



Memories of Partition's 'Forgotten Episode': Refugee Resettlement in the Andaman Islands

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On 14 March 1949, a motley bunch of 495 East Bengali refugees arrived at the Kidderpore dock of Calcutta port from a transit camp at Andul, where they had been collected from the various hastily set up camps of West Bengal. Consisting of 132 families of whom 50 were agriculturists, 22 were tanti (weavers) and 34 were sutradhar (carpenters), they were the first batch of refugees to travel to the Andaman Islands for resettlement¹ (Special Correspondent. *Purbobonger Asrayprarthider Pratham Daler Andaman Yatra* (The First Batch of Refugees from East Pakistan Set Out for the Andamans). *Anandabazar Patrika*. 15 March 1949). Though they were a tiny fraction of the estimated 70,000 refugees who awaited rehabilitation in West Bengal, Dr Bidhan Chandra Roy, the Chief Minister of West Bengal, hailed their departure as a historic event. Along with the then Minister of Relief, Nikunjabihari Maity, Dr Roy made it a point to be personally present to see off this first batch, turning it into an occasion for propaganda. In a speech delivered on the eve of their departure, Dr Roy wondered, 'In the midst of such chaos, when things are so rushed, why are so many people prepared to travel to a foreign land?' (ibid.).

The question was posed in the presence of nearly 500 refugees ready to embark on the Steam Ship Maharaja for the Andamans, and



logically speaking, should have been answered by them. However, neither the assembled dignitaries nor the press had any real intention of exploring the motivations or compulsions of the refugees. The goal was to publicise the scheme and this was best achieved by speaking on behalf of the refugees, by attributing to them motivations and aspirations they may or may not have had. Thus, Dr Roy rushed in to speak on the behalf of refugees, declaring that they were acting as 'agradut' (forerunners) and 'banibahak' (heralds) of a new age. 'With new enthusiasm, they hope to build a new island' (ibid.). This top-down characterisation of destitute refugees as intrepid pioneers, who apparently had ambitions of building a new kind of society and economy in the distant Andaman Islands, was largely a publicity exercise designed to counter allegations of forced dispersal of refugees from West Bengal. In this particular case, the ill-repute of the chosen destination as the infamous Kalapani (black waters) and a space of exile and imprisonment heightened the political stakes.

The irony of thrusting a pioneering role upon this particular group of refugees, who in effect were being displaced for a second time from the land where they had sought shelter, was perhaps not lost on the reporter. The published article, while faithfully reproducing government hyperbole, also made it a point to note that this group of intrepid pioneers included elderly men and women as well as infants, with women and children far outnumbering able-bodied men (ibid.). The Communists, who had already begun to champion the rights of refugees, were far more direct in their criticism. They opposed all plans of refugee resettlement in the Andaman Islands and accused the government of effectively getting rid of a politically volatile population by banishing refugees to a life of extreme hardship in a remote location. They gave little credence to repeated assertions by bureaucrats that only 'willing' refugees were being sent to the Andamans. Thus, if the Congress government was eager to re-imagine the refugees as pioneering settlers, the left opposition imposed upon them the opposite role of being hapless victims.

Unsurprisingly, the voices of the refugees are missing in the political row over their fate. Subsequent historical research has echoed the suspicions of the left opposition by characterising resettlement in the Andamans as 'exile' (Basu Ray Chaudhuri 2000: 106-41) and the entire process of dispersal of refugees outside West Bengal as 'a forced exodus' (Chatterji 2007a). Ironically, though written with empathy for the predicament of already uprooted families being 'frog-marched' to remote locations for rehabilitation, this scholarship ends up reinforcing



the victim stereotype of refugees and leaves no room for their agency and voices (Chatterji 2007b: 995-1032; Chakrabarti 1999). This essay draws upon oral history to bring the voices of the refugees into this debate. Relying primarily on the reminiscences of refugees resettled in the Andamans, it argues that a binary representation of the dispersed refugees, either as exiles or as pioneers, fails to capture the complexity of their lived experience of rehabilitation.

I: Forgotten by history: locating Andaman's refugees within partition studies

In the 1990s, historiography on the partition of India took a definitive turn towards a history 'from below', that sought to privilege people's experiences and negotiations of the partition of India as opposed to an analysis of the various factors leading to the partition of 1947 (Roy 1990: 385-408). While this was a welcome shift, in the past two decades it has produced its own orthodoxies and blind spots. A significant trend has been a reliance on oral history to recover and bring to light 'subaltern' or plebeian perspectives on the partition of India, such as the experiences of recovered women (Butalia 2000; Menon & Bhasin 1998), urban squatters (Bose 2000), and refugees in general (Talbot 2006; Bagchi 2003).

Unfortunately, much of this scholarship simplistically equated the very fact of being a refugee with marginality or subalternity. The inadequate attention paid to differences in class and caste background amongst refugees runs the risk of reducing refugee experiences of partition to an ahistorical and flattened whole. With the exception of feminist scholarship grounded in an understanding of how patriarchal values and policies shaped the experience of women, the dominant narrative of refugee experiences continues to privilege ethnicity as the most important feature in distinguishing refugee experiences. Much has been said about the different experiences and 'characters' of Punjabi and Bengali refugees, within official and semi-official reports (Rao 1967; Gupta et al. 2002). Recent scholarship has explored the wide regional variation in how ordinary people experienced partition (Ansari 2005; Butalia 2015; Chatterji 2007a; Roy 2012; Zamindar 2007), thus, to some degree shifting the focus from Punjab.

Comparatively little has been said about how the experience of middle class and educated refugees from dominant caste background varied from the experiences of poor refugees from subordinate caste groups, within the same ethnic or linguistic group. When it comes to



Punjabi refugees, Ravinder Kaur's scholarship is an exception to this trend (Kaur 2006, 2007). When it comes to scholarship on Bengali refugees, questions of class and caste difference are inadequately addressed. We know from Mallick (1999) and Chatterji (2007a) that Dalit or schedule-caste refugees, who were primarily Namasudras (a largely rural depressed caste hailing from eastern Bengal, who mostly follow the heterodox Matua sect, and used to be classified as 'Chandals' in the colonial census before 1911), were the last to leave eastern Pakistan. They often survived violent communal attacks which left them destitute. Lacking social and cultural capital, they were pushed out of Calcutta and dispersed to far-flung and marginal lands for resettlement, such as Dandakaranya² and the Andaman Islands. Very little is known about how dispersed Namasudra refugees rebuilt their lives and identities outside West Bengal.

Existing scholarship on memory and identity amongst Bengali refugees overwhelmingly focuses on dominant caste³ narratives of loss, nostalgia and marginalisation (Chakrabarty 1996; Ray 2002). Even when such scholarship is critical of the erasures and amnesias that lie at the core of dominant-caste narratives (Chakrabarty 1996; Sen 2014), unless equal attention is paid to the voices and memories of the dispersed refugees from subordinate castes, it risks replicating within scholarship the marginalisation of Namasudras that characterised politics and propaganda in post-partition West Bengal (Chandra, Heierstad & Bo Nielsen 2016). This essay moves away from caste-blind and Calcutta-centric scholarship on East Bengali refugees by focusing on the experiences and reminiscences of refugees dispersed to the Andaman Islands. Unlike the urban squatters who have captured so much of the popular imagination around refugees, these refugees were largely illiterate peasants who belonged to the Namasudra caste of East Bengal.

Besides caste, a second blind-spot within partition scholarship is its treatment of regions. There is an almost universal tendency of uncritically sticking to a geographical hierarchy. Certain regions, particularly Punjab and the national capital of Delhi, are seen to be not only central to the history of partition, but also representative of the "national" or "Indian" experience. All other locations are explored primarily as regional variations, marginal to the national experience. Thus, despite growing research on the richness and diversity of how partition was experienced in the divided provinces of Bengal and Assam, and its far-reaching impact in numerous frontier provinces, such as Sindh, Rajasthan, Kashmir and Tripura, the field of partition studies continues



to privilege the violence and dislocation that characterised the partition of Punjab as somehow representative of the "Indian" experience of partition.

The partition of Bengal is studied in terms of its difference or deviation from the Punjab model of genocidal violence followed by a state-led exchange of population. If Bengal occupies the space of regional variation of a so-called national narrative, every other location is treated as either marginal to this history or the site of a "forgotten" episode of partition in need of recuperation by historians. Partition historiography has several examples of such recuperative exercises (Copland 1998; Talbot & Singh 1999). The dispersal of East Bengali refugees to the Andaman Islands and their eventual resettlement falls into this latter category of a forgotten episode that unfolded in the very margins of India—in a remote and forested archipelago located at a vast distance of 560 miles from the mouth of the river Hooghly in West Bengal. This hierarchical organisation of some spaces as more central than others and the characterisation of some episodes as "forgotten" begs some obvious questions: marginal to what and forgotten by whom?

In effect, when historians treat certain geographies as more central than others, they end up reaffirming a nationalist status-quo, where northern Indian experiences and the actions and pre-occupations of the political elite based in Delhi get to occupy the national space and inform what constitutes a "national" experience as opposed to regional/ marginal ones. The characterisation of certain episodes of rehabilitation as "forgotten" is more problematic. It goes without saying that the refugees resettled in the Andaman Islands have not forgotten their journeys or their struggles to rebuild lives. To characterise refugee resettlement in the Andaman Islands as a "forgotten" episode is therefore an act of privileging the role of the historian and the subjectivities of her imagined audience, which is either the academy or an urban, educated and Calcutta-centric readership, over and above the subjectivities of the very people the historian sets out to recuperate. The act of "forgetting", especially when the forgetfulness is attributed to an entire field of study or to popular memory, is far from a natural act. Neither is the characterisation of some spaces as marginal and others as central a given. Both are actively produced by social structures; and are enabled and reinforced by contemporary politics. Therefore, to locate the rehabilitation of Bengali refugees in the Andaman Islands within partition studies in a manner that is not complicit with the social



and political status quo must involve an attempt to understand the processes by which this episode was forgotten and marginalised.

The geographical remoteness of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, located at the south-eastern edge of the Bay of Bengal is reinforced by its inclusion within the political boundaries of India. The archipelago, consisting of more than 300 Islands of varying sizes, forms a great arc stretching southward for some 620 miles between Myanmar (Burma) and the Island of Sumatra in Indonesia. The Andaman Islands are the over-sea extensions of the submerged section of the Rakhine or Arakan Range of Myanmar.⁴ After failed attempts between 1789 and 1796, these Islands were decisively claimed by the British in 1858, largely in order to secure their dominance over the Bay of Bengal. It gained infamy as a place of exile and colonial repression due to the establishment of a penal settlement around Port Blair and the eventual construction of the Benthamite Cellular Jail (Sen 2000; Vaidik 2010).

Its inclusion within independent India, as a directly governed type D province in 1947, and as a union territory since 1956, was technically based upon the imperial administrative convention of ruling the Islands as part of the British Raj. By 1947, Indian nationalists had also re-imagined the islands as a redemptive space of Indian nationalism, sacralised by the long imprisonment, torture and death of radical nationalists, especially the revolutionary terrorists. A majority of the revolutionary terrorists imprisoned in the cellular jail came from the province of Bengal, and it is this history, rather than its remote location alone that led most Bengalis to characterise the Andaman Islands as a place of exile.

It is unlikely that the Andaman Islands evoked the same terror as kalapani (black waters) either amongst the Burmese labourers, who were valued as skilled forest workers, or amongst the Oraon, Munda and Kharia tribes of the Chota Nagpur region of Bihar, who were recruited as coolies on six-month contracts by the Catholic Labour Bureau in Ranchi since 1918 (Zehmisch 2012). In other words, sending Bengali refugees to the Andaman Islands was politically controversial because specific histories of labour migrations had linked the Islands to the province of Bengal in particular ways. For most Bengalis, the Andaman Islands was a space associated with exile and imprisonment alone, while Burma, another overseas and frontier territory, has long animated the Bengali imagination as a space of adventure and opportunity.⁵



As early as 1949, Dr Bidhan Chandra Roy had started insisting that since the refugee crisis was born of a national decision to partition India, it would be unfair to expect West Bengal to shoulder the entire burden of rehabilitation of refugees from eastern Pakistan. While he was active in arranging the dispersal of refugees to the provinces of Bihar, Orissa, Tripura and the princely state of Coochbehar, his administration did not initially look to the Andaman Islands as a possible destination. The Islands were brought to the notice of the government of West Bengal by an unexpected request received from H.J. Stooks, the Deputy Secretary of the short-lived Development and Rehabilitation Board,⁶ enquiring if West Bengal would agree to send some refugees for resettlement to the Andaman Islands if a grant of Rs 1,300 was made available (Andaman Files, NAI, 1947). Dr. Roy readily agreed to this proposal.

In the years that followed, he proceeded to pressurise the central government to reserve all or most available 'empty' land in the Andaman Islands for rehabilitation of Bengali refugees (Sen 2009). His requests were denied. But in practice, the central government in Delhi and the bureaucrats who administered the Andaman Islands on their behalf repeatedly turned to the refugee camps of West Bengal between 1949 and 1952. Their goal however was not to rehabilitate refugees, but to recruit settlers and labourers for the Islands. Back in 1949, Bengali refugees were the last group of people to be considered as potential recruits to rescue a failing plan of post-war reconstruction of the Andaman Islands that had been designed in 1945 keeping ex-servicemen in mind. The scheme was thrown open to East Bengali refugees only after refugees from Punjab were found to be unwilling. Thus, despite Dr Roy's willingness to publicise the dispersal of refugees to the Andaman Islands as an instance of successful rehabilitation, in reality, the impetus for taking refugees to these remote Islands came from the administrators of the Andaman Islands whose plans of developing the Islands had hit a roadblock due to unavailability of labour.

Once a clear line of supply had been established between the refugee camps of West Bengal and sites of settlement in the Andaman Islands, an integrated scheme of colonisation and development of the Andamans was launched in 1952. This scheme constituted the core of planned developmental activities in these Islands during the first and second plan periods. Its basic impetus was to expand agricultural land by clearing forests and to set up new villages peopled by willing settlers from the mainland. Though, in theory, the plan was open to all

Indians, Bengali refugees constituted over 85 per cent of the agriculturists settled in the Andaman Islands between 1952 and 1961. These years were in fact, if not in name, the heydays of refugee rehabilitation in the Andaman Islands. After a lull of few years, there were isolated schemes of resettling refugees in the Andaman Islands between 1965 and 1970, but nothing to match the scale of the earlier period, when no less than 52 new villages were established across the length and breadth of the Andaman Islands, often to the detriment of the indigenous tribal communities, especially the Jarawas (ibid.). Yet, it is precisely during this period that reports and propaganda around refugee resettlement in the Andaman Islands dries up.

Image 1: Young Refugees Headed for Andaman Islands.



Source: Jugantar, 27 May 1950.

Between 1949 and 1951, the dispersal of refugees to the Andaman Islands was regularly in the news in Calcutta. The *Anandabazar Patrika* and *Jugantar*, both popular vernacular dailies, reported diligently on every new development regarding the dispersal of refugees to the Andaman Islands. Besides keeping readers informed on the number of families setting out, the date of their journey, and the government propaganda around it, both the newspapers took to publishing photographs of the refugees setting out for the Andaman Islands. Photographed with the ship in the background, either at the moment of embarkation or just before, these images offered a stark contrast to the stereotypical image of the hapless East Bengali refugee—uprooted,

impoverished and reduced to the indignity of living on the railway platforms. For example, a photograph of a handful of young refugee men, including several 'abhibhabokheen jubok' or boys without guardians, who had volunteered to join a work-force in the Andaman Islands, was published in the *Jugantar* on 27 May 1950. All the 'refugee boys' in the photograph pose by facing the camera directly, unencumbered by any belongings. Many cross their arms in front, in a posture suggesting resolve (see image 1).

Image 2: Stylised Sketches Representing the Helplessness of East Bengali Refugees.



Source: *Jugantar*, 4 May 1950.

The same newspaper ran a campaign to raise funds for refugees from 4 May 1950, where the appeal for generous donations was accompanied by stylised representations of the misery and abjection of the Hindus of East Bengal. Entitled "Jiboner Hok Joy" (Let Life Emerge Victorious), this series of sketches, accompanied by appeals for help represented the entire spectrum of East Bengali Hindu society, including agriculturists, fishermen, traditional drummers (dhakis), goldsmiths and weavers in states of abjection. The text and accompanying images were designed to evoke sympathy, even pity. Take for



example, the fourth and fifth advertisement in the series of at least 15 which were titled 'the indignity of camp life' and 'the providers of rice (annadata) do not get rice today' (see image 2). From the contrast between these images, it seems Dr B.C. Roy was not alone in dreaming of a second Bengal in the Andaman Islands.

Between 1949 and 1951, Bengali refugees leaving for the Andaman Islands embodied a hope for new beginnings and a belief that government schemes, though inadequate and delayed, could deliver results if implemented properly. Press reports of 21 refugee families returning from the Andaman Islands in 1949 had, for a period, put the entire scheme under question (Andaman Files 1947b). However, by 1951, there was little doubt that the resettlement of refugees in the Andaman Islands was largely a success. On 17 March 1951, the *Anandabazar Patrika* published a half page report celebrating the 'Heartbeat of new Life' (Natun Praner Spandan) in the Andaman Islands ('Natun Praner Spandan (The Heartbeat of New Life)' 17 March 1951). The report claimed that refugees resettled in the Andamans 'plough their fields, grow crops and bring home the golden harvest of paddy and fresh vegetables.' This verdict was seconded by *Jugantar*, which was by far the most vocal advocate of refugee rights and therefore, also a harsh critique of government policies. This early consensus on successful rehabilitation in the Andaman Islands paradoxically paved the way for its disappearance from the press.

The pattern of dispersing Bengali refugees to the Andaman Islands took shape between 1948 and 1951. During these early years of West Bengal's refugee crisis, dispersal outside West Bengal was yet to be discredited in the public sphere. The news of the suffering of Bengali refugees resettled in Orissa began trickling into West Bengal, carried by refugees choosing to return to Calcutta, in late 1951 (Bandyopadhyay 1970). Desertion from rehabilitation sites in Bihar and Orissa became a pattern between 1952 and 1954 (Chakrabarti 1999), and the infamous Dandakaranya scheme designed to disperse all remaining refugees in the camps of West Bengal was launched in December 1957. The Communist opposition to dispersal of refugees outside West Bengal gained strength from these policy failures between 1953-54 and 1959.

The 1960s were characterised by political controversies over the forced dispersal of 'new migrants'⁷ to Dandakarnaya and the mismanagement of the project. A more dynamic analysis of refugee rehabilitation in West Bengal reveals these important shifts in policy



and in public perceptions of West Bengal's refugee problem (Sen forthcoming). During the late fifties and the early sixties, desertions by Bengali refugees resettled in Bihar and Orissa, the squatters' agitation to hold on to their new homes in Calcutta and the grandiose plans of the Dandakaranya project occupied centre-stage. At the same time, largely successful rehabilitation of small batches of refugees ceased to be newsworthy and the Andaman Islands gradually disappeared from the news.

However, its simultaneous disappearance from public memory in Calcutta cannot be explained without taking into account the socio-economic divisions within East Bengali refugees. The vast majority of the refugees who could overcome government apathy and hostility to carve out a place for themselves in Calcutta were educated and middle class refugees from dominant castes. In contrast, 90 per cent of the refugees dispersed to the Andaman Islands were illiterate and poor peasants belonging to the Namasudra community (Sinha 1952; Sen 2009). After the loss of a common geography, no familial or social ties bound together these two sections of the refugee population. Thus, over time, despite the ascendancy of refugee politics in Calcutta and the proliferation of refugee narratives in various areas of public life, the resettlement of refugees in the Andaman Islands became a forgotten episode.

Settlers of "empty" lands: towards a history from below

Though the Andaman Islands consist of over 300 islands, the entire archipelago can be broadly divided into three zones—the Great Andaman, the Little Andaman and numerous outlying islets, many of which are unnamed and uninhabited. The Great Andaman region is an archipelago consisting of the North Andaman, Middle Andaman, Bratang, South Andaman and Rutland Islands. The history of resettlement of Hindu Bengali refugees from East Pakistan in the Andaman Islands largely corresponds to the attempts to develop and 'colonise'⁸ the Great Andamans in the two decades after independence. Colonisation of Great Andamans spread from south to north and from coastal valleys and bays in the east to sites further inland and westwards.

There were three clear phases of refugee re-settlement in the Andamans. The first phase began in 1949 and continued till the end of 1951. The refugees who arrived in the Andamans during this period were settled entirely in the South Andaman Island, in villages located



progressively further from Port Blair. This was a period of experimentation in terms of policy and the terms and conditions of settlement varied widely from one batch to the next.

The second phase began in 1952, when piecemeal schemes of settlement gave way to a decade long policy of colonisation of land in the Andaman Islands. In 1952, the Government of India inaugurated the Colonisation and Development Scheme that offered attractive packages of loans and land grants to agriculturists from the mainland of India, who were expected to expand agriculture into hitherto forested regions. This policy formed the core of state-led development in the Andaman Islands during the first and second five-year plan periods. Though in theory these schemes were open to all, the vast majority of settlers and colonisers driving this scheme forward were Bengali refugees, recruited from the numerous camps strewn across West Bengal.

This period, between 1952 and 1961, constitutes the heydays of refugee resettlement in the Andaman Islands when 2,413 families of Bengali Hindus displaced from East Pakistan were resettled in the Andaman Islands. While this is a small fraction of the thousands who had sought refuge in West Bengal, it constitutes about 85 per cent of the total number of families settled in the Andaman Islands over this crucial decade (see Table 1). In other words, Bengali refugees were the main force driving forward the Colonisation and Development Scheme in the Andaman Islands that permanently and radically transformed the demography and ecological balance of these Islands.

The third and final phase of refugee resettlement commenced in 1962, with the discontinuation of the Colonisation and Development Scheme. In the decade that followed, both the method of agricultural colonisation and Bengali refugees, as the principal colonisers, fell out of favour with policy-makers as the primary means of developing the Andaman Islands. Nevertheless, this decade saw nearly 700 refugee families settled in the Andaman Islands through two one-off schemes, signalling a return to ad-hoc measures. It is important to remember that between 1949 and 1970, there was no official policy for rehabilitation of Bengali refugees in the Andaman Islands. The refugees had to don the mantle of pioneering settlers and pass scrutiny as being suitable for the conditions of the Andaman Islands in order to gain access to land and loans (Sen, forthcoming).

There was considerable debate and discussion over the details of various schemes of settlement between various levels of admini-



strators and bureaucrats involved in shaping policy. For example, though the policy to settle the Andaman Islands using agriculturists from the mainland of India originated within the Ministry of Home Affairs, it was born in the context of an acute shortage of labour faced by the local administration of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands in the immediate aftermath of Independence/Partition. The actual details of

Table 1: Displaced families settled in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, 1953-1971.

Year	State of Origin	Number of Families	Area of Settlement	Region of Settlement
1953	East Bengal	97	Ferrargunj	South Andamans
1954	East Bengal Kerala	438 35	Rangat Betapur in Rangat	Middle Andamans
1955	East Bengal Kerala Tamil Nadu	390 37 4	Ferrargunj & Rangat Rangat Rangat	South and Middle Andamans Middle Andamans Middle Andamans
1956	East Bengal Kerala	357 52	Diglipur Diglipur	North Andamans North Andamans
1957	East Bengal Pondicherry	221 4	Diglipur Rangat (Betapur)	North Andamans Middle Andamans
1958	East Bengal Kerala	194 6	Mayabunder Ferrargunj	North Andamans South



				Andamans
1959	East Bengal Tamil Nadu Bihar	217 14 120	Mayabunder Diglipur Rangat (Baratang)	North Andamans North Andamans Middle Andamans
1960	East Bengal Tamil Nadu Bihar	250 17 64	Mayabunder Diglipur (Milangram) Diglipur (Ramnagar)	North Andamans
1961	East Bengal Kerala Bihar	228 14 13	Port Blair (Havelock) Port Blair Diglipur	South Andamans South Andamans North Andamans
1967	East Bengal	323	Mayabunder (Billiground)	North Andamans
1969- 1971	East Bengal	375	Little Andamans	Little Andamans

Source: Figures compiled from various files of the Andamans Section of the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, National Archives of India, New Delhi.

each settlement scheme saw considerable discussion and wrangling over costs between the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Finance Ministry and the Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation. Once Bengali refugees emerged as the overwhelming majority amongst potential settlers, the Chief Minister of West Bengal, Dr B.C. Roy also intervened frequently, proposing that all newly cleared land should be 'reserved' for Bengali refugees alone. There is no dearth of records on these debates over policy in the archives (Andaman Files, NAI, 1947, 1947b and 1948). However, the records reveal very little of the actual implementation of these policies, or the experience of Bengali refugees, who were thrown



into the unenviable role of being pioneering settlers in a remote and forested Island.

In the annual settlement reports, the entirety of the experience of the refugees sent to the Andaman Islands are reduced to a set of numbers—numbers resettled, numbers who deserted, acreage of land allotted, amount of paddy harvested and records of births and deaths. I turned to oral history to understand the motivations and experiences of the refugees resettled in the Andaman Islands. In 2007, I conducted interviews with 34 respondents who were spread over different villages in South, Middle and North Andamans and were identified largely through snowball sampling.⁹ Their reminiscences produced an alternative archive of memory that added texture and life to dry statistics. It also allowed a nuanced exploration of agency and identity amongst the refugees resettled in the Andaman Islands. This section combines official records with the archive of memory to reconstruct the history of refugee resettlement in the Andaman Islands from below.

The interviews reveal a range of strategies employed by refugees to adjust to their new lives. These included reliance on familial networks and quasi-familial ties forged in camps; determination to recreate a familiar cultural world through initiating festivals and building temples; adoption of new skills, such as hunting, and shifts in diet to include deer. While a recent study privileges the role played by the Matua faith in forging a sense of home (Mazumdar 2016: 170-200), in these interviews, religiosity was one of many factors that influenced refugee life and not the dominant factor. Running through the diversity of strategies employed by the refugees in negotiating the regime of rehabilitation was the shared experience of crossing the kalapani to an unknown land. This section ends with a brief description of this shared experience that sets the stage for the richness and complexity of individual refugee reminiscences that resists simplistic generalisations of victimhood or exile.

For the refugees, the journey which terminated in the islands had begun in their native villages in East Bengal. The vast majority of the refugees settled in Andamans came from the districts of Barisal, Jessore and Khulna in East Bengal. They began their journey on foot from their ancestral villages. Families travelled by boats down the interconnected canals and rivers to the nearest railhead. Most of the interviewees took the train from Khulna town towards West Bengal, and entered India at the Bongaon border. Some travelled to Sealdah station, while a few entered India on boats, through the extensive



network of water transport in deltaic Bengal. In the course of this long crossing, the refugees had to endure routine surveillance and harassment from petty officials in East Pakistan.

Ironically, reaching India marked the beginning of a new pattern of displacement. Often refugees were forced to spend days, even weeks squatting on railway platforms or on the pavements until authorities took them to camps. Most of the respondents recalled an aimless existence of being shifted from one camp to another for several years, before they were offered any scheme of permanent rehabilitation. Every single respondent highlighted their 'choice' of Andamans, vehemently denying any suggestion of state coercion. The scholarship which characterises the resettlement of camp refugees in marginal or remote lands outside West Bengal as coercion or 'exile' fails to take into account the impact of this constant and prolonged displacement upon the choices made by refugees.

Displacement, as these memories illustrate, could not always be equated to a distinct act of uprooting or a decision to leave. For these refugees it became their very existence. Once a family entered a refugee camp, they lost control over their next destination or course of action. The same refugee family could end up in work-site camps, which were mostly tents pitched in open fields, a warehouse converted into a camp or an abandoned jute mill. Moreover, the West Bengal Government followed a policy of frequently shifting the refugees from camp to camp, largely to prevent the politicisation of refugees through contact with local politicians. For many refugees the decision to go to the Andaman Islands offered a way out of this pattern of perpetual dislocation and the day-to-day ignominy of life in camps.

The refugees who were finally selected for resettlement in Andamans were collected from various camps of West Bengal and taken to a transit camp in Calcutta. Here, the government of West Bengal distributed agricultural implements, utensils and even musical instruments amongst the families; thus, combining practical aid with an attempt to boost the spirits of these pioneers (Bandyopadhyay 1970: 148-55). The journey to Andamans on the Steam Ship Maharaja, the only ship which plied between the mainland and Andamans till the 1960s, lasted three nights and four days. Once the refugee families reached the Andaman Islands, their experience varied. The first ever batch to be taken to the Andamans were allotted abandoned fields, largely ready for cultivation. Later batches of refugees were either put



to work immediately in clearing land, or housed in temporary camps while they awaited land to be cleared by the Forest Department.

The camps consisted of long two-storied barracks built of bamboo, cane and leaves, divided into ten rooms. The vast majority of refugee families, who were resettled under the Colonisation and Development Scheme, lived in such camps for months—waiting for the local authorities to disburse the lands promised to them. Years of struggle followed, against the jungle, wild animals and the isolation of the remote settlements, to carve out sedentary agrarian life. It is this struggle that the refugees resettled in the Andaman Islands spoke of most when interviewed in 2007.

In order to understand the meaning of this particular pattern of remembering, it is necessary to understand the nature of memory as a historical source. Memory is by no means a mimetic source of the past. In re-telling their experiences of building a new life in the Andaman Islands, the refugees I interviewed were obviously narrating experiences that felt relevant to their current identities. Moreover, their reminiscences were provoked by my questions and coloured by my presence—as an outsider, a mainlander and a young unmarried woman. Most of my respondents were over the age of sixty, which also increases the possibility of error born of misrememberings. Yet, cross-referencing refugee reminiscences with more conventional sources, such as government records, settlement lists, newspaper reports and anthropological surveys revealed an extremely high degree of accuracy in some basic facts.

All the refugees resettled in the Andaman Islands called themselves 'settlers'.¹⁰ Specific details of their process of settlement loomed large in their accounts suggesting that a settler identity had largely overwritten their trauma of displacement from eastern Pakistan by the time the interviews were conducted. As a rule, the respondents remembered the year they were brought over to the Andaman Islands, even identifying themselves as 54 batch, 61 batch and so on. Refugees who travelled together on the S.S. Maharaja were seldom settled in the same village. They were scattered across different small villages in smaller groups ranging from five to twelve families. Despite this scattered pattern of settlement, refugee respondents from one 'batch' kept track of each other. All my interviewees rattled off the names and locations of other 'head-families' who belonged to the same batch. Most respondents also had the total number of families settled in their own village memorised. All of these points towards a cohesive identity



amongst the Bengali refugees resettled in the Andaman Islands and an awareness of their role as settlers and agricultural pioneers.

II: Voices from the Andamans: tales of 'old men' and equal women

There are two ways to approach the reminiscences of refugees that I collected from various villages in North, Middle and South Andaman Islands. Firstly, it is possible to analyse the interviews collectively, to extract dominant themes and shared concerns that reveal the contours of this hybrid identity of refugee-settlers in the Andaman Islands. Secondly, it is also possible to argue that each interview reveals complex and contingent negotiations of the regime of rehabilitation that is inadequately captured by the shared theme of settler identity. I have already explored the contours of a shared settler identity that can be revealed through reading refugee reminiscences collectively elsewhere (Sen 2011).

However, this essay has not just sought to explore the history of refugee resettlement in the Andaman Islands, but has also highlighted the persistent reduction of complex refugee lives to flattened roles of being exiles, pioneers or merely, forgotten. In keeping with this critical theme, this section presents selections from two separate interviews, a man and a woman, resettled in two different villages of the Middle Andaman Island. Their voices, translated and minimally edited to aid legibility, reveal aspirations, perceptions and negotiations that exceed the scope of the questions asked. This section is an invitation to the readers to encounter, albeit in a mediated form, the unique ability of oral history to "speak back" to the researcher, thus resisting unidimensional representation of subaltern groups (Portelli 1981; Samuel & Thompson 1990).

Each interview is prefaced with a brief introduction to the interviewee, the context and location of the interview and a clear idea of how much of the interview has been selected for publication. The entire interview was conducted in Bengali, with the refugee-settlers speaking in the dialect of their native villages, what is often referred to as 'bangal bhasha' as opposed to formalised Bengali, which was the language I spoke. While translating the interviews I have attempted to retain the conversational tone, as much of the meaning of the narratives shared are also expressed in pauses and repetitions. Words have been inserted in parenthesis to complete incomplete sentences only where it is a necessary aid to understanding.



I have italicised the English words which were used by my interviewees and had passed into their vocabulary untranslated in order to give the readers a sense of the bureaucracy they had to negotiate as refugee-settlers. There were occasional shorthand references to significant places and people connected to the project of rehabilitation in the Andaman Islands, which did not hamper communication during the interviews but can be incomprehensible to readers. The meanings of such references, such as 'Auckland', which is short-hand for the Directorate of Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation located at 10A Auckland Road, have been clarified in endnotes in order to maintain the flow of the conversation.

Interview 1: Lalitmohan Pal of Madhupur village, Diglipur Tehsil, North Andaman Island

Lalitmohan Pal was the head of the household of a refugee family settled in the Diglipur region of the Andaman Islands in 1956 (Pal Interview, 6 February 2007). He was a young married man in his early twenties when he arrived in the Andaman Islands. I met him through his neighbour, who worked at the guest house in Diglipur where I was staying. The interview was in his living room, in a well-appointed home made out of bricks and in the presence of a younger man, a relative, who remained largely silent. Lalitmohan Pal spoke freely, clearly enjoying his role as an expert on local history. The first part of his interview, where he narrates in vivid detail how he negotiated the colonisation scheme in the Andaman Islands is reproduced below. His voice brings us face to face with a refugee subjectivity that refuses any notion of victimhood. The interview is also notable for the contrast between how clearly he remembered every detail of his arrival in the Andaman Islands and his vague and disinterested narration of his displacement from East Bengal, which was a common feature of refugee reminiscences in the Andaman Islands. The section printed below is the first eight minutes of an hour-long interview.

US: Your name grandfather?

LMP: Lalitmohan Pal.

US: And when did you arrive?

LMP: I came in 1956, in April. It was the 6th day of the month of Jaishtha, when I disembarked here.

US: How many of you were there?



LMP: At that time, on the ship that is, we were sixty families. The system then was such that... Ok.¹¹ The ground here was cleared the year before. It was cleared by Ranchi *labourers*. The Forest Department has 1900 *labourers* and they cleared as much land as they could. After clearing, it was time to bring (settlers). Ours was the *Colonisation Scheme*. We were brought here with a *loan* of Rs 1,730. We enrolled our names in this scheme, while we were still in *camps*. At the *camps* then... have you heard the name of our Rahababu?¹²

US: Yes.

LMP: And in Auckland office¹³ there was Keshtobabu. The two of them went to *camps* and let us know—we are going to take people to Andamans. Which of you want to go?

US: Which *camp* was this?

LMP: Ours was (in) Birbhum, near Bolpur town. Supur Ambagan camp.

US: Ok.

LMP: Is it [referring to my hand-held recorder] recording?

US: Yes, it is.

LMP: Supur Ambagan *camp* [almost shouting to ensure his voice is heard].

US: Speak normally, it will record.

LMP: Oh, ok. We arrived in Supur Ambagan *camp* in... eh... nineteen...erm....um.... say, in fifty-five. Or thereabouts.

US: So that's when you arrived in the *camp*?

LMP: Yes, the *camp*.

US: And before that, you were in East Bengal?

LMP: Yes, before that we were in Bangladesh. Well, not Bangladesh, then it was Pakistan. We came *direct*—after doing *migration*.¹⁴ From Sealdah we were taken the very next day to Supur Ambagan *camp*. They put us there and pitched up tents. We lived in tents. After a year of staying there, we got the call to go to Andaman. There were also calls to go to other places. We did not enrol our names. We enrolled our names for Andamans. We were eight families. We came here together.

US: So, what made you opt for the Andamans?



LMP: We opted for the Andamans because... Well, the year before, there is this area called Nabagram in Andaman Islands. The families there had arrived the year before. In that group there were two households of the Pal family. We are Pals.

US: Ok.

LMP: They were our relatives. His [pointing to a relative sitting in the room] grandfather's younger brother was there. And there was another man. Well, it's not like you will know him by name, but he was called Krishnapada Pal. They were four brothers. They wrote us letters. They wrote that next year, this place called Diglipur will be cleared. It is a large area and the quality of land there is good. Enrol your names for settlement there. Where we are, we get 200 to 250 maunds¹⁵ of paddy. Hearing all this, our families, we all, were attracted. It's a good place, good lands, large tracts, good area—hearing all this, we enrolled our names (in the scheme). Well, many families enrolled their names. But before bringing us here, they conducted an inquiry. So Keshtobabu from Auckland and Rahababu came to conduct the inquiry—have you heard of Rahababu?

US: Sadhan Raha? Yes, I have.

LMP: Oh yes. So how is Rahasaheb?

US: I have heard that he now lives in Kolkata. I have obtained his phone number. I heard that he used to live in Port Blair, but now that he is ill, he has moved to Kolkata.

LMP: Port Blair he had bought land there—even built a house. Now I think he has sold it all off and left. It was close to the Airport.

US: I have heard he is in Kolkata. I have his contact details and will get in touch with him once I return.

LMP: Ok. So, the inquiry in the *camp* was held in a tent. That was the office. Sitting in that tent office they called everybody. At that time, they *cancelled* a lot of people (meaning applications). So, a lot of people were demoralised. There were seven Pal families there. Of this seven, five were elderly men. So, they were calling the names one by one. Their names came up earlier. They went. And all five were *cancelled*. I am narrating the history for you.

US: Why were their names *cancelled*?

LMP: I am telling you. I am telling you the history.

US: Yes, please go on.



LMP: I could hear them talking amongst themselves—'*old man, old man*'. Meaning, these are elderly people. I could understand that they were telling each other. That these were '*old man*', meaning elderly people. How would they cope in the Andaman Islands? Meaning, one would have to shovel and hoe and dig and weed. They will not be able to do it. They were old men. They were past middle age. Two of us were young. Atul Pal of that house (pointing at the house next door) was there was me. We were about twenty-eight or thirty years old. We had not gone in yet. We were observing. We saw that their names had been cancelled. Later, when they called my name—Lalitmohan Pal! I responded from outside the tent—*Sir!* We won't go. Why? They said. You see, they could see we were young. So, they asked, why won't you go? Why won't we go? You see, saheb, we are seven households in the Pal family. We want to go together. You have *cancelled* five of us. What will we two achieve by going?

US: I see.

LMP: So, then they said, who all were there? I said here... the names you *cancelled* just now—Mahendra Pal, Sarat Pal, Aswini Pal, Rasik Pal. The people you cancelled. We seven want to go together. If you take all seven, then we two will go. If not, we won't. Call them, call them back, they said. So they called back the five. Included those five names first. Then the two of us went inside. Then we came. This is the history of our coming from there.

Interview II: Mrs. Kalipada Mondal of Janakpur village, Rangat Tehsil, middle Andaman Island

I arrived unannounced in Mrs. Mondal's home, which had been pointed out to me by another settler I had interviewed in a neighbouring village. Her husband, Kalipada Mondal was unwell and unable to talk, which is why Mrs. Mondal agreed to speak in his stead (Mrs. Mondal Interview, 4 February 2007). Though she was too shy to give me her full name, she proved to be an eager interviewee and her answers were full of anecdotes, reflections and detailed descriptions of how things were in 'those days'. The Mondals arrived in the Andaman Islands in 1954. Mrs. Mondal was married and the mother of two small children at that time. The interview was conducted on the porch of her mud hut, on a sunny afternoon, with Mrs. Mondal occasionally disappearing inside to check with her husband that she was getting her dates right. Printed below are two disconnected sections from a forty-minute interview. In the first section, she narrates her experience of



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coming to the Andamans, which blurs the line between choice and coercion. Her voice also highlights a gendered experience of displacement and resettlement, where the focus is on the intimate everyday texture of life instead of an attempt to narrate events of larger significance.

US: So, did you come by rail or by boat?

Mrs M: We came by rail.

US: So did you receive any documents when you got off on this side?

Mrs M: No, we did our *migration* and came. So, after doing our *migration*, we became *refugees*.

US: How? By getting your names written on some list?

Mrs M: Yes. After we reached Sealdah, the government took us to a *camp* and admitted us there.

US: Which *camp* was this?

Mrs M: Kashipur *Camp*.

US: Did you have to stay in one room with many people?

Mrs M: Oh yes, many! In one room there would be fifty families.

US: Wow! Was it a big room?

Mrs M: Oh, huge! These were huge rooms. It was a warehouse I think. I say this because there was dirt and grime all over the place—it would get on to our clothes, our bodies.

US: From the walls?

Mrs M: From the walls, from the floors! What more can you expect of a warehouse? Who can tell how old that place was? [laughs]

US: So how long did you live there?

Mrs M: We stayed there for six months.

US: What about food?

Mrs M: They gave us food. Rice, flour, pulses. We cooked and we ate.

US: How did you cook?

Mrs M: In coal ovens.

US: Did they give you the coal?

Mrs M: No. That we would buy.



US: Where did you get the money for it?

Mrs M: From the *dole* money. They gave us some *dole*, can't remember how much. Maybe Rs 12 or so.

US: And that sufficed?

Mrs M: Yes, we made do. That's how we managed there, before coming (here). My two children—they were constantly ill. And the numbers that died (there)! Daily two car-loads were taken, one in the morning and one in the evening. And in that fear...

US: In that *camp*?

Mrs M: Yes!

US: Was there any arrangement for doctors, or medicines?

Mrs M: Yes, sort of. But it was not enough. Pox, measles, what we call *basanta* (small pox), fever—all sorts of illnesses.

US: Was it mostly children?

Mrs M: Yes. Children were most susceptible. Seeing all this... my kids, they would just not recover from illnesses. My eldest son, he had fever, in fact, he had pneumonia twice. Then he had pox. Then my daughter came down with temperature. Seeing all this, we said, we have come here with our children. Now if we lose them sitting in the *camp*....

US: I see.

Mrs M: In this situation there was a chance to enroll our names for this place. That's when my old man put his name forward. And we came away. Actually, I did not want to come to the Andamans. (I thought) it's the Kalapani, so far, impossible to return from, across the seven seas...

US: You were scared?

Mrs M: Yes, I was scared. Then, one day, they showed us a movie. They showed us a *bioscope* on the situation in the Andamans.

US: Who screened this?

Mrs M: (Somebody) from the *government*. People were reluctant to come.

US: At Kashipur *camp*?

Mrs M: Yes, yes. Seeing that, I said to myself, no, that's a land of golden harvests—such beautiful crops of paddy, coconut trees,



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betelnut trees, giant pumpkins. I mean, everything that was grown around Port Blair, they showed us all that. And I said, yes, if we go there we can survive. So, we came to the Andamans.

US: So, all those illnesses you spoke of, once you arrived here, did you suffer from any?

Mrs M: No! For the first decade or two we were very well.

US: There were no major diseases?

Mrs M: There were no illnesses at all! I used to feel very happy then. See (I would think), if we had stayed on in Kolkata who knows how many medicines we would have had to take. And the medicines we were given in the camp... well, how do I explain. There were no proper doctors. We would buy the medicines we needed from the market. But money was a problem. We did not have enough. So, I worked as a maid in different houses. The little that we made helped us to get the medicines we needed. But none of us could stay healthy for long. It was a closed space, hot, and who knows for how long the place had been abandoned. This is where we used to live. It was a life without the daily sandhya¹⁶ or lamp-lighting, or any puja. We are Hindus, you see. All we managed inside the camp was Shitala puja.¹⁷

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US: The women organised this?

Mrs M: Yes, us girls and wives. We did it together. Basanta (small pox) was widespread. That is why we would do this particular puja.

US: And what about here?

Mrs M: Oh, here we do it all.

US: So what do you feel, who is better off today? Those who came to the Andaman Islands or those who stayed on in Kolkata?

Mrs M: Oh no, I am much better off for coming to the Andamans. Cause here, there is no fear of theft or robbery. Here, the value of a woman is equal to the value of a man. I am (for example) an old woman. Yet, there is not a month when, even after completing all my household work, I do not earn two to three hundred rupees. I keep hens and ducks, I grow vegetables. I always have enough money for my own needs. I don't have to ask my sons. My sons work too. As did my old man. With all this, we manage quite well. We may not be rich, but we do not suffer.

US: There is no scarcity in your household?

Mrs M: No. We have not felt want.



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US: Did you face scarcity in East Bengal?

Mrs M: Oh yes! I have seen a lot of scarcity there. The salt-water came in (to our fields). It ruined our crops. We just could not grow paddy anymore. And then there was the fear...

US: Fear of what?

Mrs M: Fear cause the Muslims would make off with beautiful Hindu girls.

US: You saw this?

Mrs M: Yes! But (more importantly) there was no justice.

US: What happened if you complained to the police?

Mrs M: If we complained, they would say, well, this is Pakistan. Why don't you do this—they have taken one, why don't you go and bring two of theirs?

US: What!? The police would say this?

Mrs M: Yes! Bring two of theirs! This is what they would say. There was no justice.

Conclusion

Refugee resettlement in the Andaman Islands, when viewed "from below", through the eyes of those who donned the mantle of "settlers" of these remote Islands can no longer be contained within a narrative of exile. Most refugees decided to opt for the Andamans for complex reasons, which are difficult to anticipate without recourse to oral history. For some refugees, their ability to move with friends or extended family gave what Calcutta-centric histories have perceived as "exile" a texture of planned and willing colonisation of land. By contrast, the abysmal conditions in refugee camps meant that for many, the "choice" to go to the Andaman Islands was made in coercive circumstances. However, all respondents retained a sense of having control over their own lives and were impelled by a will to survive and to rebuild lives. Nothing could be further than the gross caricature of Bengali refugees reiterated in various official publications, where they are portrayed as embodiments of corruption, dependence and apathy.

I have argued that the framing of refugee resettlement in the Andaman Islands as a forgotten or marginalised episode does little to expand our understanding of this history. If anything, it betrays a Calcutta-centric view of partition's aftermath. Yet, the act of forgetting,



this time, by the refugees resettled in the Andaman Islands, becomes key to understanding their identity. The refugees resettled in the Andaman Islands spoke vividly of their life in camps and of their struggle to rebuild lives in the Andaman Islands. They had comparatively little to say about their lives in East Bengal. None betrayed the kind of nostalgia for lost homes that has become near synonymous with refugee identity. In the Andaman Islands, the experience of bringing virgin land under the plough had allowed a refugee identity to be over-written by a settler identity. Moreover, the longing for East Bengal as a land of plenty is not as accessible to poor and Dalit refugees. In the Andaman Islands, poor Namasudras constituted the bulk of the resettled refugees. Their caste identity, and possible experiences of deprivation or oppression in the past would naturally mitigate against nostalgia. This specificity is crucial to understanding the distinctive pattern of refugee memory in the Andaman Islands.

Endnotes

¹ These refugees were part of a scheme to resettle 200 families in the Andaman Islands. The details of this scheme can be found in Andaman Files, NAI. 1948.

² The Dandakaranya project was launched in 1957 and designed to solve West Bengal's 'problem' of an unwanted and extra population of refugees. It envisioned using refugees as agricultural colonisers and labourers in order to develop the districts of Bastar in Madhya Pradesh and Koraput and Kalahandi in Orissa, which were all regarded as backward areas in need of development.

³ Within the context of Bengali society, Brahmins, Baidyas and Kayasthas constitute the socially and politically dominant castes.

⁴ Deryck. O Lodrick. n.d. Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Union Territory, India, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/23488/Andaman-and-Nicobar-Islands> [Retrieved 20 June 2017].

⁵ See for example the escapades of the revolutionary nationalist hero, Sabyasachi in Saratchandra's classic novel *Pather Dabi* (The Demand for a Way) which was first published in 1926.

⁶ This was constituted in February 1948 to integrate the work of refugee rehabilitation, at this time, focused largely on refugees from Punjab, with national development.

⁷ All those who entered West Bengal from eastern Pakistan after 1964 were called 'new migrants' in official parlance.

⁸ The words "colonise" and "colonisation", when used in the context of the Andaman Islands, referred to expansion of agriculture and the settlement of new villages. This is the sense in which colonisation was used in official records and this paper uses it in this limited sense. However, it can also be argued that refugee resettlement in the Andaman Islands amounted to internal colonialism or settler colonialism. The latter debate is not addressed in this paper.



⁹ Snowball sampling, which is also known as chain-referral sampling is a method of recruiting research participants by asking existing participants to identify others. In oral history, this is particularly suitable for identifying participants from within a close-knit or pre-existing social group, where members know of each other. In the Andaman Islands, the refugees who travelled to the Islands from the mainland on the same ship or at the same time period knew of each other, given that they had been the only settlers on the land at that period.

¹⁰ The word "settler" had passed untranslated into Island Bengali, along with other words like "head family", which also originated in policy.

¹¹ The three dots in the interviews indicate the pause or the search for narrative continuity through words by the speaker during the conversation with the author. They do not indicate the omission of parts of the interviews' contents (which are indicated as [...]). These dots have been kept in order to retain the conversational tone of the interviews.

¹² Sadhan Raha joined the Andaman administration as a tehsildar (a revenue department officer who oversees a revenue district, known as tehsil) in 1949. He was later promoted to the post of Assistant Commissioner of the Settlement Division of Middle Andaman and played a key role in the selection and resettlement of refugees in Middle and North Andaman Islands.

¹³ The Rehabilitation Directorate of the Government of West Bengal was located at 10 Auckland Road and came to be known as the Auckland Office amongst refugees.

¹⁴ This refers to Migration Certificates which were introduced in 1952 to control the influx across the Bengal border. All refugees from East Pakistan had to obtain this in order to enter India legally.

¹⁵ Maund is the anglicised name for a traditional unit of mass used in British India, which had considerable local variations. Following standardisation, it is now equal to 37.3242 kilograms in India and Pakistan.

¹⁶ The common ritual in Bengali Hindu households of marking the twilight hour between day and night by offering prayers to the household deity and blowing a conch.

¹⁷ Shitala or Sitala is an ancient folk deity widely worshipped by many faiths in different parts of South Asia, including Bengal, as the pox-goddess. She is the goddess of sores, ghouls, pustules and diseases.

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