is housed

First and foremost, their importance lies in that both colony committees continue to keep records of old land related government documents. In light of the nationwide NRC controversy, that was happening at that time, a Poddar Nagar's colony committee member highlighted that:

this place [the colony committee's office] looks very small, as if it is nothing, but this is an important place. Because it keeps all the old land related government documents. Meaning, if anyone has to prove where one stays, the oldest document to prove that will be with the colony committee. Those of Katju Nagar are with Katju Nagar colony committee. The government also has one copy of these documents. However, we can't go to the government directly. There are various processes (to do that). Now, those (copies) that the government has (can be accessed) through various processes. The government can also make them disappear. It happens around the world, (so) it can happen in our country as well. Having made your documents disappear, if the government suddenly says, "Yours aren't there." What will you do? It can happen. Maybe it gets burnt in a fire.

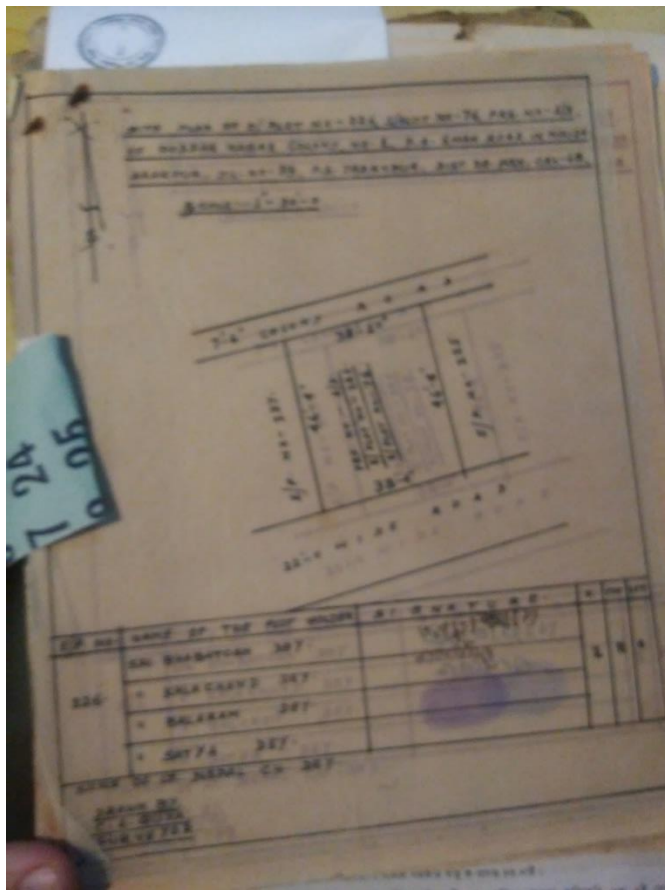


Photo 3.14, by author: An example of a record of a property document kept in Poddar Nagar's colony committee

Second, colony committees act as advisory bodies. They give advice to residents for a series of legal issues related to property, including mutation of property, and cases in which the plot holders have not got the title deed yet. Importantly, colony committees are still approached in case of promoting. As the aforementioned Brahmin priest explained:

Who needs the committee? Plot holders like me need it. Why do we need it? Suppose I have solved the litigation problem of my plot, all the brothers and sisters have adjusted amongst ourselves. Now I need promoting. Before promoting, my deeds, documents, papers, etc have to be set-up/organized. Whom should I approach then? Then I have to go to the secretary of the colony committee. In our neighbourhood, there are still 3-4 plots which are disputed plots. These are completely legal matters. Since I was involved in this thing for some time, that's why I know these matters. There are some plots which are disputed. Extremely disputed. I mean, tomorrow they can be evicted... government can tell them to leave.

Moreover, colony committees are approached by residents who have property disputes with their respective family members and this will be the subject of the last chapter. At least as far as Poddar Nagar is concerned, it appears that most residents avoid addressing their family disputes over property to the club. Although the latter is more powerful, given its political leverage, and its direct or indirect links with the party office, and this signifies that the dispute may be solved more effectively, many residents rather opt for the colony committee. There are two reasons for this. First, it is alleged that one may have to pay money to the club or the party office in order to be helped to solve the dispute. Second, given that many of the club's committee members are outsiders by addressing the disputes only to Poddar Nagar's colony committee, their family problems are 'kept within'. Apart from this, what can be inferred from the quote below from a Poddar Nagar resident is that, a strong colony committee might act as a counter weight to the power of the club, in which usually party politics pervades, and their way of handling family disputes is believed to be more just than that of the club and/or the party office's way:

Our target is the colony committee. If this becomes strong... you can't imagine... see, in every place there will be party politics. Ok? Where a colony committee doesn't have any existence or strength, there party politics will enter in every matter. (Say,) a dispute is going on somewhere, they (will reach there). What do they want? They want money. Nothing else. If you and I stay in the same house, and there is a dispute (between us); if I go and report to them that these things have happened between my elder or younger brother and I, (they will say,) "Ok, it will be done [meaning,

the issue will be solved].” (And) even at the very beginning (they) will ask for a certain amount of money (in return). And the talk will obviously be in favour of the person who gives money. If I give money, the talk will be in my favour even if I’m wrong. (And) even if you are right, it will be against you. But colony committee isn’t like that. Colony committee (listens) to both sides. If I come and complain against you, or you complain against me– they [the colony committee] won’t (make any judgment) based solely on your statement. They will make both the people sit face to face and talk. Then they will ask both of them to solve the problem mutually. The colony committee doesn’t have any legal authority in its hands. A colony committee doesn’t have a court of law’s authority. A colony committee can facilitate a mutual understanding (between the complainants) in a healthy (*shushtho*) atmosphere (*poribesh*). Otherwise, if you want to fight between yourselves, they will go there and stop (the fight). But (they can’t pass a verdict) against anyone like a court of law.

However, further research is required to find out how property disputes are being handled in Poddar Nagar’s club and in which ways the latter is related to the party in power.

Third, both colony committees act as mediators between the municipal authorities and the police on the one hand and the residents on the other, as they used to do in the past. For instance, Poddar Nagar’s colony committee despite lacking any legal authority, they occasionally intervene between the police and the residents concerning local issues such as the parking in the area. Likewise, Katju Nagar’s colony committee often mediates between the residents and the municipal authorities regarding issues such as the water supply in the neighbourhood. Moreover, Poddar Nagar’s colony tries to fix problems regarding water connection and electricity in the neighbourhood.

Fourth, at least as far as Katju Nagar’s colony committee is concerned, along with the representatives of Katju Nagar’s club they manage the relations with the promoters/developers who work in the area and I often encountered local promoters frequenting in the club. It was alleged by a Katju Nagar’s left leaning interlocutor that it is precisely because of the “moral strength” of the colony committee that the unethical activities often conducted by promoters are restricted and the relative peacefulness of the locality is ensured:

The developers are doing a lot of work here. In other areas, the kind of problems and illegal activities that occur due to the developers, here, still now, the developer’s say/ authority is not tolerated. At some point, the developers who work here are dominated (by the colony committee).

In other places, the developers have become (the dominating authority). Today I have brought my mother-in-law from my in-law's place. There [where interviewee's in-laws stay] – my brother-in-law is also a developer– the kind of dominance the developers have, that is less here. Again there, the kind of financial support that the developers provide to the club, the committee, the temple, etc. – they give it so that they can work as they want to without facing any hindrance– we don't have that (kind of financial support from the developers here). As a result, our colony committee has a lot of moral strength; and it can be said that in our area the law-and-order situation is quite peaceful compared with their area, where violence, murder etc. are a regular affair. Those things don't happen here. We don't demand any money from the developers here. Similarly, the kind of financial support, say their colony committee, the club, the temple etc. derives from the developers, we don't get that here. And we don't even want it. As a result, the committees we have here are morally stronger (than those there). There isn't any doubt in this matter. You can say that we enjoy this, or we try to maintain this (moral strength). I think, this change is comparatively more in our area than in the other areas. For instance, you see that many developers say, "We will give you money, get this thing done according to our instructions."

However, regardless of the validity of the above statement, the dynamics of the relations between Katju Nagar's colony committee and club with the local promoters require further research.

The last section of the following chapter will show that the territorialized control through the organization of East Bengali and Bengali religious festivals and worships and other sociocultural events that the colony committees and clubs exert, should be understood as part of the old residents' effort to reaffirm their control over their neighbourhood at the expense of the 'newcomers'.

Chapter 4

Promoting

Section I: ‘Promoting Raj’¹⁸ under Left Front government

Real estate transformation of the former refugee colonies through promoting and the role of CPM

Promoting¹⁹, constitutes a peculiar form of city-building that is based on the unison of small capital. It involves on the one side the landlord who either owns a vacant plot of land and/or already has a house on it which is bound to be demolished, and on the other side a promoter (or developer/contractor) with whom he signs an agreement. According to the contract agreement, the promoter is responsible for constructing a new multistoried building and, henceforth, owns 50% of the plot and usually 50% of the newly created flats. The rest of the plot and the flats belong to the landlord. For example, if there is only one owner and the promoter builds 8 flats, then the former will take four flats and the later the other four. A usual part of the agreement is that whilst promoting is going on and until the construction is completed, the promoter is liable for providing a rented accommodation to the landlord. In the West Bengal Housing Industry Regulation Act 2017 (WBHIRA), the promoter is a person who:

- i) Promoter a person who constructs or causes to be constructed an independent building or a building consisting of apartments, or converts an existing building or a part thereof into apartments, for the purpose of selling all or some of the apartments to other persons and includes his assignees; or
- ii) A person who develops land into a project, whether or not the person also constructs structures on any of the plots, for the purpose of selling to other persons all or some of the plots in the said project, whether with or without structures thereon; or
- v) any other person who acts himself as a builder, colonizer, contractor, developer, estate developer or by any other name or claims to be acting as the holder of a power of attorney from the owner of the land on which the building or apartment is constructed or plot is developed for sale; or
- vi) such other person who constructs any building or apartment for sale to the general public

¹⁸ I borrow this term from Banerjee (2003: 219)

¹⁹ Promoting is precisely what is known in the Greek context as *antiparohi*

They way the system of promoting operated in South Kolkata should be understood in the context of Left Front's housing reforms that were inaugurated since the early 1990s and put the private sector to lead the construction of housing (Sengupta 2007: 968). Initiatives such as public-private partnership housing, the development of new Townships using private capital and foreign investments that placed emphasis upon the housing needs of the upper middle class and sections of the middle class have already been discussed in the relevant literature (Sengupta 2007; Roy 2010). Lower middle-class and middle-class need for housing was supposed to be catered by small scale promoters. The legal framework that sought to regulate promoters' work was promulgated in the West Bengal Act XX of 1993[THE WEST BENGAL BUILDING (REGULATION OF PROMOTION OF CONSTRUCTION AND TRANSFER BY PROMOTERS) ACT]. The role of small promoters and the implications of the system of promoting in urban neighbourhoods, in the context of Kolkata's and more broadly India's urban restructuring, remain unexamined.

Promoting was established as the dominant form of urban development in most of the former refugee colonies, stretching from Anwar Shah Road to the edges of South Kolkata. After the 1990s, these areas have gradually developed into middle-class suburbs and became 'increasingly affluent' (Donner 2016: 10). To large extent, this was enabled by their rising property values. As Sengupta (2019: 5) observes, property prices skyrocketed:

With the extension of the Eastern Metropolitan bypass (E.M. Bypass) and the metro rail, the colony areas have become prime locations in the city. The property prices have skyrocketed and many of these colonies are now full of high rises, fancy restaurants and supermarkets catering to a well-to-do population.

Promoting began in earnest in early 2000s in the former refugee colonies of wards 93 and 95 where I conducted my fieldwork. As I was frequently told, the profile of the area underwent a sudden change. Majority of the old houses were demolished to pave the way for construction of the promoted multi-storied buildings. Shops, eateries and offices soon cropped up.

These areas were eyed by the promoters because first, the colony plots had already been amenable for selling in 1999 and second, thanks to their prime geographical location at the heart of the city. Lying just south of Anwar Shah Road, which is one of the city's most important arteries, and being very close to Jadavpur University, these areas are well connected with other parts of the city. Third, when in 2003 Jay Engineering land was sold off to a conglomeration of real estate

developers, named South City Limited, it was decided that South City residency and South City mall would soon be constructed there. The opening of South City Mall in January 2008 triggered a boom in property values, which in turn had an immediate impact having an immediate impact on rent prices and the cost of purchasing flats.

Although ostensibly this real estate transformation seemed to be solely driven by the promoters, representing a laissez-faire policy of the state, allowing the private sector to lead urban development, in reality this is only a part of the story. For, the whole project was masterminded by the CPM which was the one to offer patronage to the promoters. The party actively supported promoters' work, first, with the mobilization of CPM's informal party machinery including the CMP-controlled colony committees. As in other parts of the city well (e.g., in Dum Dum and Eastern Metropolitan Bypass) CPM cadres worked in collusion with the promoters (Banerjee 2003: 218-219; Roy 2003: 170-173). In the South Kolkata context, the colony committees acting as an extension of the party aided the promoters, who in many cases were party members, and the fact that many of CPM cadres hailed from South Kolkata localities seemed to have also played a decisive role. The way the nexus of promoters, CPM cadres and colony committees worked in South Kolkata is portrayed in the Bengali film titled *Sthaniya Sambaad/Spring in the Colony* (2009). Second, as it will be shown further below promoters' work enjoyed the backing of the formal state given CPM's control of public administration.

In hindsight, the calculations of the promoters and arguably of the party leaders proved to be accurate to the extent that this could be deemed as an example of a successful real estate speculation. As a female interlocutor – an old resident of a former colony located right next to South City's eastern wall – who has experienced the transformation, commented :

When this place got developed [meaning, South City was made], immediately a difference in the prices occurred here (from what they were before). Otherwise, those who had come in the beginning (they had bought flats at a) very (cheap rate) like 3, 4, 5 lakhs. Say 20 (years ago). As I said, if promoting started from 2000, that time (the costs were) like that. Now? 30, 35, 40 lakhs. (...) This is a very big matter. The costs increased a lot. Due to this, the promoters have become more attracted to this place. That's why whosoever, wherever they can, (are exhibiting a strong inclination) to do promoting.

This empirical fact was also corroborated by a group of middle-class interlocutors from Poddar Nagar, the neighbourhood adjacent to South City mall. They boasted about the rise in their property values due to the creation of South City Mall and the gated community. One of them, being the sole inheritor of paternal property, made a self-built G+3 storied building, comprising seven flats plus an office space in the ground floor. He was able to sell off three flats and rent out two more, while keeping one each for his sister's family and his own. A real estate developer told me that prices in these neighbourhoods have indeed risen, however they are not desirable for the wealthy or the upwardly mobile middle-class families, who prefer instead to purchase a flat in Jadavpur Junction area, or near Eastern Metropolitan Bypass. Furthermore, a resident of Katju Nagar stated that, after retirement, middle class people are able to purchase a flat in this area which is not extremely costly. According to an informant from Katju Nagar, a 77 square meter flat in a central area in Katju Nagar would cost around 36,000 euros. He also mentioned that a famous cricket player had bought a flat and stays in the locality along with his family.

Apart from the cost of buying a flat, renting out an apartment has also increased. When a resident, who lives just outside the South City wall and has not promoted his house, was asked about the changes in his locality, he highlighted the economic development commenting that: «Those who are renting out apartments, previously they used to charge 2500 rupees per month. Now they charge 6000 rupees».

Their prime location allows them to not only attract renters but also get the maximum rent. As I was told, one category of renters is the students of Jadavpur University who stay there as paying guests. The second category constitutes the employees from South City, who usually come from the fringes of South Kolkata and are financially weak. I was told that as many as twenty of them may stay in a rented apartment. This is possible because they work in different shifts at the South City Mall. In some of these localities there are renters from the Northeast States (e.g., Assam, Nagaland) who comprise the third category. As a resident of Bikramgarh— the neighbourhood which is the hub of inhabitants from the Northeastern States— informed me, the owners of the promoted flats maximize their profits by charging higher rent to the Northeasterns, considering them to be outsiders: «A person from the North East comes, he says, I will pay you 7000Rs rent. So naturally the landlord will rent off to him because he will earn 2000Rs more». ²⁰

²⁰ This is also corroborated by (Times of India 2017)

Flouting KMC (Kolkata Municipal Corporation) rules

Height	Front Open Space	Open space on side-1	Open space on side-2	Rear open space
7.5-10.0m	1.2m	1.2m	1.2m	3.0m
10.0-12.5m	1.2m	1.2m	1.5m	3.0m
12.5-15.5m	2.0m	1.5m	2.5m	4.0m
15.5-20.0m	3.5m	4.0m	4.0m	5.0m

(KMC 2009 building rules, page 39, Rule 62.)

The houses that had been built, before promoting began, had flouted KMC building rules. Kolkata Municipal Corporation (henceforth KMC) has under its jurisdiction Kolkata's metropolitan area and is responsible for the city's infrastructure and urban services. It was established in 1876 and is organized into administrative wards, each with an elected councilor, and governed by a Mayor-in-Council system (Roy 2010: 94). The refugee colonies of South Kolkata became integrated in the KMC with the Calcutta Municipal Corporation Act 1980, which came into effect in 1984. For according to KMC rules and regulations, the total floor area amenable to construction is contingent on the surface of the plot. This is estimated by a calculator called "Floor Area Ratio" or the letters "F.A.R" (being the abbreviation of the whole words "Floor Area Ratio"). It is the quotient obtained by dividing the total floor area on all floors of a building by the area of the plot. Importantly, the total sanctioned floor space is also based on a calculation that takes into account the width of the road in front of the premise. Secondly, for all constructions that fall under KMC a minimum open space in the front, on the two sides and in the rear of the premise should be kept. Moreover, a sanctioned plan²¹ has to be approved by KMC prior to the construction of the house.

²¹ Sanctioned plan means the site plan, building plan, building permit, service plan, parking and circulation plan, landscape plan, layout plan, zoning plan and such other plan and includes structural designs, if applicable, permissions such as environment permission and such other permissions, which are approved by the competent authority prior to start of a real estate project

According to KMC rules, any construction work carried out without a valid sanction plan is liable to demolition²². It appears that the CPM leaders of South Kolkata negotiated with KMC, which was at that time controlled by CPM. The result was that their houses remained unsanctioned because if KMC gave sanctions then there was a fear that if anyone filed a case against this, KMC would lose it. However, the houses could be regularized at the expense of fines and there was a tacit promise by the part of KMC that it will not implement any order of their demolition. As a 75-year-old CPM leader revealed:

At that time, we had made another demand to the Corporation (that) we (got) the (title) deed in '89, but many had made houses before that. Colony houses. No question of leaving (space). We have enjoyed as much as we could. I mustn't say this, (but) although we are [interviewee uses present tense, then shifts to past tense] refugees, we also had a lot of demands/ expectations (*Ben: Chahida*). Understood? So, the houses were made. Then they had appealed to the Corporation that the way in which permission is given to build planned houses on purchased lands, that same permission be given (to the houses already built in the colony). The Corporation then said that it wasn't possible for them to do that. The reason behind this being that those who have made houses after purchasing the land, they have to follow some rules of the Corporation. The amount of space that has to be left in the front and the back (is defined by the Corporation rules and regulations) – now, in the case of a colony, if the total (area) is allowed (to be utilized for constructing a house), then there can be a (legal) case against this (from the part of those who have made houses on purchased land by following all the Corporation regulations). So, the Corporation (authorities) said that they wouldn't be able to do that. (They said) “We can make a boundary for you all. But that's it. We can't give (any) permission (of the kind you are asking for).” (...)

The leaders had placed 2-3 proposals in front of the government. To the Corporation, they had demanded that the building plans be sanctioned. I told you that the Corporation had said, “This

²² Initially, after detection of such illegal construction, a stop work notice is served. There after KMC authority deals it under section 400 (I) or 400 (8) of KMCAct 1980. U/s 400 (1) the case is disposed off by hearing where the structure may be demolished / part demolished / fully retained considering degree of violation of rule as well as structural safety. The cases where there is danger and / or violation of rule, KMC authority may directly demolish the structure without giving chance of hearing U/S 400(8).

isn't possible." For purchased land there will be different rules and for colony there will be different. It creates a kind of division. The people of the purchased land can file a court case. In that case, the Corporation will lose (the court case). So, the Corporation didn't agree (...) So they have made the houses. Not in accordance with the Corporation rules. We had wanted to purge this. But the Corporation didn't allow this. It's that same motive that has slowly grown. The promoters are also doing the same (...)

Then what the Corporation did was that— previously when the Leftists were running this Corporation— then they had a discussion in the meeting of the House. What did they discuss? That the existing ones [colony houses] can't be demolished anymore. So, based on that a token fine was to be taken. If (someone) submits an application to the Corporation along with the token fine, then a permission will be given to him. Through this (process) the Corporation's revenues increased a lot.

When promoting began since the early 2000s the KMC rules were again systematically flouted. At that time, in the neighbourhoods concerned, given the small plots (around 3 kathas²³) and the narrow streets, if KMC rules were to be obeyed the maximum number of floors amenable for building would be two (G+1) and apart from that, the new apartments would have limited space because of the area's FAR. All the above would restrict opportunities for making profits.

To make promoting more profitable, promoters in collusion with the plot owners, backed by CPM's informal networks, and presumably with the tacit approval of KMC, developed multi-storied buildings more than two floors (usually G+2 or even G+3) by using the maximum space of the plot. «For the interest of the landlord and the developer. For this reason, they never make sanctioned plans», as the aforementioned CPM leader commented. Hence, it is an open secret that, not only in Katju Nagar and Poddar Nagar, but in the whole area of the former refugee colonies in South Calcutta, the majority of the multistoried buildings have not been constructed on the basis of sanctioned plans!

This has at least three major consequences. First, the fact that buildings have been constructed too close to each other can raise safety issues in case of an emergency such as earthquake or fire. Second, this blocks the circulation of wind and the sunlight and creates difficulties for the maintenance and repair of the buildings. Third, this also creates legal issues; for

²³ Approximately 2150 square feet = 200 square meter

one is unable to get any bank loan in order buy a flat in the former colonies. As a result, the buyers have provided raw money. But, as the resident of Bikramgarh highlighted, this may also signify that: “this money is one time money. It is not regularly earned, so the character of this money is A) perhaps phoney , because it is not under taxation (it is not shown , it is not white money), and B) therefore there are irregular behavioural patterns”.

Between informality and illegality

However, it can be argued that the production of illegalities did not only aim at providing more space to the landlords and the promoters. It should be also understood as a form of CPM’s renewing and consolidating the political bonds with the former refugee population that constituted a vast portion of the party’s vote bank. As Roy (2003: 140) has argued, informality should be construed as a “technique of discipline and power” adding that:

What is useful about the concept of extralegality is that it shows how informality is at once an outcome and a process. The significance of this process lies in the inherent ambiguities of the informal, and it is this that creates a dynamics of constant negotiation and negotiability (Roy 2003: 140)

South Kolkata residents even since the creation of the first houses before promoting have been drawn in constant negotiations with both party leaders and KMC regarding the registration and regularization of their properties. Though these processes the intersection of state and party power was exerted and political support and loyalty to CPM was reproduced and renewed.

But, the violation of building laws and regulations was not only limited in South Kolkata. There is ample evidence that during the Left Front rule there had been a systematic violation of the state’s own proclaimed policies of protecting agricultural land and wetlands and controlling urban sprawl.

For instance, the urban development in Kolkata’s eastern fringe described in chapter two, was largely depended upon illegal conversion of land from agricultural to residential/commercial use, although agricultural land use was clearly protected by the law (for example Calcutta’s High Court ruling of 1992). The quick insertion of land to real estate markets that also involved land speculation was enabled by a) informal vesting implemented by state entities, more specifically

Calcutta Metropolitan Development Authority (CMDA), and b) by illegal land transactions between developers and sharecroppers with the informal mediation of CPM cadres (Roy 2003: 159-164).

Ananya Roy realized in 1997 that in Kolkata's south-eastern areas "there was no established system of maintaining records of land ownership and acquisition" (Roy 2004: 156). In the early 1990s these areas were predominantly agricultural and were also inhabited by sharecroppers and Bangladeshi refugees who had de facto rights to land but did not possess official land records. According to Roy (2003), this regime of 'unmapping', rather than signifying an absence of planning, was in fact an important tool for Left Front's urban developmentalism agenda, offering 'territorial flexibility' and constituting a mode of planning peculiar to Kolkata, and to Calcutta's Metropolitan Development Authority, more particularly.

The state, took advantage of its right to expropriate land for public purpose, in this case suburban development. This was implemented by CMDA, through informal vesting (given that there were no official land records) which resulted in the eviction of Mukundapur as well as other refugee colonies, to make way for new constructions for middle-class and elite housing (Roy 2010: 99). Moreover, in such a predominantly rural area, informal subdivisions for middle-class housing proliferated. These subdivisions depended on illegal land deals between "sharecroppers with de facto rights to agricultural land, real estate developers, and middle-class urbanities seeking suburban plots of land", made possible by the mediation of the party (Roy 2010: 97). According to Roy (2003: 163), in these land transactions:

the peasants were first made to sign documents stating that they have no claims to the property. They then received a nominal sum from the promoters, who, with the help of CPM cadres, sell the land at ten times the cost to upper-and middle-class suburbanites. No titles of land are exchanged but the final buyers treat the "no-claims" document as a sign of ownership (Roy 2003: 163).

But apart from the above-mentioned illegal land conversions, there have been illegalities in areas that had been built on the basis of a master plan. Perhaps the most notable example is that of Salt Lake planned township. According to Rumbach (2017), Salt Lake 's original master plan, introduced by modernist architect Toskovic, was violated at least in three ways. First, according to the original master plan, the ratio of land allocated for middle-class, multifamily apartment

buildings and high-income, single-family structures was 70:30. While the master plan had put emphasis on the provision of lower middle class and middle housing, it turned out that it was housing needs of the upper middle class that were catered for. Today, the 70: 30 ratio has been nearly reversed, with the majority of plots containing detached houses rather than multifamily units or apartment blocks (Rumbach 2017: 788). Second, plots initially intended for civic amenities and green spaces were illegally transferred to well-connected individuals and commercial developers. Third, although leasehold rights were supposed to be transferred only to one's offsprings to prevent land speculation and price escalations, in fact, around 35% of residential plots in the township had been illegally sold or transferred since their original allotment. It has been alleged that falsified documents were readily available through the municipal and state government for well-resourced households. All the above were also part of CPM's patronage politics, given that in many cases, plots in Salt Lake were distributed as rewards for patronage or to encourage loyalty to the party (Rumbach 2017: 788-789; 791).

Moreover, commercial real estate projects have been constructed in parts of the city by violating KCM Building Rules, and/or by flouting environmental regulations. The most prominent example is South City residential complex. Because, part of the local Bikramgarh Jheel, one of Southern Kolkata's largest ponds, was illegally encroached for the construction of its fourth residential tower. Second, there have been violations of KMC rules regarding the height of the towers. However, it appears that KMC rules were relaxed, the developers paid a total sum of Rs. 29.18 crores as sanction fees and the construction plan was finally sanctioned by KMC in 2005 (Vasundhara Annual Survey Report 2006; Petition by Javed Ahmed Khan vs Union of India 2007). Likewise, AMP Vaisaakkhi Mall in Salt Lake, violated building norms. While the initial plan was to construct 8 stories, finally 13 stories were illegally created and retrospectively regularized by the respective local municipal authority (Rumbach 2017: 791).

All the above evidence from the city of Kolkata complicates the relation between informality and formality in the context of urbanization. It indicates that the common belief that informality should be understood as "a sphere of unregulated activities that exists outside the formal order of urbanization", does not hold true. As Ananya Roy emphasizes, "informality does not exist in a bounded sector that lies outside the formal and the legal". My evidence from South Kolkata clearly exemplifies Roy's conceptualization of the 'formal' in India's urbanization: "Instead of drawing a distinction between what is formal and what is informal, it may be more

useful to see the formal as itself marked by illegality, ambiguity, and exceptionality” (Roy 2010: 98). Or in other words: “The splintering of urbanism does not take place at the fissure between formality and informality but rather, in fractal fashion, within the informalized production of space” (Roy 2011b).

Such forms of elite and middle-class informality and illegality are commonplace in Indian cities today and are not limited in West Bengal. For example, according to Delhi’s Municipal Corporation, it is estimated that “70 percent of Delhi is «unauthorized», meaning that it violates land-use codes or building byelaws in some way or another” (Ghertner 2011: 285). Therefore, this challenges the widespread view, namely that informality and illegality are solely associated with the settlements of the urban poor, such as slums. As Roy (2011b) has argued: “Informal urbanization is as much the purview of wealthy urbanites as it is of slum dwellers. These forms of urban informality –from Delhi’s farmhouses to Kolkata’s new towns to Mumbai’s shopping malls –are no more legal than the metonymic slum” (Roy 2011b: 233)

Then the question that lies is which forms of urban informality are legitimized or even practiced by the state. Here it is useful to employ Bhan’s (2009: 60) term “legitimate”:

I use legitimate to describe settlements that enjoy a de facto or de jure security of tenure. I mean by this that they are protected – either explicitly with the plan or implicitly in actual urban development practice – from arbitrary eviction. Settlements that are legitimate need not, therefore, derive their legitimacy only from law (although some can do)

I argue that the term legitimate helps us understand the South Kolkata built environment, which although not protected by law, has in practice, as I showed earlier, enjoyed the protection of state entities, mainly KMC. How, for example, in the case of South Kolkata, can a law court’s order to demolish multistoried buildings, where hundreds of thousands middle-class people reside, be implemented? Therefore, apart from CPM’s patronage politics and the distinct relation that had been diachronically cultivated between the party and the refugee colonies, there is also another aspect that explains why the neighbourhoods unsanctioned buildings are considered legitimate by the state. To understand this, we need to turn again to Roy’s work (2003; 2005; 2010; 2011b). The short answer is that middle class and elite “are expressions of class power and can therefore command infrastructure, services and legitimacy. Most importantly, they come to be designated as 'formal' by the state while other forms of informality remain criminalized” (Roy 2011b). In

sharp contrast, in neoliberal India there is ample evidence that the state and the law courts selectively target and stigmatize the informalities of the poor (Roy 2011b: 233)

Part 3: Hegemonizing (unsanctioned) promoting

Apart from the flexible merging of formal state action and informal party mobilization (Roy 2003: 179), CPM had the power to implement promoting by virtue of its wider influence in the neighbourhoods' social, political and even family life. As Bradbury (2019: 82) writes, the local cadres in South Kolkata used to intervene in social and even family matters:

The local cadre increasingly intervened in areas of neighbourhood social life which were deemed to be outside their purview. This could also be the ways in which the party arranged marriages, negotiated divorces and settled tenancy disputes before such issues reached legal mediation

This should not be surprising because political parties in West Bengal, especially the dominant one, apart from acting as democratic-electoral institutions, and apart from controlling the public administration, they tend to pervade in most aspects of social life. As Chatterjee (2009: 43) has argued, employing the term “party society” coined by Bhattacharya (2009;2010;2016):

In West Bengal, the key term is “party”. It is indeed the elementary institution of rural life in the state – not family, not kinship, not caste, not religion, not market, but party. It is the institution that mediates every single sphere of social activity, with few exceptions, if any. This is the true significance of the shift of the old days. Every other social institution, such as the landlord's house, the caste council, the religious assembly, sectarian foundations, schools, sporting clubs, traders' associations, and so on, have been eliminated, marginalized or subordinated to the “party”

Although this term was applied in the context of rural Bengal, I argue, in line with Bradbury (2019: 151) that it can also be relevant in the South Kolkata context. It is also maintained by Basu and Majumdar (2013: 190) that the term during the Left Front government could also apply in the urban context more broadly:

The CPI-M thus created a “party-society” in which local committee members controlled access to admissions in schools, colleges, and universities; Helped ordinary folk gain admission into

government hospitals; Raised funds during natural disasters; and even were arbiters of divorce settlements and extramarital affairs

Arguably promoting ought to be extensively developed and, at the same time, needed to ensure public support. First, the intersection of party's and state's structure of power, needed legitimacy which had to be renewed on a daily basis. And it was through the coupling of its developmental agenda, in this case, promoting that organized mobilization and reproduction of political support were ensured (Chatterjee 1997: 154). Second, to eschew any possible legal sanctions due to the illegalities enmeshed. If for example, only a small number of the new multistoried buildings had been promoted structures, then the popular legitimation would not be secured. This would create more chances for residents to file police cases against the illegalities, and also intensify the fear of legal sanctions and even a possible demolition. Clearly, all the above required the active involvement of the landlords and promoting needed to be widespread. In retrospect, the overwhelming majority of newly built constructions in the area has been the result of promoting. But then, the questions that lie are: How promoting was accommodated by the residents? Was it a win-win for all, namely the promoters, the party and the residents? If not, who were those who benefited more? What were the implications in electoral politics?

I argue that promoting became hegemonic, and as it is usually the case with hegemony, this was achieved by a combination of persuasion and coercion. This was reflected in a continuum of positionalities among residents, those who on the one end, gave their consent, those who internally felt compelled, in the middle, and those who were externally coerced, on the other end, which I discuss below.

Regarding the first category of the residents, certainly, promoting was accommodated by a large section of the landholders for a number of reasons. First, many owners considered and continue to consider promoting a win-win case in terms of financial benefit, for renting constitutes a resource of income. As a Katju Nagar resident stated:

those who constituted the financially weaker section, they thought, "If I give my land to the promoter, then he will not only give me a good modern flat, but also another flat from which I can get rent. I can either sell it or put it on rent to get capital out of it."

Second, and in light of the above, opting for promoting created visions, including an opportunity to experience modern ways of living in the new apartments. This is not to say, however that

landowners were equally benefited. Their financial gain varied depending on the number of family members who had right to the promoted property. In case there is only one landowner and the promoted building has eight flats, he can be grossly benefited by taking four flats (one for himself to reside, and the rest three to rent off or sell out). However, if for instance there are four brothers who take one flat each, then they do not gain substantially, plus they lose half of their land. The functioning and reproduction of the system was based on the tacit cooperation of the residents, the overwhelming majority of whom had their houses promoted and refrained from filing police cases against such illegal constructions. As the aforementioned CPM leader revealed, there was a tacit ‘understanding’ amongst the neighbors.

Regarding the section of the population who were internally coerced to opt for promoting, this involved mainly the financially weaker section of it. As a Katju Nagar colony committee member argued:

This promoting has come due to poverty. (Suppose) one family is big (but) their living space is small. But how will they live? They can’t afford to make a (big) house on their own. This is one question. Then (there are) unemployed youths. They don’t have any jobs. How will they feed themselves? (So) the flat dealers have to sell 1 or 2 flats. (They can also) get renters. The main problem begins with poverty. Those who are the owners of promoted properties here, most of them don’t do jobs. They get 2-3 flats, which they put on rent to earn their living. And those who had big families, they weren’t being able to do it [i.e., make a big house] themselves, they couldn’t afford it. As a result, they opted for promoting, (and the) flat system started. Then slowly everyone started doing that; but it started with the poor people. Economic condition (of the poor) began the promoting (system). At first, we were all equal (financially). Then those who got educated (improved their economic condition) – but maximum couldn’t get educated, (so) their economic (condition wasn’t good). Their families were big and didn’t have enough space to live in. Then they were compelled to choose promoting. They didn’t have any source of income. So, they were compelled to opt for promoting.

Furthermore, it was also a section of those families, usually comprising of ageing parents, who either being financially sound or not, were unable to maintain and repair their old houses due to their age and/or lack of helping hands. As a left leaning Katju Nagar resident explained:

Since the joint families had become nuclear, the 1 or 2 children who were born into those (nuclear) families – most of them had to go outside for education or job. Then, the parents became alone and

it became difficult for them to maintain the house. Then what they did was that, they gave it [the house] for promoting because they didn't have the (physical) strength or the financial capacity to maintain and repair such a huge structure. (So) they gave it to the promoter (for) developing it.

In light of all the above, it appears that many residents felt that if they opted for promoting this would stop suddenly other pressures and threats. In Katju Nagar, I visited relatively affluent families who had not promoted their houses, and I was often told that the more affluent families do not opt for promoting.

Lastly, regarding the third category, it seems that external coercion was often exercised for promoting to be profusely widespread. This ranged from pressures by promoters– and family members as well–to intimidation by the promoters-party nexus. Although mostly concerned about the further marginalization of the first generation of male refugees (those who in 1950s were in their 30s and in early 1990s in their 70s) by the party-promoters' nexus, Banerjee (2003: 218-219) reveals that the fathers often receive pressures from both their sons and the promoters to sell their land and that 'the possibility of the promoter-party nexus using terror always lurks behind the promoter's overtures':

We should also explore the marginalizing impact that the emergence of 'promoter'-led 'networks of power and money' must have had on the aged men of the 1990s. The nexus between the 'promoter' and the political party makes these networks formidable in the public sphere in the colonies. These networks, out of bounds for the old father past 65 years of age, nevertheless affects the latter's real control over the family's landed property. The 'promoter' untiringly pursues the object of acquiring this land and building apartments on the site. As the aged father, with his emotional attachment to the colony environment, is often reluctant to sell his land, the promoter uses the young son to make the father relent. And, in doing this, the promoter not only appeals to the susceptibilities of the young male of a more consumerist generation, but also uses the local committee of the political party to convince or even pressurize the son. It is interesting to note how in these cases the promoter-party network of power hegemonizes youths, who, in their turn, carry this will of the powerful network home and prevail over the aged father mainly by 'conveying' to the latter the 'dangerous consequences' of not relenting. Similarly, resisting the promoter-party nexus also devolves on youths, insofar as some of them can muster the voice to. The possibility of the promoter-party nexus using terror always lurks behind the promoter's overtures. The aged father usually fails to muster the mental strength to 'face the consequences,' especially as he often

lacks ‘contacts’ with the powers in a public sphere, now dominated by new social equations. It is up to the younger men in the family to try and resist as they are in a better position to engage with this terrain of ‘contacts’ and manipulate its rivalries to keep the promoter at bay, if possible. (Banerjee 2003: 218-219)

The fact that promoters used to and still exert pressures on landowners can be also corroborated in light of the evidence in Katju Nagar. On meeting one of the few families who have not promoted their house, I was told that promoters persistently approach them with offers, in spite of their refusal to get the property developed. Another interlocutor from Katju Nagar, in his early 70s, was pressurized from both promoters and family members, namely brother and sister-in-law, to promote their house. Although he was emotionally attached to his house and initially refused to promote it, he finally succumbed to the pressures and signed the agreement with the promoter.

Moreover, if the account below from the aforementioned Bikramgarh resident is reliable, there have been extreme cases in which family members entitled to family property were cheated by other family members who happened to be promoters and who were closely connected to CPM. In these cases, these individuals grabbed the opportunity to promote their own house, without giving their siblings their respective shares, while the latter could not react because of ‘the fear factor’:

My grandfather had six sons, suppose two of them joined the CPM, they become ‘pseudoleaders’, they arrange syndicates, they build houses, they earn money. Then they would try to promote their piece of land as well. And they will try to grab the entire part by themselves. So, the four other brothers even if they protest, they cannot do anything because the administration is against them, the police is against them. And people who know what is fair will remain silent out of fear. So, the fear factor was orchestrated in a brilliant way.

The fact that not all residents equally benefited and that there had been exercised levels of coercion in implementing promoting are presumably among the factors that account for CMP’s defeats in KMC elections. It appears that the people who benefited more were the people close to the to the ‘system and its chain’, that is those who were party cadres or members or had connections with the party-promoters nexus. As my aforementioned interlocutor from Bikramgarh stated:

In a place like Bikramghar , Ronkol , Katju Nagar , Poddar with a population of 20000. Let’ s say that 1000 or 1200 people were benefited from the Left Regime economically, or maximum 15

hundred (1500) What about 18500? They waited and waited and waited. They have waited for 35 years and when finally, they got the chance things were turned up upside down. And the same history is repeating as of now. Only the faces have changed. Earlier if there were 20000 people 5000 people were benefited from it, now again 5000 people are benefited of it, but from a different color.

This may explain why the residents of South Kolkata throughout the 2000s increasingly turned their votes to the party that formed the opposition to CPM, namely Trinamool Congress or TMC. For instance, KMC Mayor was appointed by TMC since 2000s except for the period between 2005 and 2010. Moreover, most of the wards lying at the heart of the former refugee colonies have elected a TMC councilor. This includes many Wards. Wards 93 and 95, where I conducted fieldwork, have had a TMC councilor since 2005 (Ratan Dey and Tapan Das Gupta respectively). Ward 96, where the largest and perhaps most influencing former colony Bijoygarh lies, has had a TMC councilor since 2010 (during 2005-2010 it was BJP controlled). Ward 99, where Ganguly Bagan, Garia and Baghajatin lie, used to have a TCM councilor from 2005 to 2015 and one from the Revolutionary Socialist Party. Donner mentions that in Ganguly Bagan, where she conducted fieldwork a trend towards TMC was there even throughout the 1990s (Donner 2016). A clear domination of the CMP is observed only in Ward 98, where perhaps the most important left stronghold to date lies, namely Netaji Nagar, as well as in Ward 92 where Selimpur and Jadavpur areas lie.

Section 2: Promoters' 'paradise' under TMC

Further relaxation of KMC rules under TMC

Except for a few studies, Trinamool urban policies remain unexamined in academic literature (Sissener 2019; Chatterji and Roy 2020). If during Left Front's rule the formal state, even though informal ways, as it has been shown in previous section, was responsible for the acquirement of peri-urban land to make way for urban development, on the contrary, and despite few exceptions (Arnavas 2020: 111), Trinamool government "has practiced a hands-off policy regarding land, preventing forced acquisition and adhering to the Urban Land Ceiling Act" (Sissener 2019: 230). As a result, and given the small land holdings that characterize West Bengal, land deals and negotiations over land were left to 'market forces' and "informal networks mediated by local land syndicates (mafias) through a nexus among neighborhood political actors, petty contractors, and small-time property developers" (Chatterji and Roy 2020: 277).

To cover the need for middle-class and lower middle-class housing and give promoters more motivations, under TMC, KMC relaxed further its rules, thus encouraging the real estate development of small plots. In 2013, it "set to allow four-storey structures on land measuring 3.5 cottahs or less without any stipulation about the width of the road" (Telegraph 2013; The Statesman 2015). Moreover, in 2019, KMC relaxed the "mandatory requirement of building sanction plan for plots up to 3 *Katha* (or 200 sq. m) in all wards". The same year, it relaxed "building rules for the added areas by doing away with mandatory submission of Record of Rights (ROR)/ mutation deed from the Block Land and Land Record Office for getting sanction for houses on plots below 210 sq.m". Furthermore, it encouraged the regularization of structures that were violating its rules, for instance in terms of the height of the building, at the expense of fines and, lastly, it increased the FAR ²⁴ for all plots (Khatua 2021).

All the above applied to the South Kolkata context as well. Indeed, under TMC, KMC regularized the G+3 storied buildings. By that time, the KMC rules allowed for only G+2 storied buildings. It has also been rumored that residents had to bribe KMC for the sake of their properties' regularization.

Yet, the implementation of the amended rules concerning the regularization of the four-storied buildings, did not signify that the plan of the already constructed multistoried buildings in

²⁴ <https://aitcofficial.org/aitc/wb-govt-formulates-urban-development-policy/>

the areas concerned could be sanctioned. For, they still violate the area's FAR in many ways. For instance, almost in every plot the exterior space left is not sufficient. Whilst visiting one of these multistoried buildings in Bikramgarh, it was obvious that all structures surrounding the particular building were less than one-meter apart. There was hardly space enough to install an AC. I also observed that some landowners had a device directing the air expelled from the AC machine up, instead of spewing it horizontally, towards the opposite building.

Apart from regularization, TMC policy towards promoting in South Kolkata has been marked with continuities compared to the Left Front. First, although promoters used to work in tandem with the CPM, ever since its election in 2011 the major section of them has adhered to TMC. Second, as I will show below, unsanctioned promoting continues to flourish and enjoyed the tacit support of KMC, the local TMC councilors and sections of the local police and was backed by the informal party machinery.

The complex nexus implementing unsanctioned promoting

Unauthorized promoting rests on the illicit understanding and informal coordination of a complex nexus comprising the local councilor, the promoters, the local TMC party leaders and their goons, sections of the police, as well as KMC officers, engineers and mediators (or *dalals*). In what follows I try to show how are these separate actors associated. My evidence comes from Katju Nagar and Poddar Nagar interlocutors but is also confirmed by other acquaintances in South Kolkata.

It appears that before any new construction the councilor has to be informed and then bribed by the promoter for the sake of "his party's fund". In return, he allegedly gives his tacit informal permission for illegal construction to take place. Moreover, as a Katju Nagar resident revealed, promoters have to also bribe the local police station which is supposedly responsible to track illegal constructions:

Whenever a promoting starts, the police from Jadavpur Thana will always come on a round (*Ben: Tohol dewa*) here. Why would they do so? There are mistakes. The promoter is certainly doing some mistakes. Maybe he is not leaving (any space); maybe he is doing something; maybe he is constructing the building just from the road (without leaving a bit of space in the front of the structure). The police come to see this. And they go (back). Now, the promoter understands (the

hint) and thinks, “I must go to the police station and give them some money [bribe]. Otherwise, they would come again tomorrow and arrest my laborers. Since I would to pay for the release of those laborers (if they are arrested), so let me go before and give (them the money)” .

In similar vein, an informant from Poddar Nagar indicates how the councilors-party functionaries-goons and the police cooperate to keep an eye on every construction activity, forcing the promoter to offer extralegal money to the party fund and bribe the councilor. In return, promoters have the green light to construct buildings flouting KMC rules:

The undue advantage that the promoters take, that comes via the councilor like our R.. [utters this in a whisper]. (The councilors) are friends (Hindi: *yaari, dosti*) with all the promoters. They are giving money to the party fund and also paying bribes. (In return), the promoters do as they wish, like making windows very close to the street outside. They don't leave a space of 2 feet (around the house) and make cantilever windows, projecting out (onto the streets from the main structure of the house).

If (a promoter) doesn't give money. (The councilors and his goons) will notify the police that the promoter is making a house. Bricks are being brought; sand is being brought. There isn't a proper arrangement for the traffic to pass. (As a result, some officers) from the police station will come and stop (the construction). Hence, (the promoter will ultimately) have to go to the police. The promoters know that if they keep the councilor in their hands by giving him/her money, then their work will continue smoothly and they will also get some advantages. This is how things are being done. (...) The promoters sit with the councilor (and handle) everything.

Then the questions that remains is: How are the structures that are not made according to KMC rules mutated²⁵? Once again, it seems that it is enabled by a new series of bribes offered to the chain composed of KMC officers and engineers as well as mediators:

Informant: When they have to go to KMC for doing the mutation regarding the house tax, then an engineer from KMC will be required. What will he/she do? He/she [the engineer from KMC] will make a drawing of the respective flat, showing the cover area, the common area. The house tax that you will be charged—that will be for which area? To ascertain that an engineer from KMC (will be required). After he/she makes

²⁵ Mutation is the process of change of owner name in the records of local municipal bodies. The mutation process allows the change of name in government records so that property tax, electricity bill, water bill, etc. can be transferred in the name of the buyer.

the drawing, the signature, the date and the seal are put on it (and it is attached to) a form. This has to be submitted to the KMC. Then, on depositing the other (required) documents, they will do the valuation (of the property). This (process) is called mutation. After that, they will send you the bill for your house tax. You can either pay that quarterly, half-yearly or yearly. It goes like this.

Anthropologist: But how does the KMC approve (a building not made according to the regulations)? Say I have promoted a house, it is ready. Now, it is time to make the plan, and submit the plan of the construction to the KMC. So, this is not according to the regulations of the KMC. How is this plan of the engineer or the promoter submitted? If it is approved, let's say, from the KMC, although it is not according to the regulations.

Informant: Everything is possible.

Anthropologist: Meaning, (if the building is made) without leaving space (around it), etc...

Informant: Everything, everything. (If you) give this [informant. gestures to indicate money], everything can be done.

Anthropologist: But practically the plan you submit is a fake plan or the real plan?

Informant: Suppose, the house gets promoted. But it is not done according to the plan [meaning, the plan in accordance with the regulations of KMC]. The entire cover area is utilized, without leaving the space that ought to have been left. Now, when the flat [meaning, the apartment building] is completed, the flat-holders will naturally want to get the mutation done from the KMC, so that they can pay the house tax. Then, what will be done? The promoter also has an illegal understanding (*shat-gat*) with them [KMC officials]. Or, (if you) go to the KMC (office), you will find many mediators there. Previously, they were called '*dalal*'²⁶ but now they are referred through English terms like 'mediator' [*'je modhostota kore'*, '*modhostota*' means 'to mediate']. So, they [the promoters] also have ties (*shat-gat*) with them [the mediators at the KMC office]. They also have (ties) with the officers. A good amount will be given (to them). After that, they [the officers] themselves will make the papers. You will only be told that for this work, this amount (will need to be paid). Along with that, they will ask for the supporting papers/documents. Right? After that, they will take the headache of what has to be done or not (in making) the plan. They will finally hand you over the papers, saying, "This is the house tax of your flat. You can pay it in this manner."

²⁶ The word in Bengali has negative connotations as it can mean not only an agent/ broker/ middle-man, but also a pimp involved in the flesh trade.

Anthropologist: This is done by the promoter or the owner of the (respective) flats?

Informant: No, no, the promoter. They have the ties with the promoters.

It perhaps becomes clear that the entire system works as a well-oiled machine with perfecting clogs and wheels. In this way the enmeshed illegalities are masterfully concealed despite everyone's knowledge of their omnipresence!

Throughout his narration, the aforementioned informant linked the mediators' role with widespread corruption that otherwise is prevalent in the entire country. He gave supplementary examples where one has to bribe a government's service office and pay a mediator in order to get one's work done. Upon a visit to a Borough office in Kolkata, I observed the presence of mediators offering help to issue a digital ration card in exchange for money. However, as I will show further below, apart from deeming the role of certain KMC officers and mediators as corrupt, it is more useful to grasp their position in the wider context of West Bengal's construction industry.

Making promoting dominant

But before I turn to this, I will show how under TMC promoting became dominant. First of all, just as CPM, TMC sought to make unsanctioned promoting widespread because this would be beneficiary in economic terms for all the associated parts. My evidence shows that unlike CPM which had sought to make promoting hegemonic, eliciting also the resident's consent, TMC made it dominant, in a sense that dominance is a practice of power relying primarily on coercion. Not very unlike CPM, this was enabled by the combination of the informal party machinery and the formal state, that is mainly KMC and sections of the police. The first step to enforce promoting has been to discourage individuals to make self-made buildings, that is without the work of an external promoter, so that the established nexus is not bypassed. In case one tries to undertake a new construction or make an extension to one's house, he will have at least three hurdles. The first is the forced payment of a quoted amount to the political leader/goons/councilor nexus without any proper formal/legal justification. Second, he may have to face the fear of the police objecting to the way construction materials are assembled on the street. Third, he may encounter difficulties in the KMC office especially in case of any enmeshed illegalities. As the aforementioned informant explains:

Or if the owner (of the flat) wants to do it on his/her own, (he/she will have to deal through) the mediators there. Because if you want to follow the straight (uncorrupt) path, when they will ask you about the plan and you say that you don't have the plan (because) the house has been made in this manner (which is not in accordance with the stipulated regulations), they will then, in turn, scare you in ten different ways. Are you getting it? So, if you go there— really I tell you— the mediator who will be there will ask, “Yes, *dada/babu*, what work do you have?” You will say, “For this work.” He will say, “Please come, have a seat.” And the person who will try to avoid that, saying, “No, my house is complete. I have everything [the requisite documents]. The registration is done. I will get it done on my own”, to whichever officer that person goes that officer will scare him/her away. And (the officer) will scare (the person) in such a manner that the latter will have to face many troubles. For that reason, (people think that) even if money has to be spent, the work will get done properly.

Through these ways compliance to the nexus is achieved by sheer force. But still, there are cases that one has the chance to make his own house, or even extend or repair it, without having to pay any bribe. In order to do so, it appears that he need to have the informal approval of the local TMC leader and in this way to show his political loyalty and/or to have important connections in the state administration, the party or the police. I present below an anecdotal story narrated by the same informant from Poddar Nagar which illustrates how the councillor-local leader nexus, with the aid of the police, works to extract illegal money from a certain landlord, who wishes to extend his house. It also shows that any self-made construction/extension is practically not allowed unless it has the local party leader's approval.

According to the story —which I present in a short version— there were three brothers, owners of a G+1 house, who decided to extend it by adding an upper floor. They knew that without the consent of the local political leader the construction was not feasible. The youngest brother called Biman, being the most sociable among the three, took it upon himself to fraternize with the local TMC leader. He used to frequent a specific spot in the neighborhood, hobnobbing with the leader and treating him to alcohol. Although he is retired, he told a lie that he has six months of service left in the exchange department in order to show that he still has high connections. My informant clarified that Biman has a habit of telling lies and a particular knack for exaggerating his accounts of events. Initially, it seems that the political leader tried to dissuade him, suggesting instead that he get the floor promoted by them. Gradually, however, given the rapport developed, he retreated from his effort and it was clear that he did not want to impose it. When casting was

done and Biman had stacked 150-200 feet sand and stone chip materials on the road outside his house, he was quite confident that his construction would not be blocked. Even when police came, most probably called by the local leader, he claimed that the Minister of Food and Supplies is 'like an elder brother to him', uttering once again a lie. Finally, the police did not impede the construction. In the following days, the councilor visited the house and Biman immediately called the political leader. The latter convinced the councilor not to extract money from the particular construction, because as he emphatically stated "Biman was like an elder brother to him". Finally, Biman was able to have his upper floor constructed, without having to get it promoted and to pay extra money to the councilor something that represents an exception to the rule.

But this imposition of illegal tax/commission to the councilor and/or the party should be also understood as part of a well-entrenched practice which is not limited to the construction or the extension of houses. Indeed, the TMC machinery has imposed extralegal tax on the local shops, especially the eateries, including the stalls opposite South City's eastern wall, the majority of which do not possess a legal license. The party-police nexus seems to control firmly any new entrants as shopkeepers and it is clear that without their approval none of them can function. Four pertinent examples were narrated by the same informant which show how TMC offers protection to the local shopkeepers in exchange of money and/or political loyalty. The first was about a couple who run a tea shop. Before they set it up, they had approached the political leader; hence, they are still running their shop without any obstruction. It appears that there had been an economic agreement with the political leader. The second case was about a lady who had not approached the political leader. She opened a shop with a tin roof in front of her house which still remains there. She tried to open a variety store and had kept some bottles of cold drinks, a few jars containing other wares, some bread, some eggs etc. in her verandah. However, the police came and soon the temporary shop stopped functioning. It appears that it was the same political leader who had called the police. The third example referred to a gentleman who wanted to repair the roof of his small shop on the footpath and get it whitewashed and painted. It seems that this was possible only after he got the approval of the local political leader and in his case, it is unknown if he had to pay something for this. The last case was about a gentleman who opened a small makeshift shop for his business. He went to the police station to allegedly get an informal approval. It was only after the intervention of the president of the local club who had connections with 'important people',

including the high-ranking police officers of the Jadavpur police station, it was finally decided that his shop would operate unhindered.

Promoters' position in the construction industry: The rule of "syndicates"

Yet, the practice of demanding extralegal tax from residents who are about to have a house constructed or just extended, repaired or painted is not limited to the neighborhoods I conducted my fieldwork. It is a rather common phenomenon, being informally enacted by the party-councilor-goons network in many other Kolkata's localities (Frontline 2016). I was told by my acquaintances that middle-class residents in other areas of the city prefer to have their houses developed by promoters –instead of self-made– in order to avoid interference from the goons who will approach them for money to let them continue with the construction work. This practice, that is extortion and protection for building a house, has become well entrenched and before spreading to other parts of the city it became institutionalized by the construction/land mafias (the so-called syndicates) which operated in 'New Town' (Rajarhat). The promoter is the one who in most cases will manage and make the deals with the syndicates and in many cases, promoters are connected with them.

Syndicates were formed in the mid-1990s CMP', and the state entity Housing and Infrastructure Development Corporation (HIDCO)' initiative in 'New Town' (Rajarhat) area. Initially, syndicates were cooperatives that would supply with construction materials the building of the New Town. Its members were mostly unskilled youth who had lost their land and their traditional occupations because of the construction of the 'New Town'. However soon syndicates were transformed into extortion rackets. They subsequently began operating in areas where real estate activity was flourishing, predominantly in peri-urban Kolkata and in other parts of the city. (Dey and Samaddar and Sen 2013: 219; Chattopadhyay and Chatterjee 2016).

The activities of the syndicates vary. First, they act as extortion rackets and offer protection in exchange for money to individuals or real estate agents who seek to make a new construction. Extortion practices are colloquially known as *tolabaji*. Syndicate workers literally patrol the areas where new construction is undergoing. For instance, in New Town without the approval of the local syndicate no construction work can happen (India Today, 2016). Second, the syndicates act as construction mafias supplying construction material (sand, stones and bricks), usually of low quality and in prices higher than the market. Though the business of providing building materials

for construction is ostensibly legal, the manner in which it is conducted is mostly criminal as syndicate workers use body force and threats (Arnavas 2020: 11). Third, they may also offer to construct the building ²⁷. Fourth, they engage in illegal land grabbing, partly because of the aforementioned TMC's "hands-off" policy on land (Sissener 2019: 230; Arnavas 2020:7-10).

During the first days of my first visit in January 2016, I accompanied an acquaintance of mine who works in the construction industry. We went to Dankuni area (in Howrah district) to see a plot of marshy land just at the eastern side of national highway. I was told that some investors were seeking to buy this chunk of land to use it in order to install their products in wholesale market. Yet this initiative had several obstacles given that the land had multiple shareholders. It was revealed that part of the purchase would be conducted in legal terms, while the other part would be carried out through both illegal means and force by the local mafia. During my second visit in October 2020, while passing by Joka area, the same acquaintance informed me that the big chunk of vacant land just opposite Godrej Seven gated community was owned by the local mafia, and would constitute the ground for a new private housing project.

Apart from private housing, these small cartels operate in the public infrastructure industries in the State. Syndicates came into the limelight after the under-construction Vivekananda flyover collapsed in north Kolkata on 31 March 2016 just ahead of the Assembly elections, leaving twenty-six people dead and more than sixty injured. It was rumored that behind the catastrophe were the low-grade materials allegedly furnished by the syndicates (The Wire 2016).

Competition between rival syndicates often turns to be violent (The Wire 2016). Even during my first visit in Kolkata in 2016 it was very common to find in the newspapers' headlines incidents of clashes, some of them quite deadly, especially in New Town and Salt Lake, between rival syndicates, or even between syndicates and promoters.

Importantly, syndicates in West Bengal do not act as parallel states, as in the case of the Sicilian mafia, but as recent anthropological literature on the mafias in South Asia, has argued, are "deeply politically institutionalized and socially embedded" (Harris-White and Michelutti 2019: 7). These anthropological studies have illuminated how bosses develop relationships of protection with powerful politicians and police officers (Michelutti et al. 2019). Indeed, first, syndicates have links to the ruling party. TMC politicians, MPs or MLAs give them patronage, or even control or

²⁷ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D_3lBvTzrXw

are involved in these syndicates. Often, syndicate workers are simultaneously Trinamool members. Second, sections of the police can be involved in this chain (*Hindustan Times* 2016). Third, they have links with state officials, including KMC officials, state entities like HIDCO, and even with sections of the judiciary (Sissener 2019; Arnavas 2020). In this sense, Sissener (2019: 217;236) aptly argues that the boundaries between the legal and the illegal, and the formal and the informal are blurred. Or as a friend of mine had put it, “Do not think that the state and the criminal elements are entirely separate elements”.

The invocation of the syndicates has triggered severe political debates on a national scale. Ahead of 2016 and 2021 Assembly elections, as well as before 2019 Lok Sabha elections, PM Modi and Amit Shah criticized TMC for its ‘syndicate raj’ (rule of syndicates) as a marker of corruption in the state. In a late February 2021 political speech²⁸, Modi accused TMC for cultivating a ‘*cut-money*’ culture (enforcement of illegal tax/commission) in the State, which is also is deemed as liable for impeding the influx of private investment. Likewise, CPM leaders, despite the fact that syndicates flourished during their party’s rule, criticize TMC for being an ‘extortion party’ and have promised to break the ‘nexus between crime, politics and administration behind the syndicates’ if they come to power (Huffington post 2016). Indeed, during my stay in Kolkata there was a widespread complaint that Mamata Banerjee has failed to control her middle and lower functionaries who tilt to corruption. Despite some arrests which were considered as an eyewash to calm down the public opinion, it seems that Mamata Banerjee did not really have the political will to tackle the syndicates (Frontline, 2016). A recurring discourse that seeks to justify syndicates’ existence and activities is that although they work parasitically and have criminal elements, at least they provide employment to the jobless, uneducated youth. Through this way, whether rightfully or not, a portion of the profits of the real estate industry is extracted by the syndicates. But it must be also pointed out that within syndicates there is unequal distribution of these gains on the basis of inner hierarchies (bosses/workers) and other hierarchies of caste, class and religion (Arnavas 2020).

²⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bCgSUwYj2G0>

Section III: Implications of promoting for neighbourhood social relationships

In this section I seek to explore the consequences of promoting, especially of unsanctioned promoting, in Poddar Nagar and Katju Nagar with more emphasis on the latter, by shedding light onto the dynamics of the relationships among the ‘original’ inhabitants and the ‘newcomers’, which are necessarily spatial, grounded in the neighbourhood level as well as in the apartment level. More broadly, two questions can be asked that can potentially kick off further micro-level ethnographic research in different South Kolkata neighbourhoods: 1) What new social forms of urban living emerge in Kolkata’s neighbourhoods dominated by promoted multistoried buildings? 2) How has widespread promoting changed the demography of Kolkata neighbourhoods which have historically been characterized by their homogeneity in terms of ethnicity, defined by language and religion (Chatterjee 2004: 133), and what are the implications of such demographic changes?

Just before Durga Puja festival in October 2019, I had a conversation with one of the members of Katju Nagar’s Durgotsav Committee, who is also associated with Katju Nagar’s local club, about the organization of the festival in the neighbourhood. One of the committee’s tasks is to collect donations from all residents to cover a part of the cost of the festivities. Surprisingly, he stated that most of the newcomers were not willing to give donations and that they even refused to talk to them (that is, the members of the Durgotsav Committee who were collecting the donations). He continuously emphasized that the ‘original’ inhabitants of the neighbourhood are ‘a minority’. When I asked what is the ‘original’ – ‘newcomers’ ratio, though, he gave contradictory evidence. Initially, he gave a rough estimate of 25% as the percentage of the ‘original’ inhabitants. However, in the course of the conversation, he gave a divergent approximation of the ‘original’ inhabitants, consisting 50% of the neighbourhood’s population. He explained that the promoted buildings in the neighbourhood constitute around 90% of the structures, while only around twenty houses remain unpromoted. He explained that in a certain plot twelve flats are created. Out of which six are taken by the original inhabitants, and the remaining six are either sold or rented out. Given that in most cases the original inhabitants did not sell their apartments and go away but rather continued to live in the area, although they may rent out some of the flats they own, and given the existence of a small percentage of non-promoted structures in which ‘original’ inhabitants still reside, the percentage of the ‘original inhabitants’ should be around 50%. Then why does he insist that they are a minority, a persistent feeling that continued to surface in following conversations as well?

I soon realized that there was a recurrent discourse among many of Katju Nagar's residents, most of them associated with the local club and/or the colony committee, that the 'original inhabitants' constituted a minority while the 'outsiders', those who had bought or rented apartments, were the majority. And in these conversations the 25% ratio was also invoked. In these views, there was an underlying feeling that the 'original inhabitants' were under threat. Furthermore, an octogenarian Katju Nagar resident raised the issue of ethnicity, arguing that Katju Nagar is «Not a Bengali neighbourhood anymore»:

Almost 25% of all the shops here are owned by non-Bengalis. There is a grocery store nearby. If you go there, you won't find people talking in Bengali. You will hear (people talking in) Hindi. This means, that so many (non-Bengali) people have come here

Members of both Poddar Nagar and Katju Nagar committees complained that the majority of the newcomers were not willing to participate in the neighbourhood's social life (including joining the club in the case of Katju Nagar). They do not easily mix with the 'original inhabitants' and instead «They live within themselves. They try to lead a solitary happy life», or likewise «They just try to live in their own little spaces, looking after their own lives'», as a Poddar Nagar resident stated.

Moreover, Katju Nagar residents associated with the colony committee leveled criticism at the 'newcomers'. The aforementioned octogenarian resident stated that 'they are all like migratory (*Ben: Porijai*) birds', implying that the newcomers do not feel any attachment with the neighborhood. Likewise, the secretary of the colony committee argued that: «Many outsiders have come due to promoting and they don't really have love or affection for the area. They have just bought flats». This was allegedly substantiated by a survey in which it was found out that the 'newcomers' do not dispose their garbage in the garbage vat:

Secretary: We did a survey and found out that those of us who are the original inhabitants of this place, they have a geographical or environmental awareness in them. But the new flat holders are either giving the (garbage) plastic to their domestic help to disposed of or they themselves come down and keep it on one side. They don't go to the (garbage) vat to throw (the plastics filled with garbage).

Meanwhile, both Katju Nagar and Poddar Nagar residents criticized the ‘newcomers’ for treating the ‘original inhabitants’ as inferiors because of their supposedly backward ‘colony culture’. According to a member of Poddar Nagar colony committee:

They don’t allow the children to mix with others. (They say,) “They are colony people. You will become bad if you mix with them. If you go with them, your studies will be spoilt. You won’t be able to progress (in life).” We are saying these now. I haven’t said this to my family. Since I’m a colony person, I have lived with the colony culture. But the person who has bought a flat and come to live next to me, (s)he won’t allow (his/her children) to come often (to my house) because their culture will get spoilt. And when these kinds of people keep increasing (in number), (the little that is left) will also cease to be. This is the reality.

Likewise, according to a Katju Nagar resident:

They have a haughty/ high-handed attitude. They think, “These are the colony people. They were there from before. We have come here and developed them. So, we don’t mix with people like them.” There are many (outsiders) who do not mix (with the original inhabitants of the colony).

On a late January evening, whilst sitting in the tea stall besides Jagriti Shongo (Katju Nagar’s club), one gentleman (who was a ‘newcomer’), besides meting out an aggressive attitude towards me, also pointed out in a derogative manner that the ‘original inhabitants’ are neither ‘cultured’ nor ‘educated’. He mentioned that his father, being misguided by a broker, had purchased a flat in the area twelve years ago. He interestingly added that most of the new flat owners cannot tolerate the people of the ‘colony’, therefore they try to sell their apartments and flee the area. He insisted that I do research in a different area, saying that I was wasting my time here and if I published anything related to that place, I would face a problem. His last words were, « It is as if that you know that in a certain place one bomb blast will happen and you are still heading towards that place». But as far as Katju Nagar is concerned, it appears that there is a trend amongst those who purchase new flats to sell them off and leave the area. This was also corroborated by the secretary of Katju Nagar colony committee, who stated that the newcomers did not want to stay there anymore.

From all the above it becomes evident that there was an ongoing conflict between the ‘original inhabitants’ and the ‘newcomers’, especially in Katju Nagar. To some extent, these tensions emanate from the fact that the ‘newcomers’ are not represented in any local institution,

mainly the colony committee in both Katju Nagar and Poddar Nagar. Not only are they debarred from contesting in the committee elections, but they also do not have any voting rights. The exclusion of the newcomers by the ‘original’ inhabitants from the colony committees structurally creates distinctions among the former and the latter, and hence shapes the dynamics of their relationships.

Of course, as several residents admitted, the exclusion of the newcomers from the colony committees has generated a series of problems. First of all, since they are not represented in the committee, they usually refrain from addressing any issue regarding, for example, their multistoried building or related to the neighborhood. Second, since the colony committee is not voted by everyone, this makes its public legitimacy questionable. As a Poddar Nagar ‘original’ inhabitant explained:

Tomorrow the flat holders can say, “We don’t vote, (so) who are you?” Suppose I keep my car outside my house and any original plot holder has a problem with that and submits a complaint letter to the colony committee. If the secretary of the colony committee comes and tells me not to keep my car there, I can ask who he is (to tell me that). If he says I’m colony committee’s secretary, an elected member, I will reply by saying, “But I didn’t vote (in the election)”. So, this is a problem. There will be problems between flat holders and plot holders here, if the flat holders are not included in the committee’s voting process.

Furthermore, it appears that groups of newcomers have sought to self-organize to counter the authority of the ‘original inhabitants’ organizations such as the colony committees. This was mentioned by a Katju Nagar resident associated with the colony committee. However, she aggressively stated that these initiatives would not succeed and that the newcomers should be actively hindered from forming their own institutions. To put it in her own words:

They try to form their own unities; they try to unite... They do not have any institution... They don’t have (*ota ney*) ... They could make it (*ota korte pari ni*) ... They will not be able to do it (*kore porbeo na*) ... We will not accept it (*mani na*) ... We have grown up almost playing and eating the dust

The incident described below by a Poddar Nagar resident, which happened around ten years back, is telling of the unequal way in which the ‘newcomers’ were treated at that time:

Let me tell you an amusing story. In our neighbourhood, sometimes— you must know that there are many fish in this pond... mainly Tilapia, lots of Tilapia, (and) this big Lilonticas; you would love

to eat such fried fish. Very oily fish— these fish, once or twice a year, were sold when the Pukur Committees were there. The system was that, in the neighbourhood, 2-3 days before or at least the day before (the fish sale), mic announcements were done, “On a certain Sunday fish will be caught, you all are invited to come and buy them.” It was an (exciting) affair. Fish was being caught from the neighbourhood pond and sold in the neighbourhood park. The fishermen used to come from the South (24 Parganas). The fishermen were coming and dropping the fresh catch. The fish were sold for 20 rupees per kg. We had to make a line to buy fish. I have seen with my own eyes. I had also stood in the line— it was just a bit of hooliganism (*Ben: Dadagiri*) – (I heard some people say then) “Flat holders leave the line. First the plot holders of this neighbourhood will buy fish. Flat holders later.” This has happened. In front of my eyes. They (the flat owner) used to stand with sad faces and say that they were second-class citizens.

While the role of the colony committee may be clear, it was more complicated to understand the ‘politics’ underlying the organization of religious and cultural functions in the neighbourhood level. Apart from Durga puja, Kali puja, Spring Festival (*Boshonto Utshob*) and ‘*Shetola-Kali Puja*’ are organized. In Poddar Nagar other social events such as the ‘Sit-and-Draw Competition’ (*Boshe Anko Protijogita*) are organized, and I had the chance to attend them. My general observation was that all these events were attended only by very few ‘newcomers’. Probably, one reason for this is that a certain number of the ‘newcomers’ are non-Bengalis (from Gujarat, Bihar, Manipur); therefore, they not attracted to Hindu Bengali functions, except perhaps Durga Puja which remains popular even among non-Bengalis. Moreover, the sort of social activities promoted by the clubs or other committees may not be attractive to them. Therefore, in a sense the ‘newcomers’ are marginalized right from the beginning from the social life of the neighbourhood. Moreover, it could be argued that in these occasions, that is during the organization of religious and socio-cultural events, apart from the cultivation of a certain Bengali identity, the groups of ‘original’ residents mark their presence in the neighbourhood, laying claim to its control indirectly, through a form of territorialized power/control.

Apart from the colony committee and the socio-cultural events, it could be argued that groups of residents from Katju Nagar as well as members of the colony committee seek to legitimize their control of the neighbourhood through a certain recurrent narrative. A sense of belonging of the ‘former colony’ residents was justified due to their long presence in the area and a right to the colony, the ‘glorious struggle’ of their forefathers to occupy the land, and having developed the houses on their own. Therefore, it followed naturally for them that although being

a minority, they should still have more rights to the place compared to who came from ‘outside’. This view also had its moral underpinnings since the members of Katju Nagar colony committee and some residents associated with them, all above their 50s, feel that their neighbourhood, their ‘colony’ as some of them still call it, until at least the late 1990s, was united like an extended family, in which everyone knew each other and had intimate relationships, helping one another during times of crisis, and to some extent this continues to be the case among them. This atmosphere has been disrupted by the influx of the newcomers who are supposedly not interested in creating any bond with other neighbours.

To conclude, I argue that it is through the combination of the semi-institutional role of the colony committees, the participation in the socio-cultural events and the legitimizing discourses that the ‘original’ inhabitants’ control over the neighbourhood is reaffirmed.

Conflicts played out in the apartment buildings

I now turn to show how the conflicts between the ‘original’ inhabitants and the newcomers are played out in the apartment buildings, and how in turn management of resources and unsanctioned promoting aggravate their profoundly spatial relationships.

The first set of problems, disagreements often leading to quarrels among the ‘newcomers’ and the ‘old residents’, arise out of the maintenance of the promoted multistoried building. For the need of the maintenance of a building, a committee is instituted, comprising an appointed president, a secretary and a treasurer. Their responsibilities include the looking after of common spaces like the stairs and the terrace which need to be swept regularly, ascertaining the availability of lights in the common spaces during night time, and the switching on of the water pump as well as repairment of the building etc. Conflicts begin out of disagreements regarding the handling of those issues, for example, the repairment. Due to these disagreements the building and the grills are not getting painted and the problems regarding pipelines are not being solved. Other conflicts happen when the damp of one’s bathroom seeps into the walls of others apartments.

It was also admitted by some ‘original’ inhabitants that it was very common for several ‘original’ residents to not pay the maintenance fees and, in many cases, they think that «the entire house is his, although after promoting everyone has a right over the house». It is clear, therefore, that in many occasions the former plot owners’ sense of belonging towards the building is more strongly evident, and that itself can cause disputes with the newcomers.

The second issue regards the unsanctioned promoting, which has also caused other more particular disturbances, having deteriorated neighborhood relations, including even those among original inhabitants themselves. As a Katju Nagar resident explained, given that the buildings stand too close to each other:

During repair and maintenance different kinds of problems emerge, like the people of that house object because the cement is falling on their house. Objection also comes when this house gets smeared while that house is being painted. Or, when it rains, the water from that house's cornice enters into this house. All these are happening. Since (the buildings) aren't sanctioned in the way they are developed in other places, once the structure of a building is made here, these types of problems keep happening again and again. (...) There are also privacy problems of a certain kind. For example, when my neighbour installed an A.C., the hot air from its blower started entering my house. My father isn't being able to sleep because of the sound it [the A.C.] makes. It is just next to us. Then we go there to complain about this. But the electrician isn't called (to fix the problem) as soon as we complain. So, until then, we have to suffer from this inconvenience. Or, in many places, the smoke from the kitchen exhaust of one house enters another house. Then they object to that.

The third set of problems in Katju Nagar has to do with the scarcity of water. Katju Nagar's water issue is perennial. Until the summer of 2017, Katju Nagar was supplied water through two deep tube wells (pumps /boring water) which were providing daily a certain amount of water to houses and apartment buildings. The water provided was, and still continues to be unfiltered groundwater. However, this facility was insufficient given the rise of the population in the area. A group of 'original' residents took the situation in their hands by launching a movement and demanding from the local councilor to increase the number of deep tube wells. The residents' demand rested on the fact that they pay increased tax due to the creation of South City, hence they deserve a better water supply facility. Moreover, the adjacent neighbourhoods such as Bikramgarh and Poddar Nagar were supplied filtered water from Garden Reach treatment tank through underground pipelines. Their protest, which also included blocking off of roads, was covered by the local news channels (such as ABP Ananda, ZTV). This created pressure on the councilor who soon announced the installation of two supplementary tube wells in the area.

According to residents, although the water crisis was reduced subsequent to the addition of the two tube wells, it is still palpable due to the scarcity of water. Moreover, the plan to include

Katju Nagar in the provision for Garden Reach filtered potable water has not been implemented yet. Hence, for drinking purposes, the majority of residents (those who can afford it) buy drums of drinkable water from the market. There is ample evidence that South Kolkata's groundwater is contaminated with arsenic. Even though hand water pumps still function in the area, since they draw groundwater, it is dangerous to drink from them.

The scarcity of water is a fundamental reason that creates tensions between 'original' residents, who are landlords, and their renters. According to some 'original' residents, many landlords, when renting the house out to many renters, who usually work at South City Mall, advise them to use the nearby pond, since they cannot provide them with sufficient quantity of water. The management and distribution of the water also creates altercations between 'original' residents and flat holders who are amongst the 'newcomers'. Katju Nagar's colony committee's treasurer referred to such an altercation in his apartment building which has been promoted. Given the water shortage the flat holder accused the treasurer that the latter made an unequal distribution of the available water. I myself witnessed an incident in which a lady (an original plot holder's daughter) came to complain to the colony committee about the rearrangement of the plumbing system in their building. This work was commissioned by the other flat owners, who are newcomers, when her family was not at home. On returning, the original plot holder's family found that the work of the new plumbing system was almost finished, and had been done in such a way that their flat on the ground floor lost access to the water supply.

To conclude, I have highlighted how such conflicts are feeding into the already negative attitudes towards newcomers and hence enhancing the tensions and antagonisms, which then in turn make the newcomers leave the area again.

Conclusion of section III

In this section, I have highlighted different aspects of the ongoing conflict among 'original' inhabitants and the 'newcomers', which the former themselves have pointed to. To mention some, the institutional control that local maintain, the discourse that the 'newcomers' are treated as 'outsiders' or 'strangers' with whom it is not easy to form a bond, the ethnicity aspect (Bengalis/non-Bengalis), the 'colony culture' vis-à-vis the supposedly more individualistic lifestyle of the newcomers, the difficulties in sharing resources, especially water, and the problems that unsanctioned promoting has brought about.

Apart from the above factors, I was given two more interpretations of why these conflicts happen. The first was by the member of the Durgotsav committee I presented at the outset, who thinks that the real causes behind the conflicts are competition and jealousy among the neighbors, mainly in terms of their consumerist possessions. The second came from a Bikramgarh resident who raised the class dimension, indicating thus:

One of the reasons is this: because those who are outsiders have a definite defining source of income. Those who are 'insiders', most of them, do not have any. They are dependent upon their property. So somehow their mobility is restricted. And this lack of mobility makes them aggressive. They believed this belongs to them

While all the above 'emic' understandings and interpretations may hold true, I would like to suggest an overarching interpretation.

The groups of people above their 50s who are the focus of this study, are people who have experienced the transition from the self-developed houses (which in many cases housed joint families) to promoted apartments. The process of promoting may involve a kind of shock, since it presupposes the demolition of the former house accompanied by the eradication of memories, the replacement of forms of urban living and kin structures. This should be painful for many of the residents, while at the same time some of them were lured by the imaginary of flat living.

Neither the residents nor the members of the local committees were prepared for these changes that promoting would bring about, and certainly they had no past experience of what 'modern' urban living would signify in the context of a Kolkata neighbourhood. The members of the colony committees, who are currently complaining about the consequences of promoting, were the ones (not necessarily the same persons) who being part of the Left- Front's political and electoral machinery and its urban developmentalism rhetoric, as I have shown in previous sections, encouraged or even imposed promoting. Thus, some of these expectations were unfulfilled, fomenting feelings of resentment. In retrospect, they complain about the consequences of promoting, that is the influx of the 'newcomers', while at the same time the income of many of them was increased precisely because they could sell or rent out their promoted apartments, and herein lies their ambivalence. Simultaneously, quite understandably, they try to curb the effects of promoting in their neighbourhood, for instance, water shortages due to the exponential rise of the population, disputes among residents, etc.

I suggest, therefore, that the ‘original’ inhabitants, given their ambivalence for the system of promoting, they have not been able to accommodate the radical changes this has brought about and they seem to struggle to come to terms with the transformations it engendered. It would be interesting to explore through empirical research how these dynamics unfold in other South Kolkata localities which, similar to Katju Nagar, used to be characterized by strong local-based identities, a sense of tight community was cultivated and in which a substantial percentage of the ‘original’ residents continues to reside there even after promoting was completed.

Chapter 5

Disputes over property development within families

Introduction

Whilst mainly focusing on how promoting works in Katju Nagar and Poddar Nagar, a recurring discourse, namely that promoting serves to solve already existing conflicts within families regarding property issues, including division of property, was identifiable. At that time, it seemed to me that such a discourse derived from promoters' efforts to justify the usefulness and necessity of their work, and that thereby it did not necessarily reflect the residents' grounded realities. However, I soon realized that such cases were widespread; almost all my interlocutors –the majority of whom belonging to the second generation of refugees– had a story to share regarding tensions within families around property issues, even though most of them were reluctant in disclosing their own family stories.

The focus of this chapter is precisely on these property disputes within families. As my ethnographic evidence suggests, such property disputes may occur between parents and their sons and/or daughters, but most frequently among siblings. These disputes are played out in the context of self-made structures, as well as in structures which are about to be promoted, or are in the process of promoting, but also in already promoted buildings. If not properly resolved within the families themselves, such disputes are often addressed by a family member to the local colony committee, the local club, presumably the local police station and can potentially end up in law courts.

The chapter has three aims: First, to identify the reasons behind property disputes. Second, to pay attention to the varieties of ways in which family members lay their claims over property. Third, to examine how class and gender positions become embroiled in family disputes over property. It will argue that the class/ gender combine determines to great extent who has the upper hand in these disputes and who has subsequently the advantage in securing his/her entitlement to property share.

The transition from joint to nuclear families in South Kolkata's changing built environment: The main factors accounting for property disputes

A typical joint family is defined and widely understood as consisting of the individual families of two or more brothers, with the brothers' parents and presumably uncles, all of them staying together in a single house, contributing collectively in the household expenditure, sharing the resources and the kitchen. Therefore, joint families used to be characterized by the patrilineal ideology and the patrilocal norm. Although intimate relations among the family members and equal sharing of resources were to great extent attributes of joint families, it must be pointed out that discourses, including my interlocutors', often tend to romanticize them, expressing an idealized view of how joint family way of life used to be. Contrary to such representations, Neel Mukherjee's (2015) novel «The lives of others», offers an eloquent portrayal of a well-off joint family residing in North Calcutta in the late 1960s, capturing the competition and tensions among the individual families of the sons of the head of the joint family. Most parts of the city, especially North Calcutta used to be dominated by joint families at least until the late 1960.

Unlike North Kolkata, South Kolkata's refugee colonies followed a rather different pattern in terms of their prevalent family structure. For as soon as they were established in the late 1940s, they were inhabited by nuclear, or small joint families diverging from the large joint family or extended families' pattern characterizing past life in East Bengal. According to Chatterji (2007), apart from the enforcement of migration after Partition, which in many cases separated family members, the reason for the breakdown of most refugee extended families was the lack of available space in the new environment. The pattern of the large rural family household could by no means reproduced in the squatted land with restricted physical space:

The structure of family life among refugee communities also changed profoundly. When he looked at the peasant refugees of West Bengal, Kanti Pakrasi described how they struggled to preserve family life as they had known it in West Bengal, keeping intact as far as possible patrilineal, patrilocal, extended families. But already by 1948 the balance of influence inside refugee households had begun to alter. Within a year of partition, the scarcity of physical space for most refugees undermined the large Hindu joint families which had been the norm in eastern Bengal, and nuclear families now increasingly tended to hive off from them. Of course, circumstances altered cases. High-caste families generally found it easier to keep the old extended families going,

while lower castes found it more difficult. But the upshot was that the number of nuclear refugee families continued to grow apace (Chatterji 2007: 152)

In the case of Katju Nagar, the above point about the formation of nuclear families in the refugee colonies is strengthened in light of the historical evidence provided by Gautam Roy Choudhury's book. At the end of the chapter titled, 'Colony Protishtha' ('Colony Establishment') he summarizes a number of points gleaned from the interviews he had conducted of those few surviving colony residents who had witnessed and participated in the formation of the colony in January 1950. The third point in the list deals with the primary conditions governing the distribution of the plots Each plot was 2.5-3 kathas of land (one katha is 720square feet, that is around 67square meter):

C) The primary conditions for getting a plot in the colony were: One has to be a refugee from East Bengal. One must not have one's own dwelling place in West Bengal. One has to stay with one's family, meaning, along with one's mother, brother, sister and wife. One family will be given only one plot.

By and large, Katju Nagar was formed in accordance with these rules. This meant that each family unity was small, either a small joint family or nuclear family.

With the advent of the second generation —when the sons of the first-generation refugees got married— the family members multiplied thus forming joint families. Most of the families used to stay jointly in a single-storied house. It was widely narrated by my interlocutors that at least until around the 1970s it was very common to find joint families —others say until the 1990s and I have documented cases of separation after the 2000s, some of them having occurred only recently.

When asked generally about the demise of the joint families in Kolkata some of my acquaintances in the city pointed out that the main reason was the growing financial disparities inside the family and this was also what my interlocutors indicated:

It was seen that within a family some members amassed more (financial) strength than some of the others in the same family. This is one of the major causes due to which the (original) social structure started breaking. This type of financial disbalance slowly started breaking these families. The member who had more financial strength wanted to play a bigger role in the family. (Hence), the member whose financial capacity was less started suffering from inferiority complex. And some

were suffering from superiority complex [that is, the ones who had more financial strength]. This led to a tussle, and that tussle started to slowly break these [that is, the families].

Likewise, a Poddar Nagar resident belonging to the second generation, in his late 60s, identified the same reason, that is financial differentiation, as the cause of the breakdown of his own family:

From '80 to '90 every house had a joint family. Let me tell you about my house. We separated in 2005-6. Because till the parents were alive, the entire (area) had joint families. And in some houses, there lived 10 families at a time. Today, that's no longer there. Now, everyone has separated. (...) My father, my own father, used to earn quite handsomely even in those days. He had got a government job, but he left it. (He decided,) "I will do my own business. There is more money in that." He used to stay at one place with the entire family, including my elder paternal uncle (*jetha*) and my cousin brothers (*jettuto bhaiera*), (and) everyone else. When they started becoming more financially self-dependent, the differences began cropping up. Whatever my father had- now my father also became older, his income decreased, and as similar types of businesses started cropping up everywhere, automatically his business declined. Then automatically (everyone) tried getting separated. This is the root (cause).

The breakdown of joint families throughout the 1970s and 1980s led to spatial changes, as it was usually followed by the division of the plot, in most cases among the respective nuclear families of each brother. Arguably the acquirement of the land rights in 1989 and the subsequent creation of the new three-storied buildings since the early 2000s, through promoting, comprising modern flats precipitated the changes that were underway, that is the transition from joint to nuclear families. In this sense, the new built environment reshaped notions of family, consolidating the nuclear family structure and ideology. In many occasions the individual nuclear families of the former joint family used to live and continue to live in spatial proximity with each other's; be it in structures lying in separate subdivisions of the same plot or in different flats of the same promoted three storied building.

Interlocutors who have experienced the shift from joint to nuclear families, were in a position to compare and contrast their respective underlying ideologies and notions of family relationships. For instance, a Poddar Nagar interlocutor criticized values and patterns of behavior related to nuclear families, juxtaposing the respective values and patterns of relatedness that were imagined to characterize joint families:

Now, since the families have become smaller, no one wants to stay together. They mainly want to consolidate their own shares (*“nijer ta guchiye newa”*). And to maintain relations by being at a distance. This is what the people are mainly thinking. Previously, (people) used to think that no matter what we do, we will stay together even if 7 of us have to share one chappati. Now, totally (the tendency is that if) I earn more, I separate (from the others). My life becomes my own... Now people have become so selfish that they think, “If I earn 10 rupees, why should I even spend 1 rupee on someone else. I will spend it on my family. And 9 rupees will go into my savings.” And previously it was like, “I have earned 10 rupees. Everyone is sitting together and eating. That’s the most important thing.” This was the (way people thought) before.

This tendency to give clear priority to one’s nuclear family could be discerned in the narratives of other interlocutors from both Poddar Nagar and Katju Nagar. This, more particularly signified a growing concern about one’s kids, often at the expense of other close relatives, such as nephews or nieces. For instance, an interlocutor from Poddar Nagar explained that «nowadays when one gives something like a food item or money to his own kid, he tries to hide it from his nephews or nieces who might be around».

It can be argued, therefore, that the ideology of the nuclear family coupled with class differentiation among family members (primarily the brothers), laid fertile ground for subsequent property disputes over property to happen. If economic differentiation was underway even before the 1990s, the inauguration of the economic reforms in West Bengal in the mid-1990s along with globalizing processes certainly intensified the disparities within the middle-classes (Scrase & Ganguly-Scrase 2011), and arguably within middle-class and lower middle-class families. Moreover, the increasing awareness of the economic value attached to property in the context of the real-estate transformation of the former refugee colonies, especially the completion of South City Mall in 2008, also constitutes a factor behind such disputes. All the above tendencies will feature and thus become more comprehensive in Sujana and Saroj’s stories that follow.

Property disputes in self-made structures

Sujan's story

One of my first encounters in a post-monsoon late September 2019 morning was with an interlocutor belonging to a group of ex-Usha workers whom I had been acquainted with since 2016. Sujan is in his mid-70s and used to work in the factory manufacturing sewing machines. After his forced retirement under the BIFR scheme he opened a variety store close to South City mall selling cosmetics and imitation ornaments to support his family. Initially, I aimed at getting to know more about his work experience in the factory. Yet, it was evident that he was keen on talking about theatre. For this is his passion as he has been acting for the last fifty years taking particular interest in portraying shrewd characters. In his career he has acted in both local stages and in big theatres like the historical 'Star Theatre' in North Kolkata, which he feels proud of. He went on narrating that in one of his plays he performed Ali Mansoor, an evil character and historical figure. His rendition of the character was apparently so convincing that it riled up the audience. So much so that some of them even beat him after the play had concluded.

As soon as I changed the topic of the conversation asking about his house and his family the tone of his voice changed and his facial expression turned shadowy. He confessed that he used to stay only with his wife. However, as he felt lonely, he has recently invited his daughter along with his son-in-law and his granddaughter to stay in his house. Furthermore, he shared the fact that he had lost his only son to a pancreatic ailment and a daughter too passed away after an operation. He also has another unmarried daughter.

I felt that Sujan was generally ambivalent about extracting profit from his property. On the one hand, it was pointed out that he did not feel like renting this part of the house because he wanted to keep the memory of his late son and daughter alive. He added that he has given the ground floor with a nominal fee to a friend who is reliable and helps the family a lot. Arguably, he sought to balance profit with getting other forms of support from his friend. On the other hand, he said that he rents out part of his house like most of the property owners in his locality do. Since it comprises a ground floor plus three floors there is still enough space available for a renter to stay in, even excluding that which is occupied by his family. Moreover, he remembered renting out parts of the house when it was being gradually constructed.

Overall, Sujan seemed to have aptly combined the need to make out profit from his property with his emotional needs and family imaginings. Certainly, his case is not representative of the norm, that is owners who try to make the maximum of the profit they can by renting out the flats they own (as I have shown in the previous chapters).

In one of our following encounters, he showed me the exterior façade of his house standing next to the houses of his brothers. The plot was equally divided among them (each part was 12X56 feet length) in the early 1990s because of the breakdown of the joint family. However, the distance in between the buildings was not accurately defined. He explained that the disagreements regarding the gap between the separate structures resulted in disputes among the brothers which were only resolved in the court four months back. Though it seemed that Sujan compromised so that the dispute was over, yet the filial ties between the brothers were irreparably damaged. I was asked not to delve into the details of this controversy. As a corollary, I was unable to grasp the inner dynamics and the potential financial disparities among the brothers.

Saroj story

Saroj's story represents a case in which ancestral property was developed by the financial means of the family, not by an external promoter. In this case the different nuclear families of the brothers live in the different flats of the newly self-made three-storied building.

According to Saroj's narration, his parents came before Partition in 1945 to what would in a few years' time be one of South Kolkata's many refugee colonies. Around the same time, his maternal grandfather also arrived in Bandel, the former Portuguese settlement in Bengal, after having abandoned his ancestral home in East Bengal which, at present, constitutes the sovereign state of Bangladesh. His father had originally occupied a plot which measured 2 kathas (1440 square feet). Shortly after, Saroj's paternal uncle (*kaka*) also turned up along with his family. As soon as they felt more secured about their claim to the land, the occupied plot was divided into two to make separate space for the families of both brothers. Likewise, his maternal grandfather (*dadu*) gave his brother [Saroj's younger grandfather (*choto dadu*)] half of his occupied plot in Bandel.

From the age of two until Saroj was a student of 7th standard, he was transferred to his maternal aunt in Bandel for she did not have any kid of her own. Once he realized who were his

biological parents, he demanded to be sent back to them. He used to live with his parents and six siblings along with an unmarried paternal uncle of his. He has an elder brother (Sanjay), three elder sisters (Lakshmi, Pratima, Abhilasha) a younger sister (Ruma) and a younger brother (Riju). His father used to work in Calcutta Tram Company and the whole family depended upon his salary. He remembers that:

I used to live with my brothers and sisters, at that time, in a single room only. Since the area was big there were (make-shift) partitions made with bamboo ('*dormar bera*'). The room (was made of) temporary fences (*bera*). Half of the roof was made up of earthen tiles (*tali*), and the other half was made of GI sheets, corrugated sheets, I mean. With these, in those days, (the house was made). Inside (such a tenement), on a single bed my mother, my younger brother and sisters (used to sleep). My father had a separate (arrangement). My elder brother, since he was the eldest amongst all the brothers and sisters, had his own small room made with such make-shift partitions.

The above-described form of the house was the most common structure to be found in the 1950s and 1960s in most of the refugee colonies. The fact that his elder brother had his separate room is telling of the dynamics of the relations and the roles in the family established even as early as their childhood. In light of the importance of the elder son in Bengali culture it can be assumed that Saroj's elder brother was preparing for his role as the next head of the family, having both privileges (his own arrangement) as well as obligations. He graduated from Jadavpur University as a mechanical engineer. And as Saroj wryly states, this was made possible because their mother sold her gold ornaments at that time to facilitate Sanjay's studies. The disputes over property that will be discussed below are deeply rooted in the dynamics of the family relations wherein past family experiences continue to play a role today. All of his elder sisters have completed their graduation. Saroj, after completing 12th standard, worked in a tailoring shop in the neighborhood. Besides this, from time to time he also worked in Usha factory on a day-to-day contractual basis whenever extra labour was required.

On retiring in the early 1970s, Saroj's father got a little sum of money with which, under Saroj's mother's initiative, he embarked on a renovation of the original house using sturdier construction materials. Hence, the erstwhile make-shift fence walls were partially upgraded to half-walls of brick and the roof was completely covered with corrugated tin sheets, more durable than the former baked earthen tiles.

The fences were taken down and the lower parts (of those walls) were made permanent. (The formerly make-shift) boundary (of the house was replaced with) bricks. Half walls of brick. And the fences which were in good condition were re-attached on top of those (half walls of brick). And the roof was the same. The earthen tiles (*tali*) which were at the front (part of the roof), were removed. The remaining portion (was covered) with GI sheet. Less than half the area had earthen tiles. The rest had (been covered with) tin (sheets). GI sheets. That plus (more) new GI sheets were brought and the entire roof was covered with corrugated sheets. Yes, this was there that the extra fences (*bera*) which were left– I don't know what they are called in English– they were repurposed by father to make the ceiling. The GI sheets become hot in the sun. (So) using those fences only, along with some wood, he had made the ceiling. Something that is called 'false ceiling'.

In '91, under the initiative of his eldest sister and her husband the decision to construct a bigger and better permanent house was taken. Their father having passed away in 1989, the property rights had been transferred to their mother. The financial situation of all siblings was not very stable at that time but it was agreed that the three siblings, namely Sanjay, Pratima and Saroj would contribute to the expenses and Pratima would oversee the construction work.

Between 1992 and 1993, within the span of a year and a half, the work was complete as far as the ground floor, the mezzanine floor above the garage, the garage, the 1st floor, the staircase (from the ground floor), and gallery (on the 1st floor) were concerned. However, there were only two walls on the ground floor thus making an 'L' shape, with no walls constructed toward the street. They were completed later in 1997. The first floor has three rooms, big dining space, kitchen, latrine (and) bathroom combined, and balcony.

There stayed (on the first floor) –at that time– his unmarried sister Pratima, his youngest sister (Ruma), his mother, and his elder brother Sanjay as well as his sister-in-law (Sanjay's wife), and their children. Since her marriage in 1981, Saroj's eldest sister Lakshmi has been living in Delhi. Abhilasha, Saroj's immediate elder sister, got married in 1994 and, thereafter, settled down with her husband in another part of Kolkata. Hence, she had only lived for a couple of months in the bigger house. Both of the sisters did not have any claim over the property for they had moved out in order to live with their respective spouses. On the other hand, Pratima is unmarried, and has invested both time and money in the construction of the current house. Therefore, quite naturally, this has secured her a position of priority in the division of the property.

In 1995, his oldest brother-in-law suggested that it is time for Saroj to build the second floor. At that time, it was agreed that the ground floor (along with the mezzanine floor) goes to

Pratima, first floor to Sanjay, second to Saroj and third to Riju, the youngest brother. During that period of time, Saroj was working as a contractor under CPWD and this enabled him to make the maximum financial investment in the making of the house in its current form. As Riju was economically the weakest of all the siblings, the construction of the 3rd floor was postponed until such time when he would be financially stable enough to afford it, albeit with some help from his comparatively more affluent relatives if the need should so arise.

While Saroj was working in Delhi and had got married his first wife in 1997 a tussle was going on back in their house in the former refugee colony. It appears that since the ground floor that was intended to pass to Pratima was not complete both she and their mother used to stay in the first floor along with Sanjay and his family. Apparently, Sanjay wanted the flat exclusively for his own nuclear family. Consequently, he enforced his mother and sister to leave from the house. Finally, the ground floor was completed by Pratima, and she immediately moved into it with their mother. This was the first incident that accounted for the worsening of the relations between the elder brother on the one side and their mother, Pratima and Saroj on the other. Saroj thinks that the reason behind the displacement of their mother was the priority that Sanjay gave to his (nuclear) family.

In 2004 while working in Delhi, Saroj was informed that a tension was going on at his home. It appeared that Ruma (the youngest sister) and Riju (the youngest brother) felt that they were excluded from the family property by their mother. It was alleged that it was unfair that Pratima acquires the ground floor, since she is unmarried, whereas Ruma is married and has family. Hence, she made a spasmodic effort to lay claim over the ground floor occupying the floor for few hours when Pratima was absent:

They (Riju, his wife and Ruma) literally assaulted– it is called assault, no? – mother, choking her (*gola tepa*), pulling (*tana-tani kora*) and pushing (*dhakka- dhakki kora*) her”. After this event Ruma attempted to commit suicide by taking bars used for rat poison and subsequently was admitted to hospital.

Hearing about the trouble Saroj came immediately to Kolkata from Delhi, he stayed in different places for a couple of months with his mother, and when things calmed down, he transferred his mother back home (to the ground floor). Considering Ruma’s attempt to forcefully take over the ground-floor, it can be argued that not only did she challenge a customary practice, namely that daughters after marriage move to their in-laws’ or husband’s place, but also staked a claim to the

paternal property (subsequently maternal, given that after the father's death the property rights were transferred to the mother, and not directly to their sons and daughters). As Donner (2015: 325-326) argues, the patrilocal norm remains very strong amongst Hindu Bengali middle-class families. Divergences from this pattern are repudiated and in case the spouse moves to his in-laws place he can be laughed upon. However, Donner feels that there is a novel practice whereby certain couples choose to stay with the wife's parents or nearby. The three cases she presents concern only-daughters. Interestingly, in Donner's second ethnographic example (Donner 2015: 337-338) Amrita is a single daughter married with a younger man of relatively lower status. Her parents are well-off and they possess a three-story house. The couple chose to stay in that place being entitled to the property but at the same time having also the responsibility of supporting Amrita's aged parents (Donner 2015: 337-338). However, Donner does not provide any example that refers to married women who are not necessarily single daughters and her ethnography is not telling of the relationships and/or disputes over property between sisters as it is the case of Ruma and Pratima. Certainly, Amrita's story does not pertain to Ruma's case, for she is not an only child and we hardly know about her relationships with her in-laws as well as her husband's class, but it shows that a move to the wife's parents can happen only under very specific circumstances.

In addition, unlike her elder sisters (Lakshmi, Abhilasha), Ruma laid claim to her paternal property. Donner (2015: 326) has argued that it is considered a customary practice that daughters are generally excluded from any entitlement to the paternal property due to the prevalent patrilineal ideology. In the event of having inherited a portion of property they are customarily expected to hand over the legal share to their brothers (Donner 2015: 327). However, alongside other societal shifts, it is observed that there is a growing tendency for women to be more assertive in their entitlements to paternal property. This is exemplified in Donner's interlocutor who:

(...) spent huge amounts of time and effort on a court case involving her two brothers, who shared her natal home and expected her to hand over her legal share to them. This she refused flat-out, arguing that the days when sisters would just meekly hand over their share in inherited property were over (Donner 2015: 325)

This tendency may well account for Ruma's assertiveness, but at the same time, unlike Donner's interlocutor, she is not a legal heir of the property because according to her mother's will the property would be divided amongst Sanjay, Pratima and Saroj.

Moreover, according to Saroj's narrative, it appears that Ruma's target was principally Pratima whom she thinks has been much favoured in the division of property. Ruma's claim seems to be grounded in a middle-class cultural value, namely her marital status and her having children which is juxtaposed to Pratima's being unmarried and having no children. Perhaps, from Ruma's and Riju's point of view, Pratima could rent out another smaller apartment since being unmarried she did not need much space. Ruma played this card in order to contest Pratima's entitlement to the share of the paternal property. Given that spinsters are hardly well-respected in middle-class cultural worlds, Pratima could easily be in a much more vulnerable position.

However, the reality was rather different. Pratima acquired a substantial share of the property which even exceeds her personal needs. The ground floor she inherited included a mezzanine floor which she occasionally gives for rent. At the same time her mother's decision signified that Riju (the younger brother) was excluded from a legal share of the property something that contravenes the customary practice of sons being the only heir of paternal property.

It can be argued that a combination of factors made Pratima's entitlement to the ground-floor seem legitimate. First, it can be understood as an act of care and concern by her mother, whose will gave Pratima the legal right to the property share. Second, her contribution with personal labour and cash in the making of the house. Moreover, it must also be taken into consideration that her high levels of education as well as her secure employment, as she used to have a government job, gave her the exposure which rendered the supervising of the construction of the house including the handling of the manly world of engineers, contractors and builders possible. Her well-paid permanent job also gave her the capacity to contribute financially to the construction. In addition, the fact that Saroj has pictured her as a respectable figure who has played a dynamic role in all family affairs is also telling of the status she possesses. All the above gave her the advantage vis-à-vis Ruma in securing her entitlement. For Ruma is a housewife, she has not invested in the house and is not educated. As a corollary, she lacks the exposure to deal with complex procedures regarding ownership issues, not to speak about supervising construction work. Ultimately, given her lower status, the only 'weapon' Ruma could mobilize to contest Pratima's entitlement was the asset of her having family and being married.

In 2000 Riju asked Saroj's permission to stay on the second floor. Saroj had no objection to his younger brother's temporary residence in one part of the portion belonging to him. After all, at that time Saroj envisioned his life in Delhi. Not only had he married a woman from Agra, but also

bought a plot in western Delhi. Naturally, he had no plans to return to Kolkata. Both the other two elder siblings, namely Sanjay and Pratima had refused Riju to stay in their respective flats. Hence Saroj was worried that his younger brother would be left without a place to stay, considering that he was also financially unstable.

By sharing his flat with his brother, he felt that he was aptly re-enacting his maternal grandfather's gesture, who had shared the plot in Bandel with his (Saroj's grandfather's) younger brother. Furthermore, it called to mind his father's initiative in giving half of the occupied plot in the refugee colony to his (Saroj father's) brother.

Saroj pictures his younger brother as irresponsible and quite detached from the family. It is observed that ever since childhood Riju, unlike his elder siblings, did not exhibit much interest in studies. Saroj mentions that when Riju was in Mumbai, he was not able to get a job and nobody knew how he used to spend his time over there. Moreover, whilst he was working in Delhi for 4-5 years under Saroj's guidance as a contractor, he hardly fulfilled any given task. On top of that, he was supposedly creating trouble by constantly intruding into other Bengali families, and displaying little concern about stabilizing himself in any job.

Despite his instability at both personal and professional levels, Saroj indicates –with a sense of irony– that another reason behind Riju's desire to occupy his flat was that 'he got possessed by the idea of getting married'²⁹. Until early 2000s it seems that despite the complaints and the fact that the construction of Riju's floor was yet to be accomplished as per initial plan, the relationship between the two siblings was relatively good.

However, things radically changed from 2004 onwards. It appears that coincidentally with the squabble over the ground floor, his brother who had already married by then laid claim to the second floor, not in legal terms but by virtue of their presence there and Saroj's concomitant absence. Since then, Riju, his wife and his daughter have been occupying the flat that covers more than half of the floor belonging to Saroj. The smaller flat that covers the remaining floor space is occupied by Saroj, his wife and his daughter since 2017. Saroj is deeply disturbed by the fact that Riju and his family never acknowledged his polite gesture in allowing them to stay in one of his flats. Moreover, in spite of the electricity bill being sent in the name of Riju, it is Saroj who is still

²⁹ Saroj uses the colloquial expression 'bhoot chepa', literally translated as 'to be possessed by a spirit/ghost', it is actually used to describe 'a sudden, strong desire to do something, a whimsical decision'

enforced to pay the tax for that occupied flat. His invoking of his brother's wife lower status in an extremely derogative way could be interpreted as an effort to delegitimize further their claim to the second floor flat:

the girl whom Riju has married hails from Baghajatin. I would have to say that she is from a poor (*gorib*), needy family. And this girl– as far as I have heard. I can't confirm this– (aren't there some family members) who are like the garbage (*jonjal*) of the family? Amongst 4-5 brothers and sisters, if there is one that is very dangerous, quarrelsome, etc. – she was a force of that kind. For that reason, the other brothers and sisters got her married in whatever way they could.

In 2005 Saroj decided to reclaim the part of the house where Riju and his wife were staying by filing a court case against his brother. He had originally started this case in the lower court in 2005. In 2009, there was a court decree ordering his younger brother to vacate the occupied flat. However, the court hadn't fixed date by which this process ought to have been completed. Furthermore, at that time Saroj was not in Kolkata and was hesitant in evicting Riju and his family from the flat, for they had nowhere else to go. The law court issued the decision in favor of Saroj because his right over the second floor –which was transferred to him by his mother– was borne out by the necessary legal documents. His lawyer had submitted to the court the original deed, registration paper, electricity bill, the original voter ID card and the original bill of the house tax charged by the Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC).

However, once he returned to his house in 2017, he reopened the case aiming at gaining the full control of the second floor by expelling his brother and his family from the portion they had been occupying since 2000.

The case is ongoing and is far from being completed because his brother not only appealed to the higher court, but also submitted a medical report, stating that he (Riju) is undergoing treatment for some sort of mental ailment he has recently developed. Saroj fears that his court case like others can linger on from 25 to 30 years. First because there is a lack of judges. Second because one needs to give money(bribe) to get closer hearing dates. Moreover, for each consultation, even with a junior advocate, one has to pay 500-1000 rupees. And if they go and stand in the court and conduct the hearing then it is it three thousand rupees per hearing. He states that since January 2019 six hearings have happened. This means that he has already paid a large amount of money. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic the hearings are expected to get further delayed.

No doubt, Saroj has the upper hand by virtue of his legal inherited right which can hardly be challenged by Riju. Riju's claim is rather based on a customary right that allows for the son's entitlement in the paternal property he does not have an inherited right and although he has neither contributed financially to the construction of the house nor for the tax. His claim may also hinge on the generosity of his brothers given his weaker financial condition as he works as a truck driver and therefore, he is in a more vulnerable position.

In 2015, Saroj announced to his elder brother (Sanjay) that, after almost three decades, he wanted to return to his house and stay there permanently. His life had undergone significant changes. What preceded was a terrible road accident that had almost cost his life and made him feel more vulnerable. In addition, Saroj's second marriage took place in 2007 and, for a brief period of about 2 years, he went to Dubai to work for a construction company.

Saroj's decision had far-reaching consequences for his relationship with his elder brother. In the intervening years, the part of the second floor that was not occupied by Riju's family was initially used as a storeroom for Sanjay and subsequently availed by Sanjay's younger daughter. As a result, being seen as an intruder, Saroj's return was both unexpected and unwelcomed. Recalling Sanjay's reaction, Saroj notes: "As soon as I told him that I need to shift to (this) house, his total nature, body language, face— everything changed".

Earlier on, the relations between the two brothers were smooth. Saroj remembers that he was very affectionate (*snayho*) towards his nieces, and used to give them pocket money whenever he paid a visit:

After that (Dubai), I came here. I will never be dead against my elder brother. The conflict that is going on in my house isn't very old. There are many who have been facing such problems for many years. No, our relations were very good. We brothers have never called each other names (*galagali*, 'to use slangs against someone') or come to blows with one another (*mara-mari*, 'to fight, to beat each other'). There was a warm (filial) intimacy (*antorikota*) between all of us, infused with love (*bhalobasha*), affection (*sneho*) and mutual respect.

Saroj's regard for his elder brother was akin to the respect afforded to their father. In Bengali culture, the ideal eldest brother represents the closest father figure, complementing or even substituting the role of the father after the latter's demise:

After that, this elder brother was (respected as a father figure) – even if not like father, elder brother is elder brother. Our elder brother is our elder brother. Elder brother had the last say. Whatever elder

brother says, will (be done). Such a (feeling we had in our) hearts (*monay*). Really, I tell you, this thing was also there some time back.

At the same time, the elder brother is expected to shoulder excessive responsibilities and obligations, usually involving looking after aging parents and/or satisfying the needs of younger siblings. Hence, it is little wonder that there indeed exists a Bengali proverb, both humorous and telling, that goes something like this: «*Elder brother's life, donkey's life!* ». In Saroj's case, it is however, unlikely that Sanjay played this role taking into consideration the way he treated his younger brother, namely Saroj, as it will become evident below.

Yet, Saroj acknowledges the fact that his elder brother's connections proved to be instrumental for him and Pratima in helping them secure their respective jobs. So much so that Saroj felt indebted to his brother, and intended to reciprocate by presenting the latter with a token of his gratitude. Hence, after getting the job in Haldia refinery through his brother's reference he offered an inverter to his brother's family. He thinks that all relationships (even those between siblings) are premised on the principal of 'giving and taking', and this may well include transactions that are being measured in financial terms:

(I believe in) give and take policy. I have worked as a supervisor (Hindi: *thekedari*) for 16-17 years. I have been to enough places. (I have learnt that) if you want to get something, you have to give something in return. This is (the truth that one can trust) with one's eyes closed. This is what my (experience) tells me." If today you tell me about a job, I will offer you something or the other. After that if you say that no it would have been better if you had offered that much, then I will try (to meet your demand). If I can afford it, then I will give it to you. Otherwise, I will request you (to consider your demand in accordance with my capacity to fulfil it). If one wants to get something, he has to give something in return. Then, I asked elder sister, "What should I do (for elder brother to thank him for his help)?" I bought an 18 thousand rupees worth inverter— the one that is used (for electricity) during load shedding— from Tollygunge, and delivered it personally (to his house) on the 1st floor. Everything was fine.

On announcing his decision to return, Saroj hardly received a warm welcome, especially from his brothers. On the contrary, he had to wait in a rented apartment in Howrah until such time when he could move into that part of the second floor where Sanjay's younger daughter was residing then. The bigger flat on the same floor was occupied by Riju's family. Due to the lack of space, it was soon decided that the third floor would be constructed. The work began only after his brother's

elder daughter had finished her exams and the construction was finally completed. However, it was never clear whom the floor belonged. On the one hand it was built on Sanjay's own expenditure. On the other hand, according to the will of their mother, who had passed away in 2008, the 3rd floor was equally divided amongst the three siblings. Herein lies the root of the controversy:

Mother has given one-third of it to each of us. And she didn't write it (in our names) in a small (informal manner). Registry (of this) has been done in the stamp paper of the Government of India or West Bengal. Good, strong (legal documents are there) – for all 3 of us, not just for me. Sister Pratima's, my elder brother's and mine.

On Pratima's behest, it was decided that a kitchen would be built on the 3rd floor, for the smaller flat on the second floor– into which Saroj would move with his family– lacked a kitchen of its own. Although the third floor belonged to the three siblings, Pratima had not made any demand regarding her portion. Saroj's complaint was that the kitchen built for him is small in size, given that a third of that floor was larger than the area of the kitchen. Underscoring the subtle deceptive move employed by Sanjay to grab more floor space, Saroj emphatically states, "This (extra) portion has a value, right? He is enjoying that, right?"

It soon turned out that the building of the kitchen created more trouble than it was supposed to solve. In hindsight, it seems that Sanjay changed his mind over the decision of making the kitchen for Saroj. It is perhaps because he felt that he should be the only one to have the right to occupy the third floor, given that he alone covered the expenses of constructing it. In the meantime, another incident widened the chasm in the siblings' relations. The conflict rose between Pratima and Saroj on the one side and Sanjay on the other. As Sanjay wanted the newly constructed third floor to be registered in his own name, the other two siblings (Pratima and Saroj), being joint owners of the floor along with him, were required to give him their approval through signed NOCs (No Objection Certificates). However, this was denied by Pratima because for some other reason Sanjay's younger daughter insulted her in a very rough and rude way, going to the extent of even fighting with her.

Soon the disagreements, the bitterness, the verbal abuses verging on real fights culminated in a series of unsuccessful attempts made by Sanjay to forcefully take control of the newly constructed kitchen of the third floor, aiming at expelling Saroj and his family from their presence

there if not from the whole building altogether. These episodes responsible for escalating the tension between the two brothers are described below.

Sanjay's first attempt to block Saroj's family access to the kitchen of the third floor happened in 2017. To achieve his goal, Sanjay's first step was to break the lock of the kitchen and to install a new one of his own. When Saroj was informed by his wife that the door of the kitchen could not be opened, he confirmed that a smaller Chinese padlock which wasn't theirs had been used to secure the door. He also found that the door frame had been severely damaged. Regardless of his brother's offensive gesture, Saroj persisted and resumed utilizing the kitchen again.

Saroj feels that he did a mistake by not filing a complaint with the police against his brother immediately after this incident. Instead, in a terrible fit of anger, he remained at home, screaming (*chitkar*), shouting (*cheycha-michi*) and swearing (*gala-gali*) at Sanjay. Fortunately, his brother was quite calm, otherwise things could have turned violent. Saroj's niece, however, couldn't refrain from intruding into the squabble, and vehemently asserted her family's right to break the door of the kitchen, considering that it was her father who had to foot the bill for the construction of the floor. Clearly, Sanjay's claim to the whole third floor derives from his financial investment thereby contests Saroj's right given by their mother.

After doing all this shouting (*cheycha-michi*), Saroj went to the market to get some flowers [probably to be offered to the gods at the domestic altar during daily worship]. On returning, he saw 7-8 'boys'³⁰ from the neighbourhood, in his elder sister's room in the ground floor. Some of them were familiar faces to Saroj and one of them was the local leader of the dominant political party. All of them had a conversation and it was soon ascertained that it was both the brothers' fault, for though Saroj abused his brother verbally, it was the latter who had provoked the former by breaking and replacing the padlock of the kitchen. Moreover, it was acknowledged that not only Sanjay but Saroj had also contributed to the construction of the house, while Pratima had primarily

³⁰ By 'boys' J refers to the goondas associated with the local club whom his elder brother had mobilized to intimidate him. It was not the first time I heard about a case in which goondas were deployed in order to threaten or bully someone. These people are usually associated with political parties which in turn have power over the local clubs. All the major political parties, namely TMC, BJP, CPI(M) have goondas under their control. In another former refugee colony, I came to know from an interlocutor who had witnessed an incident in which some local goondas exerted violence against a renter, who had not paid his landlord the recent monthly rents, and finally pulled him out of the house. The goondas were associated with the dominant political party and their 'service' was paid for by the landlord].

handled the supervision of the laborers. Finally, the ‘boys’ left, and things settled down for a while.

In June 2018, however, Sanjay took a more decisive step to get rid of his brother and his family. Saroj confesses that he had been an alcohol addict for a long time. One night he had an argument with his wife after drinking and it seems that he was out of control. His wife subsequently went to visit her parents. Hence Saroj was left alone without having recovered from the excessive consumption of alcohol. After staying two days alone inside his room without food, he was transferred to a rehabilitation centre without his consent. He stayed there for three and a half months.

Taking benefit of Saroj’s absence, Sanjay escalated his efforts to not only obstruct Saroj’s family from utilizing the third-floor kitchen, but also expel them from the second floor altogether. Arguably, Sanjay’s attempt could be explained by his upward mobility, which gave him more means and confidence to take action. As Saroj comments: «And now, to speak the truth, if one has one’s own money, one has confidence on oneself (*moner joor thake*) ». At the same time Saroj felt more vulnerable not only because of his presence in the rehab but also because his downward mobility which is encapsulated in the statement below:

Previously, my daughter (used to eat at) Dominos and such places. As it happens when one has money. (She would say,) “Dad, let’s go to Dominos. Dad, (I want) burger. Dad, (get me a) pizza.” I used to say, “Let’s go. No problem.” Today morning, she asked me for 10 rupees. I said, “Darling, it’s difficult (for me to spare 10 rupees right now).” She is also understanding (my problem). My wife makes no demands. She doesn’t say, “Let’s go to a restaurant for dinner. Let’s go to Inox today to see a movie. I need to buy a (pair of) high heel (shoes) today. Today, I need to buy this dress.” She comes from a village (*gramer meye*, ‘girl from the village’). After marriage, she had just one fancy (*shokh*), that of ornaments. I fulfilled her demands (for ornaments) in accordance with the salary I used to get. By the grace of God, she has some ornaments worth 4 lakh 60 thousand. It has been 5-7 years now. As much as a woman requires— starting with finger rings (*angti*), ‘*shakha* and ‘*pola*’³¹ with gold work on them, ‘*chik*’ (chocker necklace), ear rings (*kanner dul*), necklace—

³¹ ‘Sakha’ and ‘pola’ are the white and red bangles (respectively) worn by married Hindu Bengali women. One can opt for a fancier and costlier version of these bangles in which case they will be laced and studded with intricate gold work. Such decorated bangles are differentiated from their simpler and cheaper variety by the Bengali adjective ‘*badhano*’. Ja gave his wife a set of ‘*sakha and pola badhano*’.

whatever was possible for me to afford (I have given her). To my previous wife A. as well. Whenever whatever she asked for (I gave it to her)

Sanjay's first step was to address the issue to the local colony committee by claiming that Saroj had sold the portion of the house he is currently residing in. However, this claim was not accepted by the colony committee for there was no legal document to prove it. Moreover, some members of the committee insisted that Sanjay should first wait for his brother's return from the rehabilitation center. After this unsuccessful attempt, Sanjay approached the local club. He allegedly harassed Saroj's wife, disclosing the family controversy to some important members of the local club with whom he was familiar:

You have to leave the house. (You are) illiterate (*irokhor*). Don't know how to read and write (*porashona jane na*).” Like this (they insulted my wife) a lot. But that is my house. As his is the 1st floor and the garage, so the 2nd floor is mine. Similarly, the ground floor, along with the mezzanine floor, is my elder sister's. In spite of that, (they) are saying, “Vacate the house and leave. Give the key.” (They) took (my wife) to the club and threatened (her) there.

Whilst staying in the rehabilitation center, Saroj was yet again bullied by some of the local *goondas*:

The daughters of my two brothers, along with a man from the club, went there (in the rehab) to threaten me, saying, “You have a week's time. Tell (your wife) to give the key (to the house). Or else, 40-50 boys from the club will go (to your house). You can understand what can happen if 40-50 boys go (there)”.

Despite the threats, Saroj's wife refused to hand over the kitchen key when pressurized to do so by Sanjay. Sanjay broke the lock for a second time. Saroj's wife, with the help of the colony committee, went to the police station and submitted a letter of complaint. Later, some men from the police station came to look into the matter. However, Sanjay allegedly bribed some people from the police department claiming that the entire third floor belongs to him. As a result, the police officers acted in his favor by coming and clearing the kitchen of Saroj's belongings. In a blatantly offensive and humiliating act, Saroj's stuff was thrown out onto the stairs from the kitchen. Some of them were put in his room by some people brought by Sanjay.

No doubt, (he) has money. By dint of his wealth, he thinks (he can get anything he wants) ... he thinks he is Mukesh Ambani. India's richest man is Mukesh Ambani. He thinks himself to be so.

(He believes that) if he pays money, anything can happen. The police department is as it is notorious/infamous (for being dishonest). Even a good person who doesn't take bribes (*ghush*) is considered to be dishonest (*ghush khor*, 'someone who takes bribes') by the common people. A uniformed police—no matter whether that person is good or bad—is considered to be someone who takes bribes (*ghush khor*). Such a department (it has become). Not everyone (though). Due to some (dishonest police officers), the entire department gets maligned.

In the meantime, despite realizing that his presence in the rehabilitation centre was imperative for his full recovery from alcoholic tendencies, Saroj nevertheless felt a strong need to return home. First, because he wanted to support and defend his family. Secondly, because he realized that there had been a deviation from the standard procedure in his transfer to the rehab. He figured out that the procedure of taking someone to the centre happens only at the behest of his/her guardian. In his case, his guardian was his wife. According to Saroj, it soon came to light that Sanjay was behind his transfer to the rehab. Through the concerted efforts of his wife and some of his long-time friends, Saroj was finally released from the rehab.

Sanjay seems to have the upper hand in the dispute over the third floor not only because of his higher educational and socio-economic position and upward mobility but also because he is the only one who has contributed financially to the third floor. He also has the power due to his connections to mobilize the local *goondas* from the local club as well as the police in his favor. Although he has the advantage in muscle power his actions were met with resistance by Saroj and his wife. Sanjay's entitlement to the third floor was contested by Saroj by virtue of his inherited right of the 1/3 of the third floor. This claim of the kitchen was also strengthened by Pratima's support and some support from the local colony committee which is nevertheless less powerful than the local club. Despite Saroj often being humiliated the outcome of this dispute is still pending.

I now turn to discuss the overarching reasons behind these disputes. As it was shown, for Saroj the initial construction of the house in the early 1990s was regarded as a collective issue what would maintain the unity of the family.

Building a house was an exciting matter (*anonder, khushir bepar*) amongst us. And it was our house. Now, it has become my (*amar*) flat, my floor, everything is mine. Then it was 'us' (*amra*). This was a way of thinking (*chinta dhara*) then.

It is not known to what extent was the family united but this represents the vision of the joint family as peaceful and united.

Saroj thinks that the ideal of a united family can be maintained during the life circle when siblings are younger and unmarried and there are often still parents around who have control over the whole unit.

To tell the truth, (before) the brothers and the sisters get married, and (when) the parents are also there– a joint family–things go well. Then, as it happens in every family, the eldest brother gets married, the sisters get married, the middle brother gets married– if there are 2 or 3 brothers in a family.

However, according to Saroj, after marriage with the possible event of the detachment from the joint family the competition between individual families emerges:

The problems get created after the brothers get married. Then, (the siblings start saying,) ‘I want this.’ When I was a bachelor, even if this thing is mine, I would say (to my brother/sister,) “Ok, you take this. No problem.” After marriage, this thing here– you are thinking that you will take this and I’m thinking I will acquire it. It’s then that the struggle (*karakari*) begins in order to ascertain who will be able to get (the desired object). Or you have something, (but) I want to take that thing. Or I have something which you want to take. This kind (of struggle occurs) in almost every house. I have realized this quite well (from my experience). All sorts of troubles commence only after marriage, (once one) has a wife and children, one feels insecure, thinking, “He has this but I don’t. What will happen to my family then? What will be of my son, my daughter?” It’s the same story in every house. (...) While the command/ advice (‘*kotha*’) of the parents or the elder brothers and sisters used to be the case before marriage, after marriage, (the boy) hears his wife’s words– that can happen! Why won’t I hear what my wife says? Why won’t I hear what my daughter says? Isn’t it so? This happens in every family, not just in mine.

Saroj’s observation about competition within families seems plausible, for it also reflects the social competition in the context of India’s economic liberalization. In both Katju Nagar and Poddar Nagar I encountered discourses that the so called ‘flat culture’ has been associated with competition among residents: «And now everyone wants to compete with each other. I [Person A] have this much, I [Person B] also have this much. I buy a flat and move into it in order to show off. This has become the present trend».

To return to Saroj's story, quite naturally then Saroj believes that in most cases the main reason behind siblings' quarrels is the priority they give to their own nuclear families. Therefore, Saroj's interpretation for his elder brother's objective (*uddesho*) is that the latter wants to acquire more space for his nuclear family and especially for his two daughters. Saroj thinks that Sanjay wants to give one floor to his elder daughter and another floor to the younger one. He assumes that after their marriage he wants to keep his sons-in-law (*ghor jamai*) here and not send his daughters to their respective in-law's houses. «They want to enjoy (*bhog korbe*) being in their own house».³² Moreover, Saroj also suspects that Sanjay keeps an eye on Pratima's house. He thinks that after her death, given that she is unmarried and does not have any children of her own, her house might be given to Sanjay. Likewise, Saroj prioritizes the needs of his own family: « I want my family members enjoy the access of my entire portion. I have to keep my child in a separate room».

Furthermore, it becomes evident that class differentiation within the family – most explicitly between Saroj and Sanjay– not only creates competition but also tends to set individual family sections apart from each other. Saroj portrays his elder brother as a wealthy person, given that he is businessman and that possesses a lot of property. Apart from the first floor and the garage, 1/3 of the third floor and a small flat in another part of the same refugee colony, he also owns an office, along with a garage and a mezzanine floor, and an apartment that he gives for rent. Both the properties lie in affluent nearby neighbourhoods of South Kolkata. Having graduated from Jadavpur University which is one of the premier institutions of higher education in India, he is entitled to get good jobs. His daughters are educated, having acquired a substantial number of qualifications. On the other hand, Saroj himself, lacking a college degree, faces certain impediments in securing a job. He has been unemployed for the last three years, having experienced downward mobility and is a class twelve graduate. Even his wife comes from a poor rural family. At the same time, as it was revealed, Sanjay spoke in a derogative way to Saroj's wife

³² For a groom, to live in the bride's house as a '*ghor jamai*' is considered to be insulting and emasculating. Such a practice is frowned up in middle-class Indian families and generally not encouraged. In such cases, the groom incurs the negative social reputation of being too incompetent to shoulder the responsibilities of his own wife and children. It is believed that as a result of such an ineptitude, the groom stays behind at his in-laws' place, living on their goodwill and grace, but with no say of his in any matter of consequence whatsoever. However, sometimes, the sons-in-law might fulfil the need for sons and help their in-laws in looking after and carrying forward their family business for instance. Whatever the inner dynamics, this practice is not very common and slightly scandalous.

by calling her ‘illiterate’, which demonstrates that Sanjay sees Saroj’s family as inferior in terms of class. It appears therefore that Sanjay and his family want to live in a place with people of a similar status and educational and socio-economic position (presumably by bringing also his prospective grooms), thereby they do not want to be associated any longer with people they consider to be of a lower class and less educated who on the top of that, as far as Saroj is concerned, has outbursts of anger due to his alcohol addiction.

Of course, the controversies sparked by the property disputes feeds complaints and injustices rooted in the inner family dynamics, which resurface in the wake of actual quarrels. For instance, after his return from the rehabilitation center:

One night I had created a lot of ruckus, saying, “How did you become an engineer? Who do you think you are? If mother’s gold bracelet, necklace and all of that time hadn’t been sold, would you have been able to become an engineer?” I told such things to him; whatever came to my mind— no invectives though— only (comments) like these.

Clearly, Saroj finds it unjust that Sanjay was the only one among the siblings who had been favored and was perhaps predestined to fulfill the expectations of his parents given that their mother made a significant sacrifice by having sold her ornaments to fund his studies. Another underlying grievance of Saroj stemming from childhood- although it was not explicitly expressed- could be that he (Saroj) was the only child given to their maternal aunt; thereby, lacking the presence of his biological parents during a crucial period of his upbringing.

This section has shown the way in which property development intersects with evolving family dynamics. The typical divisions that occur (and have always occurred) between siblings (once they get married and once parents are no longer alive, and that have to do with families’ life cycles) are now being largely played out through discussion and disputes over property. Property disputes seem to be at the centre of sibling rivalries, and they are reconfiguring the nature and development of these disputes. While property development is looked at as a solution for those typical family divisions and arguments, it actually becomes the centre of these disputes and often ends up even aggravating them (rather than resolving them).

Moreover, this section has highlighted the way in which, in family disputes, claims to property or to a stake in property are made. It has demonstrated how a variety of factors come into play that extend well beyond the factors that are usually mentioned and discussed. These are usually legal rights (through formal documents), and a moral-cultural right (as in sons are typically

seen to have more rights in parental property than girls). Yet, I argue that several other factors play a role too, such as moral rights coming from a parent promising a particular part to specific children; one's financial and/or labour contributions seem to increase one's claims to property (e.g. Sanjay and Pratima); one's actual occupation and presence (e.g. Saroj's long-term absence weakened his ability to make claims); one's general economic and educational standing (with those who have formal govt jobs and good incomes being better placed to defend their claims); and finally one's local connections (which often come with education and jobs). Therefore, this section has argued that a complexity of factors play a role in how claims are made and ultimately how disputes are resolved (or not). Precisely because there are now so many ways of making claims to property, disputes become more complex, hard to resolve and drag on forever, thus further intensifying the antagonism among siblings (and even with parents).

Promoting

So far, I have described two cases in which disputes about property are manifested in self-made houses. I now turn to family disputes that may involve 1) cases in which promoting (with an external promoter) is about to happen, 2) cases in which promoting has begun but has been halted (Shandiya's case) and 3) cases regarding already promoted buildings. I argue that rather than effectively solving family disputes, promoting is more likely to intensify them.

I begin with a story that exemplifies a case in which disagreements over property issues have resulted in creating hindrance to the house's being promoted. In the course of my fieldwork, I observed several crumbling or already demolished houses which remain in this state because of disagreements among the shareholders, as I was told. The story below derives from the narration of Poddar Nagar Kali temple's priest.

The concerned house was a joint property of three brothers and one sister. Interestingly, one of the brothers was an ascetic (*Sanyashi*) thereby having severed his familial ties and having not started his own his own family. The two other brothers were married and had kids. The elder brother left four daughters and one son; the younger brother left two sons and one daughter. After the brothers' death, the rights to property passed to the sister and the brothers' sons excluding the daughters. The three sons who are Scheduled Caste have the financial capacity to buy their own flats. The elder son (among the two brothers) works in the railways and the younger works in the

army, in a good post; the other son works in state transport. According to my informant, the paternal aunt (*Ben: Pishi*, sister to the two brothers) is unmarried and blind. It appears that there were disagreements regarding the decision to promote the house and/or about the shares each party would acquire in the prospective promoted building. Despite being aged, unmarried and blind, the aunt was powerful enough to defend her right to the property. She had the strength to disrupt her nephews' plan to promote the building. As my informant indicated, «She has given injunctions (legal warning) in everything. Consequently, the nephews aren't being able to promote their joint property. She is still alive and waiting. (She) says that if she doesn't get her share in the property, she won't allow them (the nephews) to even fix a single brick». The result so far is that the three sons have left their crumbling house as it is, because they are waiting for their aunt to die and then decide what to do with the property. «Their mothers still stay in that crumbling house, washing utensils in that house made of fence walls (*Ben: Berar ghor*, '*bera*' means fence)'. This is not just one case. There are a few other cases like this», comments my informant.

The story below refers to a case in which the promoting process began but has not so far been completed. It shows that promoting not only failed to solve the existing disputes but also aggravated them. It also represents a case in which sisters are entitled to paternal property but in the processes their right is at stake. Apart from gender hierarchies, central in this story are the imbalances of class and power among the siblings. Like Saroj's case the elder brother is the most wealthy and powerful and has the upper hand in the respective family conflicts over property. Ultimately Shandiya, the elder sister, is the one who is cheated and the most vulnerable—in the verge of being devoid of shelter.

It was a chilly early February evening—something quite uncommon for Kolkata weather even during the winter season—and as I was having an informal discussion with a few members of the colony committee in their office, suddenly a woman called Shandiya, wearing a cardigan over her sari to prevent the cold, entered the office. Her arrival turned the members immediately serious, indicative of the gravity of the matter she had come to them about. Judging from her facial expression and her reactions, Shandiya seemed to be in a state of extreme frustration and despair. She was uttering her complaint to the members, emphatically asking them to track down a certain promoter by calling him multiple times, so that he gets irritated enough to finally talk to them. She also urged the committee members to phone her landlord as well as her elder brother, in order that a speedy solution to her problem might be found.

The story that follows is borne out not only by my accidental witnessing of Shandiya's visit to the Colony Committee office and the subsequent conversation she had with the members present, but also by the later recounting of her specific case enriched with further details from two members of the Colony Committee.

Apart from the increasing pressure for housing, the orchestrated efforts of the promoters to make benefit from each and every piece of land amenable for promoting, has left only few old houses untouched, not to speak about vacant plots—it is quite impossible for one to find portions of vacant land, except few playgrounds which constitute the sole open public space. Given that the real-estate driven transformation of most of the former colony areas is almost complete—most of the multi-stories were built during the first decade of the 2000s—only few plots contain unfinished buildings which have been promoted recently. In these structures, construction is going on and soon the proper three-storied (G+3) buildings will be erected. There are some cases, however, in which due to family disagreements over property and/or the fact that promoters leave the work midway, construction has been disrupted or even halted, leaving the unfinished structures not only in a state of utter dereliction, but also mired in legal intricacies that prevent any other promoter from finishing the rest of the work.

Such is the case of the specific plot that constitutes the ancestral property of Shandiya and her other three siblings, whose old house was demolished to pave way for promoting. However, although construction had begun, it has stopped since last year and the promoted structure is far from being complete. The plot, in which the unfinished structure presently stands, lies in a central part of the neighborhood, looking like an island in the ocean of congested multi-storied buildings. It currently consists of nothing more than the foundation and a few pillars.

Furthermore, the abandoned structure has raised hygiene concerns. I was informed of two septic tanks there full of stagnant water which, in turn, proved to be a fertile breeding ground for mosquitoes (*moshar basha*). «The place has almost become a jungle», comments a member of the colony committee. The situation was improved only after a few locals took the initiative of entering the back lane of the building to remove the garbage dumped there and spread bleaching powder. The present shape of the structure reflects a complicated story in which troublesome relations amongst the siblings themselves are enmeshed with serious problems concerning a seemingly deceitful promoter.

The serious problem that has been created has to do with the temporary accommodation of Shandiya (the elder sister) as well as of her other two siblings. It appears that there was an agreement with the promoter according to which the project was expected to reach completion within 18 months from the start of the work. This stipulated time period will expire in the next two months. The problem for Shandiya is not only that construction has not resumed since it halted last year, but also that her current housing arrangement is precarious. As part of the agreement, the promoter is also obliged to provide the rent for the three siblings who would temporarily stay in apartments until such time when the construction of the promoted building is over. This sort of arrangement is very common in the agreements drawn between promoters and property owners. Those among the latter who do not have elsewhere to stay usually opt for temporarily occupying an apartment in their vicinity, the rent for which is paid by the promoter. Likewise, Shandiya and her younger sister have been put up in a rented apartment in an adjacent locality. However, the problem is that: «Somehow the promoter convinced them —since they were women— and got the agreement made between the two sisters and the landlord». The comment «since they were women» demonstrates that in many occasions the women's rights and claims over paternal property are delegitimized and thus undermined, but in this case, apart from the gender position this presumably has to do with the sisters' status and education. In spite of Shandiya's repeated insistence that the contract be made between the promoter and the landlord of the apartment, the promoter refused to do so. Instead, the contract was made between Shandiya and the landlord. Since there is no legal document technically binding the promoter to pay the rent, she becomes the person responsible of paying the rent. In spite of the absence of a written agreement, the promoter used to pay the rent. However, the last 8-9 months he has stopped to do so; consequently, Shandiya is unable to pay any rent and does not have any support network. Now the landlord is forcing her to vacate the house with the threat of calling the police. This is precisely why Shandiya was asking the committee members to search for the promoter and tell him to extend the contract, which would enable him to complete the construction and also pay the rent. Furthermore, she urged them to explain her helpless situation to the landlord, in order that she wouldn't be evicted from her current accommodation.

Her younger brother faces the same issue but he is in a better position. Unlike Shandiya, he has made sure that the contract for the rented apartment he is currently occupying is made between the promoter and the landlord. However, even the younger brother isn't getting his rents

paid by the concerned promoter for many months now. As a result, he too has received an ultimatum from his landlord. In his case, possessing a legal document might give him an advantage in the event of a court case and/or if it is required by the police. On the contrary, the elder brother is the only one among the siblings who does not need to worry about the rent, given that he has a house of his own in another locality.

In the course of the conversation in the Colony Committee office it became evident that apart from the problems with the promoter, the siblings have created problems among themselves. There is some friction between the elder brother and the elder sister regarding the share of the property each has acquired. It seems that the portion she is supposed to get when the building is promoted will be larger compared to that of the elder brother. Surprisingly, one member of the Colony Committee said in front of her in a cynical manner: «I have told your brother that there is no problem with it because since your sister does not have any child, ultimately it is going to come back to you! »

Apart from the issues between the elder brother and the promoter which will be discussed below, the underlying reason for the elder brother's attitude seems to be his putatively higher status, by virtue of which he distinguishes himself from his sister's oppressive realities defined by her class position and gender. He is well placed given that apart from the property he possesses, he has a government job that has enabled him to forge a massive political network. Besides investing him with significant amount of power, all the above-mentioned factors have simultaneously contributed towards his indifference towards Shandiya's vulnerable position, to the extent that he hardly cares whether the building being promoted will ever reach completion, notwithstanding his share in the ancestral property. Arguably, the elder's brother indifference amounts to an entire delegitimizing of Shandiya's claim to the ancestral property share. Not only because of the gender hierarchy (that in many cases excludes women from property) but also because of her lower status as she is unmarried and unemployed. Thus, it represents a case in which daughters or sisters may be entitled to property but in the process their right to it can be dismissed by the male heirs. In this sense Shandiya's case can be contrasted to Pratima's case. While both of them unmarried, Pratima unlike Shandiya by virtue of her high status was able to secure her legal right to the paternal property.

Moreover, the relationships with the younger brother are not any better. Although it is not clear why, I was told that both sisters also face problems with the younger brother. This is indicated

in the following comment made by a Colony Committee member: “The younger brother who lives in our neighborhood, came one day and complained greatly against his sisters: «You do not know they used to beat my wife, do this, do that» ”

Bitterly, the tensions persist not only between the sister and the brothers but also between the sisters themselves. The two unmarried sisters were initially accommodated in the same house. However, suddenly, the younger sister left without informing the elder: «the elder sister had gone somewhere in the morning. On returning, she found that the door was locked and her sister had left with all her things. She was subsequently traced in the house of a relative of theirs». Once again, the reason was conflict over property (but perhaps there are various other underlying reasons that account for the younger sister’s behavior). Both sisters are the owners of another house. The rent they get from that house is their only financial resource, which they used to share equally between the two of them. However, from the time the younger sister left the house, she has refused to part with the other half of the share that ought to go to her elder sister. This is the current state of things, though it is unclear how things ended up like this. Certainly, the decision to promote the ancestral property has adversely affected the siblings’ relations, has added more problems to the heap of former issues, which it was supposed to solve. From these accounts it becomes apparent that Shandiya is the only person who has been deceived more than any of her other siblings. Being in the most vulnerable position, she routinely comes to the Colony Committee office, desperately hoping speedy redressal of her grievances.

The reasonable question that the member of the Colony Committee sought to answer is why the promoter left the building undone. They wonder what caused him to abruptly abandon the project after having invested not a small amount of money (somewhere between 5 to 7 lakh rupees, which is roughly 7,000 euros) in laying the foundation of the structure. First, they doubt that the issue stems from an acute lack of funds to continue the construction work. It is widely known and also testified by another interlocutor that promoters can easily borrow money from various sources including residents from the locality. Therefore, monetary shortage should not be the case.

Secondly, they are of the opinion that if the problem was the promoter’s disappearance, it would not be too difficult to find a solution to this. The members of the colony committee have already unsuccessfully tried to trace the whereabouts of the vanished promoter. However, they think that if one addresses any of the local offices of the dominant political party, then it is quite certain that they will effectively solve the problem. They give the example of a certain Bihari

woman and her son who visited such a party office. Their complaint was that they had promoted their house (250sq feet) but the building was unfinished. As a result, some people took advantage of the promoter's absence and captured portions of the property. Despite being from a different locality, the promoter was not only traced down by the party people but also compelled to resume the work.

In light of this incident, the members of the Committee strongly believe that Shandiya's elder brother could solve the problem very quickly in coordination with the party people, provided he chooses to use his significant political contacts. On the contrary, notwithstanding his political leverage, Shandiya's elder brother neither shows any activity on the matter, nor seems concerned enough to solve the problem. This makes them surmise that the elder brother has created some kind of trouble with the promoter, which is why the promoter is not to be found and the elder brother is also not responding. They think that there might be some problems between the promoter and the elder brother, which has caused the promoter to halt the construction as an act of revenge. Perhaps there are some technical problems or illegalities that he has got enmeshed in. Another problem is that maybe the siblings, either individually or collectively, might have consulted with and/or entered into agreements with various other promoters, thereby, laying the grounds for the current messy situation.

The members of the CC are also critical of the family's decision to choose a promoter who is not from within the neighborhood. It is quite well known that «outside promoters are not to be trusted, they can leave whenever they want, they will always be more loyal to projects which are happening in their neighborhood, in their locality». Furthermore, the members stress that they had already solved Shandiya and her siblings' problem before by putting them in touch with a promoter within the neighbourhood. However, they approached a new promoter from outside the locality and, thus, created this problem, which has further complicated by the deep-rooted issues already present amongst the brothers and sisters. The CC members do not even know whether they have contacted multiple promoters or not. Despite their efforts, the CC members have been able to neither track the promoter nor contact the elder brother. Their aim is to call all the concerned parties to a meeting consisting of, first and foremost, the elder brother, the younger brother and the promoter. so that the problem is solved and that he is informed about the situation of his siblings. At the same time, it is acknowledged that they have no entitlement to enforce the landlord to allow Shandiya to stay in the apartment without paying the rents.

According to the members of CC, a possible solution for Shandiya would be to capture a portion of the unfinished structure by erecting a temporary wall using tin sheets or wooden fences. They believe that by starting to live there, Shandiya would be able to help create pressure on the promoter to complete the project. However, the said structure has no roof; only a bare skeleton has been raised in such a haphazard manner that nobody can even stay there. Another solution would be to give the work to another promoter to complete the remaining project. However, this is not possible. The original promoter has to give his permission, otherwise a court case can be filed. The only way out they can suggest for Shandiya is to address her issue to the consumers' forum or ultimately to pursue a court case.

All in all, it appears that the families which opt for promoting have the same issue as with family-based property development but that in addition there is an additional actor involved –the promoter– who can cause further complications rather than resolve the family disputes.

After promoting

After the completion of promoting, it is expected that the individual family members' shares will be accurately defined, thus not allowing space for further disputes. When a Katju Nagar resident in his early 70s was asked why he has decided to promote his ancestral property, he replied that he wanted to give his two brothers their rightful shares before he dies. As the land is primarily in his name, he feared that, though his son, isn't quite interested in the property right now, yet he may change his mind after he passes away and decide not to give any share of the property to his cousin sisters. To avoid the possibility of such a family squabble, he wants to divide the paternal property amongst the three remaining brothers. However, in practice, although promoting was supposed to solve these family disputes he indicated, that in many cases, even after promoting there can be misunderstanding among family members regarding the exact size of flats or regarding the specific floor one get his/her flat, especially when some family members reside outside the locality:

Inside the families, the problems are related to the number of the flats (the members get individually). Often, there are problems regarding the sqft of the flats [meaning, the size of the flats]. Suppose someone doesn't stay here, stays outside, and sends all the documents with his signatures via internet, when he comes later, he sees that while everyone has taken flats measuring 800, 900, 1000 sqft, his one is just 600 sqft. Disputes happen if people stay outside. If you don't

see the documents properly, if you don't see what is or isn't happening here, then disputes are bound to happen.

(...) Again, another thing happens. He finds that while everyone has taken flats in the 1st floor, he has been given a flat in the 3rd floor. He stays outside. (His family members say,) "Brother, your flat is made. Come, come. When are you coming?" After coming, he finds that it's on the 3rd floor, while they have taken on the 1st and 2nd floors. What will he do then? Different family troubles of this kind do happen.

In this sense, it appears that in many cases the nature and complexity of promoting does increase the chances of conflicts and disputes instead of resolving them. For there is more to argue over (number of flats, which floor, size of flats, type of water supplies etc) compared to just one parental property. Hence, I argue that ultimately promoting may aggravate family disputes.

Conclusion

This thesis has narrated the transformation of two South Kolkata neighbourhoods from impoverished refugee colonies in the post-Partition era to lower-middle to middle-class neighbourhoods in the post-liberalization era. The thesis has situated their recent transformation in the context of India's urban restructuring and has made a contribution in at least three main areas.

First, it has highlighted how urbanization is implicated with politics and economic growth. In the South Kolkata case, the role of the CPM has been central. As I explained in chapter one, these refugee colonies after their establishment received support from the CMP for their struggle for legalization and recognition from the state, and in turn supported the left cause. Twelve years after the 'Left Front' (with CPM being its dominant force) ascended to power, that is in 1989, with the approval of the Central Government, the residents of the former refugee colonies were granted title deeds to their land. This move was part of the Left Front's successful land reforms mostly implemented in the countryside. But it was also a way to satisfy its electorate. This was the starting point of these neighbourhoods' more recent socio-spatial transformation. Land would serve as an investment and was key to the upward mobility of the Hindu refugee community in the post-liberalization period that followed.

Indeed, after the mid-1990s, the Left-Front state-government sought to achieve economic growth through urban development, promoting housing construction and encouraging real estate speculations, forming alliances with the urban middle-classes, while largely neglecting the need to provide adequate shelter for the urban poor.

For the lower- middle and middle -class neighbourhoods of South Kolkata it encouraged the method of promoting and created a favourable context for it to flourish. As I have shown, promoting depended on CPM's patronage politics and the production of urban space through promoting was used for the advancement and consolidation of political support for the Left Front regime. Promoting was accommodated by the local institutions, such as local clubs and colony committees which were mostly CPM-controlled, and thus defined the nature of urban restructuring in Kolkata. It is through these ways and these agents that neoliberal urban development was adapted at the local and regional level, that is in South Kolkata localities and Kolkata respectively.

It can be argued therefore that urban restructuring mostly led by the upper middle-class has sought to co-opt the lower middle and the middle classes. In this way, through urban development and new property regimes, neoliberalism and the political parties that implemented neoliberal policies sought to ideologically and materially incorporate this section of the population.

Secondly, the thesis has provided significant reflections about the nature of the state and the production of space in West Bengal, through a conversation with the work of Roy (2003;2010). In particular, it seeks to break down dichotomous understandings of the formal/informal and legal/illegal in the context of urban, state-supported development. Since the mid-1990s, during the Left Front Government, there has been a systematic violation of the state's own proclaimed policies of protecting agricultural land and wetlands as well as a violation of the KMC building rules and master plans (i.e., the Salt Lake case). In the case of Kolkata's eastern fringe, as Roy has shown, the state, more particularly the Calcutta Metropolitan Development Authority (CMDA), employed both formal and informal practices (e.g., informal vesting) to make way for suburban development. As I have shown, promoting in South Kolkata involved the systematic violation of the Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) building rules that maximized building space and thus profits for both landlords and promoters, tacitly supported by the KMC. In line with Roy, I show that in a city like Kolkata, informality does not exist in a bounded space outside the formal and legal arenas of state action. It should be rather understood as a mode of urbanization that exists at the very heart of sovereignty and is a key instrument of state power. My evidence from South Kolkata clearly exemplifies Roy's conceptualization of the 'formal' in India's urbanization: "Instead of drawing a distinction between what is formal and what is informal, it may be more useful to see the formal as itself marked by illegality, ambiguity, and exceptionality" (Roy 2010: 98).

Such a view challenges conceptualizations which see formal/legal and informal / illegal as clear opposites. For instance, Partha Chatterjee's well-known distinction between 'civil society' and 'political society' (2004) which postulates that while the former is associated with the domain of law, the formal state and the middle-class, the latter is associated with the illegal settlements of the urban poor, including the negotiations between the state and the 'population' group, the governing techniques and the kinds of paralegal arrangements. My evidence complicates the term 'political society' for one more reason; it shows that informality and illegality are not solely associated with the settlements of the urban poor, such as slums, but much with the middle-class

residential areas and middle-class approaches to urban development. Various forms of elite and middle-class informality and illegality are commonplace in Indian cities today and are not limited to West Bengal. As Roy (2011b) argued: “Informal urbanization is as much the purview of wealthy urbanites as it is of slum dwellers. These forms of urban informality - from Delhi's farmhouses to Kolkata's new towns to Mumbai's shopping malls - are no more legal than the metonymic slum” (Roy 2011b: 233). Furthermore, according to Delhi's Municipal Corporation, it is estimated that “70 percent of Delhi is «unauthorized», meaning that it violates land-use codes or building byelaws in some way or another” (Ghertner 2011: 285). I have similarly shown that formal approvals for promoting and self-development of housing complexes in South Kolkata are deeply embedded in a range of informal – and strictly speaking illegal – processes, involving a range of mediating actors.

Third, the fifth chapter of the thesis has shown the ways in which property development intersects with class mobility and kin relations. The typical divisions that occur (and have always occurred) between siblings (once they get married and once parents are no longer alive, and that have to do with families' life cycles) are now being largely played out through discussions and disputes over property. However, I show that while property development is often looked at as a solution for those typical family divisions and arguments, it actually becomes the center of these disputes and often ends up further aggravating them (rather than resolving them). Furthermore, the complexity of promoting adds further possibilities for enhanced conflicts too as now not only one parental property is involved, but different flats over different floors with a multitude of issues and at different stages of development. In this sense, I argue that the processes of urban development are reconfiguring of the nature of conflicts and disputes as well as the ways in which attempts are made to resolve them.

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